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In Search of New Believers: How the Guatemalan Religious Panorama Has Changed in Recent Decades

*Hugo Leonel Ruano**

I. INTRODUCTION

This Article aims at viewing Guatemalan society from the perspective of the Christian religion, considering Christianity's influence on societal behaviors.¹ In particular, the Article examines the relationship between culture and religion from a sociological perspective in the context of the changing Guatemalan religious panorama. The Article examines Eastern Guatemala as a case study and hypothesizes possible societal and cultural effects of the current trend of growing Protestantism and declining Catholicism—considering the possibility of, ultimately, a Protestant-run Guatemalan society. Part II of the Article provides a background examination of theoretical and sociological viewpoints on religion generally. In Part III, the Article looks at Guatemala generally, examining current trends in the citizenry's religious affiliations. Part IV describes several hypotheses regarding the future of the religious panorama, examining Eastern Guatemala as a representative case study. Finally, the Article draws conclusions based on the case studies and considers future possibilities.

II. THEORY

Sociology has examined many aspects of religion and created various theories. In this section, I will examine the definition of religion, the effects of religion on cultures generally, and criticisms of religion. I will also briefly examine Max Weber's assessment on religion and capitalism.

* This paper was presented at the Sixteenth Annual Law and Religion Symposium (Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, October 4–6, 2009).

1. The reader should take into account that this essay is actually an abridgement of a larger paper: Hugo Leonel Ruano, *Las Principales Formas Socio-históricas de la Religiosidad Cristiana Guatemalteca. Ayer, Hoy, Mañana* (2009) (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Guatemala, Universidad Panamericana).

A. What is Religion?

From the methodological perspective of a sociologist, religion is a variable whose utility lies in the service offered to researchers in determining and interpreting certain forms of social conduct. Religion is not merely a fact of our times or of the history that begins with the birth of Jesus Christ. There are some people who say that there is no society that has lacked religion,² which raises the question of what it is about religion that makes it so universal in that all societies practice it, whether in an established or unestablished form.³ Common to all religions, present and past, is the notion of “the sacred”: “If we cut through the complicated variety of historical religious types, however, there does emerge one outstanding feature that will serve as a touchstone for a minimal definition of religion. This root element may be designated as sacredness, the focal center for religious veneration.”⁴ “The sacred” is that element of mystery that hides some objects or that is contained in holy books. Certainly, all religions do not see “the sacred” the same way.

Emile Durkheim hypothesized that the function fulfilled by religion is that of uniting members of society. He defined it the following way: “A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden—beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them.”⁵

Religions generate systems or patterns of beliefs shared by those who practice them. Next to these beliefs are codes of moral conduct, practices associated to rites, and the cult itself. Thus, religion becomes an indispensable part of culture, and, then, religion becomes an object created by man.

B. Religion and Culture

For many religions there is no difference between religion and culture, religion and politics, or religion and way of life. Christianity, however, varies in its interpretations and its impact on culture and

2. REECE MCGEE ET AL., *SOCIOLOGY: AN INTRODUCTION* 430 (1977).

3. An example of an unestablished form would be that of the Guatemalan natives at the colonial time.

4. MCGEE ET AL., *supra* note 2, at 434.

5. EMILE DURKHEIM, *THE ELEMENTARY FORMS OF THE RELIGIOUS LIFE* 62 (Joseph Ward Swain trans., 1965).

politics. Christianity is not exactly the same as Islam and Hinduism in the sense that being Hinduist means to have been born in India and connotes a way of living there, and Islam brings its adherents a total immersion in its culture (e.g., a non-Arab person cannot read the Coran unless she understands Arab language). At the other end, an average Christian, in whichever country he lives, bears a relative independence from the cultural settings in which he has been raised.⁶ Although said so many times already—but not for that reason void of methodological value—the separation of church from political power in the Western world has confined religious practices to the interior of churches.

C. Main Criticisms of Religion

In spite of the importance that religion has for society, some criticism has been raised against it. For example, for Ludwig Feuerbach, God is a human creation and from this concept is derived “alienation,” i.e., when man worships an object outside himself. God and religion are not anything other than the essence of man adoring himself: “Christianity worships the human individual as the supreme being, as God.”⁷ French positivism is understood as a reaction to the exaggerated preceding philosophical idealism, as it considers theology as either imperfect or a false mode of knowledge. For positivists, positive knowledge is based on natural phenomena; their properties are only verified by the empirical sciences. Augusto Comte proposed the law of the three stages, which considers each society as an evolutionary process from a very simple and traditional form toward a more complex one.⁸ Comte explained that all societies start at a theological stage, then move to a metaphysical stage characterized by abstract speculative thinking, and then end in a positivist stage replete with empirically based scientific theories. For

6. In Christianity it is possible to make the following differentiation: Catholic Christianity is more cultural (processions, pilgrimages, etc.); Protestant Christianity, on the contrary, is less cultural and more abstract. Having this subject in mind helps to understand what conceptual color the national culture would take in the specific case of Guatemala and given the hypothetical situation of an Evangelical majority in the next decades.

7. LUDWIG FEUERBACH, *THE ESSENCE OF CHRISTIANITY* 336 (George Eliot trans., 1957).

8. 3 NICOLAS ABBAGNANO, *HISTORIA DE LA FILOSOFÍA* 124 (1964).

Comte, this journey towards superior stages was the mark of progress.⁹

Karl Marx saw God as a product of men and religion as a social instrument to the service of the political power.¹⁰ The phrase “religion is the opium of the people”¹¹ is not only an acid critique of the attempts of some social groups to evade the inhumane conditions of life but also a philosophical standard that has allowed, among other things, the creation of states with clear atheistic inspiration.

