

## CHAPTER 6

### THE NATURE OF THE TYPICAL EVANGELICAL IN GUATEMALA

#### Introduction

Using data from the General Survey, this chapter analyzes the beliefs, syncretism, practices, attitudes, and the level of Christian living among evangelicals in Guatemala and then compares these to the general Catholic population. In the 1980s and early 1990s many were swept into the Church out of a popularistic evangelical movement throughout the country. Many merely made a cultural change of religious form, rather than a change of basic core beliefs. Charles Kraft aptly states that conversion is more than a mere change of religious alliance, but consists of a total change of world view.<sup>1</sup> The data presented in this chapter confirm a substantial weakness in the Guatemalan Evangelical Church. The dismal ethics and morals that many Christian leaders complain about today are directly tied to this problem. Further, there is currently a deep concern about the lack of discipleship and solid teaching within many sectors of the Evangelical Church.<sup>2</sup> This section analyzes and quantifies the integrity of basic Christian beliefs as well as levels of syncretism among evangelicals. It also examines the level of Christian living so as to understand why the Evangelical Church in Guatemala has lost ground in church growth and is situated precariously for the future. Armed with this understanding of the church's

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Kraft, *Christianity and Culture: A Study in Dynamic Biblical Theologizing in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1979), 334-38.

<sup>2</sup> From personal interviews with Orlando Pinson, president of Assemblies of God, Guatemala, 10 May 2001; Rigoberto Alvarado, co-pastor of Familia de Dios, Guatemala, 20 May 2001; Oscar Benitez, co-pastor of El Shaddai, Guatemala, 20 March 2001; Steve Sywulka, director of Radio TGN, Central American Church, Guatemala, 4 May 2001; Rosalio Ramírez, General Secretary of the National Convention of Baptists of Guatemala, Guatemala, 7 July 2001.

weaknesses, key leaders in Guatemala can seek to strengthen the Evangelical Church of Guatemala for its total mobilization.

### **The Average Guatemalan Catholic**

All Guatemalan culture is deeply influenced by the teachings and history of the Spanish Catholic Church. All Guatemalans, including evangelicals, are influenced by the Catholic culture and they cannot escape it. In order to understand Guatemalan evangelicals, the evangelicals must be contrasted against the backdrop of Catholic culture.<sup>3</sup>

#### **The Average Guatemalan Catholic Has a Semi-Christian Worldview, Is Religious and Does Not Believe in Exclusive Salvation in Christ**

The average Guatemalan is religious and Christian in his general worldview. A very high percentage of the general Catholic population indicates Christian answers to several basic Bible doctrines:

- ◆ 97.3% believe in the Trinity and 1.4% are not sure.
- ◆ 97.5% believe that Christ died for our sins with 0.8% not sure.
- ◆ 93.9% believe that Christ is God and Man with 4.1% not sure.

On the other hand, very poor answers were given to the following questions:

- ◆ 82% believe that a person can find salvation through other non-Christian religions, with 6% stating they are not sure, whereas only 12% of the general Catholic population state that salvation *cannot* be found in non-Christian religions. There

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<sup>3</sup> A friend of this author responds uniquely to the question, "How are you?" He answers, "Compared to what?" Compared to a twenty year old college student, very poorly. But compared to a 95 year old with Parkinson's disease, excellent. Relevant comparisons give a useful frame of reference. Catholics answers are used as a frame of reference for evangelicals later in this chapter.

are several explanations for this very wrong answer. First, the Catholic doctrine of purgatory is twisted to create a backdoor for those who are not "in the fold" of the Catholic Church allowing them a non-standard chance to enter heaven through a special grace apart from Christ or the Church. Second, Catholic theology has been liberalized further by the past influences of Liberation Theology that de-emphasizes the esoteric teachings of the Church and replaces them with a form of obtaining grace through works directed to changing the structure of society, i.e., institutions or government that supposedly improve society. Third, some of the Catholic thinkers have created an inclusive, loose view of "grace" that has contributed to foundations of post-modern thought as it discards any claims of absolute truth. Post-modern thought insists upon a lack of absolutes and combines itself well with the Guatemalan culture that already has an attitude of live and let live.<sup>4</sup> Fourth, to a lesser degree, the Catholic Church has begrudgingly upgraded the recognition of evangelicals from outside the faith to errant sheep as the evangelical movement grows and dominates religious and political life in Guatemala. In the Interior of Guatemala, most Catholics associate evangelicals with the term "Christians" and Catholics are called "Catholics", not "Christians". Since there is no understanding among the Catholic masses as to what a "Christian" is, it follows that there is confusion in describing a "non-Christian".

- ◆ Nearly 55% do not believe or are not sure that a person will go to Hell if he does not believe in Christ. This is directly tied to the issues mentioned above but it also shows that there is no understanding of the absolute claims of Christ but rather,

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<sup>4</sup>Manuela Cantón Delgado, *Bautizados en Fuego* (La Antigua, Guatemala: Centro de Investigaciones de Mesoamerica, 1998), 45.

salvation is associated with good works, intercession of the saints, and practicing the sacraments. Similarly, for a Catholic, the absolute claims that the Roman Church has the keys to grace have eroded in the modern world.<sup>5</sup> In the case of Guatemala, the authority of the Church has been strongly compromised as the Catholic Church has meddled in politics with disastrous results that have disenfranchised the Church with many of the common people.

#### The Average Catholic Moderately Believes in Unique Catholic Doctrine

On the average, 80% of Catholics affirmed the doctrinal questions that are unique to the Catholic Church. However, only 62% stated that a person could be helped to be saved after death. This question, of course, deals with the Catholic Doctrine of Purgatory. Only 63% believe in the authority of the Pope. The average Catholic population is not necessarily practicing Catholics, but a combination of dedicated Catholics and a majority of nominal Catholics.

#### The Average Catholic is Latently Mayan

The general Catholic population reflects a moderate Mayan influence. Breaking down the population between the races, the Ladino Catholic population is slightly syncretized by Mayan beliefs and the Indian population is moderately syncretized with Mayan beliefs. Most Ladino Guatemalans had Indian parents or most certainly, Indian grandparents. The Mayan culture still lies latent in most of Guatemalan culture.

The three questions most commonly answered affirmatively related to the following issues:

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<sup>5</sup> Jacques Barzun, *From Dawn to Decadence* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2000), 49-72.

- ◆ 53% believe it is necessary to put red on a newborn baby to ward off bad luck.
- ◆ 18% believe it is bad luck to uproot a live corn plant.
- ◆ 12% have consulted with a Mayan priest in the past 12 months.

### The Average Catholic Lacks in Christian Morals and Actions

Sixteen percent of Catholic couples admit to being "joined" or living together. This score is important because it shows the average score of the general Guatemalan society where morals are established, followed, and enforced on a personal, religious, community, and societal level. The overall score in the Actions element of this category was lowered by poor scoring in the areas of frequency of reading the Bible, inviting people to church, and scripture memory.

More than 52% of the Catholics stated that their faith is a private matter and should not be discussed with others and fully one third of this population holds grudges against those who wrong them. The only category that received a high level of positive answers was that 85% said they consider God as they express their values and priorities. This last position clearly contradicts the trends of the other Attitudes and Ethics and demonstrates the core of human nature that says and desires one thing, but lives an ignorant, contradictory life.

### Catholics Have Good Attitudes toward their Church

In this category, all the questions scored high in the affirmative with the exception of seeking the counsel of a priest. Only 58% of Ladinos indicated they would go to their

priest if they had a problem, but 84% of Indians indicated that they would seek their priest out for personal problems. The overall view of the priest is lower for Ladinos due to pro-Indian politics along with scandals involving the leadership of the Catholic Church.

## **The Average Guatemalan Evangelical**

### Introduction

Guatemalan culture is a composite of traditions from the past along with attitudes and practices of the present. Most Guatemalan culture is strongly influenced by Catholic tradition and presence, some Mayan tradition and presence, and to a lesser degree, by the current evangelical presence. In spite of Church teachings, the ambient or worldly culture has a definite and measurable influence on all people, including evangelicals. This section examines the degree that Evangelical Christian culture influences the average evangelical.<sup>6</sup> Evangelicals are scored against the "standard" or average nominal Catholic Guatemalan, and Ideal Biblical scores that a mature Christian should have. The nominal Catholic score is arbitrarily set to a baseline of 0 and the Ideal score is set to 100.<sup>7, 8</sup> Evangelical scores indicate the range between the nominal culture and the ideal and show if evangelicals are more "nominally Catholic" or more Christian.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>In order to obtain a better representation of the true evangelical, evangelicals attending church once per month or more were studied.

<sup>7</sup>Scores were derived with the equation  $(S_{AV}-S_{CAT})/(S_{POS}-S_{CAT})$ , where  $S_{AV}$  is the average score of the group being studied,  $S_{CAT}$  is the average score of the ambient or Catholic population,  $S_{POS}$  is the adjusted ideal that could be scored if all questions are answered correctly. The Scores for the categories in syncretism are based upon the equation,  $1-(S_{AV}-S_{CAT})/(S_{POS}-S_{CAT})$ . In this section this is referred to as Score.

<sup>8</sup>See Appendix 6.1 for more details on scoring criteria and methodology used to determine scores.

<sup>9</sup>Weighted versus non-weighted calculations show little difference. The non-weighted and weighted scores in order are: 3.51 to 3.51, -2.56 to -2.55, -2.48 to 2.49, 3.57 to 3.60, 2.66 to 2.68 and 4.33 to 4.31 for the categories of Foundational Doctrine, Catholic Doctrine, Mayan Practices, Catholic

Foundational Bible Doctrine Lacking Among Half of Evangelicals  
Score: 44 out of 100 points

The Score of 44 means that the average Guatemalan evangelical scores slightly less than half way between what the average Catholic believes and what the Bible teaches. Evangelicals answered the five foundational doctrine questions as listed in Figure 6.1.

