

CHAPTER 3

FACTORS FOR THE MIRACULOUS GROWTH OF EVANGELICALS IN GUATEMALA UNTIL 1993 AND THE SUBSEQUENT PLATEAU IN CHURCH GROWTH: SECONDARY RESEARCH

Introduction

The Evangelical Church of Guatemala has been a shining example of church expansion in a missions area and currently enjoys the highest percentage of evangelicals of any Latin American country.¹ The information in this section is based upon the writings of anthropologists, missionaries, Guatemalan historians, Jesuits, primary interviews and other sources. Within the context of ebbs and flows of historical and sociological movements, this section examines key events, strategies, causes and personalities that have contributed to the overall growth and the current condition of the Evangelical Church in Guatemala. While this section highlights strategies that an astute leader will observe and hopefully, put into practice, strategies alone without the timing and the Hand of God are merely tools that push plans through in a flurry of activity, but with little eternal results.

Before Evangelicals

In the early 1800s, most areas within Latin America declared their freedom from colonial Spain as they began to build independent nations. The Spanish Catholic Church was an integral part of the politics, and solidly on the side of the powerful, conservative politicians of Spain. During the Colonial period it supported the politics of domination and

¹ Johnstone, Patrick and Mandryk, *Operation World, 21st Century Edition* (Harrisburg, Virginia: R. R. Donnelley and Sons, 2001).

exploitation of Central America, and was "traditional, closed and syncretistic."^{2,3} Some of the syncretism was purposely introduced by the Catholic priests. They built Catholic churches over destroyed Mayan religious sites to "Christianize" local religions in an effort to enhance acceptance of Christianity by the Mayans.⁴

The colonial model imposed the medieval social structure wherein the wealthy landowners used the peasants to work their estates. In much of Latin America, the Indian peasants worked for the "*hidalgo*", the large plantation with a central landowner. Society naturally became divided between a rich, exploitive minority, the unskilled agricultural subsistence farmers, and semi-skilled workers. The minority of wealthy landowners owned immense tracts of good cropland; much of which remained unfarmed. The peasants (*campesinos*) were resigned to their simple and hard life without hope of improvement. The old society was not capitalistic, even though wealth was an important indicator of status. More important, was the high degree of status and influence in society that was granted to those who owned large tracts of land. Control, possession, and consolidation of lands were maintained through convenient marriages among wealthy families. By combining networks of the wealthy landowners, they developed an association of power and money that lasted through subsequent generations, continuing even to this day.⁵

The colonial regime created an unstable structure within society as it was driven by greed to take resources from the colonies. The Catholic hierarchy became pragmatically intoxicated with power as they expanded their influence and filled their coffers. Their

²Virgilio Zapata A., *Historia de La Iglesia Evangélica en Guatemala* (Guatemala: Génesis Publicidad, 1982), 8.

³Steve Sywulka, et. al., *Portadores del Evangelio* (Guatemala, Guatemala: Consejo Evangélico General, 1999), 2.

⁴Zapata, 8.

⁵Manuela Canton Delgado, *Bautizados en Fuego* (La Antigua, Guatemala: Centro de Investigaciones Regiones de Mesoamérica, 1998), 50.

politics conveniently paralleled those of the conquistadors. Everything in the colonies was considered a commodity to be used and exploited, including the people. The seeds of instability were born out of colonization and formed an incipient, never-ending struggle between the classes. The peasants depended wholly upon the land owners, or *patrones*, for their fragile and impoverished lives, which left a fertile seed bed for revolution. Just as the commodity of land has been consolidated and passed down through a small oligarchy throughout the ensuing centuries, many of the social problems that were birthed from the Colonial tradition have survived the centuries.

In spite of the monopoly of power that the Church and wealthy wielded, a small light shined in the life and works of one priest, Bartolomé de las Casas. He publicized the plight of the Indians when he wrote a letter in 1510 to Queen Isabela of Spain complaining of the exploitation of the Indians in the colonies. That letter started his tireless campaign for the dignity of the Indians and to recognize them as human beings with a soul that God loved. He was assigned the position of Lord Protector over the Indians and was given a huge tract of land in northeastern Guatemala called Las Verapaces, (translated "True Peace") to be used to protect the Indians. He wanted to convert them, not coerce them, as was the current Church strategy. He wrote, "One way, and one way only, of teaching a living faith, to everyone, everywhere, always, was set by Divine Providence: the way that wins the mind with reasons, that wins the will with gentleness, with invitation. It has to fit all people on the earth, no distinction made of sect, for error for evil."⁶ In Colonial times, this was the only area of Guatemala where the Indians were taught to read the Bible. Here, nearly 300 years later, early missionaries passed out Bibles to eager individuals who had

⁶ Parish, Helen Rand, ed., *Bartolomé de la Casas, The Only Way* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), 68.

already heard about God's Word. De las Casas was the exception that raised a voice in favor of the Indians' intrinsic value before God. In the remainder of Guatemala and Central America, the Indians were treated as animals without souls as they were mercilessly butchered, and used for slaves or pleasure by the Spanish Conquistadors.

In the early 1800s, early Protestant missionaries or colporters, such as Frederick Crowe, came to Guatemala to work for a short period of time.⁷ These missionaries used Bible distribution as a common methodology in Central America to spread the Gospel. They focused on getting the Word of God into people's hands and leaving the results to the Holy Spirit. Seeds were scattered; but apparently, no evangelical churches sprang to life during this time.⁸

Nation Building, Social Reforms and the Permanent Entry of Evangelicals: 1882-1920

Political Dynamics Favor Conditions for Evangelicals

In Guatemala the seeds of political discontent were sown much earlier than the seeds of the Gospel. The Spanish bequeathed the scourge of under-development. Dominance by a small group of economically powerful individuals, as well as minimal industrial and educational development for improvements of technical innovations, sustained the policy. The results of the colonization by Spain and the Church produced "a politically dependent society, economically, socially and psychologically."⁹ The colonization imported foreign education and values that were enforced through imposed

⁷ A colporter was a Protestant missionary of the 1800s who evangelized by selling Bibles or Bible portions.

⁸ Zapata, 21.

⁹ Delgado, 51.

religion and law. The general populace saw the leaders of the Catholic Church as having magical, religious powers because of their priestly role. Manuela Delgado stated,

The [Catholic] Church completed the essential function and transmission of teachings and ideas, which worked effectively for the Colonists. First, as Indians converted into the Church, this produced marginalized Indians who were separated from their community beliefs but whose values were not fully transformed. The social action of the [Protestant] missionaries was welcomed by the Colonizers because they were effective agents of cultural change and disruption. *But the ensuing results were a social hybrid, that equilibrated with syncretic values and practices.* " [Emphasis mine.]¹⁰

Religion in this form became the opiate of the people.

Opiates have a finite duration, and Guatemala along with most of Meso-America groaned for a revolution. In the late 1800s Guatemala birthed a new, liberal President-dictator, Rufino Justo Barrios (along with his successor, José Carrera), whose governments consolidated political power as they established and built their nation. Barrios and Carrera, using contemporary thought, adhered to the tenets of social Darwinism and pragmatically to a social Gospel. The ideas were complementary, asserting that through steady social and educational progress, the world would inevitably usher in a more advanced civilization. Barrios recognized the importance of foreign economic investments in Guatemala as corporations might stimulate internal social and economic progress.¹¹ He believed in free speech and absolute freedom of religion, but the Catholic Church was still the spiritual hegemony and an obstacle to these ends. Barrios expelled the foreign Catholic clergy, expropriated all Catholic properties,¹² and nullified the Church's

¹⁰ Ibid., 52.

¹¹ Ibid. 55.

¹² Guatemalan History Approved by Jorge Ubico Government, *Barrios a traves de la Historia* (Guatemala, Guatemala: Tipografía Nacional, 1935), 130-38.

legal representation.¹³ He invited the Presbyterian Church to enter Guatemala in order to disrupt the power of the Catholic Church, similar to the method that the colonists had utilized the Church to disrupt the Indian culture. An American visitor to Guatemala made some insightful and cogent observations on the relationship between Barrios and the Protestants,

. . . both the [Protestant] church and the school received a hearty support of Barrios; not so much because he favored this form of religion as because he recognize it [as] a civilized and progressive power, the power he admired above all others . . . since he favored it, no one dared offer any opposition, for his word was law . . .¹⁴

The Entry of Early Denominations

Presbyterians: 1882

The Presbyterian and the Central American Mission (CAM) were the two earliest Protestant groups to enter Guatemala. They both established strong works that dominated the Protestant scene for more than half a century. CAM still is dominant. At a time when Mexico held anti-American and anti-missionary ideologies, Guatemala was opened to Protestants. In 1882, by invitation of President Barrios, the Presbyterian missionary John Clark Hill entered Guatemala and initiated the Gospel ministry.¹⁵ Within four years, Hill established a small school, held evangelistic services in English, and later expanded his work into Spanish. In the foundational work of Guatemalan Protestant history, Virgilio Zapata concludes that this early work and presence opened doors for other missionaries to

¹³Douglas Sullivan González, *Piety, Power and Politics: Religion and Nation Formation in Guatemala 1821-1871* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1998), 121-22.

¹⁴Virginia Garrard-Burnett, *Protestantism in Guatemala* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1998), 15.

¹⁵Zapata, 29.

build upon the infant foundation.¹⁶ In 1887, Edward Haymaker began a profound and lasting work as he tirelessly built upon the foundations for the Presbyterian work in Guatemala. It was built upon the mainstays of preaching, Bible teaching, and general education so as to invest in people who could read the Bible and become future leaders.¹⁷ Haymaker and the subsequent missionaries for the next twenty years established ten grade schools and high schools as well as churches in the western part of Guatemala. Many in the government looked favorably on the social dimension of the Presbyterian mission and the positive influences of their strong, solid schools.¹⁸

The Central American Mission: 1896

The Central American Mission (CAM) entered Guatemala in 1896 with the missionary couple, Mr. and Mrs. H. C. Dillon. CAM was started in Texas by Dr. C. I. Schofield, the fundamentalist leader. After learning about the unreached populations of Central America he declared, "We have passed over our Samaria!"¹⁹ The early missionaries worked feverishly to initiate the CAM work. For example, the visionary Alfred Bishop who entered the country shortly after Dillon, preached 150 consecutive nights from a small rented room in Guatemala City starting in September of 1899. From this hard work was born the church, "Las Cinco Calles", which would extend a long shadow over all of CAM work for nearly forty years.²⁰ Zapata stated that Bishop and other missionaries "had a drive and dedication that could be considered 'fanatical' or 'crazy'. But

¹⁶ Zapata, 34-35.

¹⁷ Ibid., 47-49.

¹⁸ Ibid., 47.

¹⁹ Sywulka in *Portadores del Evangelio*, 6.

²⁰ Zapata, 62.

according to them, their passion was to disseminate the message in all of Guatemala."²¹ By 1919, Cinco Calles had twenty related church workers including pastors, evangelists, and Bible distributors. Virgilio Zapata emphasizes that the Central American Mission concentrated on training pastors from the very beginning of the ministry.²² Edward Cleary, a Jesuit scholar, notes that this work was exceptional in most of Latin America and describes Bishop's ministry as "assertive."²³ In addition to traditional institutes, CAM regularly held intensive conferences, inviting the best speakers available from within and from outside the country. These conferences lasted several days and dealt with specialized and systematized subjects that equipped and motivated the denomination's preachers in the practical tasks of the work.²⁴ These new leaders, then, traveled from the Capital to preach in the Interior of the Republic. The first CAM (and some of the earliest evangelical) national missionaries in Guatemala were commissioned in 1921 by the Cinco Calles church. This church also served as a firm base to both nationals and North American CAM missionaries as they branched out into the Departments of San Marcos, Huehuetenango, Jalapa, Zacapa, Escuintla, Sacatepequez, Chimaltenango, Sololá, and Quiché and southern Mexico. All these areas were entered by 1920, establishing the foundations for solid works. The consistent, visionary leadership out of the Cinco Calles Church shaped the future of CAM as it became the mother church to scores of congregations throughout the country.²⁵

²¹ Ibid., 62.

²² Ibid., 64.

²³ Edward Cleary, *Conflict and Competition: The Latin American Church in a Changing Environment* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1992), 178.

²⁴ Zapata, 64.

²⁵ Sywulka, in *Portadores del Evangelio*, 12-18.

Steve Sywulka pointed out that since the early years, CAM has strongly invested in medical missions. For example, in 1918 a CAM missionary, Dr. Becker, stated in his philosophy, "I combine the medical work with the spiritual. Those who come to our house looking for help for their diseases will also hear the Gospel before they leave."²⁶ The Central American Mission felt strongly that their responsibility was not only help people spiritually and physically, but to also help with basic education. For this reason, they began to establish Christian schools as early as 1912 which produced many subsequent CAM and Protestant leaders.