Friedrich Nietzsche is a strong critic of both society and Christianity. The following sentence is clearly indicative of his proposal: “And Christian is all hatred of the intellect, of pride, of courage, of freedom, of intellectual *libertinaje*”¹² Sigmund Freud considered religion as an attempt to protect man from suffering, coming mainly from the repression of sexual impulses by social morality.¹³ Finally, for Bertrand Russell, religion is a disease born out of fear and a source of unspeakable misery for the human race.¹⁴ Religion is pernicious not only intellectually but also morally.¹⁵

D. Sociologists and Their Religious Proposals

For Karl Marx, religion helps to maintain the dominant class structure in any society, along with its unequal distribution of economic wealth and social privilege.¹⁶ Religion is a tranquilizer that induces people to passively accept the injustices of the capitalist society.

Emile Durkheim understood that the greater social function of religion is its immense power to integrate human societies in their symbolic and institutional dimensions.¹⁷ Some exceptional force is

9. *Id.*

10. *Id.* at 55.

11. *Id.*

12. FEDERICO WILHELM NIETZSCHE, THE ANTICHRIST 73 (H.L. Mencken trans., 1920).

13. 9 SALVAT 6452 (2004).

14. BERTRAND RUSSELL, ¿POR QUÉ NO SOY CRISTIANO? 19 (1979).

15. *Id.*

16. MCGEE ET AL., *supra* note 2, at 439–40.

17. *Id.* at 442.

needed to convince people to obey rules: religion represents that force.

Weber agreed with Durkheim's contributions and added other social functions that religion fulfills. Weber proposed that religions look for an answer to a basic human necessity, the necessity to understand the meaning of life.¹⁸ Religion typically provides a system with meaning that convinces us that life is worth living. But, in the process of seeking this purely religious goal, the religious institution makes an invaluable contribution to secular life. In order to assign meaning to personal existence, religion must first define the world where human action takes place. Consequently, one of the initial tasks of any religion is to create a vision of the world that carefully delineates the form of the moral and physical universe.

E. Max Weber and the Study of Religion

Max Weber presents the hypothesis that Calvinist ethics and Puritan ideas influenced the development of capitalism.¹⁹ Traditional religious devotion used to be accompanied by the rejection of worldly things, including the search for one's better economic position.²⁰ Weber showed that some types of Protestantism favored the rational search of economic benefit.²¹

Max Weber also coined the term "sociology of religion."²² In its historical development, this discipline has shown different tendencies, such as: (1) religion in all its historical manifestations is a phenomenon that belongs to a relatively primitive stage of society (Auguste Comte, Oswald Spencer);²³ (2) religion is a particular form of ideology, used from antiquity to reinforce and to legitimize the dominion of one social class over another one (Voltaire,

18. Basically, religion provides us with the idea that life is worth living. Talcott Parsons, *Introduction to MAX WEBER, SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION*, at xx (Ephraim Fischhoff trans., Beacon Press 1964) (1922); *see also* MCGEE ET AL., *supra* note 2, at 446.

19. *See generally* MAX WEBER, *THE PROTESTANT ETHIC AND THE SPIRIT OF CAPITALISM* (Talcott Parsons trans., Dover 2003) (1958).

20. *See id. passim*.

21. One example is Calvinism. *See* MCGEE ET AL., *supra* note 2, at 447.

22. Ephraim Fischhoff, *Translator's Preface to MAX WEBER, SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION* at x (Ephraim Fischhoff trans., Beacon Press 1964) (1922).

23. Luciano Gallino, *Concepciones Clásicas de la Sociología de la Religión*, FORO DE CIENCIAS SOCIALES, Jan. 18, 2002, <http://forotextos.galeon.com/enlaces373512.html>. I followed Gallino's ideas freely in this section.

Lunacharsky, Karl Marx);²⁴ (3) religion is an answer to universal necessities derived from the conditions of existence of the individuals and human collectivities (Emile Durkheim);²⁵ and (4) religion is an institution historically affirmed as a regulator of human conduct in sexual, family, political, and economic spheres (Max Weber, Ernst Troeltsch).²⁶

Weber concentrated his analysis in Calvinism, whose ethical system grants great importance to human action in the world to glorify God.²⁷ Weber was conscious that capitalism had been present in the previous history of humankind in some form; nevertheless, he believed that modern, rational capitalism, which looks for maximization of gain and keeps accountable books, is a product of the Reformation and is qualitatively different from previous forms of capitalism.²⁸

At this point, I will focus my discussion on Guatemala and its changing religious panorama. The theoretical background discussed above provides the lens through which I conducted my case study.

III. CHRISTIANITY AND THE GUATEMALAN STATE: FROM COLONIAL TIMES UNTIL TODAY

The Guatemalan State has now been open to all religions (beyond Catholicism) for many decades, particularly since the close of the nineteenth century.²⁹ The Liberal Reformation has had particularly deep and lasting effects on the social fabric in Guatemala. Catholicism has also changed. Today the Catholic Church, being separate from the political power, has to look for new ways to approach both non-believers and believers. Evolving times have also found Catholicism to be emulating some features of the now growing Evangelical worship style (e.g., massive conversions, use of

24. *See id.*

25. *See id.*

26. *See id.*

27. *See* MCGEE ET AL., *supra* note 2, at 447.

28. *Id.* at 448.

29. It is widely accepted among scholars that the advent of the political movement called "Reforma Liberal" opened the door to other religions besides Catholicism by the end of the nineteenth century. This movement was successful in separating church and state. *See* HUBERT J. MILLER, *LA IGLESIA CATÓLICA Y EL ESTADO EN GUATEMALA, 1871-1885*, at 498 (Jorge Lujan Muñoz trans., 1976).

pop music, mass communication means).³⁰ Consequently, in modern Guatemala, Catholic believers tend to participate more in liturgy, and there is a general sense that they identify more with their church than in previous decades. In this regard, Catholic religious conviction has reached a higher level. Clearly, despite the continued prevalence of the Catholic Church, the religious panorama in Guatemala has changed from colonial times—e.g., Catholicism is no longer the official state church—and it will likely continue changing.

A. The Religious Panorama Has Changed

The changes made in the Constitution (1879) produced lasting effects in Guatemala's social fabric.³¹ Guatemala now has unprecedented religious diversity. The following studies explore this diversity further.