*Figure 6.1*

Percentage of Population			<b>Responses of Evangelicals to Five Foundational Bible Doctrines</b>
Yes	No	?	
94.2	3.1	2.7	Christ is God and Man who became flesh and lived on the earth.
44.5	46.7	8.8	Can a person find salvation in other non Christian religions as long as he looks for God with all of his heart?
91.2	1.6	7.2	Do you believe in the Trinity?
82.8	8.5	8.7	If someone dies without receiving Christ, will he go to Hell?
99	0.2	0.7	Christ died on the cross to give us eternal life.

There are major doctrinal problems with a large proportion of evangelicals. Incorrect answers due to misunderstanding the question, or not having some basic Christian orientation were expected to a small degree. As such, some individuals scored poorly on obvious questions. However, that 45% of evangelicals stated a person can find salvation in non-Christian religions and 9% are not sure, is troublesome. This is a direct carryover from the overall Catholic answer where 82% have the same opinion. Can a person who believes this be Christian?

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Practices, Superstitions, Christian Living and Attitudes toward the church, respectively. Weighting adjusted the ratio of Ladino to Indian on the sample to the same proportion as the actual population.

A corollary to the above statement is that 17% of evangelicals believe that a person who dies without Christ will not go to Hell or conversely, they are not sure that if a person dies without Christ, he will go to Hell. This follows the pattern but not the magnitude of the Catholics (55%). The rejection of the certainty of the exclusive path to Heaven through Christ rings of postmodernism, Mayanism and Guatemalan Catholicism.

Nearly 9% of evangelicals are not sure or do not believe in the Trinity. The reason for this is that many evangelical churches try to reject what they perceive as Catholic doctrine. The Triune God is a cardinal and visible doctrine of the Catholic Church. It is emphasized in Catholic corporate worship, prayers, and in all the architecture of their churches and missions. Another reason for this rejection is that the anti-Trinitarian Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons have made inroads into much of the population of Guatemala. Many evangelicals see these cults as just another harmless congregation, not realizing that their teachings are anti-biblical. Former cult members float through evangelical congregations, carrying their insidious doctrines with them as they contaminate evangelical congregations. This is not seen as a problem to 45% of evangelicals who say that salvation can be found in other religions as long as the adherents are sincere!

There are glaring problems with evangelicals and Foundational Bible doctrine. Since so many evangelicals do not believe the absolute claims of Christ, this portends that if better offers come from cults or materialism, many evangelicals and, especially their children, will certainly fall. In the future, only the evangelical religious culture or a true conversion will keep evangelicals in their churches. The Score of 44 is similar to a

flunking grade on a test and reflects a poor rating for evangelicals. This is a serious problem and is cause for alarm.

**Catholic Doctrine: Evangelicals Have a Moderate Level of Catholic Syncretism and Have a Works Theology, Score: 43 out of 100 points<sup>10</sup>**

The teachings in this category are uniquely Catholic, learned from the Catholic Church, other Catholics, or the Catholic culture and are not from the Bible. Figure 6.2 is a summary of how evangelicals responded to the questions.

*Figure 6.2*

Percentage of Population			<b>Responses of Evangelicals to Eight Catholic Doctrinal Issues</b>
Yes	No	?	
75.1	18.7	6.2	If a person treats his neighbor well and obeys the 10 Commandments, will he go to Heaven?
13	87		Must babies be baptized in order to cleanse them of their original sins?
11.5	84.6	3.9	Can you help someone who has died to reach God?
9	85.4	5.6	Mary is the Mediator between God and Man.
96.1	3.1	0.8	Is the Bible the only doctrinal authority to guide the Christian?
5.8	89.6	4.6	Can God give new doctrine through the Pope?
75.1	24.9		During the Lord's Supper, does the wine literally turn into Christ's blood?
69.4	28.5	2.1	Must a person faithfully attend his church in order to be saved?

The question regarding grounds for entering Heaven could be looked at as an open question focusing primarily on ethics, or as a question dealing with the exclusive mode of salvation. The question could be ambiguous to some. However, when one evangelizes Catholics, the statement of "I obey the Ten Commandments and treat my neighbor right" is a mantra they use for not becoming an evangelical. Most evangelical evangelists

<sup>10</sup>For scoring in the syncretism categories, the Score is derived from the inverse of the base and ceiling. This means that 0% indicates no syncretism with Catholic doctrine and 100% signifies the score of the nominal Catholic population.

understand this as Catholic spiritual phraseology. Seventy-five percent of evangelicals state that as long as one obeys the Ten Commandments and treats his neighbor well, he will go to Heaven. Salvation through works is a doctrinal issue that plagues all evangelical churches, reflecting a residual Catholic theology.

Nearly 75% of evangelicals believe that during the Lord's Supper the wine becomes the literal blood of Christ.<sup>11</sup> There is a strong carryover of the Catholic understanding of the Sacraments into the ordinances of the church. This understanding of the Lord's Supper corresponds with the superstition and magic that is endemic in Mayan culture as well.

At least 12% of evangelicals are solidly Catholic in their doctrine, with only the question of Biblical authority consistently answered correctly by evangelicals. The overall Score of 43 points indicates that evangelicals have a moderate to heavy level of Catholic syncretism.

#### Mayan Practices: Evangelicals Generally Have a Low Level of Syncretism with Mayanism: Score: 14.6 out of 100 points

This data section is treated the same for all categories of syncretism. A Score of 0 points indicates no syncretism and a Score of 100 points indicates equal beliefs as Mayans. Figure 6.3 gives a summary of evangelical answers.

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<sup>11</sup> Consubstantiation and infant baptism are also Reformed Church doctrines. However, because the percentage of Reformed Churches and corresponding members in Guatemala are not great, these doctrines have overwhelmingly crossed over from the Catholic Church rather than from the Reformed Church. Further, the majority of evangelical churches in Guatemala are Pentecostal, who historically have never prescribed to transubstantiation. On a personal note, this author has observed a magical awe that many evangelicals have toward the "*Santa Cena*" or Holy Supper (even the term is more Catholic than the New Testament term, the Lord's Supper or "*Cena del Señor*") as many members impose extra spiritual conditions on others before they partake of the "Holy Supper".

Figure 6.3

Percentage of Population			<b>Responses of Evangelicals to Four Mayan Issues</b>
Yes	No	?	
8.2	90.9	0.9	Have you consulted with a naturalist within the last 6 months?
12	88		Is it bad luck to uproot a live corn plant?
2	97.3	0.4	Have you consulted with a Mayan priest within the last 6 months?
7.9	88.9	3.2	Must a newborn baby wear something red in order to protect it from evil?

The final scoring indicates that, overall, evangelicals have little mixture of Mayan beliefs.<sup>12</sup> This is a very good score.

Catholic Practices: Evangelicals Have a  
Low Level of Syncretism with Catholic Practices: Score: 7.0 out of 100 points

This data in this section are treated the same for all categories of syncretism. A Score of 0 points indicates no syncretism and a score of 100 points indicates equal religious practice as Guatemalan Catholics. Figure 6.3 gives a summary of evangelical answers.

Figure 6.4

Percentage of Population			<b>Responses of Evangelicals to Four Catholic Practices</b>
Yes	No	?	
2.6	96.9	0.5	Do you have holy images in your house?
2.1	96.1	1.8	Does a charm of a saint protect a person from harm?
10.5	89.1	0.4	Do you decorate the graves on All Saints Day?
4.4	95	0.6	Do you have a holy shrine in your house?

<sup>12</sup> The question about a naturalist (*naturalista*) can be confused with a witch doctor (*brujo*), or an herbal medicine man (*shaman* or *naturalista*). The *shaman* and *brujo* are clearly Mayan with religious connotations, whereas the *naturalista* is not necessarily Mayan religion. Those in a primitive, Indian context understand this question as referring to an herbal medicine man and most educated Ladinos would look upon this as a witch doctor. Usually the surveyors explained the term to the respondents as *brujo* or *shaman* when they saw there was obvious confusion with the term. Adjustments to the scoring are treated in Appendix 6.1.

The question relating to decorating the graves on All Saints Day was discounted. (See Appendix 6.4). This is widely practiced by evangelicals, but it is considered a necessary and practical custom to keep the grave sites of the family clean. Evangelical leaders discussed this issue vociferously as to whether this is a Catholic religious practice or just a practical Guatemalan tradition. The Score of 7 points indicates a very low level of syncretism in this area of Catholic Practices.

**Evangelicals Have Moderate Level of  
Superstitions and Beliefs: Score: 35.0 out of 100 points**

This data in this section are treated the same for all categories of syncretism. A score of 0 points indicates no syncretism and a score of 100 points indicates the same level of religious practice as Guatemalan Catholics. Figure 6.5 gives a summary of evangelical answers.

*Figure 6.5*

Percentage of Population			<b>Responses of Evangelicals to Five Superstitions or Beliefs</b>
Yes	No	?	
27.9	72.1		Is it wrong for a Christian girl to wear makeup?
		100	If you become ill, will your spirit animal become ill also?
5.9	89.1	5	Does wearing a lucky charm protect a person from diseases?
64.5	28.8	6.7	Can the evil eye cause sickness?
9.8	85.4	4.8	Is it necessary to kiss a newborn baby in order to give it protection?

On superstitions, evangelicals believe similarly to Catholics. The vast majority of all Guatemalans believe in the evil eye. A large number of the population believe it is wrong for a Christian girl to wear makeup. The score of 35 points indicates a moderate level of superstitions among evangelicals as a whole.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup>"If you become ill, will your spirit animal become ill also?" was eliminated from the calculations. See discussion in Appendix 6.1.

Evangelicals Struggle with  
Morals and Christian Disciplines, Score: 40 out of 100 points

This section blends two categories together: morality and Christian disciplines because there is a direct relationship between the two categories.