Early Indian Work

Early in the history of CAM the missionaries began to direct their attention toward the indigenous populations in addition to the Ladino population.²⁷ Dr. C. F. Secord was the first North American missionary to dedicate his work exclusively to the Indians in 1911. His unique work of that day was noted by many, especially those in CAM. Starting in the early 1920s the mission began to look for missionaries who would live among the Indian populations, learn their languages, and teach them the Bible. As missionaries answered the call, CAM entered into the Tzutuil, Mam, and Kanjobal groups. These early missionaries suffered many hardships to establish foundational works.²⁸

The early CAM missionaries understood well that the physical and spiritual needs of the people in rural areas could be met best by establishing an incarnational presence among the people. The common practice of a pastor living in an adjacent parsonage began

²⁶ Ibid., 20.

²⁷ In Guatemala, the term "Ladino" is used for those who are culturally more Spanish or Westernized than Mayan. It is similar to a Mestizo, a term not used in Guatemala, but deals with a person's culture and biological background.

²⁸ Sywulka in *Portadores del Evangelio*, 23.

in the early 1920s as "church-missions." The Gospel was preached out of an office or a missionary residence, which subsequently grew into a church. Many of these church-missions engaged in a variety of ministries by establishing a clinic or a school.²⁹

Socio-Political and Catholic Dynamics

The early missionaries conceptualized themselves as "sowers in the field" that would be "white for the harvest" some time in the future. The main harvest was among their successful works with the very poor and the disenfranchised.³⁰ The pioneer missionaries anticipated that the poor converts would, in turn, expand the work into the middle and upper classes. Virginia Garrard-Burnett quotes Haymaker when he wrote in 1914, "the publicans and harlots, the lowest class with nothing by identification with anything on earth to lose are the first to enter."³¹ Evaluating early strategies from the viewpoint of an anthropologist she concluded, "this strategy of evangelization is highly flawed and poorly suited to a county like Guatemala, where social prerogatives flowed only in one direction: from top to bottom."³²

In reductionist terms, when Protestants entered into Indian areas, they preached about a direct relationship with God, whereas Catholics believed that partaking of some of the sacraments in the Church maintained their relationship to God. Salvation in the Protestant tradition is focused upon the individual, while Catholicism stresses salvation through membership in the corporate body of Christ.³³ Garrard-Burnett showed that the

²⁹ Mario Ríos Paredes in *Portadores del Evangelio*, 36.

³⁰ Garrard-Burnett, 46.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 40.

³² *Ibid.*, 40.

³³ Sheldon Annis, *God and Production in a Guatemalan Town* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1987), 76.

conservative Catholic Church along with the *cofradías* in Indian communities emphasized a static, peasant society based upon local traditions and culture. In contrast, the Protestant work ethic along with its new alliance to the local church favored change from the strong pagan and anti-nationalistic customs. A *cofradía* is an Indian civil-religious cargo system that integrates Mayan and Catholic religion. It preserves local customs and traditions by maintaining Christo-pagan festivals and worship.³⁴ In the early days of Protestantism in Guatemala, the dynamics of Protestantism favored progressive social changes that the government sought in order to build a nation of patriotic workers. Protestants sought to save the entire man starting with his heart, which would eventually affect his external life, family, and neighborhood. In contrast, the Catholic Church ultimately was concerned with external identification to the Catholic Church which had no practical effect in external actions of a person. Haymaker wrote in an early correspondence, "The Catholic church has crushed out the middle classes, forcing the Indians to live in degradation, humiliation, and deception which has reduced them to pauperism and illiteracy."³⁵

The liberal government reforms attempted to make all people true citizens as the central Guatemalan government attempted to link all micro-societies in the countryside to the larger nation. For this reason, the government launched aggressive agrarian campaigns and reforms to improve the primitive conditions within the interior of Guatemala. Because the Catholic Church was a factor in interfering with these reforms, the government continued anti-Catholic rhetoric and laws. This resulted in reducing the influence and power of Catholic clerics.³⁶ Edward Clearly, a Jesuit scholar, points out that from the 1910s to 1940 most communities were free of direct Catholic control and very few priests

³⁴ Ibid., 61.

³⁵ Ibid., 49-50.

³⁶ Guatemalan History Approved by Jorge Ubico Government, *Barrios a traves de la Historia* (Guatemala, Guatemala: Tipografía Nacional, 1935), 130-138.

lived in the villages. Without direct cleric intervention, the nominally Catholic Indians devoted themselves to a life within a Christo-pagan organization and established the well-known *cofradías*.³⁷

The Indians in very traditional villages looked upon both the central government and Protestant missionaries as agents of change, and as such, resisted them with hostility. The early missionaries generally made no distinction between the Indian and Ladino populations as they assimilated the Indians into Ladino churches. They felt that the Ladinos had the more advanced culture of the two, but moreover, viewed both cultures as depraved as they suffered from the similar social plights propagated by the Catholic Church, i.e., drunkenness, slothfulness, poverty, and overwhelming superstition.³⁸ Cleary notes that changed behavior and new mores brought about by conversion to Protestantism made a favorable impression both upon the local community and employers. In his view, the key to the acceptance and growth of the Protestant Church was the practical and positive changes in the converts who were responsible to the local congregation,

. . . changes in behavior for many former Catholics would be short-lived without the doctrine of a community of believers, a remnant in a bad world, because key to changing behavioral patterns has been a community of supportive relationships and a sustained expectation of personal responsibility.³⁹

Others: Quakers 1902, Nazarenes 1902 and Primitive Methodists 1916

The Friends Church, or Quakers, entered in 1902 when Thomas Kelly and Clark Buckley, both colporters, embarked into the areas around Chiquimula to sell Bibles. From their Bible distribution work, they established small congregations and Bible studies. As a

³⁷ Cleary, 170.

³⁸ Annis, 106.

³⁹ Cleary, 176.

new wave of missionaries came into the mission, they began to concentrate on secular and religious education. The Friends Church invested heavily in literature production, pastoral and missionary preparation, agricultural projects, and Indian work. Early on, they showed a progressive missionary spirit as they sent the first Guatemalan missionary, Magdaleno Hernández, to Ocoatepeque in 1914. Later, in 1923 the missions committee of the Friends Church sent a couple to Bolivia.⁴⁰

The Nazarene Church began in Guatemala in 1902. It was the first Pentecostal church in Guatemala and continues to have a strong influence in the Northern and Central part of Guatemala to this day. The type of Pentecostalism that existed in the early part of the last century is different from that of today in that the Nazarene Church in the early 20th century concentrated upon divine healing and sanctification, rather than on speaking in tongues and the gifts of the Holy Spirit.⁴¹ They concentrated their efforts mainly in the northern and northeastern portions of Guatemala. Since the early years of the Nazarene work, they emphasized secular and theological education. Zapata quoted an early journal of Reverend Vaughn in which he wrote,

The schools, that appear to be a heavy load in the beginning, have been an essential part of the development in Guatemala. In spite of the inadequate support that they have received sometimes, they have produced students with elevated ideals, a high percentage of whom have continued their studies as teachers, lawyers, doctors, engineers or agriculturalists. Some have gone even into the halls of Congress, and these former students will always talk about their fond memories that they had in our evangelical schools.⁴²

In addition to a strong concentration in education, they also worked in medical ministries, literature production, and youth, women, and Indian work.

⁴⁰ Zapata, 85-87.

⁴¹ Ibid., 88.

⁴² Zapata, 94.

The works of the earlier missionaries of the visible Presbyterian and CAM churches left positive impressions upon the central government, making it possible for other groups to enter the country to work unencumbered from the government. The Primitive Methodists arrived in Guatemala in 1916 with Thomas Pullin who was later joined by Charles Furman, sponsored by the *Free Gospel and Missionary Society*.⁴³ Their work concentrated primarily in the area of El Quiché, and specifically to the Quiché Indians of the area. The Primitive Methodist Church began its growth through a series of "acquisitions" of other churches in the areas of Santa Cruz and Chichicastenango in the Department of El Quiché.⁴⁴

Growth in the Period of Permanent Entry: 1893 to 1920

In 1880, Guatemala had a population of 1,224,600 citizens with virtually no evangelicals. By 1921, the general census showed there were 2,004,900 residents with between 8000 to 9000 evangelicals in the country or about 0.5% of the total population.⁴⁵ By standards of church planting movements today, the early church got off to a slow start. The census figures along with hindsight show that by the early twenties a strong evangelical base with deep roots was established in Guatemala that ultimately would give a bountiful harvest in a later generation. Essentially, four denominations worked the country. The two strongest were the Central American Mission and the Presbyterians.

During the foundational era of missions in Guatemala, Zapata summarized a number of factors that contributed to a later explosive growth.

⁴³ Mario Ríos Paredes in *Portadores del Evangelio*, 35.

⁴⁴ Zapata, 103.

⁴⁵ Mario Ríos Paredes in *Portadores del Evangelio*, 39.

1. Missionaries taught the most dedicated nationals to continue the work of the church through theological and Bible institutes. The institutes prepared a firm Guatemalan leadership base which matured into key directive roles of its denominations.
2. Even though the North American missionaries were under the governance of their North American churches, they were wise to generally maintain a separation of governance between Guatemalan and American churches. This allowed the Guatemalan churches to develop freely and appropriately for Guatemalan culture.
3. Protestant missions invested in education, literature and medicine which changed lives and demonstrated to authorities that Protestants were a positive influence for the country.⁴⁶

Other reasons for growth during this period are:

1. The pioneer missionaries demonstrated an evangelistic fervor and a determined work ethic which yielded strong, focused Guatemalan leaders.
2. The politico/sociological thought of the day created favorable conditions for the legal entry of missionaries and non-hindrance of their fledgling works.
3. Competition from the formal Catholic Church was minimal, as it was curtailed by the government and created a shortage of priests.
4. During the first third of the century, the children of the presidents were educated in Presbyterian schools. This obtained favor of the government, ruling elite and the successive generation of leaders.
5. The agencies recognized early the importance of directing specialty ministries toward the Indian groups in Guatemala.

⁴⁶Zapata, 113-15.

**Depression, Fascism and Political Uncertainties:
Broadening of the Protestant Base: 1921-1945**

Indians: Tools of the State or Souls Loved by God?

During the 1920s through the early 1930s, there was a clash between urban development and unionization in Guatemala, as with most of the Western world. The president, Jose María Orellana (1921-1926), ratified laws that prohibited strikes and the results along with the world-wide depression created political instability. This instability distracted the government from the task of nation building within the primitive Interior of the country. Both the unions and the liberal presidents considered the masses of peasant Indians as "Indian brutes" to be utilized as a commodity in national development.⁴⁷ The president was interested in seeing Protestant missionaries expand into the primitive Indian areas as this would help to instill education, higher morals, and an improved work ethic among this massive potential work force.⁴⁸ The positive reputation of the Protestants helped to assure minimum official opposition by the governmental officials as they entered into new areas.

Successful Indian work in native languages reinforced the view among the mission community that more similar works should be started. The CAM and Presbyterian Churches built strong urban bases first. Once establishing these bases, they emphasized rural Indian work where the Catholic presence was the weakest. One of the most famous missionaries working in the local Mayan language was Cameron Townsend, who went about the task of learning the Indian language and translated the Bible into Cakchiquel. His initial work in the 1920s in the "dialects" was viewed negatively by many missionaries.

⁴⁷ Garrard-Burnett, 67.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 68.

Townsend recruited many others into his translation work and became the founder of Wycliffe Bible translators.⁴⁹ In spite of the early efforts of some missionaries to enter Indian areas with the language, an understanding of culture and scripture portions, the Indian populations were resistant and unwilling to change their *costumbre* or customs to the new ways of Christianity.⁵⁰ Missionaries continued to advance their work through social ministries, translating scripture, and living among several Indian groups.⁵¹

The Pragmatic Dictator Closes Most Doors to Missionaries

The favors of the Guatemalan Government began to disappear once Orellana was no longer in office. On October 1929, Guatemala entered into a state of political instability as a result of the worldwide Depression. Out of the confusion rose a strong man, with a reputation of efficiency and infamy, who entered the presidency in 1931: General Jorge Ubico. Garrard-Burnett gave an interesting description of the colorful dictator,

Although he fashioned himself as a Republican dictator in the traditional liberal mold, Ubico's policies differed significantly from those of his predecessors. Paranoid and idiosyncratic, Ubico refused to surround himself with a coterie of advisers or ideologues ("I have no friends," he once famously declared, "only domesticated enemies . . .beware! I am a tiger and you are the monkeys") and ruled largely by intuition and fiat.⁵²

He distrusted missionaries and blocked their entry into Guatemala for nearly fifteen years with rare exceptions. During this time, the Catholic Church began to recover from the anti-Catholic sentiments that were common in many Latin American countries of the region as Ubico began to bestow upon them special political favors. The Catholic leaders

⁴⁹ Sywulka, *Portadores del Evangelio*, 143-45.

