BARELY FIVE YEARS had elapsed since the famed military caudillo from the eastern highlands of Guatemala, Rafael Carrera, had triumphed over his liberal enemies, in 1839, and set in motion a series of events that led to the establishment and consolidation of an independent republic of Guatemala. Now, neighboring El Salvador through military intervention threatened to reintegrate Guatemala to the Central American federation. During the events surrounding this 1844 military contest of wills, the Salvadoran president tried to entice the famed guerrilla priest Francisco González Lobos to join his forces in their goal to oust Carrera. One of Carrera's principal allies during the earlier successful insurrection, González Lobos had, since June 1841, served the Catholic parish in Jalapa, in eastern Guatemala, a potential battle line as Salvadoran troops advanced onto Guatemalan soil. In his response, González Lobos refused the Salvadoran's entreaty and reaffirmed his loyalty to Carrera and his willingness to die for la patria. A priest accompanying the Salvadoran president, who identified himself as the "Vicar of the Army," tried again to convince González Lobos to join up with the Salvadoran forces to liberate the Guatemalan people from its oppressor. González Lobos curtly responded, "I am Guatemalan, I love my country and for her I will risk my life, especially when her rights are threatened."  
González Lobos gave vent to his "irritation" (caused, he said, by the enemies of his patria who committed wrongs in its sacred territory) and concluded that he hoped to see the invaders receive their just punishment. He had clearly taken "Guatemala" as the focus of his loyalty.

Less than two decades later, the influential Guatemalan bishop Juan José
de Aycinena would cultivate a theology incorporating views not dissimilar to these popular sentiments expressed by González Lobos and other rural clergymen in Guatemala. Aycinena reflected on Guatemala’s covenant with God in an 1861 sermon commemorating independence from Spain. Unscathed by the fires of Independence while firmly defending the faith of the Catholic church, he claimed Guatemala had been divinely chosen and protected like the biblical Israel, so long as it defended God’s laws. Aycinena asked rhetorically:

What more could a nation desire than what this magnificent promise offers? . . . God is no less just nor less liberal with us than for the Hebrew nation who served as an example of what the Christian church had to become. The church is a chosen people, redeemed from slavery worse than that suffered in Egypt and sanctified with the precious blood of its Divine Liberator. Behold the reason why our republic, being a Catholic congregation, has the right to appropriate the divine promise, and if we fulfill the divine condition—and time will tell—God will not change the rules: He will reward the good and punish the evil doing.

Religious discourse during the Carrera years explicitly evolved an understanding of nation. A faith-based piety among the clergy served as the catalyst for this emerging nationalist spirit, and political circumstances pushed the religious leaders toward such a position. Capital city and rural clergy cultivated a nationalist sentiment in order to create meaning out of a fluid political situation and they sought to protect their weakened institution from the continuing secular offensive by Central American liberals. Theology affected the political spectrum, and Guatemala’s political struggles shaped the clerics’ theological understanding of events.

Since the first moments of the insurrection against the Central American federation in 1837, the issue of religion became a crucial question identifying the protagonists in the contest for social transformation. In his formal platform of grievances against the liberal government, Carrera listed the restoration of the church and the protection of its religion as his desiderata. Other contemporary Guatemalans played down the role of religion and focused on local complaints as the prime mover of revolt. Clearly, the clergy played some role in the insurrection and subsequent consolidation of the republic; but to what degree?

“Religion” and “popular religiosity” by themselves do not explain the so-
cial upheaval that eventually undermined the Central American federation. Religiosity—interwined with the historic ethnic and political struggle between Spanish conquerors and indigenous peoples—made Guatemala’s nineteenth century distinctive. The Spanish drive to conquer the indigenous peoples of Guatemala set in motion a historic religious struggle between Spanish Christianity and the Maya religious understanding of the world. Records indicate that some of the diverse linguistic communities eventually adopted and shared many of the basic Christian tenets, whereas others rejected wholeheartedly any attempt to yield their religious understandings to those of the European conqueror. Given the liberal measures against the Catholic church in the first decades after Independence, clerical presence and authority declined in many of the indigenous communities. Many now witnessed open rebellion to the Catholic church among the indigenous peoples. In some areas indigenous religious leaders even donned Catholic clerical apparel and performed services to the Sun God within the Catholic church buildings.

If these indigenous communities rejected Catholicism, what linked them to the emerging Guatemalan nation? Certainly no religious discourse emanating from Spanish descendants could have convinced them to be loyal to a greater community. Rather, their ethnic identification with the mestizo leader Rafael Carrera created a powerful alliance. Rafael Carrera’s predisposition to favor the Indian peoples in return for their support created a formidable link with his program. For example, he did not hesitate to yank out of the highland communities any clerics who provoked displeasure among the indigenous peoples. Carrera sought out the right recipe to brew an alliance between the indigenous communities of the western highlands and the growing ladino populations of the east.

Children of Spanish and Indian unions—mestizos—emerged as a third distinctive ethnic group in the post-Independence struggle. Popularly known as ladinos, this middle group also included indigenous peoples who spoke Spanish and who gradually lost an identifiable sense of common cultural past. First language, then class and color distinguished this emerging political force. As Spanish speakers, ladinos were quickly identified (and stereotyped) by European travelers in the early nineteenth century as a distinct social group yielding considerable power. One such traveler, Henry Dunn, anticipated the coming showdown between the white creoles, children of Spanish colonists, and the ladinos. Ladinos, Dunn asserted, were “the physical force” of the nation, capable of uniting “an energy to which the simple Indian is altogether a stranger,” and that “inflated with new ideas of liberty
and citizenship, and at the same time shut out, both by colour and character, from the councils and society of the Whites, [they] must be dangerous to the state."