1. What religion do you belong to?

This Article considers several studies that examine religious demographics in Guatemala. Taken during each of three years from 2000 to 2002, and consisting of random samples of around 1200 people drawn from the national population,³² the studies exemplify several societal trends that demonstrate the dynamic religious phenomenon in Guatemala in recent years. Not surprisingly, the studies show that the majority of the population continues to be Catholic. The highest number of reporting Catholics was observed in August 2000, reaching 69.7% of those surveyed.³³ That number then fell to a low of 53.6% in December 2002.³⁴ By contrast, the lowest

30. See, e.g., John L. Allen, Jr., *If Demography Is Destiny, Pentecostals Are the Ecumenical Future*, NAT'L CATH. REP., Jan. 28, 2008, available at <http://ncronline.org/node/11567>. This observation mainly relates to Pentecostals, who comprise most of Guatemalan Evangelicals, and, with respect to Catholicism, it refers to popular Catholicism.

31. MILLER, *supra* note 29; see also JORGE MARIO GARCÍA LAGUARDIA, CONSTITUCIONES IBEROAMERICANAS: GUATEMALA (2006), available at <http://www.bibliojuridica.org/libros/libro.htm?l=2210> (last visited Sept. 21, 2010).

32. All of these studies come from Secretaría de Análisis Estratégico, an agency of the Guatemalan Government, and are unpublished. I previously worked for that Agency and consequently became familiar with the data. Accordingly, the following data comes from my personal experience and familiarity with these studies.

33. See *id.*

34. See *id.*

number of reporting Evangelicals³⁵ was 23.2% in August 2000, which increased to 32.8% by January 2001.³⁶ The category of “Other” religions, including religions such as The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and Jehovah’s Witnesses, consistently represented only a small percentage of the population, never reaching higher than 4.7%, which it reached in December 2002.³⁷ The final category in the studies, “None,” accounted for those Guatemalans who are unaffiliated with any religion. This category began at 8.9% in February 2000 and concluded at 11.3% in December 2002.³⁸

Some general conclusions drawn from these results include the following: Catholics, although the national majority, are steadily declining in numbers. Evangelicals, on the other hand, have been on the rise. Finally, non-religiously affiliated Guatemalans are also increasing in number.

Table 1: National Trends

Religion	Feb. '00	Aug. '00	Jan. '01	Sept. '01	Sept. '02	Nov. '02	Dec. '02	Average
Catholicism	63	69.7	54.9	60	56	53.6	53.6	58.7
Evangelicalism	24	23.2	32.8	27.5	29.6	29.3	29.3	28
Other	2	2.8	3.7	2.75	2.8	4.7	4.7	3.4
None	9	3.9	7.5	9.3	10.5	11.3	11.3	9

In 2006, an American institution called the Global Pew Forum conducted another survey of Guatemalan religious affiliations,³⁹ which also looked at national percentages. The results were somewhat consistent with the above-mentioned studies, confirming their established pattern. Particularly noteworthy in the Global Pew Forum survey is the observation that the gap between Catholics, at 48%, and Evangelicals, at 34%, was narrower than in the other

35. For purposes of this study (and this Article), “Evangelicals” encompasses all Protestant religions.

36. *See supra* note 32.

37. *See id.*

38. *See id.*

39. Dennis A. Smith, *El Soplo del Espíritu: Religión, Comunicación y Cultura en América Latina Hoy*, Presentation at the International Seminar, *Comunicacion, Cultura, y Mision in Lima, Peru* (June 23–24, 2008); *see also* PEW FORUM ON RELIGION & PUBLIC LIFE, *SPIRIT AND POWER: A 10-COUNTRY SURVEY OF PENTECOSTALS* 80 (2006).

studies, while the number of those identifying themselves as not affiliated with organized religions was higher, at 15%.⁴⁰

Table 2: Global Pew Forum

Religion	Percent
Catholicism	48
Evangelicalism	34
Non-Affiliated	15

Both sets of studies support the idea that Catholicism is in decline in Guatemala. If the second study is accurate, Catholicism is the self-identified religion of less than half of Guatemalan adults. Evangelicals, on the other hand, are continuing to grow in numbers and today represent a little more than one-third of the total adult population. Along with the growth of Evangelicalism, the number of Guatemalans who do not identify themselves with a particular religion is growing, perhaps reflecting the increasing secularization of the Guatemalan state. This suggests that the trend toward secularization of the people is not exclusive to European society.⁴¹

2. People without religion

The rising number of people who are unaffiliated with organized religions poses several sociological questions: What is their spiritual background? What influences their choice not to affiliate with established religions in Guatemala? Are they atheists, or perhaps agnostics? Or have they been offended or put off by organized religion somehow? Whether or not these questions have clear answers, it is undisputed that this demographic already has a strong presence, and the number is growing.

One author offers a useful analysis of the Global Pew Forum survey results:

40. Smith, *supra* note 39.

41. Some European scholars complain about this matter. See, e.g., Salvatore Abbruzzese, *Religión y Cultura en la Sociedad Laica*, in ACTAS DEL II SIMPOSIO INTERNACIONAL FE CRISTIANA Y CULTURA CONTEMPORÁNEA "COMPRENDER LA RELIGIÓN," 21-34 (2001), available at <http://hdl.handle.net/10171/2569>.

I suspect that a significant portion of the fifteen percent of the sample who said they don't belong to a church are ex-Catholics and ex-Evangelicals. Colleagues from Brazil, Costa Rica and Perú have documented how many people respond to the anomie produced by migration to urban centers, to the loss of power exercised by traditional religious institutions, to economic and political precariousness and to the globalization of the economy and of culture by venturing forth on a spiritual pilgrimage. This pilgrimage tends to set forth from a traditional Catholic faith, moves through the Charismatic movement into Neo-Pentecostalism and ends with a profound sense of disenchantment with organized religion.⁴²

This hypothesis could be helpful in my Guatemalan case study. It is possible that a significant number of those unaffiliated with organized religion are former church members that became unsatisfied with traditional institutionalized religions and then move completely away from them.