⁵⁰ Garrard-Burnett, 55.

⁵¹ Sywulka, *Portadores del Evangelio*, 145-51.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 71.

were invited to preside over public events. They were permitted to have huge public gatherings of their worship services and ceremonies as they interrupted public activities with their religious processions. Evangelicals were "recommended" not to have public displays of open worship.⁵³ On the other hand, Ubico realized that the old customs and traditions of the Indians were not helping the modernization of his country, and when Catholic leaders of Mayan communities came to him asking him to prohibit the Protestants from preaching in their areas, he answered, "Your people are full of old customs; you need progress."⁵⁴ When they asked the president on another occasion to interfere with Protestants in Jutiapa, he replied, "Two things I cannot remove: the Mounted Police and the Protestants; because what the evangelicals don't improve, the Mounted Police will. . ."⁵⁵

The Entry of Modern Pentecostals

The Church of God in Indian Territory

In 1916 Thomas Pullin and Charles Furman under the auspices of the United Free Gospel Mission Society began a ministry in the Indian Departments of El Quiché and Totonicapan. After a term of service, Furman returned to the United States for his furlough and associated himself with the Primitive Methodist Church. He returned to Guatemala in 1922 and assimilated many of his former works as well as other Holiness groups into the Primitive Methodist Church. Later, the Primitive Methodists acquired the works and some properties, of the independent missionary, Dr. C. F. Secord in Chichicastenango. Furman returned again to the States where he joined the Church of God (Cleveland, TN) and re-entered Guatemala as a dynamic preacher. He proselyted fourteen Primitive Methodist

⁵³ Paredes in *Portadores del Evangelio*, 49.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 49.

churches to form the core of the Church of God.⁵⁶ This was a severe blow to the Methodist mission and a serious wrinkle in inter-church relations.^{57, 58}

Assembly of God

Only World War II helped to change the closed door policy of Ubico as the United States actively courted Latin American nations as allies against Hitler. Ubico relaxed his stance and slowly began to let outside missionary agencies enter Guatemala, such as the Church of God and the Assembly of God in 1934 and 1935 respectively.⁵⁹ The Assembly of God missionaries, John and Helen Franklin, entered into Atescatempa, Jutiapa in 1937 and preached the experience of the "baptism of the Holy Spirit" along with external manifestations. From the beginning of their work, they started a proselytizing ministry that cost the existing denominations dearly.⁶⁰

Protestant Dynamics and Slow Growth

In the late 1920s unfortunately, relationships among the Protestant denominations was at a low ebb and they suffered criticism from outside the church by the union workers for their "intrigue and deceptions" against the Guatemalan people and were looked upon as the new Conquistadors.⁶¹ The expansive, dynamic ministries within the Cinco Calles church began to sour around 1928, because the American pastor was extremely paternalistic, frustrating many of the budding Guatemalan leaders in the church. These

⁵⁶ Zapata, 127.

⁵⁷ Paredes in *Portadores del Evangelio*, 38.

⁵⁸ After that setback, the Primitive Methodist Church continued to struggle until the late 1950s when another blow hit as the brunt of the terrible Guatemalan civil war ravaged their main work area in El Quiché.

⁵⁹ Garrard-Burnett, 38.

⁶⁰ Paredes in *Portadores del Evangelio*, 40.

⁶¹ Garrard-Burnett, 74.

leaders left, and birthed another church, "Getsemani." Getsemani later formed an association of churches that became Baptist churches.⁶²

In the early 1920s, nearly twenty missionaries from the Presbyterian, Central American Mission, Nazarene, and Friends churches banded together and started an inter-missions conference which provided fellowship, sharing, and encouragement. They recognized their marked differences and competitive nature but they sought to improve strained relationships among the groups. Although denominations maintained profound differences, Zapata wrote in 1980 that the spirit of the second generation of missionaries molded the fraternal character of the Guatemalan Church. "For this reason . . . in Guatemala is the phenomena where members, even pastors, from different denominations easily cross between churches of different denominations."⁶³ This spirit exists today in the Guatemalan churches as they emphasize the importance of first being an evangelical, rather than part of a particular denomination. Similarly, in 1936 the major denominations of "sound doctrine" created a "Synod" to continue to coordinate and regionalize their respective areas of work.⁶⁴ This synod was a reaffirmation of the 1902 Comity agreement between the original denominations who had divided the county into sectors of work: the Presbyterian, Central American, Friends and the Nazarene missions. This understanding between denominations broke down in the mid 1940s as Pentecostals expanded in the country. They were not part of the initial agreement. The Pentecostal denominations were doing a work that had more of a nation-wide perspective that stimulated the four original denominations to expand the reaches of their works.⁶⁵ In 1951, the organization was

⁶² Zapata, 145.

⁶³ Zapata, 110.

⁶⁴ Paredes in *Portadores del Evangelio*, 52. Paredes is quoted in Zapata, saying that part of the reason to restate the Comity Agreement was in reaction to the aggressive Pentecostals.

⁶⁵ Garrard-Burnett, 29-32.

restructured and its name changed to the *Alianza Evangélica de Guatemala*, or the Evangelical Alliance of Guatemala.

Garrard-Burnett, Nuñez, and Sheldon Annis⁶⁶ maintain that in the period beginning with the Great Depression until around 1940, the Protestants in Guatemala failed to thrive as some have supposed and the overall growth rate of churches, outside of CAM indicate this. Garrard-Burnett asserts that the failure of the institutional missions was, in part, due to lack of support of missions from the United States as a result of the financial crisis of the Great Depression and the two World Wars. An ongoing feud between Edward Haymaker of the Presbyterian Church and Alfred Bishop of the Central American Mission (Bishop was accused as being the grand "sheep stealer") served as a poison to those outside the church. At times, Protestant missionaries felt that the Guatemalan culture was wholly unsuited to the advances that they offered in terms of the Protestant Work Ethic.⁶⁷

Summary of Growth in Broadening of the Protestant Base: 1921-1945

In 1940, the official census of the population of Guatemala was registered as 3,283,209 persons, with 162,790 living in the Capital. It indicated that there were 3,220,261 Catholics and 48,270 Protestants or, in other words, 1.47% of the total Guatemalan population identified themselves with evangelical denominations. Of the 48,270 Protestants, 27,063 belonged to the Central American Mission.⁶⁸

The evangelical church growth during this period was slow and it was not a time of "Rapid Expansion" as Zapata maintained.⁶⁹ The denominations generally continued in the good graces of the government which recognized the value of their social ministries and

⁶⁶ Annis, 78 and Nuñez, in *Portadores del Evangelio*, 71.

⁶⁷ Garrard-Burnett, 37-41.

⁶⁸ Paredes in *Portadores del Evangelio*, 57.

⁶⁹ Zapata, 118.

literacy work, especially among the Indians. Proselytizing was a real point of contention between the denominations. Taking members and in some instances, entire congregations, created strained relations between CAM and the Presbyterians; the Primitive Methodist and the Church of God; and the traditional churches with the Pentecostal churches.

On a positive note, work in the Indian dialects built a foundation. This encouraged CAM and the Presbyterians to focus on Bible translation and Indian work. Wycliffe Bible Translators formed and worked alongside major denominations. During this period, growth was limited among the Indians, but solid foundations were being prepared.

The New Liberal Government, Social Reforms and Beginnings of Maturity for Protestants: 1945-1963

Another Revolution and Nationalistic Beginnings in the Church

Guatemala plunged into another revolution in 1945 that was led by liberals who were dedicated to social and peasant reforms. The United States looked suspiciously at the resulting liberal administrations of Juan José Arévalo and Jacobo Arbenz as Communistic due to their uncompromising stances on reforms connected with the remuneration and redistribution of lands, including those of the American owned United Fruit Company.⁷⁰

The progressive administrations continued the non-interference with Protestant missionaries in the Indian areas as they put them in the forefront of education.⁷¹ Protestants believed that the ability to read the Bible was tied to Christianity and as such, all of the original denominations championed the cause of literacy. During the 1940s, evangelicals were heavily involved in denominational and governmental literacy programs.⁷² The Evangelical Presbyterian Synod held massive literacy campaigns on the United Fruit

⁷⁰ Schlesinger and Kinser *Bitter Fruit, The Untold Story of the American Coup in Guatemala* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Press, 1983), 19-33.

⁷¹ Emilio Nuñez, in *Portadores del Evangelio*, 72.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 81.

Company's huge plantations and peasant communities for nearly fifteen years. In 1954, an inter-denominational journal of Guatemalan news reported about, "a great campaign to put the Word into the hands of the new settlers [of the expropriated lands] into the Tiquisate region."⁷³

Reforms and anti-American sentiment in Guatemalan government affected the Protestant churches. During this time some Guatemalan Protestants began to make their first breaks from their missionary mentors as they formed independent churches and new denominations.⁷⁴ The word "mission" was no longer synonymous with Protestant work in general, because during the 1940s and 1950s, the independent works began to mature apart from direct control of American missionary programs.⁷⁵

In 1952, the American leadership of the Presbyterian mission concluded that it was time for the North American missionaries to leave the work in the hands of Guatemalans as they began to sever administrative ties and withdraw personnel. This proved to be premature as it nearly destroyed the Presbyterian mission, plunging it into a leadership and financial crisis. There was a backlash among other conservative American led denominations as they viewed this as proof that it was still necessary to maintain strong North American presence.⁷⁶

⁷³ Schlesinger and Kinser, 42 quoting *Guatemala News* 43 (1954), 3. The research of this project within the Interior of Guatemala indicates that one of the stronger and most concentrated areas for evangelicals, 38.6%, in the *municipio* of Tiquisate (see the Demographic section of this paper). Apparently the fruit that is seen today, is related to this massive Bible-literacy campaign.

⁷⁴ Delgado, 102.

⁷⁵ For an example of the strong distinction between "Mission" and "Church," see interview with Fernando Mazariegos, president of the Central Presbyter of the Guatemalan Presbyterian Church in Appendix 8.11.

⁷⁶ Garrard-Burnett, 114-15.

Beginnings of the Insurgency: Nationalism and New Guatemalan Churches

In 1953, the United States led a CIA backed invasion into Guatemala where they deposed the president, Jacobo Arbenz, and replaced him with the conservative General Carlos Castillo Armas. The historian, María Causes, states that when the liberal Arbenz was replaced by Castillo Armas in 1954, the old alliances within the fruit exporting oligarchy came back into power.⁷⁷ The political climate seemed to be returning to the former unfavorable times of Ubico. Protestants were tense because the new government restored many old privileges to the Catholic Church.

Continued Deterioration of the Rural Catholic Church

Not only were hostility and violence directed against Protestants, but for different reasons against the Catholic Church, as well. The catalyst for this was the Catholic Action Movement. This movement started in Europe and placed European priests in primitive areas⁷⁸ to combat "humanism, Protestantism, nationalism, subjective revelation, historical materialism, and laicism."⁷⁹ The priests entered into the Indian areas specifically to combat traditional religion by denouncing the Protestant missionaries and the customs of the Mayans. As the Maryknoll priests entered in the Departments of Huehuetenango and El Quiché in 1945, the locals said, "many customs died."^{80, 81} Catholicism, as presented by the European based missionaries, did not mesh well with the culture. Although the Catholic

⁷⁷ María Casaus Arzú and Rolando Castillo, ed., *La Metamorfosis de las Oligarquías Centroamericanas en Centroamerica. Balance de la Década de los 80. Una Respuesta Regional* (Madrid: CEDAL, 1993), 265-322.

⁷⁸ Anna L. Peterson, *Martyrdom and the Politics of Religion* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1997), 56.

⁷⁹ Garrard-Burnett, 104.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 106.

⁸¹ Cleary, 173.

Church produced followers, it produced few Guatemalan leaders. According to Cleary, between 1945 through 1954, only three Guatemalan priests were ordained, and the ratio of Catholics to priests was 16,039 to 1.⁸² Most parishes did not have priests due to the shortage. Further, Huber Miller writes,

. . . the Catholic church's failure [was to] to develop a native clergy and an adequate number of clergy to minister to its flock. This situation provided a favorable environment in which evangelicals could work and gain converts. This was particularly true in rural areas where the clerical dearth was most obvious.⁸³

The Maturing Protestant Church and a New Generation of Missionaries

During the 1950s, evangelical mission agencies renewed their interest in Central America due to wars in Asia and redeployment of personnel from these areas. Many fundamental evangelical groups began to establish connections in Latin America.

