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**ENCYCLOPEDIA OF RELIGIOUS GROUPS IN
LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN:
RELIGION IN GUATEMALA**

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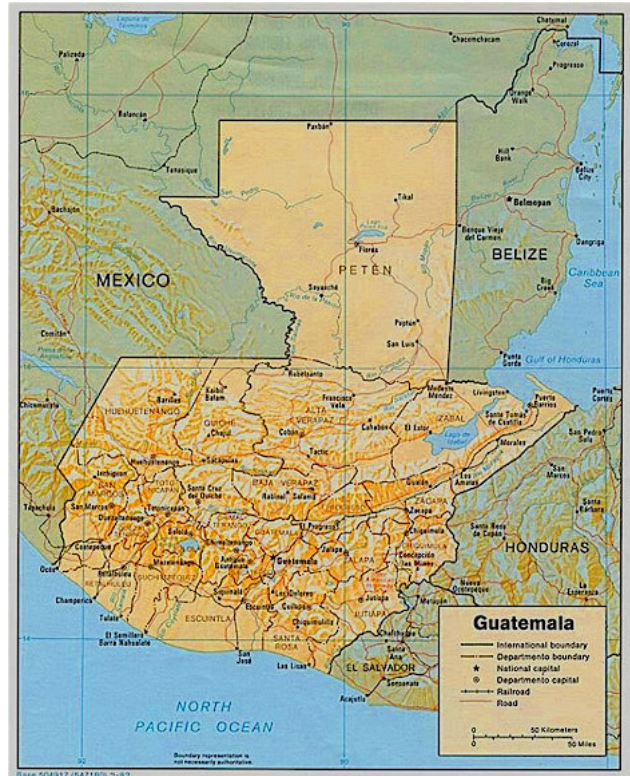
RELIGION IN GUATEMALA

Country Overview

The Republic of Guatemala is the most populous country in Central America, bordered by the Pacific Ocean to the west and the Caribbean Sea to the east, and adjacent to Mexico (west and north), Belize (northeast), Honduras (east), and El Salvador (southeast). The total population of Guatemala was 12,728,111, according to the July 2007 census. Most of Guatemala's population is rural, although urbanization is accelerating in the departmental capitals and in the national capital of Guatemala City (estimated population 2,156,348).

The country is divided geographically by the central highlands that stretch east and west. The magnificent scenery includes black-sand beaches and rolling hills and farmland along the Pacific coast; majestic smoking volcanoes, forested mountain ridges, dark-blue lakes, terraced hill-sides, and green-carpeted valleys with coffee bushes in the central highlands; tropical rain-forests in the northern lowlands; and large lakes and swamps in the Caribbean coastal region.

Known as the “Land of Trees” and the “Land of Eternal Spring,” Guatemala has been steadily losing much of its animal and plant life, particularly since the 1950s, due to the process of economic modernization. Environmental deterioration is now threatening human society and the economy, but the flora and fauna have long suffered from human activities. This process began with the early hunter and gatherer groups of Amerindians that first arrived about 2,500 BCE. It increased with the sophisticated Mayan civilization of 400-900 C.E. in the Guatemalan highlands and lowlands (as well as in adjacent areas of Mexico, Belize, Honduras and El Salvador), where more than a million inhabitants depended on large-scale agricultural production to sustain their dominance in the region. It continued during the Spanish colonial period (1492-1832) and has accelerated during the modern period (1832 to date).



Guatemalan society is divided into two main ethnic categories: Amerindian and Ladino. More than half of Guatemalans are descendants of indigenous Mayan peoples. Hispanicized Mayans and *Mestizos* (mixed Spanish and Amerindian ancestry) are known as *Ladinos*. However, the major factors for determining the size of the Amerindian population by the government have been language and dress, rather than race, which tends to underestimate the strength of the Amerindian population. The Council of Mayan Organizations (COMG) claimed that about 65 percent of the Guatemalan population was Amerindian in 1990. However, Ladinos control the nation's political and economic life, as well as determining its social standards: "to be accepted outside one's own Indian community one has to look, act, and talk like a *Ladino*," according to

Tom Barry in *Inside Guatemala* (1992). Ethnic discrimination permeates Guatemalan life, and Indians must shed their traditional dress and language and assume a Ladino cultural identity to achieve social acceptance and to succeed in the dominant society.

According to Wycliffe Bible Translators' *Ethnologue* (2005), the population of Guatemala was 55 percent Amerindian, 44 percent *Mestizo*, and about one percent other races. Fifty-four living languages are spoken in Guatemala (not including those spoken by immigrant groups) among 23 ethnolinguistic groups, with Spanish being the dominant language (about 44 percent, followed by the principal Mayan languages of Quiché, Mam, Cakchiquel and Kekchí. Spanish is the major trade language because most of the Amerindian languages are linguistically distinct, which hampers communication outside one's own ethnic group. There are an estimated 100,000 Black Caribs (Afro-Amerindian who speak Garifuna) in Central America, but only about 16,700 live in Guatemala, predominantly on the Caribbean coast at Livingston and Puerto Barrios.

Additional ethnic components of the Guatemalan population include Afro-American West Indians (who speak English or English Creole) on the Caribbean coast, Middle Easterners (mainly Lebanese and Jews), Europeans (mainly Germans and North Americans), Chinese and Koreans.

Current Religious Situation

Christianity remains a strong and vital force in Guatemalan society, but its composition has changed during generations of political and social unrest. Historically, the dominant religion has been Roman Catholicism. In 1980, 84.2 percent of the population was reported to be Roman Catholic; 13.8 percent was Protestant (most of whom identified as evangelicals); and about two percent was identified with “other religious groups” (including traditional Mayan religions) or had “no religious affiliation.” However, by 1990, the Catholic population had declined to 60.4 percent (a decline of 24 percentage points), while the Protestant population increased to 26.4 percent (an increase of 12.6 percentage points); 2.1 percent were adherents to “other religions”; and 11.1 percent had “no religious affiliation” (CID-Gallup Poll, June 1990).

Surprisingly, during the decade of the 1990s, a series of public opinion polls revealed little change in religious affiliation between 1990 and 2001. However, between 2001 and 2006, the size of the Protestant population increased from about 25 percent to almost 31 percent in 2006, while the Catholic population remained relatively constant at 55-57 percent. Those affiliated with other religions also remained steady at two to three percent, while those with no religious affiliation declined to about 10 percent.

A characteristic of most cities, towns and villages in Guatemala is the presence of a Catholic church situated on the central square or plaza. The Metropolitan Cathedral (original construction 1782–1815) in Guatemala City is a visible sign of the historical presence of the Catholic Church in the life of the nation.

The *Mestizo* population of Guatemala has strong ties to traditional Roman Catholicism brought to the Americas by Spanish missionaries, who themselves carried the cultural baggage of their Iberian homeland with its pre-Christian Celtic spirituality and Medieval Roman Catholicism. Consequently, the general religiosity of the *Ladinos* of Guatemala contains elements of European as well as Amerindian “popular Catholicism” (syncretism).

Historical Overview of Early Social, Political and Religious Development

The Classic Mayan civilization was dominated by large city-states in the Valley of Guatemala (where Guatemala City is now located), at Tikal in the lowlands of the Peten, at Copán in northwestern Honduras, and at Palanque in the Chiapas foothills of Mexico. This civilization rapidly declined after 900 CE due to environmental changes (mainly drought), over-population, internal social and political disintegration, and competition with rival Amerindian empires (Toltec and Mixtec), according to many scholars. The center of Mayan civilization shifted from the previous city-states to new ceremonial centers in the central and northern Yucatán Peninsula in present-day Mexico, such as Chichen Itza and Mayapan, during the period 600-1500 CE.

By the time the Spanish *conquistadores*, colonists and Roman Catholic priests arrived in the early 1500s, the Mayan civilization in Guatemala was in disarray and engaged in bitter rivalry with other major Amerindian groups, which facilitated Spanish domination. By 1650, a combination of disease, war and exploitation had greatly reduced the size of the Amerindian population in Guatemala, from about one million in 1500 CE to only about 200,000 in 1650. The Spanish and Spanish Creole (American-born of pure Spanish blood) elite ruled over the growing *Mestizo* population (mixed Spanish and Indian blood) and the dwindling Amerindian population, which declined from 80 percent of the total population in 1778 to 65 percent in 1893. In 1973, Amerindians were less than half of the nation's population, according to government authorities.

Politically, Guatemala achieved its independence from Spain in 1821-1823, after nearly 300 years of Spanish colonial rule under the Captaincy General of Guatemala, which governed the Spanish territories of Central America and the modern Mexican state of Chiapas.

The first Spanish colonial capital, Santiago de Guatemala, was destroyed by floods and an earthquake in 1542. Survivors founded a second capital, now known as La Antigua Guatemala, in 1543. In the 17th century, Antigua Guatemala became one of the richest capitals in the New World. Always vulnerable to volcanic eruptions and earthquakes, Antigua was destroyed by two earthquakes in 1773, but the remnants of its Spanish colonial architecture have been preserved as a national monument. The third capital, modern Guatemala City, was founded in 1776, in the "Valle de Nuestra Señora de la Ermita."

After the independence of Central America from Spain in 1821 and its later separation from the independent Mexican Empire in 1823, Guatemala became part of the United Provinces of Central America (later called the Federal Republic of Central America), comprised of the modern states of Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Costa Rica – Panama was a province of Colombia until November 1903. **General José Francisco Morazán Quezada**, born in Honduras in 1792, was one of the principal leaders of the Liberal Party. His first term as President of the Federation was from 1830 to 1834. In 1834, Morazán oversaw the relocation of the Central American Federal Capital from Guatemala City to San Salvador. Morazán was re-elected as the Federation's president in 1835 and served until 1839. He also served as the Head of State of Honduras (1827-1830), Guatemala (1829), El Salvador (1839-1840) and Costa Rica (1842).

As President of the Federation, Morazán enacted many reforms, including freedom of speech, the press and religion; equality of people of all classes before the law; and trial by jury. All of these reforms were opposed, with extreme prejudice, by the Conservatives who wanted to maintain the old class system. The Liberals approved the separation of Church and State, secular marriage and divorce, and an end to government-enforced tithing to the Catholic Church, which made most all of the Catholic clergy enemies of Morazán and his Liberal allies. General Morazán was further denounced when he ordered all the Catholic clergy out of the country, and told them never to return or face certain death.

The Liberal democratic project was strongly opposed by Conservative factions allied with the Roman Catholic clergy and the wealthy landowners. Local conservative factions wanted to retain the old Spanish Roman Catholic system of caste titles and privileges, so they pressured Liberal rebel leader **José Rafael Carrera Turcios** (b.1814-d.1865) to join their cause. He turned his back on the Liberals and sided with the Conservatives.

During the period of 1838–1840, the Federation experienced a civil war between the Conservatives and Liberals. Without a strong sense of national identity, the various political factions were unable to overcome their ideological differences, and the Federation dissolved after a series of bloody conflicts. By 1838, Carrera became the *de facto* ruler of much of Guatemala, after using religious fanaticism to motivate his troops in battle with the cry, "*¡Viva la religión y muerte a los extranjeros!*" (Long live religion and death to foreigners!). Morazán repeatedly chased Carrera's forces out of cities and towns, but Carrera would simply retreat to the mountains and retake the area as soon as Morazán's military forces left the area. The union effectively dissolved in 1840, by which time four of its five states had declared their independence.

The Republic of Guatemala was created in 1838 under Carrera and his Conservative political allies. Carrera, known as "an illiterate but shrewd and charismatic leader," was President of Guatemala on two occasions: from December 1844 to August 1848, and from November 1851 to April 1865. His government signed a Concordat with the Vatican in 1852, repealed the anti-clerical legislation established under the rule of Gen. Morazán (1829-1838), reinstated the Catholic religious orders, and allowed the Catholic clergy to operate the nation's few public schools.

However, after Carrera's death in 1865, the Conservatives were wrested from power by a coalition of Liberal forces. In July 1871, **Justo Rufino Barrios** (b.1835-d.1885), together with other Liberal generals and dissidents, issued the "Plan for the Fatherland" that proposed to overthrow Guatemala's long entrenched Conservative leadership (1838-1871). They succeeded in doing so when **General Miguel García Granados** (b.1809-d.1878) was declared president (1871-1873) and Barrios became commander of the armed forces. After Barrios himself became President (1873-1885), the Catholic Church was again subjected to harsh legislation, the Jesuits and other foreign clergy were expelled, the archbishop and bishops were exiled, tithes were eliminated, convents and monasteries were prohibited and closed, church property was confiscated, priests were prohibited from wearing clerical garb and were barred from teaching, religious processions were proscribed, and civil marriage was required of all citizens. These anti-clerical laws so crippled the Catholic Church in Guatemala that it has never fully recovered its former influence. During the Barrios' administration, the railroad from the capital to the Pacific coast was completed in 1880.