3. What do current religious trends point to in the years to come?

In an effort to make sense of the above statistics, I consider various possible scenarios for the future of the Guatemalan religious panorama.

a. Scenario 1: Catholics and Evangelicals. It is evident that in recent decades Protestantism has grown remarkably in Guatemala. This trend prompts the question of how this will affect the country as a whole. It is clearly possible that, if the growth continues at the current rate, with all other elements being equal, Protestantism—which has already transformed into an independent variable of social change—could reach as high as 50% of the population in two or three decades. That change would create a social religious panorama very different from the one we see today. For the very first time, the population would be divided in half by religious affiliation. The weight of Protestantism would be felt not only in the immediate and

42. Dennis A. Smith, *El Soplo del Espíritu: Religion, Cultura, y Misión*, Contribution to Panel on Religious Communication: Dialogue and Diversity at the Sixth International Conference on Media, Religion and Culture (CMRC) (Aug. 2008).

peripheral forms of the national mass culture but also in other spheres such as economics and politics. The rise of Protestantism would have a substantial impact on the country if it were to affect a change in societal values and ethics that increased values such as personal discipline, responsibility in the work place, less alcohol consumption among the working class, and greater sense of family responsibility.

b. Scenario 2: Catholics and Evangelicals. The first scenario focuses essentially on the rising force of the Evangelical church and its potential to change the country's religious panorama, while ignoring other factors. Such a scenario is purely theoretical. It is unlikely that the Catholic Church, which is still strong in Guatemala today, will watch passively as the social-religious environment changes against it without working to alter the outcome. Factoring in Catholicism as another independent variable, contrary to the Evangelical movement, the outcome in two or three decades could be very different, decreasing the momentum of the Evangelical growth.

c. Scenario 3: Other religions. Although the above-mentioned examples of this category were the Jehovah's Witnesses and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the category truly covers a much wider spectrum. It is difficult to speculate about the effect of religions that could settle down in Guatemala, particularly non-Christian religions such as Islam or Judaism, and how they would be perceived in the national eye. Post-modernity and globalization suggest that the growth of "other religions," which would increase religious diversity, is very possible.

d. Scenario 4: The non-religious. Another clear trend in the data is the rising number of those people who chose the "Non-Affiliated" category. A major portion of this category comes from former members of established churches that desert their faith. Many believers abandon their native religion and take refuge in this segment of non-believers. This trend is prevalent, and all signs point to its continued growth.

Except for scenarios 1 and 2, which are mutually exclusive, the remaining scenarios could occur simultaneously.

(1) *The desertions.* Desertion from the main churches is one troubling trend to academics who analyze religious phenomena and who belong to the camp that acknowledges the beneficial effects of the moral values of religion on the average citizen. Jorge Gómez reports that of 8.6% of desertions among Evangelicals in Costa Rica, 62% had returned to the Catholic Church, 31% were not affiliated with any church, and 6% had joined the Jehovah's Witnesses or The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.⁴³

The largest number of desertions occurred due to personal problems (28%). The next most prevalent reason was a lack of clarity in the administration of finances (12.8%), and third was the behavior of other members (8.9%).⁴⁴ Gomez argues that the reason some new members soon abandon their new religion is the lack of attention they receive from current members.⁴⁵ He attributes their initial conversion to emotional preaching that included unfulfilled promises (e.g., promises of material abundance, health).⁴⁶

The Catholic Church, since the 1980s, has created strategies to slow down the rate of desertions, already calculated at 10,000 a day in Latin America.⁴⁷

IV. GUATEMALA AS A CASE STUDY

This shifting religious panorama makes Guatemala an interesting case study for understanding larger trends in Latin America. Moreover, it reflects other general, global characteristics and trends occurring outside America. The two prevalent trends in Guatemala that are global in reach are secularism and religious diversity. I will focus my examination on religious diversity.

A. Religious Diversity

As is clear from the above data, religious diversity is ever more prevalent in Guatemala. The presence of a variety of religions other than Christianity in Guatemala portrays a religious spectrum that is

43. JORGE GÓMEZ, THE GROWTH AND THE DESERTION IN THE COSTA RICAN EVANGELICAL CHURCH, *available at* www.protestantedigital.com/hemeroteca/048/historias.htm (last visited Sept. 21, 2010).

44. *Id.*

45. *Id.*

46. *Id.*

47. *Id.*

very different from what the country was in previous decades, when it was essentially mono-religious.

Among the most recent entrants to the Guatemalan religious panorama is the Russian Orthodox Church. This demonstrates how the number of Christian churches, outside of Catholicism and Evangelicalism, is increasing. The number of mosques, synagogues, Buddhist temples, and other oriental congregations is also increasing.

B. Research Problem and Hypothesis

This Article focuses on the effects of the growing trend of increasing Protestant numbers and decreasing Catholic numbers. One main issue to investigate is: What are the main distinguishing elements that characterize the social conscience of believers in their relationship with the local church and religion of their preference, and which group of believers—Catholics or Evangelicals—has a greater identification with its religion?

1. General hypothesis

The Eastern region of the Republic, like a regional community, demonstrates that people's identification with religions is relatively different from the national average. The Eastern people who are practicing Catholics having greater identification with their religion, while the Protestants have a somewhat less strong identification, both compared to the national averages discussed above.

2. Particular hypotheses

1) Most inhabitants of the Eastern provinces identify with some organized religion.

2) The majority of believers belong to or identify with Catholicism.

3) Most non-believers were once members of Catholic or Evangelical churches.

4) The majority of Evangelical believers were once members of the Catholic Church.

5) Evangelical believers have a greater degree of identification with their church than Catholics.

6) Evangelical believers have a greater degree of identification with work than Catholics (following Weber).

7) Evangelical believers are more business-oriented than Catholics.

8) Most Evangelical believers live more frugal lives than Catholics.