Garrard-Burnett wrote,

The new faith missions, which heralded this fresh approach, were free from the established Protestant churches in Guatemala and differed from the traditional denominations in structure, purpose, and methodology. Where the regional churches were sectarian, the new groups were inter-denominational, where the traditional denominations engaged in a wide range of projects such as schools, clinics, and translation projects, the new groups -- with exception of the Wycliffe Bible translators -- concentrated entirely on evangelization. Above all, where the established churches had been divided on the question of politics, the new organizations were staunchly and unequivocally anti-Communist.⁸⁴

As the revolution was beginning in 1953, a phenomenal movement started in the small Assembly of God Church with the miraculous healing campaigns of T. L. Osburn. Orlando Pinzon stated that the work mushroomed in the central highlands to such an extent

⁸² Ibid., 170.

⁸³ Ibid., 170.

⁸⁴ Garrard-Burnett, 108.

that there was a need to formally organize the churches into presbyters and districts in 1957. With subsequent unified direction and increased training, they expanded even more. By 1980, the Assembly of God Church became well-established throughout the country.⁸⁵

As CAM continued to expand, it began to mature and to add additional ministries to its organizational structure. From 1944 through 1957, the Central American Mission organized its local regional chapters. This organization served to strongly unify the denomination and resulted in a time of intense growth. During this time CAM introduced the radio ministry, (as would other denominations later), matured their theological education for leaders, accelerated entry into Indian areas, and emphasized evangelization and development of women, youth and children.⁸⁶ Nuñez states that CAM continued the basic ministries as the Church matured,

The Central American Mission has always given priority to "evangelism" and the education of those who believe in Christ for salvation. But there have been such a variety of needs within the majority of Guatemala, that . . . many missionaries and pastors have not been deaf to the cries of the poor, and much less of the true Bible teaching about authentic love and good works. This Christian sensitivity has resulted in the establishment of clinics, kindergartens and schools; medical crusades, literacy campaigns and other social works.⁸⁷

Because of the strong forces of nationalism, doctrinal differences and diverted beliefs of the newly converted Protestants, dozens of small indigenous groups began to split off from the older established churches. Many of these formed new denominations that had no relationship to any American sponsored denominations. One of the most impressive examples was the Prince of Peace Church led by José Muñoz . He stated that his denomination would be "pure Guatemalan." And it was! They did not have an

⁸⁵ Orlando Herrera Pinzon, superintendent of the Assembly of God Church in Guatemala, taped interview by the author and Abner Rivera, Guatemala, Guatemala, 10 May 2001.

⁸⁶ Emilio Antonio Nuñez in *Portadores del Evangelio*, 75-82.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 83.

American staff or help in their nationalistic and tirelessly evangelistic work.⁸⁸ Muñoz was an eloquent speaker who knew how to effectively use his God-given talent of public speaking. He preached in his church, in the streets, in campaigns, on the radio and was well known throughout all of Guatemala. As he prayed for the sick there were "marvelous healings that only God could do."⁸⁹ In 1955 there were 300 members in his church. By 1980, the Prince of Peace Church had more than 29,000 members with 567 churches and following his death, the church continued to grow. According to Zapata, this Pentecostal Church dynamically grew due to Muñoz's contagious and dynamic nature, his popular radio program, and the emphasis upon young people.⁹⁰ As of 2002, Prince of Peace is the fourth largest denomination in Guatemala.⁹¹ The success and appeal of the Prince of Peace Church stimulated many denominations to press for nationalization and to increase independence from the mother denominations.⁹²

CAM continued to expand Indian works and enter into more language groups. During this time they established the work in Barillas as they concentrated in scripture translation, evangelization, and teaching. Shortly after entry into Barillas, they established a Bible institute, a medical clinic, and a radio ministry. Today Barillas is a bastion of CAM work. They expanded into other language groups during this time: the Kanjobal, Ostancalco Mam, Chuj, Jacteco, Tekticteco, and other languages as well. CAM has always emphasized Bible translations into local Mayan languages as they worked closely with Wycliffe Bible translators.⁹³

⁸⁸ Garrard-Burnett, 116.

⁸⁹ Zapata, 156.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 156-157.

⁹¹ See demographic section.

⁹² Garrard-Burnett, 117.

⁹³ Sywulka, in *Portadores del Evangelio*, 141-51.

Growth in the Period of Beginnings of Maturity for Protestants: 1945-1963

According to the 1950 population census, there were 78,208 evangelicals in the country, representing 2.8% of the country's population. Suazo quotes Zapata where he calculated that 23,000 persons were in the CAM community in 1950.⁹⁴ Much of the early history of evangelicals was influenced by CAM. By 1960, Protestant presence grew to 4% of the total population, according to the historian Jorge Lujan Muñoz.^{95, 96}

During this phase of Protestant life, some of the conditions that provoked Protestant growth were the following:

1. Evangelicals continued both strong evangelistic and social ministries.
2. Evangelicals emphasized the training of nationals thus creating new generations of leaders.
3. Evangelicals introduced effective Christian radio broadcasting.
4. Nationalism and anti-American sentiment accelerated independence from some American mission agencies, creating ministries that were Guatemalan in nature.
5. The Catholic Action Movement further alienated the general rural population from the Catholic Church.⁹⁷
6. The growing presence and subsequent establishment of the Assembly of God and Church of God Denominations created healthy competition among the traditional denominations.

In his doctoral thesis, Julian Lloret summarized factors for church growth in the Indian areas:⁹⁸

⁹⁴ David Suazo J., in *Portadores del Evangelio*, 92.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁹⁶ According to Peter Brierly, ed., *World Churches Handbook* (London: BPC Wheaton Ltd., 1997), 371-377. The evangelical community was 3.4% of the total population.

⁹⁷ This is also the conclusion of Wilton N. Nelson, *Protestantism in Central America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 58.

⁹⁸ Julian Lloret, "The Maya Evangelical Church

1. Effective pioneer evangelism by North American and Guatemalan missionaries.
2. Biblical edification of new converts and formation of local leadership.
3. Translation of the Bible into Indian languages.

The Civil War and the Explosion of Evangelicals and Pentecostalism: 1963-1976

Bloody Politics and Social Instability

After the coup of 1953, Guatemala suffered political instability that culminated in another *coup de estat* in 1963 when the Army brought firm and harsh order into the country under the presidency of Enrique Perleta Azurdia. This regime marked the beginning of an extended civil war which marred the political and social dimensions through subversion, guerrilla warfare, and planned violence in order to destabilize the government. In 1966, Perlata relinquished the reins of the government to another general, Julio César Mendez Montenegro, who stepped up the military campaign against insurgents. The war became so difficult that a state of emergency was declared from 1971 to 1972 and constitutional guarantees were removed. The government launched a campaign to eliminate selectively intellectuals and leaders of the popular movement. Amnesty International filed a report with the United Nations in 1978 where they stated there were 20,000 political assassinations committed between 1965 and 1977.⁹⁹

As a result of the insecurity, the 1970s birthed the popular worker and peasant movements for union and security. University students and labor unions led systematic public demonstrations to disrupt the functioning of government. The government reacted to these public demonstrations as they organized execution squads to eliminate key members of the illegal groups. As government reaction against its citizens escalated, even

in Guatemala" (Doctoral Thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1976), 253-55.

⁹⁹ *Informe de Genocidio. Los Refugiados Guatemaltecos* (Mexico, D. F.: Edinos La Paz), 10.

more insurgent groups against the government developed. They formed a military campaign against army and government infrastructures primarily in the western and central parts of Guatemala. In the late 1970s various guerrilla factions in Guatemala melded into one movement that was known as the National United Revolutionaries of Guatemala, (URNG). The nineteen years of continued violence between March 1963 and March 1982 permitted the institutionalization of the Army as a formidable political force. From 1963 through 1985, Guatemala was ruled by military dictators.¹⁰⁰

Growing and Visible Evangelicals Become a National Presence

The majority of Protestant churches in Guatemala have strong roots in North American Protestantism. As such, movements from the United States have directly influenced the Protestant movement in Guatemala. Protestantism in the United States can be divided into four categories.

- ◆ Mainstream Protestantism which came from the European immigration into the United States.
- ◆ Fundamental Protestantism which was birthed from the frontier revivals of the 19th-century in the United States.
- ◆ Pentecostalism which had its beginnings in the lower class revivals during the early part of the 20th-century.
- ◆ Charismatic neo-pentecostalism has risen during the 1960s and 1970s out of traditional Pentecostal churches directed toward the middle and upper classes.¹⁰¹

Since Guatemalan Protestantism is historically related to Protestantism in the United States, religious trends from the States influence Protestants in Guatemala. In the early 1950s, citywide evangelistic crusades using the media were popularized in American

¹⁰⁰ Delgado, 57.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 99.

culture by Billy Graham. His interdenominational evangelistic crusades contributed to a new growth wave of Protestantism or Evangelicalism into the American Churches and promoted cooperation among strong, traditional Protestant denominations.

Just as the massive American evangelistic campaigns were reaping fruit in the States, the key evangelical leaders in cooperation with the *Alianza Evangélica* planned and executed massive campaigns that began unprecedented interdenominational cooperation and a great harvest. The 1958 Billy Graham campaign in Guatemala City had more than 42,000 in attendance and thousands were saved. Even though this was not the first massive evangelistic campaign in Guatemala, this was the first inter-denominational campaign that had immense audiences; and all of the nation took notice. This was only a prelude. One of the most profound events for evangelicals was the 1962 Evangelism-in-Depth campaign, directed by Kenneth Strachan of the Latin American Mission. According to both secular and evangelical historians, this campaign added between 15,000 to 20,000 new converts to the Evangelical Church in one year. The main goal was to evangelize personally every household in Guatemala City. The Latin American Mission was truly an inter-denominational organization as they coordinated individual denominations to follow through with new converts. Their methodology included massive advertising campaigns, radio sermons, elaborate parades, advertising jingles, seminars, week-long retreats, and door-to-door evangelism delivered by trained Guatemalan laymen. The glitzy and massive advertising was new to Guatemala.¹⁰² The Evangelism-in-Depth project distributed 500,000 Gospels and one million tracts by Guatemalans to nearly 250,000 homes. All churches that participated experienced incredible numerical growth.¹⁰³ The Latin American

¹⁰² Willy K. Braun, "A Campaign Becomes a Movement," *Latin American Evangelist* 48 (Nov 1968): 1-5.

¹⁰³ W. Dayton Roberts, "Pentecost South of the Border," *Christianity Today* 7 (July 1963): 32.

Mission attributed the unparalleled success of this crusade to the door-to-door strategy evangelization, efficient planning, and above all, God's grace.¹⁰⁴ Protestants were given high visibility as the President of the Republic, Miguel Ydígoras Fuentes, addressed the audience of pastors and welcomed the participants. This was the first time a Guatemalan president had officially participated in a public evangelical event.¹⁰⁵ These events marked a turning point for Evangelicals as they lost the fear of being known as Evangelicals and in turn, more aggressively evangelized and planted churches.¹⁰⁶

Other massive interdenominational campaigns followed, such as the 1968 "Campaign of 100,000" where more than 30,000 believers were added to the Church. Luis Palau held a massive evangelistic campaign in 1971, adding more than 3000 people to the Church. David Suazo contends that the campaigns were successful because denominations grew as a result of these efforts. But more profound were the unprecedented cooperation between various denominations and new evangelization strategies that continued long after the campaigns. The campaigns developed strong evangelistic national leadership able to advance the national Church.¹⁰⁷

Critical Mass of Evangelicals Removed the Stigma of Being Evangelical and Created Momentum

The national campaigns in Guatemala pushed evangelical work into the critical mass zone. In explaining the overall growth of evangelicals in Latin America, Mike Berg

¹⁰⁴ George W. Peters, *Saturation Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), 45-75.

¹⁰⁵ Zapata, 175.

¹⁰⁶ Clifton L. Holland, personal correspondence, 25 January 2002, of a pre-press document to be published in J. Gordon Melton and Martin Bauman, ed., *Religions of the World: A Comprehensive Encyclopedia of Beliefs and Practices* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO), to be published in June 2002.

¹⁰⁷ David Suazo in *Portadores del Evangelio*, 94-96.

and Paul Pretiz described, "a critical mass of evangelicals had been achieved."¹⁰⁸ If there was a small amount of highly dedicated Christians in a city or area, their presence might not be felt by the non-evangelical population. When at least 10 percent of the population were dedicated evangelicals, aggressively evangelizing, then the entire city began to feel their presence. This created a spiritual ambiance, so that if a person was not part of an Evangelical Church, he felt he was missing something. A critical mass legitimized the evangelical sub-culture and encouraged all evangelical groups to see themselves as a part of a positive, and growing movement in society. This positive ambiance stimulated the stronger churches and encouraged the weaker churches and denominations as they benefited from the momentum of the stronger and more aggressive denominations. Burg's and Pretiz' general description of Latin American movements describe the evangelical picture in Guatemala after 15 years of massive campaigns.