*Figure 6.6*

Percentage of Population			<b>Responses of Evangelicals to Nine Areas Related to Christian Morals and Actions</b>
Yes	No	?	
96.6	0.2	1.2	Should a Christian fulfill the Word of God?
96.5	1.6	1.9	Should a Christian have a life that is distinct from others?
74.1	25.9		Do you read your Bible on a regular basis?
37.6	57.9	4.5	Do you have a bad habit that you cannot change?
78.2	20.4	1.4	Do you memorize scripture on a regular basis?
16.5	81.6	1.9	Are you a fallen (backslidden) Christian?
48.8	51.2		Have you invited someone to Bible study within the last 6 months?
96.5	3.5		When you break a Bible teaching, do you recognize your error and try to correct it?
11.5			11.5% of the evangelical population is "Living Together". Marital status for the balance of the population is: Married = 63.9%, Single = 20.9%, Widow = 3.7%.

This section was the most difficult to formulate meaningful questions that would elicit honest answers. Most people know the correct answer they should give to avoid embarrassment. That being the case, the questions were very carefully phrased.

Two sets of answers are likely more positively answered than the reality in Guatemala. That 74% of the evangelical population read their Bible on a regular basis and 78% memorize scripture seem much too high, especially because Guatemala is nearly 48% illiterate.<sup>14</sup> Perhaps some of the affirmative answers mean any form of Bible reading, such as a few sentences or Bible reading within the context of a public worship

<sup>14</sup> (PAHO) "1999 Basic Country Health Profile 1999", <http://www.paho.org/english/SHA/prflgut.htm>, accessed 28 August 2001.

service. This same question resulted in a surprisingly high affirmative answer by Catholics as well. Quite likely, because of the high regard of Sacred Scriptures by most Guatemalans, they felt they had to give a correspondingly high answer.

A sign of the overall morality of the evangelical population is unambiguously seen from the problem of cohabitation. Because information was derived from the demographic section, the surveyors likely received honest answers. The survey started with a similar format as government surveys which have cold and sterile demographic questions. Of Catholics, 16% cohabit and 12% of evangelicals cohabit. Related to this, it is troubling that 42% of evangelicals have a bad habit that presumably compromises their Christian testimony.<sup>15</sup>

As a reflection of the outward looking evangelistic tendencies of evangelicals, nearly half have invited others to their church or Bible study within the last 6 months. This reflects the strong evangelistic nature of most Guatemalan evangelicals.

The Score of 40 indicates a moderate range between the ideal score and the ambient Guatemalan population. This score is helpful in comparing denominations and groups. It shows also that many Christians have fundamental areas in their lives that they are not cultivating to grow in Christ as his disciples.

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<sup>15</sup> Determining personal morality is difficult because many answers are incriminating and do not want to give honest answers to questions such as: "How many adulterous relationships do you have?" or "Do you have problems with alcoholism?" Both of these questions reflect the serious problems in the general culture and are typical reasons why men fall and abandon the church. As a compromise, they were asked, "Do you have a bad habit that you cannot change?" The problem is that a bad habit could range from a person who eats too much to being a rapist. Most people have something in between the extremes when they answer this question. Nevertheless, most in Latin culture understand the meaning of the clandestine question that saves face. Because of the nature of the questions and the uncertainty of honest answers, this section is more useful for relative comparisons rather than judging against some perfect ideal.

Evangelicals Struggle with  
Christian Attitudes and Ethics: Score: 38 out of 100 points

The morality questions concerning grudges, looking to God first, and discussing one's faith are based on ethics from the Sermon on the Mount. The answers reflect a low level of knowledge and/or adherence to some of Christ's basic teachings. The overall scoring in this area reflects a weakness in the church.<sup>16</sup>

*Figure 6.7*

Percentage of Population			<b>Responses of Evangelicals in the Areas of Attitudes and Ethics</b>
Yes	No	?	
73.2	20.2	6.6	Must the attitudes of a Christian worker be different than those of a non-Christian?
51.5	44.4	14.1	Do you think that an evangelical advances more economically than the rest of the population?
15.3	82.5	2.2	When others treat you wrongly, do you hold grudges against them?
32.1	66.1	3.8	Being a Christian is a private matter and should not be discussed with others.
93.2	5.5	1.2	I take God into consideration before I express my values and priorities.
89.8	8.8	2.0	Do you think that doing your job well is part of being a Christian?

Evangelicals Have Very Positive  
Attitudes toward Church: Score: 80 out of 100 points

The answers given to the questions in this category demonstrate a high level of respect by evangelicals toward their church and their pastor. Figure 6.8 summarizes evangelical responses.

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<sup>16</sup>The question concerning the evangelical and economics is not tied to ethics, but is more an opinion or personal observation. It is related to clean living, discipline, and God's blessings that advances a person. The overall score of the category is relatively low because Catholics had similar responses.

Figure 6.8

Percentage of Population			<b>Responses of Evangelicals to Questions about their Church</b>
Yes	No	?	
72.2	27.8		Do you go to your pastor with personal problems?
97.1	2.2	0.7	Does your church teach you how to apply the Bible in your life?
89.5	8.9	1.5	If your pastor were to give you advice, would you follow it?
10.9	89.5	0.4	Have you changed churches within the last 6 months?
82	18		If your pastor tells to you do something, would you do it?

### Summary

Most evangelicals in Guatemala lack in Foundational Bible doctrine. They have moderate syncretism with Catholicism and slight syncretism with Mayan beliefs. They are moderately superstitious, and struggle with their Christian morals and ethics. They are evangelistic. They love their churches and pastors.

### **Crisis: Most Guatemalan Evangelicals Are Not Christian**

#### Bible Knowledge Directly Affects all Aspects of Christian Living

On the basis of statistical analysis,<sup>17</sup> there is a positive correlation between Foundational Bible Doctrine and morality, and to a lesser degree, to attitudes toward the church. An inversely proportional relationship exists between Foundational Bible Doctrine and the following categories: Catholic Doctrine; Superstitions and Beliefs; Mayan Practices; and Catholic Practices. This means that as evangelicals know their basic Bible doctrine it raises morality and attitudes toward church. More Bible knowledge also minimizes syncretism with Catholicism and Mayanism.

<sup>17</sup> Appendix 6.2 contains the statistical data derived from the Spearman Correlation and results of a statistical Factor Analysis.

Using Only Foundational Bible Doctrine Criterion  
Determines that Not All Evangelicals are Christian

If a person is a Christian he will have Christian beliefs and a Christian lifestyle.

Evangelicals separate into the following groups according to scorings on Foundational Doctrine: excellent, good, poor and non-Christian doctrine.<sup>18</sup> The following proportion of the evangelical community falls into these groups:

36.3% of evangelicals have excellent Bible doctrine

8.7% of evangelicals have good Bible doctrine

38.1% of evangelicals have poor Bible doctrine

16.9% of evangelicals have non-Christian doctrine.

Figure 6.9 demonstrates a strong and explicit correlation between the level of Foundational Bible Doctrine and all other categories. The level of Catholic Syncretism sharply and unambiguously increases as Fundamental Bible Doctrine decreases. This is

*Figure 6.9*  
**Religious Values of Evangelicals Based Upon Levels of Bible Doctrine**

	Total Evang Population	Excellent	Fair	Poor	Non-Christian
% of Evangelical Population	100%	36.3%	8.7%	38.1%	16.9%
Categories	Average Scores				
Catholic Doctrine*	43.4	37.2	41.3	45.9	50.5
Mayan Doctrine*	1.4	0	0	5.5	11.6
Catholic Practices*	7.4	5.7	5.8	7.3	10.7
Superstitions/Beliefs*	34.7	26.5	31.2	38.8	44.3
Christian Life/Morality**	40.2	52.7	34.8	38.1	21.3
Attitudes/Church**	80	93.9	64.9	80.9	56.7
*Lower scores signify less syncretism. **Higher scores signify more Christian in character.					

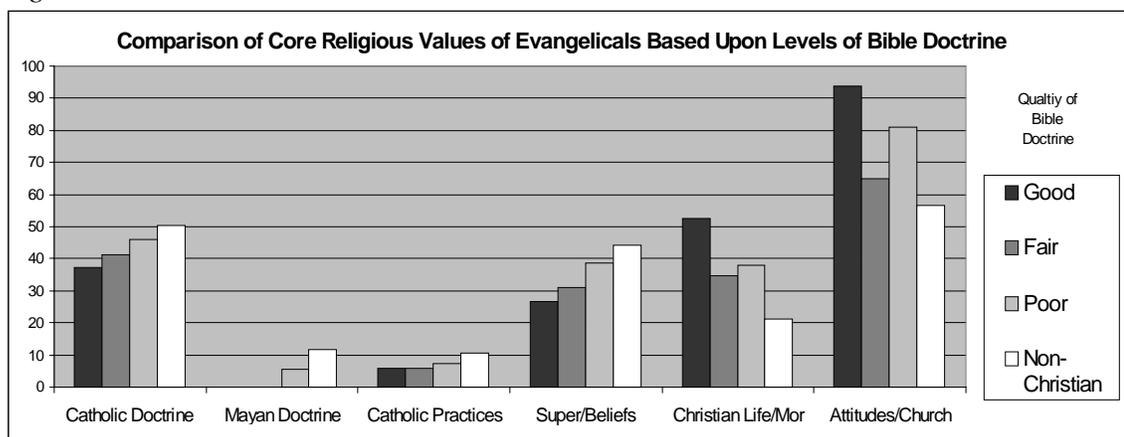
<sup>18</sup> Five points (raw) signify excellent doctrine. Four points signify uncertainty on one question: good doctrine. Three points signify one incorrect answer or two uncertain answers: poor doctrine. Two points signify two incorrect answers out of five questions: a non-Christian.

also the case for Mayan Syncretism, Catholic Practices, and Superstitions/Beliefs.

Evangelicals with a high level of Foundational Bible Doctrine have a substantially higher level of Christian Life/Values as well as better attitudes toward the church.