The decline of cochineal production – a natural pigment of a bright red color obtained from the carminic acid produced by some small, plant-sucking homopterous insects that live on cacti, feeding on moisture and nutrients in the cacti, was widely used as a dye for fabrics, pottery, food coloring and other industrial uses prior to the invention of synthetic pigments and dyes in the late-19th century – caused some economic dislocation in Guatemala by the 1860s. However, Guatemala's porous volcanic soil, constant temperature, and single rainy season made its highlands ideally suited for coffee production, following the lead of Costa Rica. Guatemala began to produce significant amounts of coffee during the Conservative era (1838-1865), but it was under subsequent Liberal regimes that coffee production and exports led to the modernization and economic growth of the country prior to 1900. Coffee farms (*fincas*) sprang up around Cobán, Antigua and Amatitlán, and then spread to the western highlands and the Pacific coastal slopes.

By 1870, coffee production rose to 44 percent of all Guatemala's exports, and became the largest single export commodity, a position that it has held ever since.

Manuel José Estrada Cabrera was President of Guatemala from 1898 to 1920 (22 years), the longest uninterrupted presidency in the nation's history. He became president after the 1898 assassination of **President José María Reyna Barrios** (1892-1898). Estrada, a lawyer, was a moderate within the Liberal Party, who worked to solidify the less controversial reforms of President Barrios; he was the first civilian Guatemalan head of state in over 50 years. He was able to retain power by controlling elections in 1904, 1910 and 1916. One Guatemalan historian suggested that the extreme despotic character of Estrada did not emerge until after an attempt on his life in 1907.

Estrada encouraged development of the nation's infrastructure: highways, railroads and sea ports. The long-delayed railway from the Caribbean coast to Guatemala City was completed in 1908 with assistance from the International Railways of Central America, a subsidiary of the U.S. multinational corporation **United Fruit Company (UFCO)**, founded in 1899. UFCO became an important economic and political force in Guatemala during his presidency. *Banana and coffee production and export dominated the nation's economy during this period.* Unlike coffee, which was grown mostly by individual producers on small farms, bananas became a giant foreign-controlled plantation crop. Estrada cultivated friendly relations with the U.S. Government. He supported U.S. policy during the Panamanian revolution of 1903, when the Colombian department of Panama declared its independence and its new leaders immediately signed an agreement with the U.S. to build the Panama Canal and create the U.S.-controlled Panama Canal Zone.

Estrada's regime became infamous for its brutality and corruption. In 1906, Estrada faced serious revolts against his rule from rebel forces that were supported by governments of some other Central American countries, but Estrada succeeded in defeating them. His achievements were overshadowed by growing repression and blatant corruption, including bribes given to the president. The condition of workers was little better than peonage, and officials of the Estrada administration created a spy system to report subversive activities. Internationally, Estrada was frequently concerned about plots by Guatemalan exiles in neighboring countries to overthrow him. He was forced to resign in 1920 after the National Assembly (legislature) declared that he was mentally incompetent.

Estrada's most curious legacy was his attempt to foster a **Cult of Minerva** (the Roman name of Greek goddess Athena) in Guatemala: in 1899 he initiated feasts of Minerva to celebrate the accomplishments of students and teachers, and he ordered a number of Hellenic-style "Temples of Minerva" to be built in the country's major cities.

Carlos Herrera Luna served as the acting president of Guatemala between April and September 1920, and was president of Guatemala from September 1920 to December 1921. Herrera was a powerful businessman in the sugar industry who owned and developed Pantaleón Sugar Mill; he invested wisely in land, crops and machinery. Pantaleón Sugar Holdings is today one of the top 10 sugar companies in the Americas, with mills in Central and South America. Herrera was deposed in a coup, led by **Gen. José María Orellana Pinto** (1873-1921), in July 1921 and he fled to exile in El Salvador. Orellana served as the *de facto* president from December 1921 until his death in September 1926. **Lázaro Chacón González** (1873-1931) served as acting president between September and December 1926 and as president from September 1926 to January 1931, when he resigned after having a stroke.

At that time, Guatemala was in the midst of the Great Depression and nearly bankrupt. The Liberal Party joined with the Political Progressive Party to nominate **Gen. Jorge Ubico y**

Castañeda (1878-1946) as Chacón's successor as President of the Republic. In his inaugural address, he pledged a "march toward civilization." However, after taking office, he began a campaign of efficiency that included assuming dictatorial power. His nickname became the "Little Napoleon of the Tropics." Ubico focused on stimulating coffee exports and improved prices. He built an extensive network of roads and modernized local administrations, including health and school facilities. Ubico also abolished debt slavery and peonage, and oversaw the enforcement of the vagrancy law, which issued identification cards to all Guatemalans for the purpose of enforcing employment. His methods, however, were authoritarian; he harshly suppressed opposition through press censorship and police control. He also engineered constitutional changes (twice) in order to extend his term as president. While his main focus was the nation's economic development, his efforts mainly benefited the upper-class of large landholders, which generated criticism from the middle and lower classes. He also stressed the importance of the military through the "educational mission of the barracks." Ubico was a strong opponent of communism and associated it with criminality and political opposition.

In addition, Ubico expressed a concern for the nation's Amerindian population and extended government services in an effort to improve their lifestyle. Under his regime, the majority Mayans underwent a legal revolution that permitted them to freely move about the country and seek employment. However, this freedom was mainly an illusion as the improvements created a paternalism that extended government control over the largely rural population. In reality, Ubico merely transferred their dependency from landowners to the national government.

In order to promote economic development and recovery from the Great Depression, Ubico adopted a pro-American stance, and the UFCO became the most important company in Guatemala. UFCO was granted import duty and real estate tax exemptions by the government, and it soon controlled more land than any other individual or group in the nation, along with the nation's only railroad; it also controlled electricity production and distribution, along with the port facilities at Puerto Barrios on the Caribbean coast, the nation's principal port in the first half of the 29th century.

Active opposition to Ubico began in 1941, when university students and legislatures opposed another extension of the President's tenure until 1949. Despite Ubico's pro-German sentiments (Germans controlled nearly two-thirds of Guatemala's exports), he joined neighboring Central American countries in declaring war against Germany and its allies in 1941. Ubico's government collaborated with the U.S. Government in detaining suspected Nazi sympathizers in Guatemala, confiscating their property and other assets, and removing them to detention camps in Texas, where they remained until war's end in 1945. These actions in Guatemala and other Central American countries successfully reduced German influence and economic power in the region. Due to growing opposition against Ubico's regime from university students and labor organizations, the dictator suspended constitutional guarantees and tightened the military grip over the country. This action led to a series of strikes, which ended in Ubico's resignation and exile in June 1944 (Woodward 1999:234-235).

Following the dictatorship of **Gen. Jorge Ubico y Castañeda** between 1931 and 1944, liberalizing trends began under the nation's democratically-elected, reformist civilian governments during the period 1944-1954. **President Juan José Arévalo Bermejo**, who was in office between 1944 and 1949, was an idealistic university professor who proclaimed his belief in "spiritual socialism," and his progressive policies angered Conservatives and Catholic Church authorities. Arévalo sponsored a new Constitution in 1945, modeled in part after the Mexican

Constitution of 1917; he encouraged workers and peasants to organize themselves to achieve greater social equity, and he pushed education, social welfare and other reforms.

In 1950, **Colonel Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán** (governed from 1950 to 1954), won the presidency with support from a center-left coalition of political parties; he accepted support from the clandestine Guatemalan Communist Party before and after the election. The new president convinced the legislature to approve the country's first income tax; he expanded public works and the exploitation of energy resources; he pushed a program of agrarian reform that led to the expropriation of the uncultivated portions of large, private plantations (including vast holdings of the U.S.-owned UFCO), and the redistribution of 1.5 million acres to 100,000 landless peasants; and he promoted the legalization of the Communist Party. Conservatives and officials of the Catholic Church used anti-Communist rhetoric to attack the Arbenz administration, which contributed to his loss of popular support among the general public and the triumph of the CIA-engineered, rightwing military *coup d'etat* led by **Coronal Carlos Castillo Armas** in 1954.

The clandestine CIA-instigated *coup d'etat* was championed by U.S. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, whose brother Allen was Director of the CIA and was a primary stakeholder in the UFCO, which owned significant portions of the rural land subject to Arbenz' agrarian reforms. However, the pretext for supporting Arbenz' overthrow was "fighting Communism" in Central America, the U.S.' backyard, in the context of the Cold War in the post-World War II period.

Coronal Castillo Armas, who ruled Guatemala as president until his assassination in 1957, moved swiftly to eliminate all Communist influence from the country. A National Committee for Defense against Communism was quickly established to supervise a repressive purge of government institutions, labor unions, student organizations, political parties, and other social organizations. A decree replaced the Constitution of 1945, authorized Castillo's military rule of the country, outlawed the Communist Party, and banned all subversive books and propaganda. Thus began a wave of brutal repression under successive military governments for the next 30 years.

During the first phase of the conflict, mainly the 1960s, the "insurrection" was led by middle-class intellectuals and university students with mostly an urban base of support. In response to the increasingly autocratic rule of **General José Miguel Ramón Ydígoras Fuentes**, who took power in 1958 following the murder of Col. Castillo Armas, a group of junior military officers from the military academy revolted in 1960. When they failed, several went into hiding and established close ties with the Cuban Government. This group became the nucleus of the forces that were in armed insurrection against the government for the next 36 years. The guerrilla organization was known as the **13th of November Revolutionary Movement (MR-13)**, named after the day of the insurrection. The MR-13 based its operations in the countryside, deep in the mountainous southeastern region of the country.

Shortly after **President Julio César Méndez Montenegro took office in 1966**, the army launched a major counterinsurgency campaign that largely broke up the guerrilla movement in the countryside. The guerrilla forces then concentrated their attacks in Guatemala City, where they assassinated many leading figures, including U.S. Ambassador John Gordon Mein in 1968. The third phase of the civil war took place during the 1970s when old and new organizations joined the insurgent's armed struggle against a succession of military governments that by then were the rule. The war, at this stage, was fought on both urban and rural fronts, especially in the Mayan Highlands. The civil war evolved into the brutal repression by military forces of dissidents (including Catholic priests, nuns and lay leaders), *campesinos* (rural peasants) and indigenous communities who were suspected of collaborating with the leftist insurgents.

The **Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity** (URNG) was formed as a guerrilla umbrella organization in February 1982 by four revolutionary groups active in Guatemala: the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP), the Revolutionary Organization of the People in Arms (ORPA), the Rebel Armed Forces (FAR), and the National Directing Nucleus of the Guatemalan Labor Party (PGT-NDN).

In March 1982, retired **General Efraín Ríos Montt** came to power as the chairman of a military junta that took over the government and began a violent "scorched-earth" counterinsurgency campaign in the indigenous highlands against the URNG and its supporters until he was toppled the following year. By the time a civilian government returned to office in 1986, the URNG recognized that coming to power through armed struggle was out of the question, and they took initiatives to negotiate a political solution. Gradually, between 1986 and 1996, the army and government were drawn into a peace process that was moderated and verified by the United Nations and included other international actors as key players. Both sides made major concessions. Obligations were imposed on the government, including significant constitutional reforms, which were internationally binding and would be verified by the UN.

On 29 December 1996, a formal peace agreement was signed by the Guatemalan Government and the URNG in the presence of U.N. Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali that officially ended the 36-year civil war (1960-1996), the longest civil war in Latin American history. The Secretary-General of the URNG, Commander Rolando Morán, and President Álvaro Arzú jointly received the UNESCO Peace Prize for their efforts to end the civil war and attaining the peace agreement. Afterward, the URNG became a legitimate political party with the support of other leftist organizations; it later won several legislative seats in national elections in 2003 and 2007.

Gen. Ríos Montt took over the reins of government as part of a three-man junta in 1982 with the support of the Guatemalan armed forces, and quickly identified himself as a "born-again" Christian and a member since 1979 of a local evangelical church in Guatemala City, known as *Iglesia Cristiana Verbo* (The Word Christian Church, related to a US-based missionary organization from Eureka, California, called Gospel Outreach).