The Ascendency of Pentecostalism

Close to the time of the massive evangelistic campaigns Pentecostalism began to dominate the religious landscape. The interdenominational spirit of the massive campaigns established a network of interrelationships boosting Pentecostalism to the stature of the main line denominations. From 1965 to 1970 the Assembly of God Church grew from 18,800 to 87,800 members, almost a five-fold increase in five years. The Church of God doubled in size during this same time.¹⁰⁹ Pentecostal theology swept through many rural congregations and birthed new ones. Pentecostal worship form became the dominant style

¹⁰⁸ Mike Berg and Paul Pretiz, "Five Waves of Protestantism" in Cook, ed., *New Face of the Church in Latin America*, 63.

¹⁰⁹ Peter Brierly, ed., *World Churches Handbook* (London: BPC Wheaton Ltd., 1997), 371-77.

within many traditional churches and it created conflicts in other churches.

Garrard-Burnett observed that Pentecostalism had a special affinity with the Indian groups because glossalia substituted for their indigenous utterances commonly used in their Mayan worship. She also pointed out a more earthly affinity toward pentecostalism,

. . . moreover . . . the Pentecostal services provided entertainment and its purest form . . . To the poor in urban and rural areas alike, the Pentecostal services provided free entertainment and emotional outlets with which neither soccer games, movies, nor other churches could compete.¹¹⁰

Apart from the emotive worship form of Pentecostalism, Harvey Cox maintained that it rose to the forefront for religious reasons. He stated,

. . . while the beliefs of . . . many other religious groups are enshrined in formal theological systems, those of Pentecostalism are embedded in testimonies, ecstatic speech and bodily movement. But it is a theology, a full-blown religious cosmos, an intricate system of symbols that respond to the perennial questions of human meaning and life.¹¹¹

Rather than new doctrine, Pentecostalism offers a new experience with God. Juan Sepúlveda asserted that Pentecostalism ascended over Catholicism and many traditional Protestant forms because they emphasize an intense personal encounter with God as opposed to a relationship with an organization.¹¹²

Some observers believe that the incredible growth of Pentecostals during the late 1960s and early 1970s was not a result of net Protestant growth, but was a transfer growth from the main line denominations. This transfer growth indicates that a fundamental change was occurring within Protestantism itself. In 1970, sixty percent of the evangelical

¹¹⁰ Garrard-Burnett, 117-18.

¹¹¹ Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the 21st Century* (Reading Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley, 1995), 15.

¹¹² Juan Sepúlveda in Guillermo Cook ed., *New Face of the Church in Latin America* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1994), 72.

population of the country was Pentecostal.^{113, 114} In 1980, three of the six largest denominations were Pentecostal and 52.1% of evangelicals as a whole were Pentecostal.¹¹⁵

Growth in the Period of Evangelical Explosion and Pentecostalism: 1963-1976

In 1975, evangelicals continued to grow in total numbers and also in relation to the general percentage of the population. There were 640,000 evangelicals out of a total population of 6,022,000. This signifies that slightly more than 10 percent of the total population was evangelical.¹¹⁶

Zapata summarized the growth style of the evangelical work in two pertinent ways.¹¹⁷ First, growth by division through doctrinal reasons, culture, or personality that formed new denominations and churches. Second, growth through addition of new converts through massive evangelistic events. He concluded, "rare is the church that lacks congregations, missions or preaching points (white fields). This missionary zeal has grown the evangelical community more than any other reason."¹¹⁸

Zapata attributed the incredible growth of churches to constant evangelizing efforts of the laity on a personal level or through massive campaigns, united campaigns, and an emphasis on reaching young people through youth societies and special ministries. Other growth factors were the myriad of church supported organizations that worked in the areas

¹¹³ Garrard-Burnett, 119.

¹¹⁴ Sherman states that more than half of the evangelical population was Pentecostal by 1981. Amy L. Sherman, *The Soul of Development: Biblical Christianity and Economic Transformation in Guatemala* (Oxford, 1997).

¹¹⁵ Holland, personal correspondence.

¹¹⁶ Peter Brierly, ed., *World Churches Handbook* (London: BPC Wheaton Ltd., 1997), 371-77.

¹¹⁷ Zapata, 173-74.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 173.

of Bible translation, university work, relief work, social work, and education. The heavy and effective use of radio and television profoundly edified the evangelical community. Saturating the media with the Gospel created an open climate to hear, understand, and accept the message of Jesus Christ.¹¹⁹

The last reason for evangelical growth is that "critical mass" was achieved. This began to change Guatemalan culture and politics in the coming years.

The Spiritual Explosion out of Political Degeneration and National Catastrophe: 1976-1993

The Explosion of the Church

A devastating earthquake rocked Guatemala in 1976 killing more than 23,000 people. This tragedy awakened many conservative evangelical Christians and churches in the United States as wave after wave of American fundamental groups came into Guatemala to help rebuild in the aftermath of the disaster. Secular historians realized that the fallout after the earthquake substantially accelerated the growth of evangelical churches within Guatemala.¹²⁰ The fastest growing churches in this time were CAM, Church of God- Whole Gospel, Prince of Peace, Assembly of God and Elim. Evangelical churches enjoyed a 14% annual growth rate and by 1982, 20% of the population was evangelical. Statistical records demonstrated however, that most of the evangelical growth was not in the traditional denominations but rather, within the new and established Pentecostal denominations.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 172-75.

¹²⁰ Suazo in *Portadores del Evangelio*, 103.

¹²¹ Ibid., 104.

The Horrible Insurgent-Government War Produced Insecurity in the Countryside and Security in the Rural Protestant Churches ¹²²

During the ruthless years of military power, General Lucas García was elected president in the general elections on March 17, 1982. The elections were decried as being fraudulently stolen. This was not unusual in Guatemalan politics, but this time the fraud was so blatant that it created an outcry from most sectors of Guatemala and they refused to be silenced. Lucas then initiated the darkest years of Guatemalan history. More than half of a million people were displaced from their homeland during the regime of Lucas García, primarily from the departments of El Quiché and Huehuetenango. In addition to the refugees, brutal mass murders signaled a wave of government repression. The four Departments registering the most assassinations in descending order were: El Quiché, Alta Verapaz, Escuintla and Huehuetenango.¹²³ On March 23, 1982, the younger officers of the Army brought down Lucas García in a military coup, annulled the elections, disbanded Congress, and returned the Republic to the 1965 Constitution. The government was run by a trio of younger officers until the "junta" was dissolved, leaving only the fiery evangelical, General Efraín Ríos Montt, as president. Ríos Montt thus inherited an out of control government as well as a desperately unstable social order.

With the country in disarray, a deep seated resentment among the peasants (*campesinos*), and frustration within the richer classes, a revolution was birthed. Montt unleashed an enormous counter insurgency campaign that precipitated the most radical waves of repression that Guatemala had ever known. The military government led by Ríos Montt was not a monolithic movement, but was a combination of counter-revolutionary

¹²² Most of this information was structured from the information of the excellent book of Manuela Delgado, *Bautizados en Fuego*, 57-65.

¹²³ César Castañella, *Lucha por la Tierra: Retornados y Medioambiente en Huehuetenango* (Guatemala, Guatemala: FLASCO, 1998), 111-35.

reform and war. Montt has said, "Heroes usually return from wars covered with medals and decorations; I only want to be covered with the blood of Christ."¹²⁴ Ríos Montt was an active member and leader in the evangelical Verbo Church, and was the first evangelical president, albeit a dictator, to rule in Latin America. He received the support of North American Protestants, (mainly Pentecostals) as they asked for economic help in order to combat Marxist insurgency and poverty.

The President attempted to convert the religion of Guatemala to Protestantism as he placed Protestants in key positions of government. He was openly an evangelical as well as evangelistic as he gave weekly radio and television addresses. Converting to Protestantism was convenient and popular as it immensely helped a person's employment as well as personal safety. Montt's presence as the Pentecostal evangelical president helped legitimize Neo-pentecostals in the country among all socio-economic classes.

Montt's moralistic and disciplined rule only lasted two years. He was tolerated by the right-wing military establishment and the business elites only as long as he was bringing order to the ravaged country. But in time, it was clear that he could not bring economic recovery and in short order, was deposed from power by General Oscar Humberto Mejías Victores in 1984.

Stabilizing the country and human rights were Mejías' priorities. He opened the country for the entry of human rights groups as well as the European Community which assessed the needs of the basic infrastructure and aided in its recovery. International human rights groups through military records discovered that between 1954 through 1980 more than 70,000 Guatemalans were assassinated by military groups. The Mejías regime

¹²⁴Delgado, 59.

served a two year transition to prepare for the free election of a President. In 1986, the first time in more than thirty years, Guatemala elected a president who was not a military leader.

Historians maintain that Vinicio Cerezo Arevelo, (1986-1991) was handed a relatively tranquil country, with a golden opportunity to bring peace and economic development, but squandered it on internal scandals, graft, corruption, and nepotism. He did not go far enough to break the vicious cycle of war and was accused of being involved in violations of human rights. Before he left office, all of Guatemala was tired of the scandals, broken promises, and the terrible economy.

In the last year prior to Cerezo leaving office, evangelism and politics began to mix. From the El Shaddai Church, a prophet by the name of Jorge Serrano Elías entered the presidential race. With a combination of a growing evangelical population in Guatemala coupled with the reality that a new social base had to be constructed, the people elected the evangelical, Serrano Elías, to lead in social and moral reforms.¹²⁵

The Leftist Catholic Church Was Not a Safe Haven During the War

Catholic theology looks to social and political solutions to the problem of general corporate sin. This opens the door to social activism. In 1943 the socially active Maryknolls, headed by a former Maoist from China, entered into rural areas of Guatemala, propagating liberation theology among catechists. They established "grass root Christian communities of political and social action" based upon Paulo Freire's principles of "See-Judge-Act."¹²⁶ The catechists were labeled as Communist social activists and by the 1970s and 1980s the army treated the community service groups as insurgents. "In

¹²⁵ Anne Mortley Hallen, *Beyond Missions: Toward an Understanding of the Protestant Movement in Central America* (Boulder, Colorado: Rowan and Littlefield Publishing, 1996), 106-107.

¹²⁶ Peterson, 43.

Guatemala, the idea of an 'Evangelical guerrilla' would be absurd; a 'Catholic guerrilla' would not."¹²⁷ The combination of a ravaged culture shaking the very social fabric along with the rapid decline of the Catholic Church, helped to open the doors further to the aggressive Protestants.¹²⁸

Not only did politics alienate the Catholic Church, but the lifestyle of persons in the Church contrasted to law abiding evangelicals. Concentrating upon social action versus personal responsibility to God has observable effects. Delgado contrasted between the attitudes of members of evangelical churches in relation to those in the Catholic Church,

. . . the best proof that the person has identified himself as an evangelical . . . is that he is always under scrutiny by others, and when he violates one of the precepts [of his church], he is quickly reminded by others. . . . But no one is worried about nor censors a Catholic when he gets drunk, goes to the Fiestas or beats his wife. That is, it is not considered necessarily a contradiction with his religious affiliation. . . . It is necessary to admit that among Catholics, in general, there is a minimum practical connection between the rites, moral prescriptions and daily conduct.¹²⁹

Protestant Concern with Individual Salvation

Protestants grew for the practical reason that during Montt's regime "Protestantism was simply safer than Catholicism."¹³⁰ Protestants grew because in a war context of instability, many Pentecostal churches often preached apocalyptic themes. As many rural people saw their loved ones murdered and others displaced, they identified with the end-time cataclysmic plagues and wrath of God.¹³¹ Only the Bible could explain the evil

¹²⁷ Annis, 144.

¹²⁸ Delgado, 82.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 113.

¹³⁰ Annis, 79.

¹³¹ Ibid.

they saw in their lives. During the most intense years of counter-insurgency in the 1970s and 1980s, a vast influx of people joined the rural Protestant churches as a sure way of avoiding persecution or execution from the army and guerrillas.¹³² Evangelicals, and especially traditional Pentecostals, did not concern themselves with social structure. They concentrated on individual salvation and conversion. During this era of cultural upheaval and displacement, some traditional Protestant and many Pentecostal churches offered personal help for refugees, and a refuge for those who lost friends and family through the fellowship of a church. The Evangelical Church helped to fill the void created by the horrible civil war.