Figure 6.10 demonstrates the same data of Figure 6.9 in graph form and shows that the level of solid Bible doctrine has a direct relationship upon the Christian life. Each gray bar represents a decreasing level of Foundational Bible Doctrine as the shades become lighter. Looking only at Catholic Doctrine, as the Foundational Bible Doctrine decreases, Catholic Doctrine increases. (Looking at the columns from left to right, Foundational Bible Doctrine increases). Under Christian Life/Morality, as Foundational Bible Doctrine increases, scores in Christian Life/Morality increase. What is troubling however, is that only 36% of the evangelical population has solid Foundational Bible doctrine.

*Figure 6.10*



Between 25.1% to 41.6% of Guatemalan Evangelicals are Questionably Christian

Figure 6.11 contains the most troubling information in this entire report. When only strict Foundational Bible is used as a judging criterion, a mere 44% of the evangelical population is judged to be Christian. Using loose standards by this criterion, 83% of the evangelical population is Christian. When Foundational Bible standards and

Catholic syncretism are coupled together to score evangelicals, the percentage of Christians drops from 44% and 83% to 38% and 66% for strict and loose doctrine, respectively. The scoring of Christians among evangelicals drops slightly if Foundational Bible, Catholic syncretism and Morals/Actions are considered together to 37% and 65% Christians among evangelicals. Including Foundational Bible, Catholic syncretism,

*Figure 6.11*

**Percentage of Christians among Evangelicals in Guatemala According to Successive Combinations of Christian Criteria**

Criteria	Foundational Doctrine <sup>1,2</sup>	Doctrine and Catholic Syncretism <sup>3</sup>	Doctrine and Catholic Syncretism and Morals/Actions <sup>4</sup>	Doctrine and Catholic Syncretism and Morals/Actions and Attitudes/Ethics <sup>5</sup>	Doctrine and Catholic Syncretism and Morals/Actions and Attitudes/Ethics and Superstitions <sup>6</sup>
Strict Doctrine	44.1%	37.6%	37.1%	34.8%	25.1%
Loose Doctrine	83.1%	66.2%	64.7%	60.2%	41.6%

<sup>1</sup> Strict doctrine allows one neutral answer

<sup>2</sup> Loose doctrine allows one negative answer

<sup>3</sup> This allows 3 out of 8 incorrect answers in the Catholic Doctrine category as well as the Doctrinal Criteria.

<sup>4</sup> This allows 4 out of 8 incorrect answers in the Morals/Actions category as well as the Catholic Doctrine criteria and the Doctrinal criteria.

<sup>5</sup> This allows 2 out of 6 incorrect answers and 1 neutral answer for the Attitudes/Ethics category as well as the Doctrinal, Catholic and Morals/Actions criteria.

<sup>6</sup> This allows 4 out of 5 incorrect answers for the Superstitions category as well as the Doctrinal, Catholic and Morals/Actions and Attitudes/Ethics criteria.

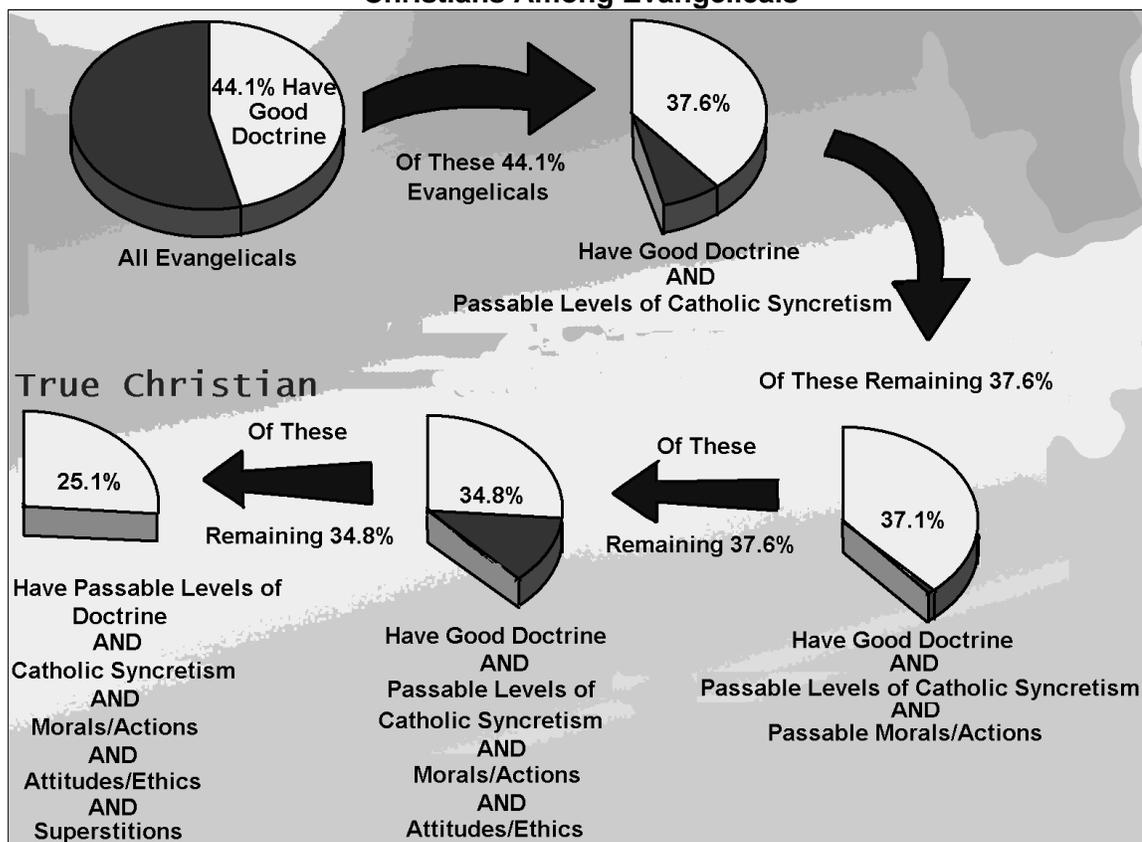
Morals/Actions and Attitudes/Ethics 35% and 60% (strict and loose criteria, respectively) of the evangelical population is Christian. Lastly, when all the above criteria plus Superstitions are considered together, only 25.1% and 41.6% (strict and loose criteria, respectively) of the evangelical population is Christian. Conversely, between 58% to 75% of the evangelical population is questionably Christian.<sup>19</sup> These results may be tempered

<sup>19</sup>Data queries are as follows: N=4010. Strict doctrine n=1771, Strict doctrine and Catholic syncretism n=1511, Strict doctrine, Catholic syncretism and Morals/Actions n=1489, Strict doctrine, Catholic syncretism, Morals/Actions and Attitudes/Ethics n=1397, Strict doctrine, Catholic syncretism, Morals/Actions, Attitudes/Ethics and Superstitions n=1004. Loose doctrine n=3333, Loose doctrine and

by the fact that these calculations are based upon interviews from people who self-identity as part of an evangelical church, but evangelical churches do not recognize all self-proclaimed evangelicals as members. Some of the larger denominations have nearly an equal amount of persons identifying themselves to the church as compared to the reported membership. Figure 6.12 treats the data in a graphical fashion.

Figure 6.12

**Graphical Depiction of Successive Layering of Christian Criteria with the Guatemalan Evangelical Population to Demonstrate the Percentage of True Christians Among Evangelicals**



Catholic syncretism n=2661, Loose doctrine, Catholic syncretism and Morals/Actions n=2594, Loose doctrine, Catholic syncretism, Morals/Actions and Attitudes/Ethics n=2416, Loose doctrine, Catholic syncretism, Morals/Actions, Attitudes/Ethics and Superstitions n=1669. When 3 out of 4 questions for Catholic practices are answered incorrectly for all the above criteria for strict doctrine n=997 or 24.9%.

### Discussion on the Shallow Guatemalan Church

In the race to evangelize and bring more into the fold, the Guatemalan church has done a poor job of producing disciples of Christ. Similar to the times of Constantine, the masses were swept into the church out of popular appeal and in the case of many of the new church members, there was no heart conversion. Personal observations in many churches verify suspicions that many churches are ignorant of practical Christian teaching and training. The zeal for evangelism in Guatemala is noteworthy, but the imbalanced emphasis on evangelism to the exclusion of producing disciples of Christ has produced a large and weak church that has stalled out the church growth. The church has leveled off in its growth since 1992 and has slowly declined in the percentage of the population since the mid 1990s. One of the obstacles to making disciples, mature churches, and subsequent church growth is the heavy syncretism, contradictory life style, and poor Bible doctrine by many evangelicals. Indeed, many churches are growing at the expense of other churches due to fervent evangelical efforts.<sup>20</sup> But the evangelism is now cultural and familiar, and in many cases the Gospel message is neutralized by the contradictory lives of church members.

In light of the above results that between 58% to 75% of the evangelical population are questionably Christian, there is cause for great concern that demands a refocus of the energies of the leadership of the national churches, as well as in the leadership of the international missionaries. What kind of seeds have been planted to produce such a weak and errant crop? In Guatemala, the picture is very different than in the United States or in Europe where liberalism has taken a similar toll upon the church.

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<sup>20</sup> See Chapter 8.

The insidious liberalism has undermined the authority of Holy Scriptures along with the foundational Biblical stories that give presuppositions which shape the Christian world view. In the United States the diluted Christian worldview has produced a church whose ethics and morals are nearly equal to the pagan culture. The Barna Research group demonstrates that only 41% of evangelicals in the 12 largest denominations are "born again." These studies show a similar trend of a declining biblical orthodoxy and morals in Christian circles.<sup>21</sup> Much of this has been precipitated by a low respect of the authority of God's word. This is not the case in Guatemala as this study shows that 97% of the entire population believe that the Bible is the Word of God. Though there is a vast ignorance about the Bible, there is a deep respect for it in all of society. With this cultural advantage, at least 95% of evangelicals would be considered conservative in the theology that they do know. In spite of the tremendous advantage of having a high regard for Holy Scripture in Guatemala, the ignorance and the misapplication of Scripture produces effectively the same fruit as does Christian theological liberalism in the United States and Europe. Blind, unquestioning and unthinking faith exists in Guatemala and it follows leadership out of personal convenience and ignorance. This is evident as evangelicals overall express a high level of confidence in their church and leadership but have a low level of Christian lifestyle.