For about 18 months, Guatemala was ruled by this Protestant military dictator who gave orders for the army to brutally suppress the nation's guerrilla movement and its sympathizers, who in growing numbers were Mayans living in rural villages in the central highlands. The government formed local **Civilian Defense Patrols (PACs)** to counteract the insurgency in the countryside. Participation was in theory voluntary but, in practice, many people, especially in the rural northwest, had no choice but to join either the PACs or the guerrillas. Ríos Montt's conscript army and PACs recaptured essentially all guerrilla-held territory; consequently, guerrilla activity lessened and was largely limited to hit-and-run operations. However, Ríos Montt won this partial victory only at an enormous cost in civilian deaths.

Ríos Montt was deposed in August 1983 by his Minister of Defense, **General Óscar Humberto Mejía Victores**. Mejía became *de facto* president and justified the coup, saying that "religious fanatics" were abusing their positions in the government and also because of "official corruption." However, Ríos Montt remained in politics, founded the Guatemalan Republican Front party (FRG), and was elected President of Congress in 1995 and 2000. **Mejía Victores** served as president of Guatemala from August 1983 to January 1986, during a time of increased repression and death squad activity by government forces.

Marco Vinicio Cerezo Arévalo of the Christian Democratic Party served as president from January 1986 to January 1991. He was followed by **Jorge Antonio Serrano Elías** (of Lebanese descent), who was president from January 1991 to May 1993, under the banner of the Solidarity

Action Movement. *Serrano ran against the popular Jorge Carpio who unsuccessfully tried to use Serrano's fundamentalist Protestant beliefs against him as a campaign issue. Serrano was the second Protestant to become a Head of State in Latin America, after Ríos Montt.*

The Serrano administration's record was mixed. It had some success in consolidating civilian control over the army, replacing a number of senior officers and persuading the military to participate in peace talks with the URNG. He took the politically unpopular step of recognizing the sovereignty of Belize, which until then had been officially, although unsuccessfully, claimed by Guatemala as a province. Although the Serrano administration reversed the economic slump it inherited by reducing inflation and boosting real economic growth, in May 1993 Serrano illegally suspended the Constitution, dissolved Congress and the Supreme Court, imposed censorship and attempted to restrict civil freedoms, allegedly in a campaign to fight corruption.

However, the attempted self-coup by Serrano against his own government was met with strong protests by broad sectors of Guatemalan society. This, combined with international pressure and the army's enforcement of the decisions of the Constitutional Court that ruled against Serrano's actions, forced him to resign as president on 1 June 1993 and to flee the country. He remains in exile in Panama, where the Guatemalan government has made numerous unsuccessful attempts to have him extradited to face charges of corruption.

Ramiro de León Carpio was president of Guatemala from June 1993 to January 1996. De León promised to defend public freedoms and the rule of law, as well as to make progress in the negotiations with the guerrillas, and to purge the armed forces of corrupt elements. On 26 August, he demanded that all the deputies in the National Congress and all the members of the Supreme Court resign. This created a crisis that was not resolved until 16 November, resulting in 43 amendments to the 1985 Constitution, which were approved in a referendum on 30 January 1994. On 6 January, negotiations began with the main guerrilla group, the URNG, but this time under the auspices of both the United Nations and the Organization of American States, and with a reduced role of the Guatemalan military in comparison with the previous negotiations. On 29 March, he signed the Global Accord on Human Rights, which among other things demanded the disbandment of the PACs that had been accused of perpetrating massacres during the civil war.

Álvaro Enrique Arzú Yrigoyen was president from January 1996 to January 2000, under the banner of the National Advancement Party (PAN). The main achievement of his presidency was to sign a final peace agreement with the URNG that ended Guatemala's 36-year-long civil war in December 1996. In April 1998, the assistant Archbishop of Guatemala City, Bishop Juan José Gerardi, was murdered two days after publishing a report on the suspected involvement of the military in atrocities during the civil war. With suspicions that the President's own security guard had been behind the murder, and amidst mounting national and international pressure, he formed a commission with his most trusted collaborators and members of the Catholic Church to fully investigate the crime.

The Truth Commission (Historical Clarification Commission, created by the Oslo Accords of 1994) stated that Guatemalan military influence over the government passed through different stages during the years of the armed confrontation. It began during the 1960s and 70s with the Army's domination of the structures of the executive branch. The Army subsequently assumed almost absolute power for half a decade during the 1980s, by penetrating all of the country's institutions, as well as its political, social and ideological spheres. During the later, final stage of the confrontation, it developed a parallel, semi-visible, low profile, but high impact, control of national life. In the military itself, the Guatemalan military intelligence system became the driving force, to control the population, the society, the State and the Army itself.

The Commission's final report, entitled *Guatemala: Memory of Silence*, was published in February 1999. The report identified a total of 42,275 named victims; of these, 23,671 were victims of arbitrary executions, and 6,159 were victims of forced disappearances. It found that Mayans accounted for 83 percent of the victims, and that 93 percent of the atrocities committed during the civil war were attributed to the nation's armed forces and PACs.

Alfonso Antonio Portillo Cabrera served as the nation's President from 2000 to 2004 in representation of the FRG, the party led former military dictator Efraín Ríos Montt. *Portillo, also, was a professed evangelical.* On the day of his investiture Portillo said that Guatemala was "on the edge of collapse," and promised a thorough government investigation into corruption. On 9 August 2000 he declared that the governments of the previous two decades had been involved in human rights abuses. While he showed determination to see through his regenerative and progressive program, his government soon became overwhelmed by the reality of the political and mafia corruption in the country. During 2001 his government faced a continuous wave of protests that sapped the credibility of his government. The FRG was accused of bringing corruption on an unprecedented scale to the country. His government has been tainted by accusations of theft, money laundering, money transfers to the army, and the creation of bank accounts in Panama, Mexico and the USA by many members of his staff, which totaled more than \$1 billion.

After the FRG lost to Óscar Berger's GANA party and the new president was sworn in to replace Portillo in January 2004, the Berger administration (2004-2008) proceeded to revoke Portillo's political immunity from prosecution in February and Portillo immediately fled to Mexico. From 2004 to 2006, Portillo lived in Mexico City in a luxury apartment in one of the city's most exclusive neighborhoods. Portillo has been accused of authorizing \$15 million in transfers to the Guatemalan Ministry of Department, after which government authorities believe he made several transfers of public funds to bank accounts held in his own name, or in those of his relatives and even some of his friends. After a long legal process, Mexico's foreign ministry approved Portillo's extradition to Guatemala in October 2006. Upon his return to Guatemala, he was arrested and held on a series of fraud and corruption charges, but was soon freed on bail (Q1 million or about US\$130,000). While awaiting trial, he is working on appeals and other legal resources to stall the process and avoid the trial (as of April 2009).

The current President of Guatemala (2008 - 2012), Alvaro Colom Caballeros of the Unidad Nacional de la Esperanza (UNE), is a center-left politician, industrial engineer and Mayan priest who studied traditional Mayan cosmology under the guidance of the priest Cirilo Pérez Oxjal, a respected Quiché leader and former president of the *Consejo Continental de Ancianos de América*. Colom was elected president in November 2007 due to the strong support he received from the politically-mobilized Amerindian population that had grown tired of being marginalized by Ladinos within Guatemalan society and was resentful of Ladino dominance in national politics. During his campaign, candidate Colom was strongly supported by Rigoberta Manchú, an internationally respected human rights activist, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992. The campaign was centered on a major issue: the crime and corruption that have characterized Guatemala's democratic institutions under civilian rule. Support for Colom was strong in provincial Guatemala and among Mayans who responded to his promise to improve healthcare and schools for the poor, rural and indigenous population.

The Roman Catholic Church

Conquistador Pedro de Alvarado y Contreras (1495-1541) and his army invaded Guatemala during 1523-1527 and subjugated many of the Amerindian peoples with even more than the customary atrocities. The Amerindians rapidly declined under the imposed system of slavery and heavy tribute. Alvarado was subsequently appointed governor of Guatemala by Charles I of Spain and remained its governor until his death.

Even before the conquest was complete, the **Dominican friars Pontaz** and **de Torres** had taken up residence among the Quiché – in Quetzaltenango (an important Quiché center) and Patinamit (the capital city of the Cakchiquel kingdom), respectively – and had begun the difficult task of converting the Mayans to the Catholic Faith. In 1530, **Father Francisco Marroquín** (1535- 1563) arrived from Spain to organize the Catholic Church in Guatemala, and in 1533 he was confirmed as the country's first bishop. He gave special attention to the indigenous people and their languages, becoming particularly proficient in Quiché, into which language he translated the catechism. These early Catholic missionaries were reinforced two years later by priests Zambrano and Dardon of the Order of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mercy (Mercedarians), who established a convent of that order in Santiago de Guatemala, which became the capital city of the Spanish province.

Beginning in 1536-1537, **Spanish friar Bartolomé de las Casas** (1484-1566) established a Dominican convent at Santiago de Guatemala for the conversion of the natives, and applied methods of peaceful evangelization in the region of Vera Paz. Las Casas became well-known for his advocacy of the rights of Amerindian peoples of the Americas, whose cultures he described with great care. His descriptions of the *caciques* (chiefs or princes), *bohiques* (shamans or clerics), *ni-táinos* (noblemen), and *naborias* (common folk) in the Caribbean clearly showed a feudal structure. His book, *A Brief Account of the Destruction of the Indies* (original title in Spanish: *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias*), was published in 1552. He gave a vivid description of the atrocities committed by the conquistadors in the Americas – particularly in the Caribbean, Central America and what is now Mexico – including many events to which he was a witness, as well as some events he includes from others' eyewitness accounts.

Under these two religious orders, working in harmony with the Franciscans who entered the territory in 1541, the general “conversion of the Indians” was gradually accomplished. By 1545 these religious orders had implemented a program of instruction and conversion in which the Indians were forcibly gathered into towns and around their respective mission compounds. Priests visited a few outlying areas at different times, but the geography prevented extensive contact with remote Amerindian groups.

In the early years of Spanish colonization, the Catholic clergy protected indigenous peoples who lived near the missions. Laws were passed in 1542 at the instigation of Catholic missionaries that attempted to eliminate some of the harsher practices of exploitation that had been imposed on Amerindians living in remote areas by Spanish authorities.

During the colonial period the Catholic Church was an agency of the Spanish Crown, although the friar's evangelization methods sometimes occasioned conflict with the civil authorities. Catholicism in Guatemala developed around the veneration of the saints; local lay religious associations, called *cofradías*, were charged with caring for the saint's images in local communities. *Cofradías* in Guatemala are a mix of Spanish and Amerindian practices.

Santiago de Guatemala was made a diocese by Pope Paul III on December 18, 1534. The Diocese of Guatemala was raised to Metropolitan See by Pope Benedict XIV on December 16, 1743, with the Dioceses of Nicaragua and Comayagua (Honduras) being subordinate to it. By

1750, more than 424 Catholic churches and 23 missions had been established in the territory of Guatemala.

In the early 18th century, **Dominican friar Francisco Ximénez** (1666–1729) discovered a copy of the *Popol Vuh*, the sacred book of the Quiché Maya—sometimes referred to as the Mayan Bible—in the town of Chichicastenango in the central highlands. The manuscript, a compendium of ancient Mayan traditions handed down from before the Spanish Conquest, was evidently a copy from an older record; it was written in the Quiché language, apparently shortly after the Conquest. Ximénez made a copy of the manuscript and then translated it into Spanish about 1725.

Cuban-born **Bishop Luis Ignatius Peñalver y Cardenas** (1749-1810), formerly Bishop of New Orleans (Louisiana), was promoted to the Archiepiscopal See of Guatemala in 1801. Archbishop Peñalver soon attained prominence through the interest he had in questions concerning education and the public good. At his own expense he built a hospital and various schools. He resigned his Episcopal See in March 1806, returned to Havana and devoted the last years of his life to charitable works. At his death he bequeathed an estimated \$200,000 to the poor and established several important legacies for educational institutions.

The Diocese of San Salvador, erected by Pope Gregory XVI in September 1842, and the Diocese of San José de Costa Rica, erected in 1850, also became part of the **Metropolitan Church of Santiago de Guatemala**. Together with the Archdiocese of Guatemala, these four subordinate dioceses (Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador and Costa Rica) constituted the **ecclesiastical Province of Central America**.

By 1908, the Archdiocese of Guatemala included communities of Dominicans, Minor Observantines of St. Francis (Franciscans), Recollect and Capuchin Missionaries, Jesuits, the Oratory of St. Philip Neri, and priests of the Mission of St. Vincent de Paul. There were also religious communities of various female orders: Poor Clares, Capuchins, Conceptionists, Catarinas, Belemites, Rosas, and Dominicans. The Religious of the Institute of St. Vincent de Paul serviced in hospitals and taught poor children; these Sisters were employed in the hospitals of the city of Guatemala, Quetzaltenango and Antigua Guatemala.