9) Evangelical believers participate more in daily church activities than do Catholics.

10) Catholic believers are more likely than Evangelicals to view work as a curse from God to men.

C. Eastern Guatemala

Eastern Guatemala, as understood here⁴⁸ (which occupies a total area similar in size to the Republic of El Salvador), is home to almost two million people according to national census figures.⁴⁹ Although warmer and at a lower altitude than the West, it has a long mountainous range that modifies the relief, and gives it climate diversity and various ecosystems that introduce remarkable changes that often go unnoticed by the occasional tourist. The East borders with both El Salvador and Honduras. It is a center of commercial and touristic interchanges with those countries and, thus, is susceptible to outside influences.

All six provinces, or “departamentos” as they are called in Spanish, started from a common history, back in colonial times. They began as a part of the Province of Chiquimula, and later became one of several provinces making up “La Capitanía General de Guatemala.” La Capitanía General de Guatemala is the name by which the entire area making up Central America was known when it was ruled by the Spanish Crown, from 1520 to 1821. The Province of Chiquimula, whose territorial surface was considerable according to the limits that Domingo Juarros indicated, is described as follows: “To the west, the Verapaz; to the east, Comayagua; to the south, Escuintla, Sacatepéquez and Sonsonate; and the North Sea by the north course.”⁵⁰

48. Eastern Guatemala contains six provinces: El Progreso, Zacapa, Izabal, Chiquimula, Jutiapa, and Jalapa.

49. The area of El Salvador is 21,393 square kilometers, similar to the six Guatemalan provinces as a whole, which total 21,308 square kilometers. HUGO LEONEL RUANO, *TRAS LAS HUELLAS DE CHIMALAPA* 77 (Leon Palacios ed., 2008).

50. ROSA FLORES, *CHIQUIMULA EN LA HISTORIA* 45 (Jose de Pineda Ibarra ed., 1978).

1. *Ethnic diversity*

The presence of colonial life does not have to hide or ignore the pre-Hispanic past. I already quoted extensively from the ancient Kingdom of Chiquimulhá, also called Payaquí, whose kingdom included the six provinces of the East, the western portion of the republics of El Salvador, and Honduras. That kingdom mainly originated from recurrent migrations by Nahuas, an indigenous tribe whose center was located in the north, in what is now Mexico.⁵¹

Along the Motagua River, some antique ruins of Nahua culture have been excavated recently, such as San Cristóbal Acasaguastlán, Chimalapa, and others,⁵² whose language was Nahuatl or some derivative, such as Alaguilac. Along with these characteristics, other characteristics are present that surprise laypersons, even though they are well-known to archaeologists and scientists, due to the acknowledged fact that Guatemalan ruins are exclusively Mayan. But there is also the presence of a few Mayan cultures, like Chorties, living in some towns in the department of Chiquimula, and Pokomans in Jalapa.⁵³ In the Province of Izabal, there is a rich and flourishing sample of Caribbean culture, denominated “Garífuna,” that increases the ethnic diversity of this area.⁵⁴

2. *The social characteristics*

From an ethnic perspective, Eastern Guatemala is today mainly “Ladina,” a term used in Guatemala by academics and institutions to designate people with mixed ancestry, or “Mestizos” from white and Indian descent, although there is also a minority presence of indigenous people and Garífunas.⁵⁵ Most Eastern provinces would be classified within the intermediate level of poverty: El Progreso, Izabal, Zacapa, Chiquimula, and Jutiapa have poverty rates of 41.8%, 51.7%, 53.9%, 59.5% and 47.3%, respectively.⁵⁶ Jalapa has a higher figure, 76.35%, similar to the figures of the most impoverished

51. *Id.* at 20; *see also* HUGO LEONEL RUANO, *TRAS LAS HUELLAS DE CHIMALAPA, GUATEMALA, DE LEON PALACIOS 25* (Leon Palacios ed., 2008).

52. RUANO, *supra* note 49, at 77.

53. Ruano, *supra* note 1, at 86.

54. *Id.*

55. *Id.*

56. SECRETARÍA GENERAL DE PLANIFICACIÓN, *MAPAS DE POBREZA DE GUATEMALA* (2001).

Western provinces.⁵⁷ As far as human development is concerned, at first glance, the East is slightly below the rest of the country (0.603 as opposed to 0.608). When the Province of Guatemala⁵⁸ is excluded, however, the latter group's average drops to 0.592, extracting from this last group the Province of Guatemala, the average drops to 0.592, evidence that in 2002 the situation of the East was relatively better than the rest of the country. With regard to health, the East is relatively inferior to the rest of the country (0.638 as opposed to 0.673), even excluding the Province of Guatemala from the results.⁵⁹ As far as education, the index of the East is superior to the rest of the country (0.587 versus 0.572).⁶⁰ The same is true of income (0.586 versus 0.569).⁶¹

3. *The urban and rural worlds*

According to the latest census (2002), Guatemala as a nation continues to be a country whose population predominantly lives in rural areas, 54%, as opposed to 46% in urban areas.⁶² Those averages vary by province; in some the rural population rises to more than 70%. This is the case in Chiquimula, Jalapa, and Jutiapa. Although the national population density average is 103 people per square kilometer, Chiquimula, Jutiapa, and Jalapa are over the national average with averages of 127, 121, and 118 people per square kilometer, respectively.⁶³ Coincidentally, those provinces also have higher rates of rural population. This fact can be interpreted as creating higher pressure on land used by farming activities.

Additionally, the East has more paved roads than the national average.⁶⁴ Although there are some mountainous areas, the land in general is relatively flat, which has facilitated the development of a road network connecting most municipalities with the respective head city, an important fact that allows commodities and people to

57. These figures, calculated by a governmental institution called Segeplan, refer to the amount of the population living in poverty and extreme poverty.