It has been said that the church in Guatemala is a mile wide and an inch deep. One of the most serious problems in the Evangelical Church in Guatemala is that leaders implicitly have equated church membership with conversion and have done a poor job of

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<sup>21</sup> Tim Ellsworth, *SBC Life*. (October, 2001): 5, quoting the research of the Barna Research Group.

discipling believers. David Hesselgrave points out that there are motivational factors for conversion. All three of the following are good motivations: 1) to have a better life; 2) that one is in the presence of the Holy God (God-oriented); and 3) a societal motivational factor in that a person does not seek something for himself, but rather seeks the good of another person or his social group.<sup>22</sup> The first and last are motivators to bring a person to Christ, but in the end, walking with Christ must be more than an acceptance based on personal or societal interests. In Guatemala, there has been a strong momentum for non-spiritual reasons to accept Christ, such as economic improvement, safety from war, personal satisfaction, social status, or following the popularistic wave of the evangelical movement. As Hesselgrave points out, fulfilling these needs do not fulfill the necessary conditions for being a Christian. True conversion occurs when a person truly commits himself to Christ Jesus by faith, repents of his sins, and discards habits and cultural forms that conflict with Christianity. In Guatemala, the ambient Catholic syncretism dilutes Biblical Christianity and produces many individuals tossed by every current of the wind as they cross over from one religious group to another. But as they become members of new groups, they have retained the old traditions and world views.

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<sup>22</sup>David J. Hesselgrave, *Planting Churches Cross-Culturally* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1995), 239-40.

## CHAPTER 7

### A COMPARISON OF THE LEVEL OF INTERNALIZATION OF THE GOSPEL AMONG MAJOR DENOMINATIONS OF GUATEMALA

#### **Introduction**

The shallow overall condition of the Evangelical Church of Guatemala is cause for great concern. The disappointingly high percentage of lostness and nominalism within the evangelical community disables the church from producing viable disciples of Christ. By measuring and comparing the largest denominations of Guatemala, lessons from the most effective denominations can be learned. The more effective denominations experience healthy numerical growth and demonstrate a high degree of internalization of the Gospel by measurable criteria. This is measured by the composite score of all of the categories examined in this study. This comparison indicates which groups are doing a better job of teaching their members the Bible and quantifying the application of basic Christian teachings to everyday life.<sup>23</sup>

#### **Comparing Elements of Internalization of the Gospel between Major Evangelical Denominations**

##### Foundational Bible Doctrine Among Major Denominations

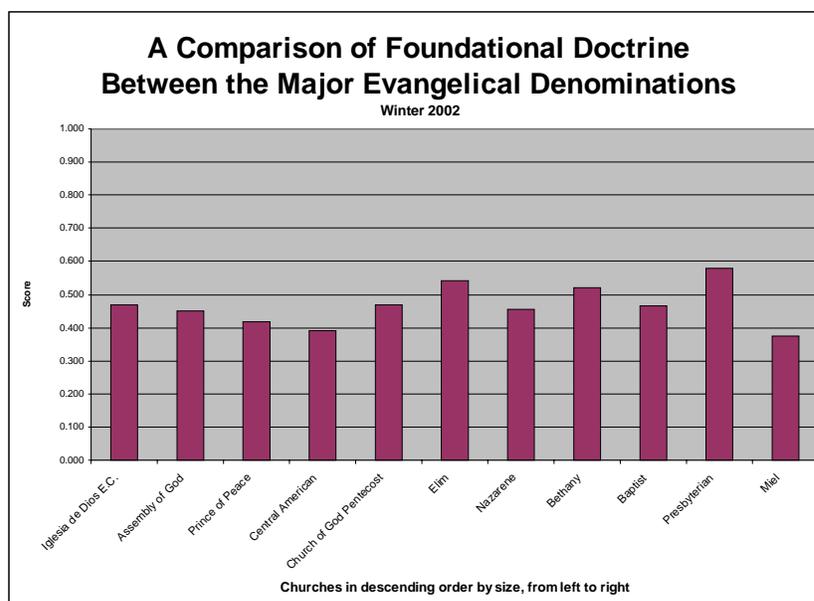
Figure 7.1 shows a comparison between the largest eleven evangelical denominations of Foundational Bible Doctrine using the Score as discussed earlier in Chapter 6. Answering all the questions according to Biblical norms, gives a perfect score

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<sup>23</sup>The comparative church criteria was analyzed using only answers from evangelicals attending their church at least once per week. This gives a smaller database to work with, but these individuals are more likely to be the true members of the studied denomination. They are more affected by the teachings and ministries of their church as compared to the loosely associated nominal evangelical.

of 100 points which establishes the ceiling of the chart. The score of the average Catholic population was set at 0 points, which is the base of the chart. A moderate difference exists between denominations in the area of basic Christological and salvation related doctrines. Nearly a 20 point spread lies between the highest and lowest scoring denominations. Presbyterians score the highest with 58 points, followed closely by Elim. On the low end of the spectrum is Miel, the schism from the Elim church, with a score of 38 points. Again, the main confounding issue among all churches is that nearly half of the members of these denominations do not believe in the exclusivity of salvation found in Christ. This is cause for great concern as even the best of the denominations score very low in light of Foundational Biblical doctrine.

*Figure 7.1*



### Syncretism: The Measure of Catholic Beliefs among Major Denominations

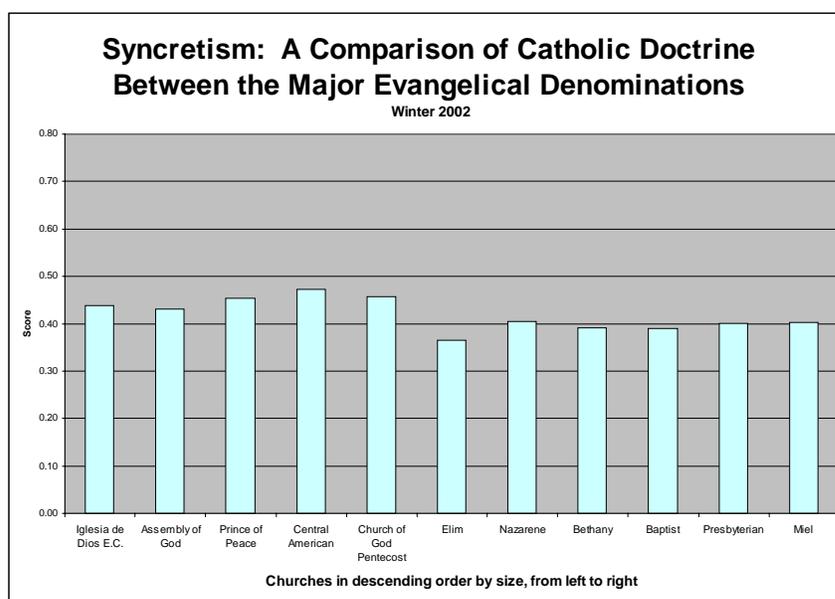
Due to the prevalent Catholic culture in Guatemala, there naturally is a degree of Catholic syncretism in the evangelical churches. All evangelical denominations have a

disturbingly high measure of syncretism in their churches. The main issues that cause problems for evangelicals are various forms of works-based salvation (nearly a quarter of the adherents to the major denominations state that they must go to church in order to be saved and slightly less believe they must follow the teachings of the Ten Commandments in order to be saved) and a strong belief in transubstantiation. This is disturbing as evangelicals follow the same trend as Catholics, but not to such an extent. There is lack of understanding and internalization of God's grace in most denominations and in its place, prevails a strong legalistic adherence to certain church practices. Evangelical legalism could be partly due to a carryover of works-based Catholic grace. This interpretation of "grace" forgives every lifestyle if certain external and measurable religious rites are prescribed to. Catholic "grace" nullifies the demand for internal transformation and the resultant Biblical Christian living. On the other hand, evangelical legalism focuses on the external moral actions that many Catholics have lacked. In the end, both of these religious forms are based upon a works theology.

If a group scores 100 points, this signifies there is no syncretism and conversely, if a group scores 0 points, this shows that the group is Catholic. The denominations have only about a 10 point spread between the high and low scores in this category. The Central American Mission (CAM) has the largest number of congregations and the largest congregations in rural Indian areas. CAM's work is concentrated in several different Indian groups located in the Western and Central part of Guatemala. It has the highest level of Catholic syncretism with a score of 24 points. The reasons for this are still unclear, but could be because much of this church is formed out of primitive Indian groups. These groups are relatively isolated from Western thinking and teaching. There are a number of other possibilities for this low score. The Indian groups which make up

CAM contain a large number of illiterates. The teaching methods of the church could be a barrier to the content, resulting in misunderstanding, misapplications, and strong legalism. It is possible that the training style used in Bible institutes is not uniformly appropriate to all Indian cultures. The churches that follow CAM with a high level of Catholic syncretism are Prince of Peace and Church of God Prophecy. Both of these churches are spontaneous Guatemalan movements that have prospered in rural Indian areas. The churches least affected by a mixture of Catholic doctrines are the highly Ladino Elim and Presbyterian churches.