Historically, the Roman Catholic Church has had a strong popular base among *Ladinos* and Europeans but has met with more resistance in predominantly Amerindian areas of the country where indigenous beliefs and practices are maintained. Spanish missionaries played a critical role by establishing new religious, social and economic structures in the colony; building monasteries, churches and schools with forced Indian labor; and helping to organize the Mayan labor force for the new cacao and indigo plantations.

Until after Independence from Spain in the early 1800s, the Catholic Church had no competition from Protestant groups, although there was a constant struggle to maintain its dominance in the Mayan communities where the ancient religious traditions prevailed. The resulting syncretism of Catholic and Mayan beliefs and practices produced the Guatemalan-brand of “popular religiosity” that prevails today among the Amerindian population.

Independence from Spain in the 1820s and the emergence of a new economic class of coffee growers in the later 19th century, which included many German immigrants, weakened the hegemony of the Catholic Church. Politically, Guatemala achieved its independence from Spain in 1821-1823, after nearly 300 years of Spanish colonial rule when the Captaincy-General of Guatemala became the United Provinces of Central America.

In 1838, the independent Republic of Guatemala was created under rebel leader Rafael Carrera (1814-1865). In 1852, Carrera’s government signed a Concordat with the Vatican, repealed the anti-clerical legislation established under the rule of Francisco Morazán (1829 to

1838), reinstated the Catholic religious orders, and allowed the Catholic clergy to operate the nation's few schools.

However, after the death of Carrera in 1865, the Liberal Justo Rufino Barrios came to power (ruled from 1873 to 1885) and the Catholic Church was again subjected to harsh legislation, the Jesuits were again expelled, the archbishop and bishops were exiled, tithes were eliminated, convents and monasteries were closed, church property was confiscated, priests were prohibited from wearing clerical garb and were barred from teaching, religious processions were proscribed, and civil marriage was declared obligatory. These anti-clerical laws so crippled the Catholic Church in Guatemala that it has never recovered its former influence.

In addition, President Barrios declared “religious freedom” and invited Protestant denominations to establish churches and schools in his country in an effort to counteract the dominance of the Roman Catholic clergy and their political influence. Also, in the 1870s, President Barrios invited German immigrants to help develop the country.

In 1872, an official census of Catholic clergy provided information regarding 119 expatriate priests in Guatemala. Although the national population more than doubled in the 75 years following this census, the number of priests remained about the same; in 1946, there were only 126 priests (28 religious and 98 secular), most of whom were stationed in Guatemala City. This shortage of Catholic priests limited the extent of church ministries to people who lived in remote villages. Huehuetenango only had one priest per 88,000 inhabitants, and Quetzaltenango had one priest per 45,000.

It was not until the 1930s that the Roman Catholic Church began to recover some of its former power and prestige in Guatemalan society. Under the dictatorship of **General Jorge Ubico** (ruled from 1931-1944), the Catholic Church was able to exercise more political influence, but when Ubico was overthrown in 1944 by a coalition of progressive army officers and civilians who were intent on modernizing Guatemala, the Catholic Church felt that its own social and political power was being attacked.

During the 1940s and 1950s, the Catholic hierarchy and its lay organizations – the **Society for the Propagation of the Faith** and **Catholic Action** – joined forces with the Anti-Communist Party (PUA) and other rightwing organizations to counteract the liberalizing trends of the nation’s democratically-elected, reformist civilian governments during the period 1944-1954. **President Juan José Arévalo Bermejo** (1944-1949) was an idealistic university professor who proclaimed his belief in “spiritual socialism,” and his progressive policies angered Catholic Church authorities. Arévalo sponsored a new Constitution in 1945, modeled in part after the Mexican charter of 1917; he encouraged workers and peasants to organize themselves to achieve greater social equity, and he pushed education, social welfare and other reforms.

Mary Holleran (Coke 1978:203-204) described the Roman Catholic Church in Guatemala in 1946 and expounded on six major obstacles to an effective ministry: (1) The shortage of priests was so severe that many rural parishes were abandoned; (2) the majority of the clergy were foreigners (Spaniards, Italians, Germans, Mexicans, Costa Ricans and North Americans in that order) and the few native clergy were “often berated as being ignorant, or dirty, or greedy;” (3) the bishop and most of the priests only spoke Spanish and communication in Indian areas was ineffective; (4) the foreign priests failed to appreciate the basic psychology of the Mayans; (5) the mountainous terrain and a lack of suitable transportation made travel very difficult; and (6) the physical deterioration of church property symbolized the general deterioration of the Catholic Church’s social, spiritual and political influence in Guatemalan society.

Around 1949, a new Catholic reform movement began in Guatemala, called **Acción Católica** (Catholic Action, also known as the *catequista* movement because it used trained

laymen to spread Catholic teaching through the use of a catechism), which was a militant lay Catholic organization engaged in the “re-conversion of Guatemalan Indians,” among other things. Whereas the Catholic Church had long ago accommodated itself to “Christo-Paganism,” according to Coke (1978:205), “the reform movement embraced a new iconoclasm that aimed at destroying the saints and idols worshipped in Indian churches.” These tactics caused deep resentment in the traditional Mayan communities. This reform movement also produced renewed attacks by Catholics on the Protestants and on Bible reading.

Under **President Castillo Armas** (1955-1957), the expropriated lands were returned to their former owners, all unions were disbanded, and thousands of people were killed in a purge of Communists and radical nationalists. Also, in 1955, the **Guatemalan Christian Democratic Party** was established with strong support from the Catholic Church. The new government removed restrictions on the Catholic Church by allowing ownership of property, the entrance of foreign clergy and religious workers, public schools could offer Catholic religious instruction, and priests were granted authority to officiate at weddings. In turn, the Catholic hierarchy “blessed the military government” and supported its anti-communist ideology and “cold-war” tactics.

According to Skidmore and Smith (1984:319), “The 1954 coup marked a turning point in Guatemalan history. It virtually eliminated the forces of the political center (as represented by Arévalo and Arbenz). So the country had only a left and a right, and the right was in control. Coffee planters, other landowners, and foreign investors and their subsidiaries regained their power under the protection of neo-conservative military regimes.”

One characteristic of this entire modern period, especially after the mid-1960s, was the frightful abuse of human rights by repressive, rightwing military dictatorships with the tacit support of the Conservative, anti-Communist elements within the Catholic hierarchy. Military and paramilitary counterinsurgency operations, mostly in the countryside against the Amerindian population, led to the killing of tens of thousands of alleged “political dissidents and their supporters” between 1966 and 1982.

During the 1950s, the Catholic Church was revitalized by the arrival of many new foreign priests, nuns and other religious workers (mostly with a conservative political orientation), which provided needed resources for establishing new churches and schools and for expanded its social assistance efforts throughout the country.

Historically, reform within the Roman Catholic Church structure in Guatemala has been slow, and many nominal Mayan Catholics have chosen to participate in revitalization movements of Mayan spirituality. Some Catholics have chosen to ignore formal religion altogether, while others have become involved in recent reform movements within the Catholic Church.

Since the 1960s, a new emphasis on individual and small group Bible study, coupled with the availability of the Scriptures in native languages, has provided impetus for the revitalization of Catholicism in Guatemala, following the decrees of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). Some of the reforms introduced by Vatican II had a significant impact on the Mayans because the language of the liturgy was changed from Latin to vernacular languages; the change to Spanish was immediate, but increasingly the Mayan languages were used in indigenous areas.

In December 1973, the **Catholic Charismatic Renewal** (CCR) was established in Guatemala as a “laymen’s apostolic organization” authorized by the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church. At that time, the Archdiocese of Guatemala sponsored two retreats with the participation of Father Harold Cohen of the Archdiocese of New Orleans as the featured speaker. The first retreat was held on December 7-9 with the participation of 38 priests; the second was held on 10-12 with the participation of 150 male and female religious workers. One of the results

of these retreats was the organization of the first CCR prayer group in the *Parroquia de La Asunción*, Zona 2, of Guatemala City. By August 1975, 63 CCR prayer groups had been formed in the whole country.

The CCR grew remarkably during the early-to-mid 1970s after Father Francis McNutt and laywoman Ruth Stapleton from the USA spoke at a spiritual retreat for Catholics, where 35 people were reported to have “spoken in tongues.” The CCR gained popularity among middle- and upper-class Guatemalans until certain restrictions were implemented by Catholic authorities beginning in June 1974 under the supervision of a Pastoral Service Team, led by Monseñor Ramiro Pellecer. As a result, many “spirit-filled” Catholics chose to leave the Catholic Church and join evangelical churches, especially in Guatemala City. By September 1979, the CCR had grown strong enough to fill the National Stadium during a rally led by Father McNutt.

After adequate ecclesiastical controls were implemented, the CCR received the strong support of Monseñor Próspero Penados del Barrio, bishop emeritus of the Archdiocese. Land was donated to build a large CCR conference center, *Auditorio P. Juan Pedro Pini*, with a capacity of 5,000 people. This effort had the blessing and support of Archbishop Monseñor Rodolfo Quezada Toruño, the Metropolitan Archbishop and president of the Episcopal Conference of Guatemala (CEG). The CCR headquarters are at **Centro Carismático Católico**, 5 calle 0-16, Zona 1, Guatemala 01001, Guatemala.

During the 1970s, the Catholic Church in Guatemala underwent a significant social and political revolution within its ranks. Propagation of “Liberation Theology” has polarized reformists from conservatives and has created a new group of progressives with a strong social consciousness under the banner of “the preferential option for the poor.” The military-dominated government of Guatemala views activist priests and nuns as “subversives” and treats them as such, along with lay-members of Catholic organizations that are involved with the urban poor, destitute rural peasants and victims of repression. Some observers believe that evangelical churches, because they tend to be more apolitical than many Mayan Catholic communities, became an attractive alternative for many Mayans who were seeking to escape from military repression against suspected guerrilla sympathizers (Berryman 1984[1]: Chapter 6).

The Catholic voice in Guatemala is often discordant as Catholics respond to a variety of social concerns. Individual Catholics frequently hold opinions that diverge from the hierarchy, and the hierarchy itself is not always unified. Within the Catholic Church in Guatemala social stances on issues such as abortion, ordination of women and divorce tend to mirror those of the Vatican. Abortion is illegal in the Guatemalan Penal Code, but family planning is available in much of the country.

Stung by the loss of hundreds of thousands of mainly nominal Catholics to Protestant churches since the 1960s, the Catholic Church began waging an intensive campaign to win back its “lost sheep” to the Catholic fold by denouncing evangelical pastors and missionaries of being “false shepherds” and of being funded by a “conspiracy” of the U.S. government, the CIA and U.S. multinational corporations to keep Guatemala and other Central American countries out of the hands of Marxist revolutionaries so that the U.S. government would not lose its political and economic hold on the region.

The modernization of the Catholic Church that came with the **Second Vatican Council (1962–1965)** dove-tailed with aspects of the older Catholic Action movement's agenda; there was a push for more direct pastoral involvement with social concerns. In Guatemala this resulted in a wave of cooperative and social organizing. **Catholic Action's "Christian Base Communities"** stressed education and consciousness-raising, and cooperated with one another throughout the highlands. They presented an alternative to both the guerrillas and the government, and, in many

cases, peacefully supported the political goals of the guerrillas. This movement was attacked in the late 1960s and again in the late 1970s and early 1980s, when many priests and religious workers were killed or threatened. All religious workers were pulled from the Diocese of El Quiché in 1980 due to the wide-spread violence in which 13 priests had been killed. Some exiled priests and nuns formed the “Guatemalan Church in Exile” and continued to try to draw international attention to the bloody civil conflict between repressive government armed forces and the “popular insurrection” led by leftist guerrilla rebels.

During the 1970s, the Catholic religious orders began an intensive missionary effort in isolated areas where indigenous groups practice Mayan spirituality. A school was established to train expatriate missionaries in the cultural practices of the indigenous groups, and in language acquisition, politics and social concerns.

During the 20th century, the Catholic Church, as an institution, supported the *status quo* fostered by Conservative government policies that favored *Ladino* society over Amerindian groups and that defend “national security” over human rights. However, a minority of Roman Catholic leaders (including bishops, priests and nuns) opted to defend the interests of “the poor and oppressed” rather than support a series of repressive governments and a submissive Catholic Church. Some of these priests and religious workers became martyrs for their faith during the Guatemalan civil war (1960-1996) as well as in the aftermath.