In spite of the war that was destroying the countryside, evangelicals continued to grow in notoriety, boldness, and numbers. In the middle of the reign of terror and public demonstrations led by insurgents, a light shined as evangelicals celebrated the centennial anniversary of the Evangelical Church in Guatemala in 1982. This massive series of events surprised all of Guatemalan society, including evangelicals. More than 750,000 people gathered on 2 November 1982 to celebrate God's work in Guatemala.¹³³ This was the largest public gathering in the history of the nation.¹³⁴

Pentecostal Churches Sweep the Rural Base and Gather in Large Numbers

During the time of her study in the early 1990s, Garrard-Burnett reported the competition between Pentecostals and the traditional churches. Even though the core

¹³²Delgado, 99-100.

¹³³History and this author's observations are that evangelicals hold massive, orderly rallies for Jesus and Catholic Action Groups hold massive rallies, blocking the streets demanding justice.

¹³⁴Suazo in *Portadores del Evangelio*, 105-106.

doctrine was similar, Pentecostals accused the traditional groups of lacking both the Holy Spirit and life in their worship services. The traditional churches accused the Pentecostals of being over-emotional and manipulative in their disordered and uncontrolled services.¹³⁵

Initially Pentecostals found a foothold primarily among the rural poor who were outside the social and political system. Pentecostalism gave them a sense of belonging along with an emotional religion that displayed practical results through a disciplined lifestyle.¹³⁶ Cleary shows that in the political and social climate in the war torn rural areas, many found it easy and convenient to leave the Catholic Church and enter into the haven of apolitical Pentecostal churches.¹³⁷ Quite likely the massive influx of members into the rural churches in Guatemala was due to genuine conversion to Christ for many, but many others only made a cultural shift from a Christo-pagan Catholic Church into the Evangelical Church. Cleary correctly observed,

Indians who were accustomed to believing in a life of spirits and in shamans found a life of the Spirit much alive in frequent services and healing ceremonies readily available without dependence on the specialized office of a native shaman. Many of the same needs were evidently felt by Ladinos on the fringe of society . . . in which old alliances had been changed.¹³⁸

Cleary was not the only one to look at the large sweep of converts into the Pentecostal churches. Annis summarized causal factors for the deep cultural changes in Indian culture. "These include: Protestant acceptance of individuals who are otherwise socially, economically, or psychologically maladjusted, help in dealing with urban isolation, support in coping with alcoholism, the spread of literacy, the desire for economic gain, the curing

¹³⁵ Garrard-Burnett, 117-18.

¹³⁶ Juan Sepúlveda in Guillermo Cook, ed., *New Face of the Church in Latin America*. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1994), 73.

¹³⁷ Cleary, 171.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 181.

of disease, and help in allaying the frustration of those who are experiencing 'status incongruency'.¹³⁹ In a modern society that looks for a religion with experiential realism, Pentecostalism is increasingly attractive and offers concrete answers to everyday life. Cleary concluded that Pentecostalism has the capacity to draw participants from many lifestyles.¹⁴⁰ Putting this in context, these observations are all from neutral or hostile sources that do not consider the cultural shift in terms of Divine intervention.

Neo-Pentecostals Spearhead a New Urban Growth Wave

Neo-Pentecostals and a New Ministry Style

Between 1962 to 1963, the neo-pentecostal movement began in Guatemala.¹⁴¹

Several of the current Neo-pentecostal churches that continue to influence the Evangelical community in Guatemala began between the early 1960s and the 1980s. The Elim Church has enjoyed some of the most spectacular growth in all Guatemala. It was formed in 1962 by Dr. Otoniel Ríos Paredes, a dynamic preacher, former sports announcer, and well-known medical doctor who was known as a profound student of the Bible. In 1980 the church had a membership of more than 8,000 people. The church met in the largest auditorium in Central America at that time which seated 9,000 people. The Central Church also had 69 churches and works within the Capital, with a total of 20,000 members. By 1992, the church had more than forty new works in the Capital and nearly 10,000 people attending the Central Auditorium. Nearly 7,000 churches internationally made it one of the largest denominations in Guatemala at that time. This church drew other leaders and

¹³⁹ Annis, 78.

¹⁴⁰ Cleary, 183.

¹⁴¹ This coincides with the beginning of the phenomenally fast growing neo-pentecostal church, Elim.

congregations to it like a magnet as it projected its influence throughout Central America.¹⁴² By the end of the 1980s, Elim and other neo-pentecostal churches were well known and their influence was felt in many evangelical churches.

Iglesia Betania was formed in Quetzaltenango by Efraín Avelar in 1970 and it currently has more than 129 churches. Avelar came from a Presbyterian background and his church has become a pace setter and model for many evangelical churches in the Western Highlands of Guatemala.¹⁴³

Neo-Pentecostals such as Fraternidad Cristiana, La Familia de Dios, Verbo, El Shaddai, and others modeled a "new" way of worshipping and working. There was little doctrinal difference between neo-pentecostalism and the old Pentecostals, but there was a difference in worship style as Neo-pentecostals did not exhibit the extreme, uncontrolled spiritual manifestations during worship services.¹⁴⁴ The reasons for dynamic growth of churches were a deliberate emphasis on worship form and ministry style. Efraín Avelar, pastor of one the fastest and consistently growing neo-pentecostal denominations, explained it in these terms,

In the 1980s, we made some changes: we left legalism behind, and we entered the new system of praise and worship, that many churches in Guatemala now have. Some call it the renewal of praise or the restoration of praise, that is a greater expression in praise. That also made our congregation attractive. . .A church that has dynamic and live praise is going to attract youth. I believe that solemn hymns from the Protestant reform are beautiful, but I believe that they do not fit in with the life of youth today. The church should conform to the times in which it is living. If I do not have youth in my congregation, I do not have a future in my church.

¹⁴² Mynor Giron, senior pastor of the Elohim Church, interviewed by the author, recorded, Mazatenango, Guatemala, 23 March 2001.

¹⁴³ Efraín Avelar, senior pastor of Bethany Church (denomination) interview by author, recorded, Quetzaltenango, Guatemala, 20 March 2001.

¹⁴⁴ Garrard-Burnett, 104.

We adopted the discipleship system, and we began to have forty groups of discipleship. We involved some 400 people in the church. Discipleship is a system where the cells serve in discipling, not evangelizing.

Another very important aspect for the life of the church is the place that we give to the Holy Spirit. A congregation where the Holy Spirit is given a place is going to be a congregation where God is going to have a great participation.¹⁴⁵

El Shaddai, started in 1983 in Guatemala City by Harold Caballeros, has cast a long shadow upon all Guatemalan evangelical churches. There are currently 26 churches associated with El Shaddai. They developed a dramatic media campaign as they prayed for the entire country and launched the "Jesus is Lord" campaign. They placed the slogan on hundreds of full-scale billboards throughout the country, distributed thousands of bumper stickers, and used other media to broadcast the message. Throughout the entire country the message "Jesus is Lord of Guatemala" confronted everyone.¹⁴⁶ This campaign, along with the impressive work of other Neo-pentecostals and others, made the Evangelical Church more visible and desirable in some people's eyes, and others viewed it ominously as evangelicals began to conquer Guatemala for Christ. Evangelicals were growing, victorious, and euphoric. Around 1992 it was commonly thought that Guatemala was 33% evangelical and many denominational leaders in the *Alianza Evangélica* were projecting that by the year 2000, 50% of the population would be evangelical.¹⁴⁷ Shortly after this media and prayer campaign, one of the leaders of the El Shaddai Church, Jorge Serrano Elías, was elected president of Guatemala. This was the first time in the history of Latin American politics that an evangelical had been elected as president of a democracy.

¹⁴⁵ Efraín Avelar, senior pastor of Bethany Churches, recorded interview by author, Quetzaltenango, Guatemala, 20 March 2001.

¹⁴⁶ Oscar Alberto Benitez, associate pastor of the El Shaddai Church, recorded interview by author, Abner Rivera and Kory Eller, Guatemala, Guatemala, 20 March 2001.

¹⁴⁷ Abner Rivera of SEPAL, interviewed by author, Guatemala, Guatemala, 14 May 2001.

Politics and Neo-Pentecostals

Neo-pentecostalism appeals to both the urban upper-middle and lower-upper classes, and is known as the Pentecostalism of "people with money." The Verbo Church and Elim Church are both influential neo-pentecostal churches that produced two presidents of the Republic and have been actively involved in politics and creating politicians. The Verbo Church has a formal seminary course on the relationship of Church and State.¹⁴⁸ Garrard-Burnett recorded what this researcher observes firsthand:

. . . these churches primarily concentrate themselves in the capital and in provincial cities of major importance focusing on the upper class and parts of the middle class . . . explaining the social evils and the threat against their social position as a demonic attack against which they must defend themselves. Evil is clearly delimited, and members fight, with the help of the power of God . . . The neo-pentecostal churches, in place of retreating from society, promote social and political participation of their members.¹⁴⁹

The neo-pentecostal churches are Calvinistic in their work ethic and their political involvement, but they are more Armenian with regard to the doctrine of salvation.¹⁵⁰

Many neo-pentecostal churches are active in social reformation within Guatemala. One of the most active churches in this type of ministry is the Verbo Church. When Montt was president of the Republic, he named several evangelical pastors to be in charge of an integrated social program in the Ixil Triangle. Armed with evangelical translators, evangelical directors, and evangelical workers, they implemented an effective social program in the Triangle. Some outside of the church looked upon these programs as Evangelical manipulations in order to influence politics.¹⁵¹ The Neo-pentecostal focused on both spiritual and physical needs.

¹⁴⁸ Leonel Soberanis, member of the National Conservatory of Verbo Ministries, recorded interview by Abner Rivera, Guatemala, Guatemala, 22 May 2001.

¹⁴⁹ Garrard-Burnett, 104.

¹⁵⁰ Amy L. Sherman, *The Soul of Development: Biblical Christianity and Economic Transformation in Guatemala* (Oxford, 1997).

¹⁵¹ Leonel Soberanis, member of the National Conservatory of Verbo Ministries by Abner Rivera,

Enormous Growth in All Denominations in all Areas of Guatemala: 1976-1993

During this time there was a flurry of growth within all evangelical denominations.

The list of growth and achievements is very large. Some examples follow:

- Profound strides were made within the Indian works. Wayne Gute reported that the Central American Mission within the Mam area had grown from 6,600 in 1964 to 25,000 in 1995.¹⁵² The entire membership of CAM increased from 68,060 community size to 130,000 baptized members in this period.¹⁵³
- Presbyterians reported unprecedented growth among the K'ekchí Indians.¹⁵⁴
- Between the years of 1975 to 1990, the Assembly of God Church more than doubled from 42,829 to 109,000 members.¹⁵⁵
- Cavalry Mission quadrupled in this time from 10,100 members to 40,000 members.
- The Baptists, nearly quadrupled in size from 13,900 members to 52,700 members with the majority of the growth among the K'ekchí Indians. From 1976 until 1993, the Baptist K'ekchí grew from only a handful to nearly 12,000.¹⁵⁶
- The Church of God-Full Gospel tripled from 23,350 to 70,900 members.¹⁵⁷
- The overall percentage of evangelicals rose from 10.1% in 1975 to 26.4% in 1990.¹⁵⁸

recorded, Guatemala, Guatemala, 22 May 2001.

¹⁵² Wayne Gute, *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 32 (April 1996): 194.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 105.

¹⁵⁴ Fernando Mazariegos Rodríguez, superintendent of the Presbyterian Church of Guatemala, recorded interview by Abner Rivera and the author, Guatemala, Guatemala, 12 November 2001.

¹⁵⁵ Based upon interpolation of data from Brierly, ed., 371-77 and interview with Pinzon.

¹⁵⁶ Frank Johnson, "Baptist Church Growth Among the K'ekchí People of Guatemala: An Update" (Interoffice report of the International Mission Board-SBC, Guatemala, Guatemala, 29 October 1997). The figure of 12,000 is an interpolation of Johnson's data.

¹⁵⁷ Brierly, ed., 371-77.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

Reasons for Explosive Growth in the Evangelical Church from 1976-1993

During this time period the Evangelical Church in Guatemala enjoyed an unprecedented growth rate. Virtually every denomination within Guatemala was growing, but certainly by this time the Neo-pentecostals groups *seemed* to be in the forefront of growth and innovation. In 1993 the four largest denominations were the Assembly of God, the Church of God - Whole Gospel, Prince of Peace, and the Central American Mission. These combined denominations accounted for more than one-third of all evangelicals. Of these four denominations, CAM was the only non-pentecostal group.¹⁵⁹

According to Holland, the total number of Protestant congregations in 1964 increased from 1,525 congregations with approximately 72,500 members to 6,448 congregations, with 334,454 baptized members by 1980 representing 13.5% of the population. By 1987 there were 9,298 congregations with evangelicals comprising approximately 20% of the population.¹⁶⁰

Many of the reasons for growth during this period are similar to reasons previously described. The following identifies these factors, explaining those reasons unique to the growth of the period.