58. The province of Guatemala is typically an outlier, which strongly affects the averages.

59. See SECRETARÍA GENERAL DE PLANIFICACIÓN, *supra* note 56.

60. *Id.*

61. *Id.*

62. See INSTITUTO NACIONAL DE ESTADÍSTICA, INE, LUGARES POBLADOS (2002).

63. *Id.*

64. See Ruano, *supra* note 1, at 91.

be transported to the nation's capital—the most important market of the whole country—and other points.

4. Catholic and Evangelical churches in the East

Many buildings near Catholic churches were built in colonial times. Although there have been some renovations because of wear-and-tear and the 1976 earthquake, few buildings have been constructed since colonial times. The buildings are generally big, and their cost of construction would today be extremely onerous. They are located along the central squares of the cities, just in front of the local political power, the *Municipalidad*.

In contrast, those buildings where the Evangelical churches function are generally far from the central squares. For obvious reasons, these buildings have been built after the Liberal Reformation in 1871. They are generally small, with low costs of construction and low operating expenses.

The total number of Catholic churches in the region is seventy, of which fifty-nine are located in urban towns and eleven in rural communities. In the case of Evangelical churches, the total reaches 1520 in the entire East, of which 376 are located in urban towns, and 1144 in rural communities. Based on these numbers, twenty-two Evangelical churches exist for every one Catholic church.

D. Findings

I conducted various studies to answer the research problem and to test the hypotheses.⁶⁵ The Catholic and Evangelical adherents

65. Several techniques were used by the author in order to answer the research question and the hypotheses presented previously. These techniques allowed data gathering in the six provinces of Eastern Guatemalan during November and December 2008. These techniques are as follows:

Survey research. A random and independent sample of 420 people was drawn from the population, giving all members an equal chance of being selected. As estimated, a sample of at least 400 would be needed in order to generalize validly from the sample to the population. A team of assistants was hired to make phone calls to the members of the sample, as selected from the phone book, following the questionnaire already elaborated by the author. This questionnaire was designed to determine religious affiliation, degree of religious identification, and other factors. A margin of error of +/- 4.5% is estimated. People selected were given freedom to choose the kind of religion they are affiliated with or have some identification with.

Local observation. The author visited both Catholic and Evangelical churches in some communities of the region in order to get acquainted with issues such as locations of buildings, facilities, social aspects of believers, size of buildings, and other factors. The churches were not randomly selected.

make up the demographic majority, and, for that reason, they are highly differentiated and diverse. Regarding occupation, housewives and employees are common in this demographic, as common in the whole population as in the subpopulations. They even have members in different education levels. The relative absence of illiteracy makes sense given the fact that, compared with the rest of the country, the East has one of the lowest rates of illiteracy. The case of people who are not Catholic or Protestant is seriously affected by its small statistical representation. And for people without religion, no province has illiterates. Housewives are the largest single group in both main religions (Catholicism and Protestantism), making up slightly more than 27%⁶⁶ of the corresponding population. For Catholics, the wage-earners come second with 26.5%, retailers are 14.8%, students and teachers are each 8.2%, retirees 7.3%, with other groups having a minor presence. For Evangelicals, wage-earners represent 19.9%, teachers 9.2%, and students 8.5%, with other occupations having minor representation.

In both religions, the average age is quite similar—42.1 for Catholics and 42.7 for Evangelicals—but it increases to 58.2 for members of another religion. People who claim no religion are generally younger, with an average age of 34.7 years.

1. Religious orientation

According to the data collected, the predominant religion in the region is Catholicism, making up 53.8% of the population, followed by Evangelicalism with 34.5%, other religions making up 1%, and people without religion totaling 10.7%.

The most traditional province is El Progreso, with the highest percentage of Catholics at 65.8%. This number is even higher than the national averages discussed previously. On the opposite end is Zacapa, with the lowest of 44.8%, which is lower than the national numbers. This fact is significant, inasmuch as Zacapa is host of a bishopric.⁶⁷ The remaining provinces are near the national average.

Personal interviews. These were conducted with local laymen of both churches, as well as priests and pastors. These people were not randomly selected.

66. Most of the statistical calculations have been carried out with the program SPSS, version 11.5.

67. The Diocese of Zacapa, which includes Zacapa and Chiquimula.

As far as Evangelicalism is concerned, El Progreso has the lowest percentage, 28.9%, which is perfectly logical given the situation previously explained. On the other end is Jutiapa, with 39%. There, the gap between Catholicism and Evangelicalism is only fourteen points, which is the lowest of the region and probably one of lowest of the whole country. The remaining provinces, with the exception of Chiquimula, are above the national average.

Other religions have little statistical presence in the region. In provinces such as El Progreso and Izabal, no individuals selected this category; in the rest, the highest figure is 2.6%, in Chiquimula.

In relation to inhabitants of the East that neither practice nor identify with any religion, the results are truly surprising, inasmuch as the percentages are above the national averages. In Zacapa and Chiquimula, for instance, the highest figures are found—15.5% and 14.5%, respectively. Izabal follows with 13.4%. El Progreso has the lowest ratio, with 5.3%. Other provinces fall somewhere in the middle.

Many nonbelievers confess previous enrollment in some religion. In fact, 26.6% come from the Catholic Church, 28.8% from an Evangelical church, and 2.2% from another religion.

What causes believers to move away from their religion? A significant number of people, 48.8%, affirm that “[t]hey do not need” religion in their life; another 6.6% were more specific and stated that their previous religion “defrauded them.” It is surprising that no participants claimed to be atheist.

Most Catholics in the survey have remained loyal to their church, with only 3.1% saying they came from Evangelical churches. Although most Evangelicals have also remained loyal to their churches, 26.9% of them came from the Catholic Church and 1% came from another religion. Of the few people who identify with another religion, 75% have identified with that religion “always,” and the rest came from Catholicism.

The numbers in these findings support the conclusion that both main churches, Catholic and Evangelical, are losing members to each other and to other churches. The Catholic Church, however, has lost the most.