Assistant Bishop Juan Gerardi was murdered on the night of 26 April 1998 at his residence in Guatemala City, only 300 yards from the presidential palace. He was bludgeoned to death by unknown assailants in his garage. Cardinal Rodolfo Quezada Toruño of Guatemala City said, eleven years after the still unresolved murder, that there were still unhealed wounds in the Catholic Church and Guatemalan society as a whole. The cardinal recalled Bishop Gerardi as a “notable promoter of peace and human rights and an exemplary pastor of the poorest and most needy.” Bishop Gerardi’s murder, despite investigations conducted in cooperation with European and U.S. experts, has not yet been clarified.

The majority of the members of male Catholic religious orders in Guatemala have always been expatriates, primarily from Spain, Italy and North America. Indigenous leaders were seldom trained. Native languages, values and music were usually ignored and sometimes repudiated.

According to Stahlke (1966), Roman Catholic sources reported 459 priests – 128 diocesan priests and 331 religious priests – of which 346 were foreign-born, serving in 213 parishes throughout the country in 1966 under Archbishop Monsignor Mario Casariego. In addition, there were 417 male religious and 604 female religious serving in their respective religious orders in a variety of ministries. Catholic institutions included three seminaries for preparing local clergy, 115 primary schools, 47 secondary schools, six agricultural schools, one university, seven hospitals, 50 medical clinics and 18 dental clinics.

In 1970, less than 15 percent of all Catholic clergy and religious workers in Guatemala were nationals. At that time, there were 650 male religious and 850 female religious workers in the nation. According to a 1971 study by CLAR (*Confederación Latinoamericana de Religiosos*), only 13 percent of members of male religious orders in Guatemala were native born, six percent were born in other Latin American countries, and 81 percent were foreign born (outside of Latin America). Regarding members of female religious orders, 14 percent were native born, 66 percent were born in other Latin American countries, and 22 percent were foreign born (CLAR 1971).

In 1976, official Roman Catholic publications claimed that 88 percent of Guatemala’s population was at least nominally Catholic. The hierarchical structure of the Catholic Church consisted of one archdiocese with eight dioceses. One archbishop, 15 bishops, 641 priests and

1,104 nuns served in 341 parishes. In 1975, there were 177 Catholic religious workers in Guatemala from the USA and Canada (Coke 1978:203). In 1979, 95 priests and nuns from the USA were serving in Guatemala, in addition to 38 priests and nuns from Canada. These missionaries represented approximately 35 different Catholic religious orders from North America.

In March 2009, the Guatemalan Catholic Church administered two archdioceses: the Archdiocese of Guatemala led by Archbishop Cardinal Rodolfo Quezada Toruño, appointed in June 2001; and the Archdiocese of Los Altos Quetzaltenango-Totonicapán (erected in 1996) led by Archbishop Oscar Julio Vian Morales, S.D.B., appointed in April 2007. In 2001, the two archdioceses reported a total of 14 dioceses and 428 parishes, which were served by 359 diocesan priests and 461 religious priests (for a total of 820), six permanent deacons, 769 male religious, 2,059 female religious workers.

Sacredness for Guatemalan Catholics revolves around the sacraments and images of the saints, the Virgin Mary and Christ on the Cross. People often maintain personal connections to particular saints in their home community or elsewhere, and some saints are considered to have healing powers or the ability to intervene in human affairs.

Throughout the year many Guatemalan Catholics make pilgrimages to certain sacred images, where they burn candles (the colors of which signify special needs), say prayers, and make vows and promises. Major townships throughout Guatemala have patron saints. Each year festivals are held for a week or so to commemorate the saint's day.

Besides the Mass and other rituals related to the liturgical calendar, the most important Catholic rituals in Guatemala are those related to the celebration of Holy Week (*Semana Santa*, the week before Easter) and to the annual pilgrimage to the shrine of the “Black Christ of Esquipulas” (also known as “El Señor de Esquipulas”), in the city of Esquipulas, located near the Honduran border. This pilgrimage takes place around January 15, but the season extends through Holy Week. Images of the “Lord of Esquipulas” are found in many local sanctuaries as well as in other Central American countries.

The Protestant Movement

Pioneer efforts were made by **English Baptist missionaries and laymen in the British colony of Belize** to distribute the Scriptures in the Spanish territory of Guatemala. The first known effort took place in 1824 when Joseph Bourne, an English Baptist missionary stationed in Belize Town, visited the ports of Ysabal in Guatemala and Omoa in Honduras (Crowe 1850:327-328). In 1825, **two English Baptist laymen, R. J. Andrew and James Wilson** (representatives of G. F. Angas & Company based on Jeffrey's Square, London), travelled from Belize to Guatemala on company business for four months, which “by their conduct and conversation probably bore the first living testimony of the Gospel [that] had ever penetrated that dark land [the interior of Guatemala],” according to Crowe (1850:328-329).

In 1834, the “Eastern Coast of Central America Commercial and Agricultural Company” signed a contract with the Guatemalan government to allow the establishment of a British agricultural colony in Alta Verapaz Department. This concession was granted during the Liberal administration of **Dr. José Felipe Mariano Gálvez** (1831-1838), chief of state of Guatemala within the Federal Republic of Central America (1823-1840). Beginning in 1834, this enterprise attracted an odd assortment of international settlers to the Alta Verapaz colony of New Liverpool in the fertile and well-watered Polochic Valley, at the junction of the Polochic and Cajabon rivers, to the west of Lake Isabel (Lago de Izabal). In 1839, the Company began to establish a

second agricultural colony, named Abbottsville, located to the west of New Liverpool at a higher elevation in the modern municipality of Panzós on the Río Boca Nueva. However, the older settlement at New Liverpool had numerous problems and had been abandoned by most of the 80 colonists by September 1839.

Frederick Crowe (b. 1819), a young English seaman who had become a Baptist in Belize City in 1837, accepted an offer from the Company to move to the new settlement of Abbottsville in January 1841 where he worked as a school teacher and served as a voluntary chaplain, despite the dismal living conditions and immorality that he encountered. He was a replacement for the **Rev. Rudolf Krause**, a German Lutheran chaplain, who arrived in Abbottsville with his family in early 1839 and left the settlement before year's end due to poor health and opposition from the degenerate settlers.

While residing in Abbottsville with his French wife, Crowe began to make plans to make an arduous journey from Abbottsville to Guatemala City by way of Salamá, Baja Verapaz, as a missionary and Bible salesman (colporteur). Crowe set out for Salamá in 1843 with a mule-cargo of Bibles and other evangelical literature provided by the Belize Baptist Mission and the British Honduran Bible Society in Belize City. After he was prohibited from selling his assortment of literature in Salamá, Crowe continued his journey to Guatemala City with the hope of receiving government permission to reclaim his confiscated cargo in Salamá and to freely sell and distribute his literature in Guatemala City and elsewhere in the country.

However, Crowe encountered further opposition from government officials in the nation's capital, and he was forced by his circumstances to remain there for some time. He decided to support himself by teaching English and French to children of Liberal families, who supported his efforts to open a private school for boys and later another school for girls.

Although Crowe was supported in his educational and missionary efforts in Guatemala City by a few Liberal families, he was strongly opposed by the Catholic clergy and Conservative politicians who forced his expulsion from Guatemala in April 1846. Although no permanent organizational structure was established by Crowe, the English Baptists of Belize have the distinction of being the first known Protestants to work among Ladinos in the Republic of Guatemala.

It was **Liberal President Justo Rufino Barrios** (1873-1875) who finally established freedom of speech and worship in Guatemala. Barrios was responsible for the official introduction of Protestantism into the country by inviting the **Presbyterian Church of New York City** – now an integral part of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) – to send missionaries to Guatemala in 1882, allegedly "to counteract the influence of the Catholic clergy" in its opposition to Liberal reforms.

The **Rev. John Clark Hill** arrived in late 1882 to begin Presbyterian work in Guatemala City, although Hill did not speak Spanish upon his arrival and his first activities were among 30-40 distinguished English-speaking foreigners who were already Protestants. Nevertheless, Hill and his successors were successful in establishing Presbyterian churches and schools in the country.

By late 1885, Hill and his assistant Luis Canales had begun to preach and teach in Spanish, and had initiated a process that led to the formal establishment of the Central Presbyterian Church, under the ministry of the **Rev. Edward M. Haymaker**, in 1888. The first sanctuary at the present site was not built until 1894, adjacent to the National Palace. Haymaker's ministry in Guatemala began in 1887 and did not end with his retirement in 1936 but with his death in 1944, at age 89. In addition to planting churches, the Presbyterians founded the American School in 1883, a hospital and nursing school in 1912, a bookstore in 1915, a girl's school in 1918 and an

industrial training center in 1919. By 1935, there were 22 organized Presbyterian churches and 198 preaching points with 2,805 baptized members in Guatemala.

The English worship services in Guatemala City, begun by Hill in 1882, were continued by James R. Hosmer and a succession of other pastors. Today, the nondenominational **Union Church**, located in Plazuela España, traces its founding to that date. This is the oldest Protestant congregation in Guatemala.

In 1893, the Rev. Francisco G. Penzotti (1851-1925) was designated by the **American Bible Society** as its agent for Central America. He was born in Italy and immigrated with his parents to Montevideo, Uruguay, where he became a Methodist pastor in 1879. Penzotti established his regional office in Guatemala City, where it remained for 13 years. He collaborated with Protestant missionaries and laymen in the distribution of the Scriptures throughout the region but not without widespread opposition from Roman Catholics authorities. In 1906 Penzotti left Guatemala to become the Executive Secretary of the Bible Society of Río de la Plata with headquarters in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

The fourth Protestant missionary organization to work in Guatemala was the **Central American Mission** (now known as CAM International, with headquarters in Dallas, TX), which sent Mr. & Mrs. Edward Bishop to Guatemala City in 1899, a city of about 70,000 inhabitants in 1900. The first CAM church established was located at a major intersection in the capital city and named the "Cinco Calles" Evangelical Church, built in 1903 and pastored by Bishop, which became the "mother church" to hundreds of CAM congregations throughout the country. In 1935, there were 63 organized churches and 185 preaching points with 4,031 baptized members and 13,224 adherents in CAM-supported work.

Not only has the **Central American Evangelical Church Association** (CAM-related), founded in 1927, become one of the largest Protestant denominations in Guatemala, but CAM has also had an important role in training pastors and lay leaders for the non-Pentecostal Evangelical movement, originally through its Central American Bible Institute (founded in 1926) and later through the Central American Theological Seminary (known as SETECA), created in 1965 by upgrading the Bible Institute program to a university-level program.

By 1935, other Protestant mission agencies were working in Guatemala. The **Church of the Nazarene** traces its origins to work begun in 1901 in Cobán and Zacapa by missionaries affiliated with **The Pentecostal Mission (TPM)**, an independent holiness organization founded in 1901 by the Rev. J. O. McClurkan with headquarters in Nashville, TN. The first TPM worker to arrive in Guatemala was Miss Eula Fay Watson who established a school for girls in Cobán (department of Alta Verapaz), followed by the Rev. and Mrs. John Thomas Butler who also worked in Cobán and later in Zacapa (department of Zacapa) between 1901 and 1915. During that period, 13 TPM-supported missionaries served in Guatemala. When TPM merged with the Church of the Nazarene in 1915, the Rev. and Mrs. Richard Anderson (who arrived in 1904) joined the Church of the Nazarene, while the Butlers joined the Central American Mission. Three additional Church of the Nazarene missionaries arrived in 1917: Eugenia Phillips (Cobán) and Mr. and Mrs. J. D. Franklin (Salamá).

In 1902, the **California Friends Mission (Quakers)** began its ministry in the southeastern part of the country, near the border with Honduras and El Salvador, with headquarters in the Department of Chiquimula. **The Seventh-Day Adventist Church** arrived in 1908 and began work in Guatemala City and Quetzaltenango, the nation's second-largest city. **The Christian Brethren** (the "closed communion" branch of the Plymouth Brethren) began work in Guatemala in 1924 through the ministry of Carlos Kramer in Quetzaltenango, a German-heritage Guatemalan and former Presbyterian.

The Pentecostal movement had its origin in Guatemala in the ministry of the Rev. and Mrs. Amos Bradley who served in Guatemala affiliated with the **Pentecostal Holiness Church** (PHC, organized in 1911 in North Carolina). The Bradleys were that denomination's first missionaries in Central America during 1913-1918, while serving in Guatemala and El Salvador. Previously, the Bradleys had been independent holiness missionaries in Guatemala between 1909 and 1912.