Historians and sociologists recognize external social factors significantly enhanced the growth of Evangelical Church. A summary of Delgado's reasons for growth are:¹⁶¹

1. Evangelical churches satisfied the social instability and lack of community caused by the exodus from the rural areas into the cities due to war.

¹⁵⁹ See Appendix 1 for statistical details.

¹⁶⁰ Holland, personal correspondence.

¹⁶¹ Delgado, 98.

2. There was a crisis of the legitimacy of the dominant Catholic political leaders of the country. These groups lost credibility with the later governments of Guatemala starting around the late 1960s and continued into the new democracy.
3. The Catholic Church suffered division and crisis over these years.

Summarizing other factors previously mentioned in this section:

1. The critical mass of the evangelicals continued with strong momentum as evangelicals and its culture entered all areas of Guatemala, including politics.
2. The presidencies of two evangelicals extended the momentum of the movement.
3. The theology of Pentecostal doctrine was simple and adaptable, offering immediate and practical applications to life situations.
4. Evangelicals, and especially Neo-pentecostals, effectively exploited the mass-media and adapted new worship forms in order to make known the Gospel.
5. Apocalyptic preaching in war-torn areas with solutions offered by Pentecostal churches addressed people's needs.

The Plateau of Explosive Growth: 1993-2001

Trends and Neo-Pentecostalism

The neo-pentecostal Verbo Church gained national prominence when one of their members, General Efraín Ríos Montt, became president of the Republic in 1983.¹⁶² The prestige of having an evangelical president quickly gave impetus to all evangelicals, particularly the Neo-pentecostals, as they became legitimate and popular among the middle and upper social classes. The Neo-pentecostals emphasized the blessings of God, hard

¹⁶² Leonel Soberanis, member of the National Conservatory of Verbo Ministries, recorded interview by Abner Rivera, Guatemala, Guatemala, 22 May 2001.

work, and a prosperity Gospel that were suited to the middle class. As prosperity and materialism grew in American culture in the 1980s and the 1990s, the Gospel of wealth and prosperity within sectors of the Pentecostal church grew.

Mynor Giron, himself a Neo-pentecostal leader and apostle, characterized successful neo-pentecostal leaders as avid students of the Bible with a fire to preach. They are superb communicators, and strong, authoritative pace setters for the ministry and Church. They have an enormous vision for God's work.

They do not think in terms of a section of Guatemala City or the entire City. They do not even just think about reaching Guatemala for Christ. They have an attitude of one of the great preachers, Spurgeon, who said, 'The world is my parish.' Their vision is to reach the world for Christ.¹⁶³

With God-sized visions, Giron observes that these leaders are aggressive and do not easily succumb to opposition. In the 1980s and early 1990s, many Guatemalan leaders looked to other strong charismatic or neo-pentecostal leaders, such as Paul Yonggi Cho, Benny Hin, Peter Wagner and in the past, Jimmy Swaggart. Their style and theologies are emulated after passing through Guatemalan filters.

At the beginning of the 1990s the growth of most traditional evangelical denominations slowed down considerably. In retrospect this is easy to see, but during the mid 1990s, this was imperceptible and the impression among most groups was that evangelicals were still exploding. Some churches that continued to experience impressive growth, however, were the Assembly of God, Church of God and most neo-pentecostal churches. The highly visible neo-pentecostals churches continued to influence other denomination's and church's methodologies and worship style. Their style of praise music,

¹⁶³ Mynor Giron, interviewed by author, Guatemala, Guatemala, 8 November 2001.

order of worship, cell groups, and general worship form began to establish a new norm for many other evangelical churches.

Mid 1990s Evangelical Growth Figures Are Contradictory

In recent years, many of the Guatemalan leaders have come to believe that Guatemala is 45% evangelical and the city of Almolonga is 80% evangelical. Websites of denominations and independent missionaries stated that Guatemala was between 40% to 50% evangelical.¹⁶⁴ Formal studies showed something quite different. Gallop-CID polls showed Guatemala as the following: June 1990: 26.4%, July 1991: 19%, May 1995: 22%, October 1995: 23%, April 1996: 25%, September 1996: 22%, and February 1997: 21%.¹⁶⁵ The SEPAL study of 1991 indicates that Guatemala was 19% evangelical.¹⁶⁶ CBN (Christian Broadcasting Network) in 1990 surveyed Guatemala and indicated it was 17 % evangelical.¹⁶⁷ The 1999 paper by Montgomery (which was not a study) asserted that 72% of Guatemala was evangelical.¹⁶⁸ The lower figures were based upon actual surveys and polls whereas the higher figures above 32% were based upon conjecture or quotes from old or non-authoritative sources.

¹⁶⁴ Several examples are: Jim and Mary DeGoyle of Verbo Ministries wrote that Guatemala is 50% evangelical in "Christianizing a Country", <http://www.verbo.org/site/index.html>, accessed 1 April 2002; Casa Bernabe posted 40% in <http://www.casabernabe.org/page22.html>, accessed 1 April 2002; The Caleb Project claimed in their Infostatistics that Guatemala is 43% evangelical in http://www.calebproject.org/bomm/df_schch.html, accessed 25 February 2002. Elim claimed "50% must be evangelicals" in <http://www.elim.org.nz/btmag/bt4..html>, accessed 1 April 2002. There are many websites that use similar percentages to describe evangelical presence in Guatemala.

¹⁶⁵ Clifton Holland in personal correspondence 12 February 2002, quoting CID-Gallup of Central America (San Jose, Costa Rica, 2002). Apartado 4413-1000, telephone (506) 220-4101.

¹⁶⁶ Rhodes, SEPAL study.

¹⁶⁷ Holland, personal correspondence.

¹⁶⁸ James Montgomery, "Guatemala 14 Years Later: 72 Percent Evangelical" February 1999, interoffice correspondence from the Dawn Report to SEPAL.

Evidences of Slowing Growth

Early Signs of Suffering Numerical Growth and Spiritual Growth

In 1992, SEPAL research indicated that some of the smaller denominations, such as the Christian Missionary Alliance, were losing ground.¹⁶⁹ SEPAL reported a slowing growth, but this report was largely ignored by evangelical trend setters.¹⁷⁰ For example, in July of 1991, a CID/Gallup poll showed that 19% +3% of the population was evangelical.¹⁷¹ In addition, a SEPAL study directed by Ross Rhodes, showed that there was a high rate of church closures in rural towns.¹⁷² The report raised deep concerns about the level of training of the local pastors and their ability to maintain a church. Rhodes quoted a regional supervisor of a major Pentecostal denomination as he stated,

'When it comes to Bible knowledge, most of us know very little and the rest know even less!' . . . The evangelical church of Guatemala has learned to believe that the answer to their problems is to do more evangelism and church planting. They are so painfully lacking in Bible knowledge and doctrine that they don't even know what they are missing. Consequently, they have become masters at church planting, but babes in keeping a church together and healthy.¹⁷³

Most of these reports were not circulated in the evangelical community. Although there were definite signs of a faltering growth rate of evangelicals in Guatemala, miraculous

¹⁶⁹ Ross Rhodes, researcher of SEPAL, interoffice communication to Larry Keyes, Guatemala, Guatemala, 19 May 1992.

¹⁷⁰ Reports of a growing evangelical percentage continued so that it was commonly believed that by 2000, 40% of Guatemala was evangelical. Before embarking on this study, this researcher and others on the SEPAL team met with the *Alianza Evangélica*, chaired by Edmundo Madrid in June 2001, where members admitted they did not know the real percentage, but thought it to be between 35%-45%. No one knew, but this was their perception. Hence, the *Alianza* partnered with SEPAL to find out the facts.

¹⁷¹ CID/Gallup Poll, *Omnibus Guatemala*, OP no. 4 (July 1991). This study has a margin of error of 3%. Though flawed in methodology, it still raised the possibility that there was a substantial gap between the real level of evangelicals and the supposed level of 33%.

¹⁷² Rhodes cites one example of a study in San Pedro Yepocapa in the Department of Chimaltenango where in 1986 they recorded the names of 15 churches. In January of 1991, a follow-up study identified 40 churches but only one (1) of the original churches from the 1986 study was intact.

¹⁷³ Rhodes, SEPAL report.

growth was reported by evangelical leaders.¹⁷⁴ The common belief at the time was that Guatemala was then between 25% to 33% evangelical.

The sin and disgrace that one of the most influential Pentecostal/neo-pentecostal evangelists fell into was highly visible and undeniable. Jimmy Swaggart's devastating debacle nearly closed the international Swaggart ministries, which had been a role model for many powerful neo-pentecostal leaders. Clifton Holland, a researcher of religion in Meso-America, questioned if this could have contributed to the slowdown of evangelical growth.¹⁷⁵ It certainly had a negative impact upon the evangelical community as this confirmed to the adversaries of evangelicals that the prosperity preachers were charlatans.

Fallen is the Great Serrano: Scandals of Evangelical President Contribute to Decline

Jorge Serrano Elías campaigned as an evangelical presidential candidate in 1990. In spite of progress made in Guatemala under the new democracy of Venicio Cerezo, the country still had horrible problems of internal security, graft, corruption, and a deteriorating infrastructure. The sentiment has often been expressed by rural Guatemalans, "We need a man who will rule with a heavy hand and clean up Guatemala. We need the General [Montt] back." Had the constitution permitted it, the colorful evangelical front runner candidate, General Efraín Ríos Mont, would have easily won the election, particularly with those in the Interior of the country. Montt's campaign of honesty, peace, and security implicitly became the campaign of Serrano. Although Serrano

¹⁷⁴ For example, in 1992 the Sentinel group produced a video called "Transformations" that was popularized in many evangelical sectors and endorsed by *Charisma Magazine*, CBA Marketplace, the National Prayer Committee and distributed by YWAM, Campus Crusade, Promise Keepers and Aglow. The video reported on the miraculous growth in Almolonga, Quetzaltenango where they claimed that 90% of the town was evangelical. Some of what is reported in the video is disputed by other groups, such as Concerned Christians, www.concernedchristians.50megs.com/index.html (1 February 2002). This survey indicates that 59.5% of the population of Almolonga identified themselves as evangelicals in 2001 (with n=370, 220 responded they were evangelical, Christian and attended church at least once per month). This study shows that Almolonga has some of the highest rates of syncretism among Evangelicals.

¹⁷⁵ Holland, personal correspondence.

was elected by evangelicals in 1992, he tried not to alienate himself from the larger Catholic population.¹⁷⁶ The sense of euphoria within the evangelical community caused by the election of the evangelical president quickly faded as he became entangled in scandals and massive corruption. The government under Serrano's corrupt rule fell quickly into such bureaucratic stagnation and chaos, that it could not even fulfill the basic services of government, such as hospital care or road maintenance. The forgiving evangelical community could not believe their Christian president was robbing them blind. Reports of his corruption and purchases of properties continued until he was finally unable to govern. After two years of reigning, he declared a "self-coup" and left the country in disgrace. But he left rich.

A constitutional crisis followed Jorge Serrano's departure in 1993. Congress then elected Ramiro de León Carpio, a well known and respected figure, who worked for the Office of Human Rights, a human rights organization that reported directly to the Archbishop's office. The muted evangelicals feared the worst with this new Catholic president. After legally cleaning out the most corrupt from the Supreme Court and Congress, de Leon Carpio worked with congress to stabilize the country and returned it to a functioning government.¹⁷⁷ After completing his term noted for its honesty and dignity in 1995, De Leon Carpio turned over the reigns of the presidency to the newly elected, Alvaro Arzú Irigoyen.

Lack of Pastoral Preparation Contributes to Plateaued Growth

Pastors in Guatemala prepare in various and contrasting ways. SEPAL investigator Rhoss Rhodes observed that most pastors in the rural indigenous interior of Guatemala

¹⁷⁶ Anne Mortey Hallen, *Beyond Missions: Toward an Understanding of the Protestant Movement in Central America* (Boulder, Colorado: Rowan and Littlefield Publishers, 1996), 107.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 112.

have been believers for a maximum of ten years and have no formal theological training. Indeed, many cannot read nor write. Rhodes in 1991 wrote that 40% of the churches and pastors were independent and did not have anyone to offer them theological training.¹⁷⁸ Demonstrating the extreme Bible ignorance of some of the rural pastors, the report stated,

David was also working with a group of pastors on the biblical requirements of eldership. It turned out that these rural pastors had never heard these things before. One had been living between his wife and his mistress. Until that moment he did not even know it was wrong!¹⁷⁹

One must hasten to add that not all rural pastors are ignorant, but there is a vast chasm of ignorance among many of the smaller churches' leadership. The Bible students and scholars in Guatemala City and some provincial cities are the result of years of heavy investment by many established denominations. The El Shaddai Church in Guatemala City has a high standard for their pastors and recognizes this problem in many churches. They expect a minimum amount of theological formation so that

. . . whatever boring person who wants to preach doesn't get up in his own church. . . . You have to prepare yourself even though we respect the liberty and calling of God. The majority of churches in Guatemala are abusive as they think that all they need is the Holy Spirit to do the job.¹⁸⁰

Illiteracy Contributes to Plateaued Growth

Guatemala suffers from a high rate of illiteracy which directly affects church leadership. Nearly 13% of the pastors do not read their Bible not to a lack of diligence, but a lack of ability.¹⁸¹ According to the 1993 census, 40% of the population 15 years and

¹⁷⁸ Rhodes, SEPAL report.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Delgado, 114.