As stated earlier, the focus of this Article is to determine the main distinguishing elements that characterize the social conscience of religious believers in relation to the local church and the religion of their preference. In addition, this Article seeks to determine which

group of believers, Catholic or Evangelical, has greater identification with its religion. In order to answer these questions, a study was conducted in Eastern Guatemala. In addition, a number of hypotheses have been presented to help better understand the religious outlay of the region, especially in relation to the Catholic and Evangelical religions.

Below is a short analysis of the findings of the study and a set of responses to the other hypotheses presented in the paper.

Hypothesis 1: Most inhabitants of the Eastern provinces identify with some religion. The findings show that 89.3% of the people from the East—nearly nine out of ten—identify themselves with some form of religion. Therefore, the data support this hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2: The majority of believers belong to or identify with Catholicism. According to the survey, 53.8% of the people are affiliated with the Catholic religion. Therefore, the data support this hypothesis also.

Hypothesis 3: Most nonbelievers came from Catholic or Evangelical churches. This hypothesis also receives support. According to the data collected, 26.6% of nonbelievers came from the Catholic Church, while another 28.8% of nonbelievers came from Evangelical churches. This results in a total of 55.4% of nonbelievers that once identified with either church.

Hypothesis 4: The majority of Evangelical believers were at one time members of the Catholic Church. This hypothesis is not supported by the findings, as just a little more than a quarter (26.8%) of Evangelical believers came from the Catholic Church.

2. Level of religious identification

*a. Degree of identification.*⁶⁸ The data demonstrate that there is a positive valuation of identification with institutionalized religions. In the case of the Catholic religion, a little more than a quarter (26.5%) of believers granted the highest score (10) to their identification with this church, while another quarter (24.3%) granted a lower positive score (8). In the case of Evangelical religions, an even greater number of believers (44.8%) identified with their religion by granting the highest score (10), while 17.2% of believers granted a lower positive score (8) to their identification.

68. A 10-point scale was used to measure this subject, with 10 being the strongest level of identification.

Few followers in both churches expressed a weak link (fewer than 5 points) with their preferred religion.

If we cross religious identification with religious affiliation, the following averages are obtained: Catholics 7.63 and Evangelicals 8.3. These figures suggest Evangelicals have a greater degree of identification with their religion than Catholics.

b. Participation in church activities. Participation in church activities also provides evidence of believer identification with religion because those who participate in church activities most likely identify themselves more strongly with their religion. Approximately 64% of Catholics describe themselves as participating “little” in church activities, while nearly 10% have “no” participation in those activities, and a quarter of the total say that they participate “a lot.” A little more than half of Evangelicals (52.4%) say that they participate “little,” 7.6% say they do not participate, and 40% say they participate “a lot.”

Hypothesis 5: Evangelical believers have a greater degree of identification with their church than Catholics. The results suggest that this hypothesis may be correct. But the main question is this: do the differences in the samples between Catholics and Evangelicals resemble actual differences in the population parameters?

The technique selected to make this determination is the chi square goodness-of-fit test.⁶⁹ The critical value is 15.1. According to the corresponding table, with nine degrees of freedom and an alpha of .05, the needed value to reject the null hypothesis of no difference in populations must be greater than or equal to 16.9.⁷⁰ Therefore, the null hypothesis is not rejected and both groups of believers are equal in terms of identification with their corresponding religion.

Hypothesis 6: Evangelical believers have a greater degree of identification with work than Catholics (following Weber). After all the calculations were made, the results included the following statistical means indicating degree of identification: 8.0 for Catholics and 7.89 for Evangelicals. These results are the opposite of what was

69. This is a test for assessing the statistical significance of cross-tabulated variables. It is based on a comparison between the observed cell frequencies of a cross-tabulation or joint contingency table and the frequencies that would be expected if the null hypothesis of no relationship was in fact true. See GEORGE BOHRNSTEDT & DAVID KNOKE, *STATISTICS FOR SOCIAL DATA ANALYSIS*, 106 (Peacock Publishers, 1985).

70. See *id.* at 453 (this refers to Table B. Critical Values of the Chi Square Test).

hypothesized. The critical value given by the chi square test is 10.4. According to the table, the minimum value for rejecting the null hypothesis of no difference between populations is 16.9. Therefore, both populations are equal concerning their identification with work.

Hypothesis 7: Evangelical believers are more business-oriented than Catholics. According to the results, there is disagreement among the two main religions when considering the content of the hypothesis. The findings provide evidence that seven out of ten Christians (either Catholics or Evangelicals) reject the supposed link between making money and participation within the church. For the Guatemalan Christians who live in the East, therefore, making enough money has no relation to religion. But what about the rest of the population? Again, using the chi square test resulted in a critical value of 1.3. According to the table, the value of 5.9 is obtained for an alpha of .05. Therefore, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected, and again both populations are equal in their interpretation of enterprise activity in relation to church activity.

The Evangelical Christians of Eastern Guatemala, therefore, agree with the Catholics and reject the correlation of business and religion.

Hypothesis 8: Most Evangelical believers live a more frugal life than Catholics. The average response was 6.8 for Catholics and 6.4 for Evangelicals. These figures are the opposite of the hypothesis. Again, the question is: are those sample differences representative of the whole population?

The results of the chi square test include the following: the critical value is 16.0. For nine degrees of freedom and an alpha .05, the minimum value to reject the null hypothesis is 16.9. So, again, the null hypothesis of no difference between the populations cannot be rejected. In other words, both groups of believers are equal on this matter.

Hypothesis 9: Evangelical believers participate more in daily church activities than Catholics. The calculated value is 8.4. Looking at the table for an alpha of .05 and 2 degrees of freedom, a minimum value of 5.9 is needed to reject the null hypothesis. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected and the research hypothesis is accepted. Evangelicals participate more in the daily activities of their church than Catholics.

Hypothesis 10: Catholic believers are more inclined than Evangelicals to assume that work is a curse from God to men. No

Evangelical surveyed believes that work is a curse from God, but a few Catholics do. Again, the customary statistical test indicates the critical value of 9.4. For an alpha of .05 and nine degrees of freedom, the minimum value to reject the null hypothesis⁷¹ is 16.9. Therefore, the null hypothesis is not rejected. Both populations are equal in this matter.