The Bradleys returned to Guatemala in 1922 invited by the **Primitive Methodist Church** (PMC, founded in England in 1812) to supervise their new mission station in Totonicapán, which had been established by independent holiness missionaries, the Rev. and Mrs. C. Albert Hines, in 1910-1912; they retired in 1922 and returned to Texas. The Bradleys arrived in Totonicapán in May 1922 where they had a fruitful ministry for the next four years, including evangelizing among the Mayan Indians in the surrounding territory and participating in the translation of the Scriptures into the Quiché language (Gospels of John and Matthew) in collaboration with the Rev. Paul Burgess of the Presbyterian Mission in Quetzaltenango. In 1928 the PMC assigned the Bradleys to work in Chichicastenango to succeed Dr. C. F. Secord, an independent Plymouth Brethren missionary, who had sold his property to the PMC upon his retirement (served in Guatemala from 1900 to 1928). However, Mrs. Bradley's health was seriously affected by the climate and the family had to return to the USA on a medical furlough in 1930. Later, Amos Bradley served in Guatemala as an independent Pentecostal missionary from 1930 to 1936 and in Costa Rica from 1936 until his death in 1955.

In 1916, Thomas A. Pullin and Charles T. Furman of the **United and Free Gospel Missionary Society** (an independent holiness organization, founded in Turtle Creek, PA, which became identified with the Pentecostal movement in 1916; its name changed to "Free Gospel Church, Inc." in 1957) arrived in Guatemala to begin an itinerant evangelistic ministry in El Quiché and San Cristobal, Totonicapán, respectively. In 1920, both couples returned to the USA to strengthen their base of support. When Furman and his family returned to Guatemala in 1922, they were affiliated with the Primitive Methodist Church and remained so until 1934 when doctrinal differences (Holiness vs. Pentecostal) forced them to resign. On 13 de April 1932, it was reported that the "Pentecostal Fire" descended on the members of a small Primitive Methodist Church in Totonicapán while the Furmans and Pullins were in the USA on furlough. From Totonicapán, the flames of the Pentecostal revival spread throughout the countryside and into nearby towns and villages.

In October 1934, Mr. and Mrs. Furman joined the **Church of God (Cleveland, TN)** at the invitation of J. H. Ingram of the Church of God Foreign Mission Board, and returned to Guatemala as that denomination's first missionaries in the country. Furman proceeded to visit PMC churches and encourage the leaders to join him in the ranks of the Church of God, which resulted in 14 PMC churches switching their affiliation to the Church of God. The Full Gospel Church of God marks its founding date as 1932, the year when Furman's Guatemalan co-workers experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit. In the spring of 1935, Furman reported 16 organized churches with 672 members. In 1944, Mr. and Mrs. Pullin left the PMC and became missionaries with the Church of God in Guatemala. By 1980, this Pentecostal denomination had grown to 664 churches and 234 missions with 34,451 members.

Pastors and missionaries of the **Assemblies of God** in El Salvador began work in the Department of Jutiapa, Guatemala, in 1927, as an extension of their ministry in El Salvador. In 1932 and 1933, missionary Ralph Williams, superintendent of the work in El Salvador, made several trips to Guatemala to encourage the brethren in the few congregations that had been founded. However, it was not until 1937-1938 that Ralph Williams and John Franklin were

successful in organizing the first six churches in Guatemala, which held their organizational conference in Atescatempa, Jutiapa, from 31 December 1937 to 2 January 1938. Mr. and Mrs. John Franklin became the first Assembly of God missionaries to be stationed in Guatemala, beginning in 1937. By 1940, 20 churches had been organized and work had begun in 36 additional towns. The Central Assembly of God was established in Guatemala City during 1939-1940 by pastor José Ibarra from Mexico. Assisting him was young José María Muñoz, who later left the Assemblies of God and founded his own denomination, the Prince of Peace Evangelical Churches. Following a healing campaign by T. L. Osborn in Guatemala City in 1953, the work began to grow more rapidly in the capital and in the central highlands, and by 1980 churches had been established throughout the country. In 1960, there were 95 churches and 3,300 members; in 1970, 315 churches and 11,000 members; and in 1980, 748 congregations with 35,909 members. In 1990, Luisa Jeter de Walker reported 1,385 churches, 2,329 preaching points, 1,630 ordained pastors, 2,379 lay pastors, eight Bible institutes, and 224,751 adherents (1990:117). Total baptized membership was estimated to be about 127,500 in 1990.

The Prince of Peace Evangelical Church Association was formed in 1956 by José María Muñoz in Guatemala City, among a group of believers that had left the Central Assembly of God. Many of the early members of this new denomination had been members of other Evangelical churches, but were drawn to Muñoz' ministry because of his popular radio ministry and powerful Pentecostal preaching. From a group of 100 in 1956, membership grew to 4,500 in 1967 and to 29,130 in 1980 with 567 congregations.

The Elim Christian Mission began as a house church in 1962 in Guatemala City, led by a well-known medical doctor and radio personality, Dr. Otoniel Ríos, who became an evangelical during the Evangelism-in-Depth campaigns in 1961. In 1973, Ríos terminated his medical practice to devote himself to a full-time pastoral ministry and building up a large central church, which grew to 3,000 members in 1979 after the congregation moved into a new auditorium. By 1980, the ministry of Elim included 147 congregations (churches and missions) with a total membership of 15,290, with a growing association of sister churches in El Salvador.

Other Evangelical denominations that began work in Guatemala prior to 1960 are the following: the National Evangelical Mission (1923), National Association of Baptist Churches (1926), German Lutheran Church (1929), Emmanuel Church Association (1940), Inter-denominational Evangelical Mission (1944), Baptist Convention of Guatemala (1946), Continental Missionary Crusade (Calvary Churches, 1947), Church of God of Anderson-IN (Galilee Church of God, 1947), Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (1947), Church of God of Prophecy (1950), United World Mission (1952), Defenders of the Faith (1952), Bethesda Church of God (1952), Apostolic Church of Faith in Jesus Christ (1953), International Church of the Foursquare Gospel (1956), Palestine Pentecostal Church (1956), the Missionary Church of God (1957), and the independent Churches of Christ (1959).

The Continental Missionary Crusade (Webb City, Missouri) began work in Guatemala City in 1947 under the leadership of the Rev. Norman Parish, Sr., and his wife Leyla, as an independent Baptist mission. The work of this mission is organized under the name **Calvary Evangelical Church – Iglesia Evangélica El Calvario**. In 1978, the Rev. Norman Parish, Jr., was the General Director of the Mission.

In 1963-1964, this denomination experienced a Pentecostal revival that began during a spiritual retreat of adults and young people, which was the precursor of the **Charismatic Renewal Movement** in Guatemala. By 1965, 30 churches and 35 preaching points had been established throughout the country, with between 3,000-4,000 adherents. In 1980, Superintendent Abraham Castillo reported 91 churches and 57 missions with 6,450 members.

However, some of the original Calvary churches did not approve of the new Charismatic-Pentecostal emphasis espoused by denominational leaders, which led to the separation of this group of churches in 1964 in order to retain their Baptist heritage; the name of this new association was the **Hispanic-American Mission** (*Misión Hispanoamericano*), now affiliated with the **Spanish-American Inland Mission of Erie, PA.** In 1980, this denomination reported 20 churches and missions with about 1,022 baptized members. Many of these churches (15 of 20) are located in the departments of El Petén, Izabal and Santa Rosa and still use the name *Iglesia El Calvario*. The superintendent is the Rev. Rubén Valladares Tolico with headquarters in Colonia La Florida, Zone 19, of Guatemala City.

Meanwhile, Calvary Evangelical Church trained hundreds of Christian leaders in its Bible institute at the central church in Guatemala City during the 1960s and 1970s, which prepared them to evangelize and plant churches in Guatemala and other countries as part of the growth of the **Charismatic Renewal Movement**. Pastors of the central church since 1963 have been Ramón Avilés, Norman Parish Jr., Manuel de Jesús Uribio, Heliodoro Goge Calderón, Víctor Toranzo and, since 1978, Job Eliu Castillo.

Several members of their own leadership team were sent out with the blessing of senior officials to begin home Bible studies among Roman Catholics for the purpose of winning them to Christ and forming new congregations of Charismatic believers, where Evangelicals and Roman Catholics could worship together freely in a neutral setting. One such leader was Jorge H. López (age 28), who founded the **Christian Fraternity of Guatemala** (*Fraternidad Cristiana de Guatemala*) in 1978 with 22 members from *Iglesia El Calvario* who were “sent out” to begin this new ministry. In January 1979, this group began to meet for Sunday services in a banquet room at a downtown hotel in Guatemala City, Hotel Guatemala Fiesta, where the attendance continued to grow. Then, in December 1981, the church moved to another hotel, El Camino Real, which had larger facilities to accommodate 800-1,000 people for Sunday services. Six months later, the church rented a movie theater, *Cine Reforma*, to accommodate larger audiences and remained there for two and a half years. In 1985, the church purchased a large lot on Calzada Roosevelt (one of Guatemala City’s major highways), and moved in to a remodeled auditorium that seated 750 people. A new church facility was built at that site during 1990-1991, which had a 3,500-seat auditorium, inaugurated in February 1991. During the next few years, church officials were forced by increased attendance to add a second Sunday morning service; later, a third worship service was added: 7:00 am, 9:30 am and 12:00 pm. Due to its continued growth, church officials decided to purchase another property in Zone 3 of Mixco, a suburb of Guatemala City, where the Christian Fraternity built a new 12,200 seat auditorium, which was inaugurated in May 2007. Another example is Gamaliel Duarte who founded the “**Jesus Christ is Lord**” Church in Zone 13 of Guatemala City in 1980, with an average Sunday attendance of about 300 persons.

The **Charismatic Renewal Movement (CRM)** is reported to have begun in Guatemala during 1969-1970 with small group meetings among both Catholics and Protestants, some of which were led by Tim Rovenstine of World MAP. Rovenstine was instrumental in bringing Catholics and Protestants together in the beginnings of the CRM in the early 1970s, aided by visiting members of the Full Gospel Business Men’s Fellowship (FGBMF), members of the Word of God Community in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and Father Francis MacNutt and his team of Charismatic leaders that included Methodist pastors Joe Petree and Tommy Tyson.

Tim Rovenstine was ordained as a Wesleyan minister in Houston, Texas, in 1968, but that same year he was relieved of his pastoral duties for having received the Baptism of the Holy Spirit at a Full Gospel Businessmen’s Meeting in Corpus Christi, Texas. Later, while attending Spanish language school in Mexico, he became involved with the Charismatic Catholics. Still

later, he hosted three Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship airlifts to Mexico and Guatemala. Tim served the "church at large" in Guatemala with 16mm films and cassette duplicating equipment between 1970 and 1976.

One of the main ecumenical bridges between Catholics and Protestants during the 1970s and 1980s was the John 17:21 Fellowship, which was associated with David du Plessis in the USA and Europe. However, the Latin American branch of the John 17:21 Fellowship was established by U.S. Charismatic pastors Robert Thomas, Paul Northrup and Bill Finke (all former missionaries in Latin America), together with local leaders, in Guatemala City after the destructive 1976 earthquake, which resulted in massive relief and development operations by local and international service organizations. The Latin American branch of the **John 17:21 Fellowship** was coordinated by Robert Thomas (a pastor in Los Altos, California), who worked closely with Friar Alfonzo Navarro and the Catholic Missionaries of the Holy Spirit in Mexico City. Navarro, together with Catholic and Protestant Charismatic leaders, formed **UCELAM, the Christian Union for Evangelizing Latin America**, with annual conferences in Mexico City. Some of the UCELAM teams included Bob Thomas, Paul Northrup, Bill Finke and Juan Carlos Ortiz (a former leader in the Argentine Renewal movement) who spoke to many ecumenical audiences in the USA and Latin America during the 1980s.

During the 1960s and 1970s, additional Protestant groups initiated ministry in Guatemala: the New Jerusalem Church of God (1960), Assembly of Christian Churches (1962), Episcopal Church (1962), Holy Spirit Evangelical Church of the Sanctuary of Mount Zion (1962), Door to Heaven Pentecostal Church (1963), Christian & Missionary Alliance (1963), Evangelical Mennonite Church (1964), Pentecostal Church of God of America (1965), Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities (1968), Mount Bashan Evangelical Churches (1968), Voice of God Evangelical Church (1968), Springs of Living Water Church (1972), Pentecostal Church of God of New York (1972), Bethany Evangelical Mission (1972), the Word Christian Church (1976), Center of Faith, Hope and Love (1978), Christian Fraternity (1979) and the Jesus Christ is Lord Church (1980).