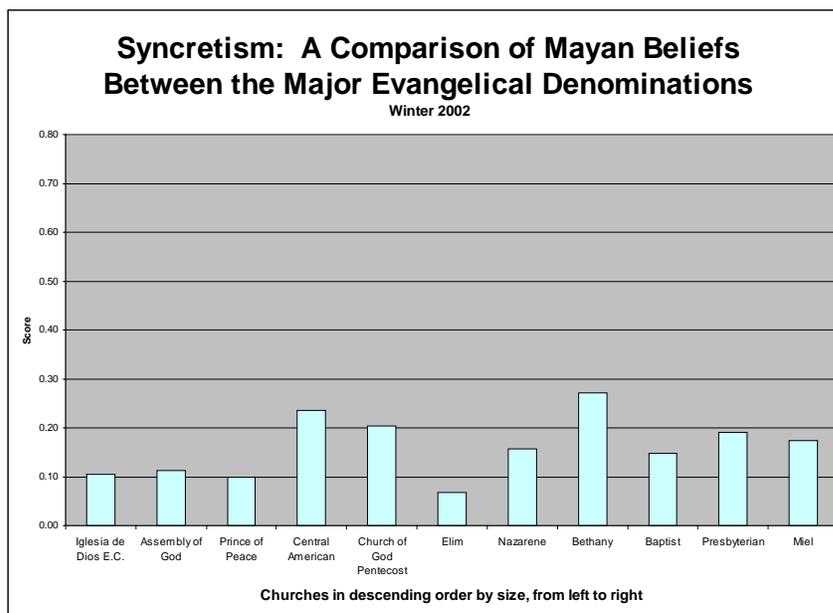
Figure 7.2



#### Syncretism: The Measure of Mayan Beliefs among Major Denominations

Overall, there is a low level of Mayan practices in the major evangelical denominations. The most affected, however, is the Bethany church scoring 27 points, with the base of 0 points, representing the ideal score, and 100 points representing the Guatemalan ambient population. The Bethany Church is centered in the very Indian West of the country. The least affected by Mayan practices was the Ladino, Elim Church.

Figure 7.3



### Syncretism: A Comparison of the Use of Common Catholic Practices in Major Denominations

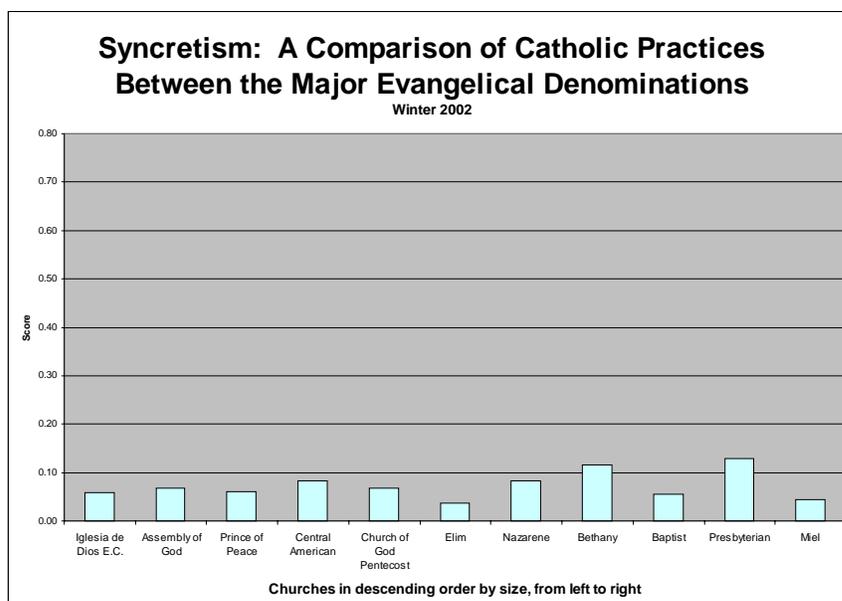
Evangelicals as a whole, and especially the larger denominations, exhibit fewer Catholic practices than syncretism of Catholic or Mayan beliefs. Practices are concrete, visible and verifiable and are easily observed by family and community. If an evangelical knows that a certain doctrine opposes the teachings of his church, he may try to hide his true beliefs to others with dishonest answers as they are easier to deny than actions. Once unusual practices are spotted, the practitioners are corrected, shunned or castigated into external conformity or are rejected from the group.

Although the general level of Catholic practices is substantially lower than Catholic beliefs for the larger denominations, Catholic rituals are still practiced out of ignorance by some evangelicals. The celebration of All Saints Day and the Day of the Dead are still clung to by some evangelicals. On these holy days, family members enter

the graveyard to clean, paint, and tend to the sepulchers of relatives. Then they make prayers on behalf of the dead, and leave food on the sepulcher for the deceased one to eat that night. Many evangelicals consider this practice (or a portion of it) a practical Guatemalan or family custom, not strictly tied to the beliefs of the Catholic Church.

The denomination that exhibits the highest level of Catholic Practice is Bethany Church, scoring nearly 12 points, which in reality is a low level of syncretism, and the least syncretized is the Elim church with a mere 4 points.

*Figure 7.4*

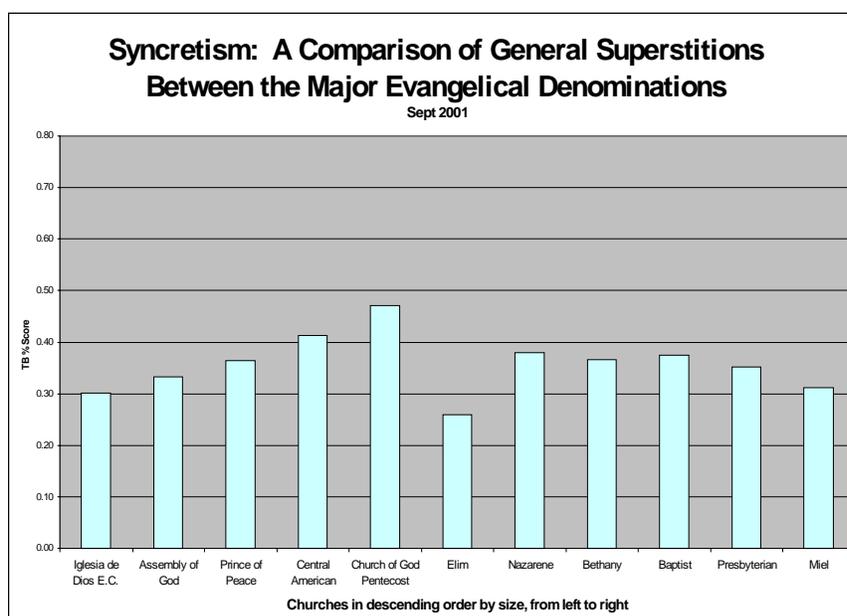


### Syncretism: Superstitions among Major Denominations

The nature of superstitions touches all areas of life, including the trivial ones. However, if a Christian has a high level of superstitions and fears, then one has to ask if he really believes God protects him. Which world view is more prominent in his life: the Christian one, or the fatalistic, family-community world view? There is a fine line

between the level of superstition and the level of faith in God which is proportional to an understanding and application of Biblical teachings. When a person knows more Bible, he has more knowledge and is motivated to know and do God's will because of a love toward God. Love and trust in God cast out all fear, including the fears behind superstitions.<sup>24</sup>

*Figure 7.5*



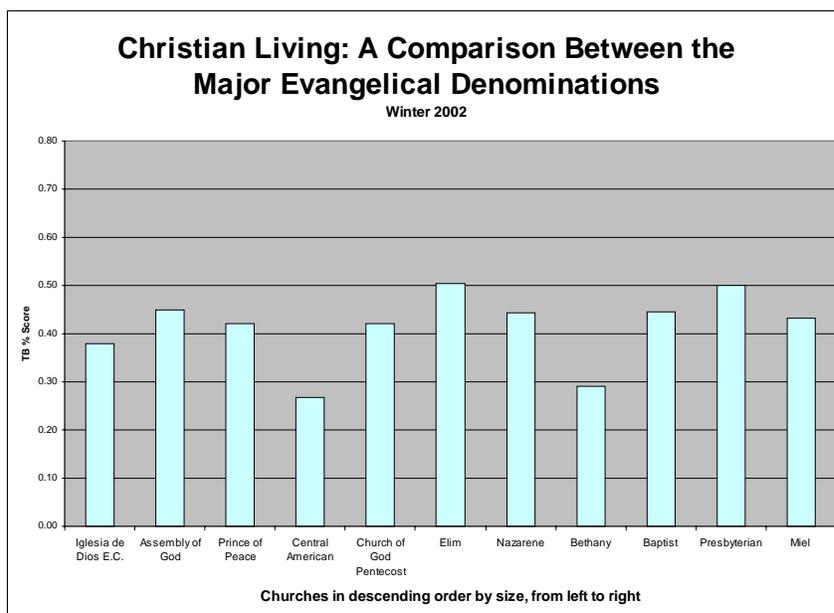
The groups with the highest measure of superstitions are the Church of God-Pentecost scoring 47 points, followed by CAM with 41 points. The least superstitious denomination is the Elim church with a score of 26 points. In syncretism categories, the less points scored, there is less syncretism. CAM has a high incidence of all varieties of syncretism, while the Elim church generally has the lowest incidence of syncretism.

<sup>24</sup> See supporting data in Appendix 7.2.

## Morality and Actions among Major Denominations

In one sense, morality is the watershed of Christianity as it verifies to all persons the validity of the claims of Christ in one's life. In the words of Christ, a Christian shines his light and "they will know you by your fruit." This section demonstrates that what a person believes, determines how he lives. There is a cycle in which beliefs give birth to actions and actions verify beliefs.