E. Analysis of the General Hypothesis

Before the study was conducted, the general hypothesis of the paper was that the Eastern region of the Republic, like a regional community, shows that people's identification with their religion is relatively different from the national average; specifically the data would show a greater preference for the Catholic religion and a smaller preference for Protestantism.

The census and Pew Global Forum measurements are separated by four years, with the Pew survey being more up to date. This is why the author reasons, with the Pew survey, that Catholicism in the East would be more prevalent than Catholicism nationally, and Evangelicalism of the East would be less prevalent than Evangelicalism nationally. Although the first general hypothesis is certain, the second is false. Therefore, the data support the general hypotheses only partially.

V. CONCLUSION

The findings confirm that most people in Eastern Guatemala practice some form of religion. Religion itself acts like social cement, shaping believers by means of constant interaction, uniting and identifying them as members of a social group, and setting limits on their natural selfishness. Thus, religion is not merely a false conscience or a kind of political manipulation coming from the upper social class. People adhere voluntarily to the religion of their preference and carry out their own rituals without perceiving any remuneration beyond the spiritual satisfaction of the individual conscience.

From the findings of this survey, we can glean that the Evangelical mentality does not surpass the Catholic mentality in regard to work or the combination of business with religion,

71. In this case it would indicate that both populations are equal. The alternative would reveal that the Catholics are inclined to believe that work is a divine curse.

contrary to what Max Weber averred in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.⁷² What is the reason behind this? Both churches strongly reject the Weberian ideas and stick to a mentality very much like the one Weber considered of as traditional and typical of Catholicism in Martin Luther's time.⁷³

Local members of the Catholic Church continue using the term "sect" indiscriminately to apply to all other religions,⁷⁴ regardless of the qualitative, theological, and historical differences among them. This use can be seen as a defense mechanism due to the social weakness and gradual loss of prestige which persists in spite of its enormous international and local institutional structure.

The Evangelical church—here viewed as a whole—has greatly benefitted from the spiritual emptiness left by the Catholic Church for the people living in the rural area of that part of the country.⁷⁵ The growth of Evangelicalism seems not to have a visible end, and in a couple of decades—if all other elements remain equal—Evangelicals could surpass Catholics and become the new dominant religion not only in the East but in the whole country. Thus, the Evangelical church bears the seeds of change and could provide a new cultural aspect to Guatemala.

On the other hand, the larger religions in the country unwillingly yield members to other religions; this movement is mainly, although not exclusively, from the Catholic Church to the Evangelical churches. This fact is observed as a symbol of steady decline, which conveys frustration and disappointment in the conscience of ex-believers. The believer's pilgrimage from church to church makes the

72. Max Weber considers modern, rational capitalism to be a product of the Reformation era and is qualitatively different from previous forms of capitalist endeavor. The Protestant Ethic thesis proposes, for example, that Protestantism nurtures individualism and some independence of familial ties, along with a powerful drive toward upward social mobility, while Catholicism reinforces the opposing sentiments of obedience to authority and reliance on members of the extended family. See MAX WEBER, *THE PROTESTANT ETHIC AND THE SPIRIT OF CAPITALISM* (Talcott Parsons trans., Dover 2003) (1958).

73. A reader must bear in mind that these conclusions come from data I collected myself, meaning that believers of local churches, both Catholic and Evangelical, are quite traditional on this point.

74. This statement refers to some local members of the Catholic Church. The term is applied to Christian churches but not to non-Christian religions such as Judaism, Islam, and others. See JESÚS MARÍA SARASA, *LOS PROTESTANTES EN GUATEMALA* 114 (1992).

75. By the term "spiritual emptiness" I am referring to colonial times, in which people living in rural communities were not spiritually supported by the Catholic Church, which was then the official church. See Ruano, *supra* note 1, at 150.

individual's conscience an orphan. What is the spiritual situation of these people? This question seeks a deep answer.

Does diversity lead Guatemala to secularization? The Guatemalan society shows some signs of secularization, contrary to some beliefs that this is an exclusively European matter.⁷⁶ There are more people that do not have interest in religion, and their numbers continue to increase rapidly. Part of this is certainly due to institutional religion—as indicated by the words of now nonbelievers—whose actions cause the migration out of the churches. How does the dissatisfaction with institutional religion prompt believers toward secularization? This is another question looking for a deeper answer.

A. A Recommendation for the Central Government in Light of the Changing Religious Panorama

The Guatemalan academy, which consists mainly of private universities, has already opened up to the study of current religious phenomena. Universities that have engaged in these studies include Rafael Landívar (a Catholic, Jesuit institution), Panamericana (an Evangelical institution), San Pablo (Evangelical), Mariano Gálvez (Evangelical), De El Istmo (Catholic), and Mesoamericana (Catholic). Perhaps among the major Guatemalan universities the lone exception is the University of San Carlos, a state-sponsored university that does not study religious phenomena.

The executive branch of the Central Government carries out population censuses periodically; these aid the study of the changing panorama and other social, cultural, and economic conditions in Guatemala. The most recent census was in 2002, and the following one will be in 2012. Censuses are carried out by the National Institute of Statistics, known as the INE. Thus, it is the INE that provides Guatemalan social researchers—and the interested public—with trustworthy and up-to-date information. However, the INE's censuses do not include a category for "religion," which, unfortunately, negatively impacts any study of the religious panorama by creating a dearth of reliable data. Having these data would not only aid scholars interested in the religious panorama but would also serve as a check for less reliable numbers produced in magazines, newspapers, and other media. The lack of information

76. *See supra* note 41 and accompanying text.

also affects the churches in a profound way because churches cannot perceive their strengths and weaknesses as viewed through the eyes of the citizenry.

It is my recommendation that the Central Government require the INE to add religion to its census questionnaire, so as to better aid the government, scholars, and religious institutions themselves in evaluating the ever-changing Guatemalan religious panorama.