Protestantism in Guatemala has become a very diverse phenomenon after a century of growth and development since the first missionaries arrived. **A 1978-1981 national survey of the Protestant movement in Guatemala conducted by a PROCADES-SEPAL research team** revealed the presence of over 200 denominations and independent church associations with 334,453 baptized church members (15 years or older) in 1980. SEPAL (*Servicio Evangelizadora para América Latina*), the service arm of Overseas Crusades Ministries in Latin America, was headed by the Rev. Galo Vásquez in Guatemala City. Between 1960 and 1980, the national Protestant average annual growth rate was 11.8 percent. The total Protestant population of Guatemala was estimated by PROCADES (Central American Socio-Religious Studies Program, based in Costa Rica) to be 13.8 percent in 1980, up significantly from 6.7 percent in 1973, 4.7 percent in 1965 and 2.8 percent in 1950.

Despite differences of tradition, doctrine and practice, many of the leaders of the respective Protestant denominations in Guatemala met together periodically, although informally, to discuss common problems and resolve conflicts during the period 1909-1935. However, a formal structure was organized in 1935 to facilitate interdenominational cooperation, the **Synod of the Evangelical Church in Guatemala**, although it was not until 1937 that member organizations formally ratified the agreement. In 1951, the Evangelical Synod was restructured and its name changed to the **Evangelical Alliance of Guatemala (AEG)**.

It was under the auspices of the AEG that a vast interdenominational evangelistic campaign was conducted in 1961-1962 throughout the country, under the banner of "Evangelism-in-Depth"

(EVAF), a program designed by missionary and national leaders of the **Latin America Mission** (LAM) in Costa Rica. Led by the LAM's Kenneth Strachan, EVAF was hailed as a great success by the AEG and missionary leaders. More than 20,000 "professions of faith" were reported during the citywide campaigns and house-to-house visitation efforts.

During the week of 23-27 January 1962, an interdenominational leadership retreat was held in Guatemala City, sponsored by AEG and World Vision International (based in Monrovia, CA), with the participation of about 1,500 pastors and missionaries from throughout Central America. During the opening ceremony for this event, on January 23, the **President of Guatemala, Miguel Ydigoras Fuentes**, and the Mayor of Guatemala City, Dr. Luis Fernando Galich, addressed the audience of about 3,000 and welcomed the participants. This was the first time in history that a Guatemalan president had participated in a Protestant rally. This singular event and the two-year EVAF program were a symbolic turning point for Evangelicals in Guatemala, who lost their fear of being known as Evangelicals in public and began to openly evangelize their communities and aggressively plant new churches throughout the country.

These events signaled a new era of rapid church growth in most areas of the country. Between 1960 and 1964, the total number of Protestant congregations (churches and missions) increased from 1,156 nationally to 1,611. The national Protestant membership grew from 36,928 in 1960 to 72,500 in 1964, which represents a membership increase of 18.3 percent annually; this was the highest period of church growth in Guatemalan history. The second-highest growth period was 1973-1978, when the total membership growth increased by 17.5 percent annually -- from 127,778 to 286,130. By mid-1980, there were 6,448 Protestant congregations in Guatemala with 334,453 baptized members and a Protestant community of 1,003,359 or about 13.8 percent of the national population of 7,262,419 (30 June 1980), according to PROCADES.

On February 4, 1976, Guatemala City and a large part of the country (16 of 22 departments) were severely shaken by a major earthquake that registered 7.5 on the Richter scale, which caused massive destruction and loss of life. According to Roger Plant (1978:5), "Of a total population of approximately 5,500,000, over 22,000 were killed, more than 77,000 injured and over 1,000,000 made homeless; it was the severest natural catastrophe in Central America during the twentieth century."

Although upper- and middle-class neighborhoods were only slightly damaged, many of the poorer districts of Guatemala City were devastated, along with poorly-constructed homes of the peasantry in the central highland provinces of Chimaltenango and Sacatepéquez and the lowland areas of Zacapa and El Progreso, where whole villages were flattened or virtually disappeared from the earth. The failure of the government to rebuild destroyed rural villages only added to already great misery among the various Mayan communities that turned to international aid agencies and religious organizations for assistance.

In addition, vast numbers of urban squatters were left with no place to live amidst the mass of rubble and fallen earth, where re-settlement was prohibited for safety reasons. In order to survive the harsh conditions, thousands of urban squatters improvised by setting up tents and huts in vacant lots, public parks or by the roadside in the major cities.

The response of Protestant denominations and service agencies, both national and international, to the survivors in the aftermath of this earthquake was swift and significant, both in terms of emergency assistance and more long-term community development activities. This produced a favorable reaction among those who received immediate as well as long-term assistance from evangelical organizations, with a resulting burst of growth in attendance and membership of evangelical churches.

The new social concern among Protestants that resulted from the 1976 earthquake had a positive impact on society in general, because evangelicals and their neighbors were forced to deal with the emergency situation and with rebuilding efforts as part of the same local community. National and international evangelical relief and development efforts were directed at all those in need, and not just at the needs of local Protestant congregations and their adherents. Therefore, the Guatemalan population, in general, was favorably impressed by expressions of evangelical friendship and compassion through their local, national and international relief and development activities in the post-earthquake period, according to reports from scores of local pastors, relief and development workers, and denominational officials between 1976 and 1980. This general situation produced a favorable climate for evangelical church growth after 1976, especially in areas hardest hit by the great earthquake.

In 1982, Guatemala Evangelicals celebrated the Centennial of the arrival of the first Protestant mission board, the Presbyterian Church in the USA, by sponsoring a variety of inter-denominational activities nationwide. With growing social strength in Guatemalan society, the Protestant community in general has taken more interest in the humanitarian problems and needs of the larger society and a more active role in community affairs, but not necessarily in politics. Their theology tends to be pre-millennial and their hope is that the Lord will “rapture” them out of this present evil world to escape the Great Tribulation.

Most Guatemalan evangelicals believe that politics are “dirty and sinful” and that it is dangerous to even discuss social problems in public out of fear of being labeled a “social activist” or a “subversive,” which could have serious repercussions: someone might report them to the civil authorities and they could run the risk of being detained, threatened, beaten, tortured and/or disappeared. The “disappeared” are never seen again by their relatives and friends, the police have no record of their arrest or detention, and usually their bodies are never found. However, some dead bodies, usually with their head and hands cutoff to avoid identification, are found frequently along the roadside throughout the country, allegedly left by “death squads” as a warning to others who might be tempted to criticize the government, military, police, political party leaders, etc., such as Mayan leaders, labor union organizers, opposition political party members and human rights advocates.

Complicating this general situation is the case of former **General José Efraín Ríos Montt** who took over the government as part of a three-man junta in June 1982 with the support of the Guatemalan armed forces, and quickly identified himself as a “born-again” Christian and a member since 1979 of a local evangelical church in Guatemala City, known as *Iglesia Cristiana Verbo* (The Word Christian Church, related to a US-based missionary organization from Eureka, California, called Gospel Outreach).

For about 18 months, Guatemala was ruled by this Protestant military dictator who gave orders for the army to brutally suppress the nation’s guerrilla movement and its sympathizers, who in growing numbers were Mayans living in rural villages in the central highlands. Ríos Montt was strongly criticized by the general public, especially Roman Catholics, for his moralistic leadership style (while “President,” he preached on the radio about the virtues of morality and good citizenship), his odd personality (weird, Quixotic), his religion (Protestant and Pentecostal) and his genocidal acts against the civilian population. During his rule, Guatemala experienced the most brutal and bloody stage of the entire civil war that began in 1960 with a revolt by young, reformist military officers.

Although at first, some evangelical leaders rallied around Ríos Montt and enjoyed the notoriety of being seen with him, others more wisely decided to keep a safe distance from him and his government policies, fearing a backlash of resentment and repression against the Evan-

gical Church after he left power. Some commentators have argued that the identification of Ríos Montt with the evangelical movement helped the churches to grow, while others believe that the Ríos Montt melodrama harmed the evangelical public image and hindered Protestant church growth.

However, the ouster of Gen. Ríos Montt in August 1983 had surprisingly little impact on evangelical church growth in Guatemala, although there was some negative backlash. During the weeks immediately following the coup led by **Gen. Óscar Humberto Mejía Victores** there was a brief period of tension between Protestants and Catholics, when evangelical pastors complained of police intimidation, anonymous death threats, and general public harassment. However, at the urging of the Guatemalan Evangelical Alliance, Gen. Mejía discouraged the harassment of evangelicals by issuing a reaffirmation of the nation's commitment to freedom of religion and by providing police protection for evangelical activities.

When the **National Directory of the Protestant Movement in Guatemala** was published by PROCADES-SEPAL in 1981, the largest denominations were the following: the Association of Central American Churches (809 churches and missions with 38,480 members), Assemblies of God (748 congregations with 35,909 members), Church of God-Cleveland (898 congregations with 34,451 members), Prince of Peace Evangelical Church (567 congregations with 29,130 members), Seventh-Day Adventist Church (216 congregations with 17,207 members), National Presbyterian Church (295 congregations with 16,263 members), Elim Christian Mission (147 congregations with 15,290 members), and the Church of the Nazarene (129 congregations with 11,349 members). All the other denominations had less than 10,000 members in 1980, but Pentecostal groups had 53.2 percent of all the Protestant church members in the country, compared to 5.4 percent for the Adventists, and 31.6 percent for the Separatist-Free Church Tradition. Of the ten largest Protestant denominations in 1980, only four were Pentecostal.

Overall, Protestant denominations in Guatemala experienced phenomenal church growth, especially in Guatemala City, the northern lowlands, the Caribbean and Pacific regions, between 1960 and 1980. Although Protestants only represented 2.8 percent of the national population in 1950, after three decades of explosive growth 14 out of 100 Guatemalans were Protestants in 1980. Most of this growth has occurred among the *Ladino* population, but several "people movements" (voluntary mass conversions to the Protestant Faith within an ethnolinguistic group) were reported among a few Amerindian groups.

During the period 1960-1980, Guatemala became a "showcase" for the growth of the Protestant Movement in Latin America, but the enthusiasm of evangelical leaders regarding continued high rates of church growth in Guatemala often exceeded the reality. A series of public opinion polls taken between 1990 and 2001 in Guatemala helped to correct some of the erroneous growth projections made by evangelical leaders: the CID-Gallup company reported that the Protestant population was 26.4 percent in May of 1990 and 25 percent in April of 1996. Early in 2001, SEPAL conducted a public opinion poll in Guatemala that showed Protestants to be 25.3 percent of the national population. Therefore, it seems clear that the size of the Protestant population had not changed in Guatemala in more than a decade, although the number of Protestant congregations had continued to increase: from about 6,450 in 1980, to 9,298 in 1987, to about 18,000 in 2001. It seems logical to assume that if the number of Protestant congregations grew by 258 percent between 1980 and 2001 that the total membership probably increased by a similar rate of growth. So why has the size of the Protestant population remained stable at about 25 percent?

One possible explanation is that there may have been "a great falling away" (desertion or exodus) of Protestant adherents in Guatemala during the 1980s-1990s due to discouragement

about the performance of evangelical politicians, such as Gen. Efraín Ríos Montt (military dictator during 1982-1983) and Jorge Serrano (president during 1990-1993), as well as disillusionment over the financial and sex scandals regarding popular Evangelical TV personalities, such as Jim and Tammy Bakker (1987) and Jimmy Swaggart (1991). It is easier for "adherents" to desert the church when things go badly than for committed baptized church members to abandon ship during stormy weather, so it may be true there was "a falling away" of the less committed churchgoers during these hard times in Guatemala.

Another major factor that must be considered during the period 1960-1996 was the political and social upheaval caused by a brutal and bloody civil war between the "public security forces" of the Conservative government and a series of Marxist-led revolutionary forces, which at the time of the Peace Talks in late-1996 were led by the URNG. The 36-years of armed conflict caused an estimated 200,000 deaths and the forced exile to Mexico of about 250,000 people from conflictive zones, mainly among Amerindian peoples in the central highlands, and about one million internal refugees.

During the 1980s, evangelical public opinion was divided for and against support for Gen. Ríos Montt, who offended many people—Catholics and Protestants alike—by his public radio messages that blended anti-Marxist rhetoric with evangelical sermons. The leadership of the Evangelical Alliance of Guatemala, which represents most evangelical organizations in the country, decided to back off from publicly supporting Ríos Montt and to distance themselves from his government to avoid a possible negative backlash and persecution of evangelicals should Gen. Ríos Montt be overthrown.

After alienating business, military and political opposition leaders, as well as the Catholic Church, **Ríos Montt was overthrown by Defense Minister Gen. Oscar Humberto Mejía Victores** in August 1983 who served as Head of State until January 1986. Although evangelicals were not persecuted after the ousting of Ríos Montt, there is no doubt that the public image of evangelicals did suffer. Consequently, there was a growing erosion of evangelical strength as the less committed adherents stopped attending evangelical worship services and either drifted back to the Catholic Church or stopped going to church altogether, thereby joining the growing ranks of those with no religious affiliation. At a later date, President Mejía was charged with murder, kidnapping, and genocide in the Spanish court system, along with Ríos Montt.