*Figure 7.6*



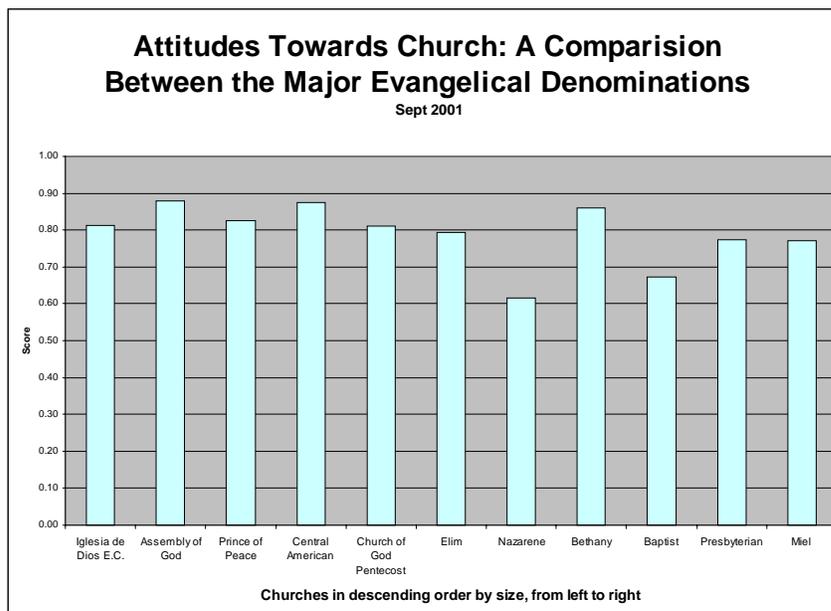
A 25 point spread exists between the extremes in the measurement of Morals/Actions between the large denominations. Not coincidentally, the denomination with the highest syncretism scores has the very lowest in Christian living. This demonstrates when non-Christian beliefs and practices are mixed with Christianity, the very essence and power of Christianity are compromised. This is most evident in the

case of CAM. CAM churches have the highest Indian population and at the same time are self governing and self propagating. Church growth in this denomination has been at a standstill for at least five years and factions within the denomination are isolating themselves from the central leadership. In spite of excellent training material, there seems to be a major problem internalizing solid Bible teachings into the overall CAM constituency. Bethany has the second lowest score. On the other end of the spectrum, the Elim church has the highest level of Morals/Actions. This is the same church that has some of the highest scores on overall Foundational doctrine and the least amount of syncretism. Although there is room for applause for the Elim Church as it scores the highest, all churches, including Elim, lack in the basic areas studied and must make strong efforts to ground their pastors in Bible knowledge, appropriate methods of teaching, pastoral skills, Christian ethics, and lifestyle.

#### Attitudes toward the Church from Members of Major Denominations

The majority of denominations scored very high in this category. The Assembly of God Church, Central American Mission, and Bethany churches received high scores of around 88 points. The only church that scored notably lower than others was the Nazarene church with a score of 62 points. Of all categories, this one is the most encouraging as it indicates a love and faithfulness that evangelicals have toward their churches.

Figure 7.7



### Summary of a Comparison of the Major Denominations

Although there are glaring deficiencies in the church, including a huge percentage of non-Christians and high levels of syncretism, many of the lost sheep are in the church and are a captive audience who should be challenged, converted, and disciplined under the vigilant leadership of evangelical pastors. The solutions to the problems and challenges of the evangelical churches lay in them.

### Factors that Explain Deficiencies among the Largest Evangelical Denominations

A consistent pattern of extremes exists within the largest evangelical churches in Guatemala. The Elim and the Presbyterian Churches have the highest level of basic doctrine and Christian Living. Further, Elim singularly has the least amount of Catholic

and Mayan syncretism. By contrast, CAM has the following characteristics: lowest Foundational Bible doctrine, highest levels of Catholic and Mayan syncretism, and lowest level of Christian Morals/Actions. The level of Foundational Bible Doctrine has a direct relationship to: Catholic and Mayan syncretism, Christian Morals/Actions, and Attitudes toward church.

Economic Class Relates to the Level of Foundational  
Bible Knowledge and the Christian Life:  
Extreme Poverty Crosses Cultural and Denominational Barriers Adversely  
Affecting Foundational Bible Knowledge and the Christian Life

Figure 7.8 shows the percentage of economic levels or class within each major denomination. The Presbyterian Church has the highest proportion of members from within the middle and upper/middle classes. This is followed by Elim with a solid middle and upper/middle class and then a strong upper/lower class. The Miel church has a solid range of all middle classes. Very similar to Elim is the Bethany church with slightly less middle and upper/middle, more lower/middle, and then more upper/lower class.

On the other end of the spectrum, the churches of the lowest classes are the Nazarene, Assembly of God, Prince of Peace, and then the Central American Mission, respectively. The other denominations fall somewhere between these extremes.

Do economics necessarily correspond to the level of Bible doctrine and Christian living? Some of the average scoring churches in the areas of doctrine, syncretism, and Christian living are on the lowest economic scale. This demonstrates that economics play a part in these areas, but they are not necessarily a limiting factor in producing strong, Biblical Christians and churches. Conversely, both the Elim Church and Presbyterians

have the highest scores of Doctrine, Christian Living, as well as the highest level of economics.

*Figure 7.8*

**Breakdown of Economic Levels of Membership Within the Major Evangelical Denominations**

Denomination	Low/Low Class	Middle/lower, Upper/Lower Class	Lower/Middle Class	Middle and Upper/Middle Class	Upper Class
Assembly of God	23.1%	33.5%	27.9%	14.1%	1.3%
Baptist	21.0%	25.7%	32.4%	18.1%	2.8%
Bethany	5.5%	30.3%	24.8%	38.6%	0.7%
Central American Mission	21.8%	29.2%	29.2%	16.6%	3.2%
Elim	9.4%	29.6%	18.9%	40.3%	1.9%
Church of God Whole Gospel	14.1%	30.6%	27.9%	25.9%	1.2%
Church of God Pentecost	11.7%	38.7%	35.2%	12.9%	1.4%
Miel	5.3%	26.3%	31.8%	34.2%	2.2%
Nazarene	27.3%	29.8%	28.0%	14.9%	0.0%
Prince of Peace	22.3%	30.5%	27.2%	19.1%	0.9%
Presbyterian	7.7%	20.5%	20.5%	46.2%	5.1%

There is little difference between the assimilation of the Gospel among the poorest Ladinos and the poorest Indians but, the scores of the lowest classes are, in general, very low (see Figure 7.12, page 207). The very low score should cause great concern because this economic class represents 17% of the Evangelical Church. It seems for this economic class, that the culture and lifestyle, that make a person poor, supersedes the differences between Ladino or Indian cultures. On a side note, once a person becomes a Christian, many of the motivated ones will move upward in the economic and educational level. The Evangelical Church must grapple with the issue of how to disciple and work with this special class of persons who never leave the lowest classes.

Nearly one-third of the evangelicals come from the middle/lower to upper/lower classes. Within these classes there is a small difference of assimilation of the Gospel between Ladinos and Indians. As the economics and associated lifestyle improve, the cultural factors between Ladinos and Indians begin to play a greater part in the assimilation of the Gospel. As the economic class increases, the Indians fall behind in assimilating the Gospel. Interestingly, the lowest assimilation for both groups is in the upper classes, presumably because they are so busy with the worries and cares of the world.

#### A Higher Level of Secular Education in Denominations Positively Affects the Level of Foundational Bible Knowledge, Morality and Christian Actions

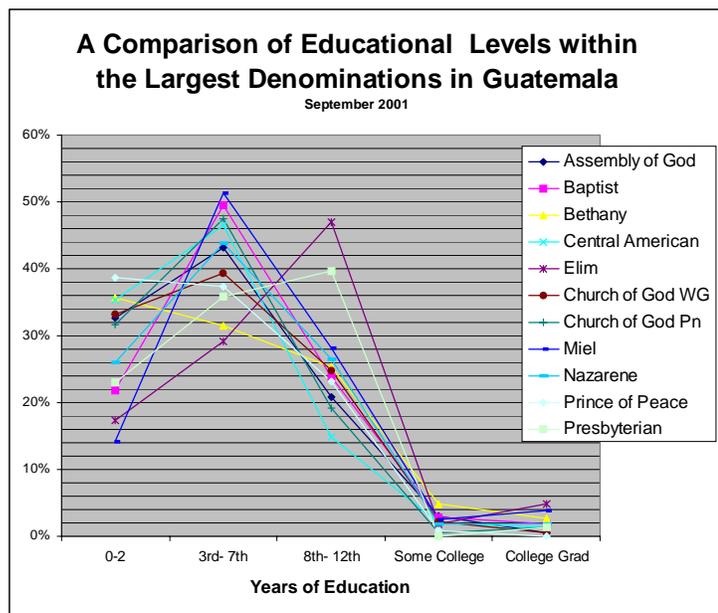
Although the Bethany Church has the lowest average level of education of all the denominations, it has a relatively high level of college level members. Presumably, the more educated evangelicals with more financial means have a higher status in society and in church than the less educated people. The question is, do these educated elite play key leadership church roles as they train and model for others? Apparently they do in the case of Bethany church because the church has some of the highest scores in the level of Foundational Doctrine.<sup>25</sup>

The Nazarene church has the next lowest educational level, yet it has a higher than average score on doctrine, and a slightly higher than average score on Christian Living along with a lower level of syncretism.

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<sup>25</sup> Bethany is the only church that contradicts the trend that good doctrine implies low levels of syncretism and high levels of Christian living. On the contrary, they have a high level of syncretism and a low level of Christian living.

Figure 7.9



Both the Elim and Presbyterian churches stand out as having members who possess higher levels of secular education, as well as have the highest scoring on the level of Bible doctrine and Christian living. Although the lack of secular education tends to limit the level of internalization of the Gospel in Guatemala, this must be considered as part of the total situation. Secular education is loosely tied to the level of Foundational Doctrine and Christian Living in Guatemala.

#### Literacy Directly Affects All Aspects of the Christian Life

Literacy is related to the level of education. The statistical data derived from the Factor Analysis in Appendices 7.5 and 7.6, clearly show a strong relationship between literacy and the Christian life. Evangelical Attitudes among literates scored higher than non-literate evangelicals. Christian Attitudes among literates scored higher than

non-literate evangelicals. Bases and Results of the Faith among literates scored higher than non-literate evangelicals.