¹⁸¹ n=439 pastors, 35 did not read any chapters of the Bible per week, taking no answer as zero and assuming that for 1 chapter per week, half (20) were semi-literate.

older are illiterate.¹⁸² The 1999 Pan American Health Organization reports illiteracy is 36% of the adult population.¹⁸³ Illiteracy in Guatemala does not correspond to measured functional illiteracy of developed countries. Functional illiteracy refers to an individual who can read on a basic level, but cannot comprehend what he is reading. Most reports cited about illiteracy in Guatemala refer to illiteracy in terms of persons who cannot recognize enough words to form a sentence. This is a particularly germane distinction for discussing illiteracy within the rural leadership of evangelicals because many who are reported literate do not comprehend what they read.¹⁸⁴ Considering illiteracy and the non-measured functional illiteracy, the conclusion may be drawn that at least 80% of Guatemalans cannot read sufficiently to comprehend what they read.

Various Mayan languages and cultures are found throughout the mountains of western and central Guatemala. Literacy is further compounded by those whose primary language is not Spanish. Even when Scripture is reduced to a Mayan language, the educated Mayans prefer Spanish. Narciso Poz, a Quiché translator for the "Jesus Film", indicates that the Quichés prefer to read Spanish because it is standardized whereas a Quiché translation is colloquial and vague.¹⁸⁵ Mazariegos reports that once reducing the scriptures to a Mayan language, the majority of the intended audience cannot read the product because of illiteracy.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸² Alfredo Tay Coyoy, *Análisis de la situación de la Educación Maya en Guatemala* (Guatemala, Guatemala: Editorial Cholsamaj, 1996), 35.

¹⁸³ Pan American health Organization www.paho.org/English/SHA/prflgut.htm, accessed on 23 January 2002.

¹⁸⁴ Herb Klem, "Dependence on Literacy Strategy: Taking a Hard Second Look", *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 12:2 (April-June 1995): 59.

¹⁸⁵ Narciso Poz, interviewed by author, Quetzaltenango, Guatemala, 1 May 2001.

¹⁸⁶ Mazariegos interview.

If many of the rural pastors cannot functionally read, how do they learn how to preach the Bible? In some cases, denominations such as CAM or the Church of God have different levels of training for pastors. Other groups, such as the Assembly of God are considering requiring pastors to have a minimal secular educational level before they can pastor.¹⁸⁷ Baptists are emphasizing training their leaders in the oral traditions of the Bible, known as "Chronological Bible Storying." Pastors who are not a part of an overseeing denomination are left to their own imagination, with many obtaining their Sunday sermon by listening to the radio.

Syncretism in the Evangelical Church Contributes to Plateaued Growth

The rural Indian population has been well known by Guatemalans and anthropologists to mix Mayan customs and beliefs with Catholicism, creating a syncretism referred to as Christopaganism, which is neither Mayan nor Catholic. Unfortunately, many evangelical leaders suspect that something similar is happening among the rural Indian evangelical population. These "evangelicals" adhere to the vocabulary of the Evangelical Church, but have a lifestyle and belief system so confused that they contradict many of the basic tenets of Christianity. Folk religion is a degradation of a true religion and its norms are contaminated by local traditions and lore. Christian folk religion is a hybrid religion that is a mixture of Christianity with local superstitions, customs and beliefs that are not Biblical. Clinton Arnold states there is a sense of utility and manipulation of the pure religion in order to produce rapidly desired personal results.¹⁸⁸ For concrete relational

¹⁸⁷ Pinzon interview.

¹⁸⁸ Clinton E. Arnold, *The Colossian Syncretism, The Interface between Christianity and Folk Belief in Collossae* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 12-13.

thinkers who are usually illiterate or semi-literate, the Christianity of mainline denominations is too distant and cerebral. Experiential and "applied" religious formulas supersede the precepts and Truth from the Bible or the Church.¹⁸⁹ These natural inclinations tend to detract an individual from the knowledge and norms of Holy Scripture. Folk Christianity and syncretism establish their theology and morality quite apart from the Bible, and Mayan Christopaganism exemplifies this effect.¹⁹⁰ This study measures the level of syncretism within the evangelical community and finds it quite high.

Denominational Circumstances Contribute to Plateaued Growth

As evangelicals were making advances in politics during the early 1990s, the Presbyterian Church suffered a major division that illuminated the struggle between the Ladinos and the resurging Mayan movement. The Western Synod led by the powerful Bethel Church of Quetzaltenango had a growing Mayan cultural/religious movement legitimized through Liberation Theology which sought to control the Presbyterian educational system. This Mayan movement met severe opposition from other synods. The resultant friction ended in a schism in the Presbyterian Church, followed by lawsuits in the public court system. Miraculously, nearly ten years later, the synods have made amends and have reunited.¹⁹¹

Elim was a church growth marvel, although it only started in 1963. It quickly rivaled other older denominations in church membership. With the death of Dr. Ríos

¹⁸⁹ David J. Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 58.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Fernando Mazariegos Rodríguez, superintendent of the Presbyterian Church of Guatemala, interviewed by Abner Rivera and the author, Guatemala, 12 November 2001.

Paredes in 1997, the fastest growing neo-pentecostal church, Elim, split into different groups: Elim, Miel, Elohim and a number of independent churches. The division was not over any single issue, but without the strong leadership of Dr. Paredes and an experienced infrastructure, it was impossible for a new leader to fill the void left by the amazing Dr. Paredes.

Resurgence of the Catholic Church Reclaims Some Evangelicals

The Charismatic movement within the Catholic Church of the late 1960s in the United States has brought about a shift of emphasis to a more personal faith. The hemorrhaging of the Catholic Church in Guatemala can be attributed to many factors and is beyond the scope of this discussion. However, one clear cause of this decline is that the growth of the evangelicals had been at the expense of nominal and Christopagan Catholics. In response to these losses, the Catholic Church has instigated the "Groups of Colors," a couples oriented Bible study group, marriage conferences, and Catechists. Catechists are laymen working in Bible study groups who solidify and expand the Catholics Church's diminishing base. Since the early 1990s, the Catholic Church has had more openness to Charismatic practices; even to their songs and to some degree, open evangelism. Cleary cited a study made in a section of Guatemala City called "La Florida," where since 1981 the evangelical churches have not significantly grown, whereas the Catholic parish is crowded to overflowing. In 1989, the local priest welcomed 1,800 persons back into the Catholic Church who were formerly evangelicals. As another example of Catholic resurgence, Kay Warren identified growing Folk Catholicism in rural areas of Guatemala in the late 1980s.¹⁹²

¹⁹² Cleary, 185.

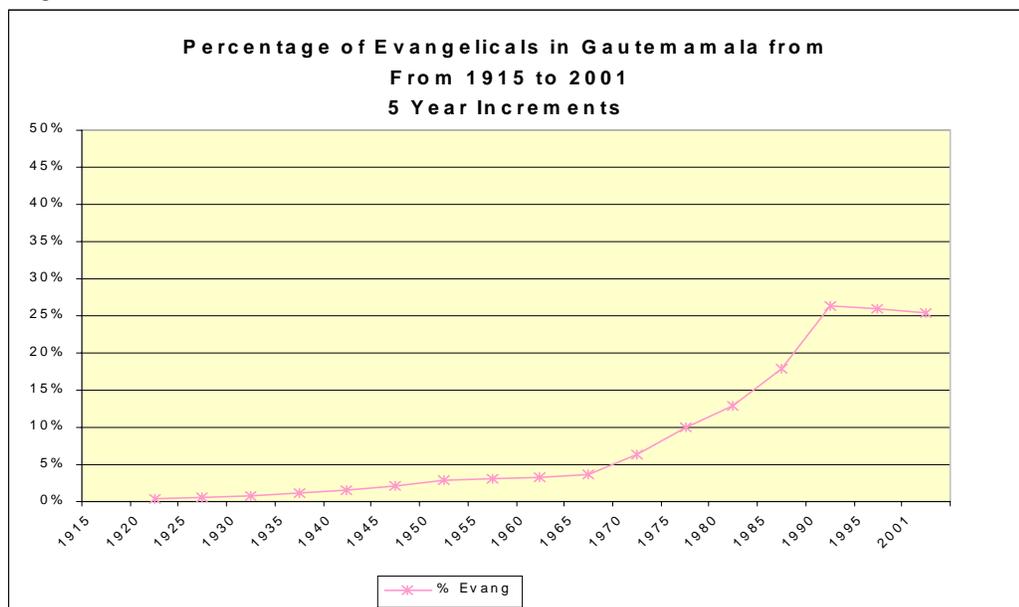
Summary of Growth Data for the Guatemala Evangelical Church Until 2001

Figure 3.1 depicts the general growth trend of the Evangelical Church until 2001.¹⁹³

Reliable studies indicate a general plateau in church growth starting in the early 1990s.

Because of differing methodology of these studies, it is difficult to make accurate

Figure 3.1



comparisons between several data points. For example, studies before 1991 were based upon internal church records. In the early days of the Evangelical Church until around 1955, these data were relatively accurate since most of evangelical presence was from the major denominations. After this time, the information is inconsistent and difficult to interpret. Until the mid 1980s, some statistics referred to baptized members and others referred to "evangelical community" which is 3 times the baptized membership.¹⁹⁴ Once the plethora of independent churches arose in Guatemala, it was difficult to tabulate all denominations, but the last thorough count was the 1984 SEPAL study. However, the current SEPAL team states that the 1984 study showing evangelicals as 31% of the

¹⁹³ Graph information is taken from the data of Appendix 3.1.

¹⁹⁴ Wilton N. Nelson, *Protestantism in Central America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 72.

population is dubious.¹⁹⁵ Once the Church grew to such large proportions, it was impossible to accurately ascertain the true size by depending upon church reporting. According to Holland, the "evangelical community" conversion factor of 3 was changed to 2.5 because it did not square to field experience. In other words, the conversion factor was subjective. The Gallop polls are based upon projections of surveys taken from population samples. These surveys are consistent in design and methodology, but they do not consistently correspond to previous studies that used different methodologies. Scientific population sample polling is the most accurate and feasible method for determining the current percentage of evangelicals because of the size and complexity of the Evangelical Church.

Summary of Reasons for Plateauing of Growth Rate of the Evangelical Church

The influences of negative factors counter the positive factors as the church membership has plateaued since the early 1990s. Understanding the causes for the plateau of the Church as well as the dynamics for church growth equips the Church to address issues in order to return to a favorable growth rate. The Church reaches an equilibrium state when losses and growth are equal. Some of the factors that retard church expansion are:

1. The highly visible Evangelical Church fell from the esteem of many, due to serious moral lapses of prominent leaders.
2. Inadequate preparation of many pastors leaves them ineffective in making disciples and growing churches.

¹⁹⁵ Kory Eller, Guatemala SEPAL researcher, interviewed by author, Guatemala, Guatemala, 23 November 2001.

3. Illiteracy plagues the country, culture and the Church. Many evangelicals are ignorant of simple doctrine, and they have no understanding of the true life in Christ.
4. Lack of understanding and use of the Mayan Bible in Mayan groups contribute to Biblical ignorance.
5. Syncretism and Christopaganism are evident in the Evangelical Church. During the war years many rural Guatemalans made a mere cultural shift into the Church rather than a true conversion to Christ.
6. Declining membership of several key denominations contribute to plateauing church growth.
7. Resurgence of the Catholic Church attracts and reclaims some evangelicals.
8. Though not a direct factor in the plateaued growth, some studies of the past have not accurately reflected the percentage of evangelicals. When the mistaken notion of a higher percentage of evangelicals is compared to polling data such as Gallop's or this study, the contrast between the hyperbolic reporting and scientific polling falsely implies a severe decline in evangelicals. The church's overall inability to recognize their current standing has not helped leaders to honestly assess their progress and problems.

The evangelical reader must not look at these reasons for deceleration as a defeat, but rather, as a challenge. In spite of all these warning signs, there are still denominations that are successfully growing and they have lessons to teach to all of the evangelical community. The following chapters examine the current status and health of the Evangelical Church. The primary research will demonstrate if the Gallop data from the 1990s is an aberration or a trend.