In 2001, Baptist missionary Roger Grossman reported the following statistics on adherents, based on an extensive national research project: Assemblies of God (600,540), Church of God-Cleveland (487,984), Independent (188,421), Prince of Peace Church (179,038), Seventh-Day Adventist Church (175,849), Association of Central American Churches (162,175), Pentecostal Church of God (136,743), Church of the Nazarene (102,345), Elim Christian Mission (105,435), all Baptists (75,648), all Presbyterians (65,800), Bethany Church (60,000), MIEL (43,929), New Church of God (28,129), Galilee Church of God-Anderson, IN (25,705), Friends-Quakers (23,347), Church of God of Prophecy (22,984), Evangelical Mission of the Holy Spirit (18,790), Calvary Church (17,730), Verbo (14,649), Evangelical House of God (14,104), Living Water Church-Agua Viva (11,693), Voice of God Church (11,047). All other Protestant groups had less than 10,000 adherents each.

In 2010, Evangelical mega-churches (congregations with +2,000 members) in Guatemala City included: the Christian Fraternity (Jorge H. López), Assembly of God Central Church (Pastor Byron Josué Girón), the House of God Church (Carlos "Cash" Luna), El Shaddai Church (Harold and Cecilia Caballeros), Elim Central Church (Pastor General Héctor Nufio, founded by Dr. Othoniel Ríos Paredes), Palabra Mi-El Central Church of Jesus Christ (Apostle Gaspar Sapalu Alvarado, a split from the group found founded by Ríos Paredes), Showers of Grace

Church (Dr. Ángel Edmundo Madrid Morales), Royal Life Christian Church (Pastor Rony Madrid, son of Edmundo Madrid), Full Gospel Central Church of God (Pastor Nicolás Menéndez), Calvary Central Church (Pastor Job Eliú Castillo), Prince of Peace Central Church (Apostle Josué Muñoz), Family of God Church of Jesus Christ (Pastor Luís Fernando Solares), Nazareth Central Church (Pastors Danilo de León y Walter Heidenreich), and Ebenezer Ministries of Guatemala / Ebenezer Church of Christ (Sergio Enríquez).

Ecumenical relations in Guatemala are complex, with strong divisions between Pentecostal and non-Pentecostal leaders and their respective denominations. Nevertheless, many conservative evangelical leaders are represented by the **Guatemalan Evangelical Alliance** (*Alianza Evangélica de Guatemala, AEG*) at the national level, regardless of their denominational affiliation. However, a few of the most conservative denominations (called Fundamentalists) are not members of AEG and do not support its activities, such as the Trinitarian Bible Society (affiliated with the Independent Board of Presbyterian Foreign Missions, led by the Rev. Harold Ricker), the Plymouth Brethren (*Hermanos Libres*), Baptist Bible Fellowship, the independent Christian Churches / Churches of Christ, etc. Internationally, AEG is affiliated with the **Latin American Confraternity of Evangelicals (CONELA)**, which is associated with the World Evangelical Fellowship (WEF).

Also, the **Latin American Council of Churches (CLAI)**, affiliated with the World Council of Churches (WCC), has a few members in Guatemala. CLAI membership is divided into two categories: the only full-member is the **Episcopal Church of Guatemala**; fraternal members include the **Evangelical Center of Pastoral Studies in Central America** (*Centro Evangélico de Estudios Pastorales en Centroamérica*), located in Zona 2, Ciudad de Guatemala; and the Guatemalan chapter of the **Mesoamerican Christian Community** (*Comunidad Cristiana Mesoamericana*), also located in Zona 2, Ciudad de Guatemala.

Other Religions

Between 2001 and 2006, those affiliated with other religions remained steady at two to three percent, while those with “no religious affiliation” (this includes agnostics, atheists, no preference, and no response) were about 12.5 percent, according to two polls: CID-Gallup in November 2001 and Latinobarómetro in 2006.

Included in the “other religions” category were **non-Protestant marginal Christian groups**: the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (see below), the Jehovah's Witnesses (364 congregations with about 24,000 members and 68,650 adherents in 2005), Philadelphia Church of God, Yahweh's House of God, Light of the World Church (Guadalajara, Mexico), Voice of the Cornerstone (Puerto Rico), Children of God (The Family), United Church of Religious Science, Christadelphian Bible Mission, Growing in Grace Ministries International (Miami, FL), Mita Congregation and the People of Amos Church, both from Puerto Rico.

Mormon missionaries first arrived in Guatemala in 1947. The first official meeting was held in a rented building on 22 August 1948, with 66 people in attendance. Later that year, John F. O'Donnal baptized the first convert in Guatemala. By 1956, three small congregations with a membership of about 250 had been established. Membership grew to 10,000 by 1966, and 18 years later, when the Guatemala City Temple was dedicated in 1984, membership had risen to 40,000. By 1998 membership had quadrupled again to 164,000. In 2007, the Mormon Church reported one temple and 418 congregations with 215,186 members. If these last statistics are valid, then the Mormon Church was larger than most Protestant denominations in Guatemala at

that time. [Note: Roger Grossman's 2001 study reported only 55,441 Mormon adherents nationally.]

There are three Eastern Orthodox denominations in Guatemala. (1) The **Orthodox Catholic Church of North and South America** (with headquarters in Akron, Ohio) ordained José Imre as Bishop of Guatemala in 1990, with headquarters in Tiquisate, Department of Esquintla; this denomination operates a seminary in the municipality of Nueva Concepción, Esquintla. Prior to 1988, the Guatemala jurisdiction was known as the Catholic Orthodox Church of Guatemala and Latin America. (2) **The Apostolic Orthodox Catholic Church of Guatemala** was legally established in 1995 under the jurisdiction of Archbishop Antonio Chedraui, Metropolitan of Mexico, Central America, Venezuela and the Caribbean, which is affiliated with the **Holy Synod of the Patriarchy of Antioch** (headquarters in Damascus, Syria). The Orthodox Parish of Guatemala is centered at the Orthodox Catholic Church of the Transfiguration (dedicated in 1997), which is located at the Rafael Ayau Orphanage in Zone 1 of Guatemala City and led by Hieromonje Padre Atanasio Alegría. Associated with this church body is the **Orthodox Monastery of the Holy Trinity Lavra Mambré**, which was founded in 1986 by Mother Inés Ayau García and Mother María A. Amistoso with the blessing of Metropolitan Damaskinos Papandreu. Although the monastery was originally located in Guatemala City, a new complex of buildings was constructed on the shores of Lake Amatitlán during the 1990s, under the leadership of Madre Inés. (3) **The Orthodox Old Apostolic Catholic Church of Guatemala and Central America** is lead by Archbishop José Adán Morán Santos, with headquarters in Colonia Inde of Villa Nueva, a southern suburb of Guatemala City.

Non-Christian religions included the following: Animism, Baha'i Faith, Islam, Judaism, Chinese religions, Japanese religions (Mahikari Divine True Light), Buddhism and Hinduism.

The origins of the nation's **Jewish community** can be traced to German immigrations that arrived in Guatemala in the mid-19th-century. The community formed by these immigrants was small and isolated from the rest of the Jewish world, and its descendants are mostly no longer Jewish, culturally or religiously. Immigrants whose Jewish traditions are still present arrived at the beginning of the 20th century from Germany and the Middle East, followed in the 1920s by Eastern Europeans. Many of the latter came via Cuba and considered Guatemala only a transit stop until they could obtain visas to the USA. Due to Guatemala's restrictive immigration laws, the Jewish community was reduced to only 800 people in 1939. After World War II many Jewish refugees entered the country and settled in Guatemala City, Quetzaltenango and San Marcos. According to the 1965 census, out of 1,030 registered Jews, 276 were engaged in industry and commerce, 66 in the free professions, and seven in agriculture. The same census indicated that the Jewish community had 74 mixed marriages, accounting for 27.2% of the Jewish population. Approximately 1,200 Jews lived in Guatemala in 2000, and the majority resided in Guatemala City. The Jewish community continues to shrink due to assimilation and intermarriage. The Jewish community is comprised of three main groups: German, Sephardic and East European (Ashkenazi), each with its own institutions. Sociedad Israelita Maguén David synagogue (Sephardic, Orthodox, founded in 1923), Centro Hebreo/Shaaréi Binyamin synagogue (Eastern European Ashkenazi, Orthodox, founded in 1941), Sociedad Israelita de Guatemala and Bet-El synagogue (German Ashkenazi, Liberal, founded in 1969), and Casa Hillel Jewish Community (Comunidad Hebrea Beit Ha-madrij Hillel). Other organizations, unified under the Jewish Central Committee include B'nai B'rith, Wizo and two youth groups, the Maccabi and Gvafti (a Reform youth movement). A Jewish school, Instituto Albert Einstein, was founded in 1957; it had an enrolment of about 100 children in 1969, from kindergarten through preparatory levels.

The **Muslim community** is composed of about 100 families (approximately 1,200 people), of which 95 percent are Palestinian Arab immigrants who arrived during and after the 1970s. The Islamic Da'wah Mosque of Guatemala is located in the outskirts of Guatemala City, led by its Imán, Amin Omar.

Buddhism organizations include: Antigua Sangha (Vietnamese Zen); Buddhist Center of Guatemala City (Tibetan, Karma Kagyu, Diamond Way lineages); Friends of the Dharma; Kagyu Dak Shang Choling; Buddhist Center of Huehuetenango; Buddhist Group of Guatemala (Tibetan); Casa Tibet Guatemala (Lhundrup Tongpa Ling); and Losang Chogyel Study Group (Vajrayana, Tibetan, Gelugpa lineages).

Chinese religions: In 1897, a government decree was issued requiring all Chinese in Guatemala to register and take out residential permits, and forbidding any further immigration into the country by Chinese nationals. In December 1906, there were registered, under the decree of 1897, 604 Chinese citizens. Most of the early Chinese immigrants arrived in Guatemala between 1877 and 1908 during the construction of the national railroad system or to work in agriculture (coffee and banana plantations), whereas most of the newer arrivals came to Guatemala in the post-World War II period. The early Chinese immigrants, as well as later arrivals after World War II, *brought with them a variety of religious beliefs* (Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism and animistic tribal religions), most of which were lost over time due to cultural assimilation, intermarriage and conversion to Roman Catholicism. [In the late 1930s, as World War II was just beginning in Europe, many Chinese left their homeland, fleeing in the face of the impending Japanese invasion and occupation of China. After World War II, there was a new Chinese diaspora from mainland China, Taiwan and Southeast Asia, followed by later emigrations from Taiwan, Hong Kong and elsewhere to Latin America, including Guatemala.

Hindu organizations in Guatemala include: International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKON), International Sri Sathya Sai Baba Organizations, Transcendental Meditation (TM), and Vaisnava Mission.

Ancient Wisdom groups include Grand Universal Fraternity, the Ancient & Mystical Order of the Rosæ Crucis [AMORC], Universal Gnostic Movement, New Acropolis Cultural Centers. **Psychic-Spiritualist-New Age** groups include the Spiritist Association, Guatemalan Heliosophical Network, Spiritual Magnetic School of the Universal Commune, Ishaya Techniques, Church of Scientology, the UNIFICATION CHURCH OF WORLD CHRISTIANITY, Raelian Movement, and Silva Mind Control / Silvan Method.

Many of the Amerindian peoples practice religious syncretism, which combines their ancient animistic beliefs and practices with a Roman Catholicism imposed on them by civil and religious authorities during the Spanish colonial period (1521 to 1821). The result is a “popular Catholicism” that retains significant elements of Amerindian spirituality, which includes animistic beliefs and practices such as **magic** (white and black, good and evil), **witchcraft** (*bujería*), **herbal healing** (*curanderismo*) and **shamanism** (the shaman is an intermediary with the spirit world). Animistic beliefs are strongest among the Amerindians who are the least acculturated to *Ladino* society, and who live in the central highlands or the rainforests of the lowlands in the Petén region of northern Guatemala. However, since the end of Guatemala’s civil war (1960-1996), there has been a resurgence of Mayan Spirituality in the predominantly Mayan areas of the Central Highlands, among both Roman Catholics and Protestants.

Also, **Garifuna religion** (among the Black Carib) and **creole religion** (among English-speaking West Indians: Myalism and Obeah) is practiced on the Caribbean coast in Livingston, Puerto Barrios and surrounding areas. In addition, there are numerous psychics, mediums, clairvoyants and astrologers who announce their services in local newspapers.

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