### A Higher Percentage of Indian Population within a Denomination Is Linked to a Generally Lower Internalization of the Gospel

The percentage of Indians within each denomination contributes to the differences of the levels of Foundational Bible Doctrine (and all aspects of Christianity) within the churches. Figure 7.10 shows the ratio of Indians to Ladinos in the major evangelical denominations in Guatemala. The denominations are ranked from left to right starting with the highest doctrinal Score.<sup>26</sup> The chart demonstrates that the denominations with a higher percentage of Ladino population generally have a higher score on Bible doctrine. This demonstrates that even though the Indian population widely embraces evangelical Christianity, it has difficulty in fully assimilating the Gospel and its message into their hearts. This is not a radical revelation or discovery made in this study, as this is well known to students of missions and anthropology. The Church of God-Whole Gospel breaks this trend and apparently is making the most significant life changing progress with the Indians. CAM has a large percentage of Indian churches that have been planted by second or third generation Guatemalan Christians, and to the outsider, these churches seem to be very indigenous. One of the unexpected surprises of this study is that the CAM churches consistently scored low, in spite of a vast network of local Bible institutes

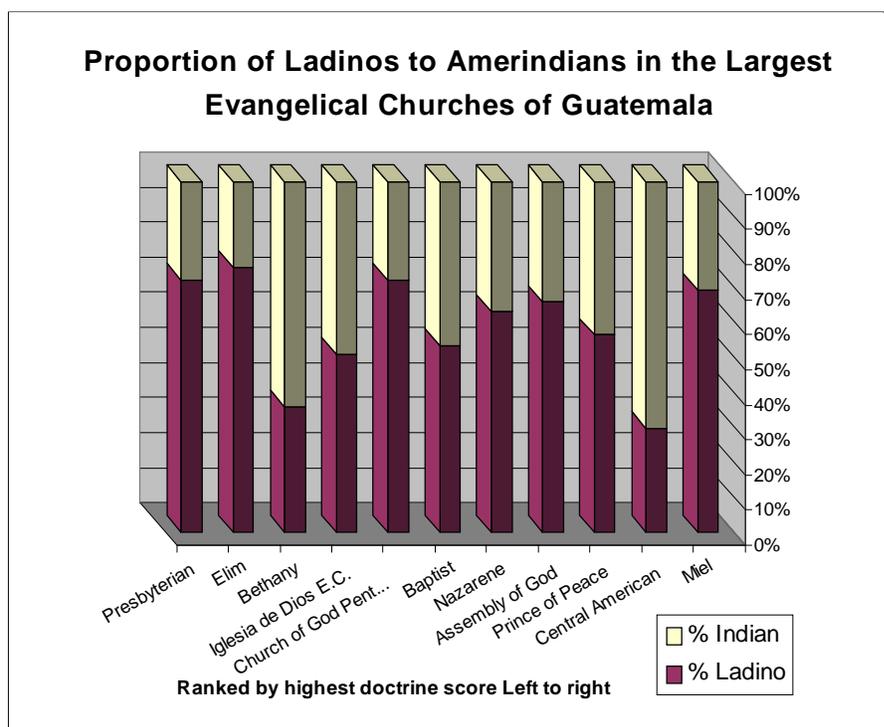
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<sup>26</sup> Although the Bethany church has a relatively high doctrinal score, this church is the only exception to the observation that higher levels of Foundational Bible Doctrine signify higher levels of Christian Living and less syncretism. The Bethany church scored in the lower levels Christian Living and syncretism and its significance in the ranking of doctrine in the context of this section are discounted.

in Spanish and several Indian languages, and a world-class seminary in Guatemala City.

A related issue is that in a number of the CAM areas, which are heavily Indian, a significant amount of their churches break away to other denominations or form new, independent churches.

Figure 7.10



### Issues Relating to the Assimilation of the Gospel in Indian Culture

Some of the blatant differences between the Ladinos and Indians are:

education/literacy, language, history/tradition, and economics. According to the data in figure 7.11, as secular education increases, the scoring of Foundational Bible Doctrine increases, with the exception of the University years. Even after differentiating between the races by secular education and therefore, literacy, Ladinos score an average of 4%

more than the Indians from grades 0 through 12. A college graduate is exposed to many worldviews and can think and deal in abstract terms. Their level of assimilation of the Gospel is much higher than the rest of the population and approximately equal for both Ladinos and Indians. Secular education has a bearing on assimilating the Gospel for both Ladino and Indian cultures.

The results derived from a statistical Factor Analysis in Charts 7.13 and 7.14 (page 206) show the differences in overall scoring between Indian and Ladino evangelicals; and illiterate evangelicals versus literate evangelicals. All categories of the Factors can be generalized as the Christian Life. Ladinos score higher than Indians in all factors combined. However, Indians scored significantly lower in Evangelical Attitudes and significantly lower in Attitudes towards Religious matters. Illiteracy contributes to a more pronounced deficit of the Christian life than does Indian culture.<sup>27</sup>

Language is the most obvious issue associated with Indian culture. Language and culture are inseparable since language reflects the culture and the culture forms the language. Indians, as a group, have less secular education, and are also poorer while having a distinct culture. These factors influence the level of internalization of Biblical Christianity.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Overall, illiterates scored 5% lower than literates for all combined factors. Illiterates scored significantly lower in factors 3, 4, 5 and 7. These are Evangelical Attitudes, Christian Actions and Beliefs, Catholic Attitudes and Beliefs, and Attitudes toward Religious matters.

<sup>28</sup> All major Indian groups have the Bible or Bible portions translated into their language. Those who can read, normally read Spanish. In the case of Quiché, many literates prefer Spanish, because it is more standardized than the a Quichean translation. These are a montage of local dialects that are most understandable to the more traveled, experienced and literate Quichés. . . who read Spanish. This is according to Narciso Poz an experienced Bible translator and a Jesus Film translator.

Figure 7.11

<b>Foundational Doctrine Raw Scores of Evangelical Ladinos and Indians by Educational Level</b>			
Education Level	N	Ladino	Indian
0--3	2,013	3.48	3.34
4--6	1,371	3.65	3.48
7--12	1,315	3.64	3.49
University	107	3.2	3.32
U. Grad	57	3.99	3.94

Figure 7.12

<b>Foundational Doctrine Raw Scores of Evangelical Ladinos and Indians by Economic Level</b>			
Economic Class	N	Ladino	Indian
Lower/Lower	840	3.24	3.21
Mid/low-upper/low	1,484	3.61	3.54
Low/middle	1,310	3.3	3.41
mid/mid-upper/mid	843	3.97	3.83
lower upper	168	3.54	3.07

Figure 7.13

#### **A Comparison of Factor Scores between Ladino and Indian Evangelicals**

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Factor 6	Factor 7	Factor 8	Factor 9
Ladino	9.39	8.02	7.28	6.2	8.59	7.1	7.72	9.15	9.52
Indian	9.06	7.69	6.78	5.91	8.3	7.28	6.94	9.11	9.27

Figure 7.14

#### **A Comparison of Factor Scores between Literate and Illiterate Evangelicals**

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Factor 6	Factor 7	Factor 8	Factor 9
Illiterate	8.92	7.73	6.24	5.7	8.07	7.35	7.01	8.94	9.33
Literate	9.33	7.93	7.28	6.18	8.55	7.12	7.56	9.17	9.46

### **Conclusions About the General Health of the Evangelical Church in Guatemala**

All of the major denominations of evangelical churches in Guatemala have low levels of Foundational Christian doctrine with a concomitant high level of Catholic syncretism and a low level of Christian living. Using loose criteria, more than half of the evangelical population is not Christian and using more formal criteria, 75% of evangelicals in Guatemala are questionably Christian. The overall level of morals and ethics in the evangelical community further compromise the overall growth rate of the

Evangelical Church which is not keeping up with the growth rate of the general population.

The ambient cultural issues of economics, race, language, and education all affect the internalization of the Gospel within a specific population group. The factors of extreme poverty and the subculture associated with it transcend other cultural factors and is a primary reason for impeding the internalization of the Gospel in Guatemala. Once individuals rise to the middle lower classes and above, Ladinos internalize the Gospel significantly more than Indians. The level of internalization of the Gospel is directly related to literacy. Similarly, it is related to the level of secular education until the college years at which time there is a sharp drop. Though all of these cultural factors have an influence upon the internalization of the Gospel, they do not necessarily become absolute impediments, except for the culture that causes extreme poverty.

Denominational composition differs by socio/economic, racial and educational factors. There are differences in the nature of church membership and degrees of Christian maturity between the denominations. The Presbyterian and Elim churches deal with similar populations that are more educated and generally within the middle/middle and upper/middle classes. These churches are approximately 71% Ladino. These denominations have the highest level of evangelicals with good Foundational Bible Doctrine and the highest level of Christian Living. The Central American Mission has the highest degree of syncretism, lowest level of Foundational Christian Doctrine, and lowest level of Christian Living as well as the highest percentage of Indians at 74%. The Church of God-Whole Gospel demonstrates that in spite of a relatively poor, low educated and 50% Indian membership, they have a relatively higher level of Foundational

Bible Doctrine and Christian Living. Their fruit demonstrates they are doing one of the best jobs of contextualizing the Gospel and many lessons can be learned from their leadership. Their leadership, training and worship style contribute to overcome the socio-cultural impediments to the Gospel.

The early history and the leadership of each denomination established a trajectory of work within certain people groups or socio-economic classes. As nationals from specific people groups grew into leadership positions, the leadership and denomination had a propensity for working with and assimilating similar population segments. A denomination rich in leadership skills and businessmen easily attracts businessmen, merchants and persons of that class. Some of the denominations in Guatemala are composed of rural Indians and they attract rural Indians, such as the Church of God-Prophecy. To be sure, some denominations have a varied membership, but they have a propensity for a certain class and culture. Unless a denomination is purposeful in attracting other cultures and peoples, it will not. Likes attract likes. Because of this, some denominations are largely composed of population groups who have difficulty in assimilating the Gospel, such as illiterates, certain Indian groups, or the extremely poor. Leadership must be cognizant of their constituency and make adjustments to assure that their flock grows to the full measure of Christ through purposeful and appropriate Christian education and ministries. In other words, the effective denomination overcomes, adapts to or capitalizes upon these cultural parameters by using appropriate forms of worship, ministries, and Christian education. In this way, they will be more effective in making disciples to reach the stature of Christ.