When Carrera’s largely mestizo force first occupied Guatemala City in February 1838, the white elite in the city saw only “barbarians” and “Indians” who shouted “Long live religion!” and “Death to foreigners!” Carrera had coalesced the nascent political force of the emerging mestizos with many of his indigenous admirers. Understanding how Carrera nourished and accomplished the multiethnic coalition among Indians and ladinos is crucial to any understanding of the influence of religion upon the development of the Guatemalan nation. A peculiar and fascinating blend of power politics and religion unique to Latin America in the nineteenth century merged to construct a multiethnic and multiclass alliance and assured the emergence of the Guatemalan nation. Understanding this phenomenon requires both a look into the historical context of the Carrera period and a review of some of the theoretical issues inspiring these questions.

Background

Various indigenous kingdoms were etched upon the territory that now comprises contemporary Guatemala, long before Spanish conquerors reached its shores in 1524. Descendants of the ancient Maya Empire—Quiché, Cakchiquel, Mam, Tzutuhil, and Kekchi peoples—settled amid picturesque volcanic mountains and valleys, fighting each other and forming alliances when necessary. The arrival of the Spanish conqueror Pedro Alvarado heralded one of the bloodiest chapters in the conquest of indigenous groups in the Americas. Protected by its steep mountain precipice, a large homogeneous highland population was protected from the depopulation that occurred among their counterparts in the lowlands, who were either decimated by disease or shipped off to labor in the mines of South America.

The Catholic church played a critical part in the conquest. Early missionaries made a name for themselves, especially the Dominican Bartolomé de las Casas who set about defending the integrity of indigenous peoples from the avarice of Spanish colonists while working for their peaceful submission to the crown. Catholic officials established Guatemala’s bishopric in 1534, suffragan to Seville, and later, in 1547, to Mexico. In 1743 Guatemala’s Catholic church became independent of Mexico’s bishopric, and the other churches in Central America now answered to ecclesiastical authorities in Guatemala.
The Catholic church struggled desperately for the loyalty of one of the largest concentrations of Indian peoples in Latin America. Franciscan, Mercedarian, and Dominican missionaries combed the hills and valleys in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, consolidating the indigenous communities into manageable towns. Inga Clendinnen’s *Ambivalent Conquest* clearly demonstrates that resistance flowered among the ancient Maya. It did not take the form of open confrontation but assumed more subtle forms. Many Indians took refuge in the popular religious sodalities, *cofradías*, to ensure a certain degree of autonomy and popular religiosity, while others openly challenged Catholic hegemony. When, in the mid-nineteenth century Father Vicente Hernández went to Momostenango to recommence the work of the church, the Indians balked at his attempts to win them over. When informed that Hernández planned to baptize the Indians there, they curtly refused: “the turkeys and other animals were fat and healthy, and hadn’t been baptized.”

Ever since the conquest, two groups had vied for power in the area: Spanish and Indian communities. Children of Spanish colonists, *creoles*, waivered between their father’s homeland and their own birthland, while Indian communities resisted, shared, or acquiesced to the dominating Spanish presence. Spanish-speaking ladinos (or mestizos), the emerging political force of the nineteenth century, did not hesitate to identify with Guatemala against Spain.

These social groups clustered according to the geographical limitations and resources of the territory. While Spanish-speaking communities settled in the central and eastern highlands, the indigenous communities survived the political and cultural invasion in the western highlands. In turn, geography affected patterns of settlement with respect to the mountain highlands and the humid lowlands. Creoles and ladinos came to dominate the central and eastern highland areas of Guatemala City, Sacatepéquez, Jalapa, Santa Rosa, El Progreso, and Chiquimula (see map 1). The majority of the indigenous peoples lived in the western mountainous areas of Huehuetenango, San Marcos, Totonicapan, Quiché, Quezaltenango, Sololá, Chimaltenango, and the central highland area of present-day Alta and Baja Verapaz. Difficult climatic conditions impeded large concentrations of Spanish-speaking and indigenous people in the humid lowland areas of Retalhuleu, Suchitepéquez, Escuintla, Zacapa, Izabal, and El Petén.

During the colonial era, regular and secular clergy followed these settlement patterns. Regular clergy, those who were bound by vows and who lived in community according to the rules of the monastic body, migrated to
higher concentrations of indigenous peoples. The secular clergy, those priests not bound by vows who lived in the world and owed canonical obedience to their bishops, settled with the growing Spanish-speaking peoples of the east. 10

These divisions deeply shaped the political and religious history of Guatemala. Spanish and creole elites searched long and hard for an export product that would enable them to link up to the world market and share in

Map 1. Geographical Regions of Guatemala
international trade. After the collapse of the indigenous slave trade and the few gold mines in Honduras, settlers invested in cacao as their principal product. But a sporadic market played havoc with the entrepreneurs on the Central American isthmus.\textsuperscript{11}

Another answer to this historical quest rested with the export of colorants. By the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, indigo and cochineal (supplemented by cattle and sheep) formed the basis of the economy. Merchants within the colonial jurisdiction (Audiencia) of Guatemala traded through New Spain (Mexico) until the eighteenth-century depression forced them to link with Europe by other avenues. The late eighteenth-century indigo boom enhanced commercial ties to Europe through the Caribbean, thus fostering a certain economic independence from New Spain. With the creation of the Consulado de Comercio (merchant guild) in 1773, Guatemalan merchants could now deal directly with their European counterparts rather than through intermediaries in New Spain. But the market for indigo also disappeared. Cochineal in the nineteenth century and coffee and bananas for the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries were produced with similar hopes of finding a viable export product to produce sufficient wealth for the merchant and elite class.\textsuperscript{12}

The whole Central American territory, governed by the Audiencia of Guatemala, remained an appendage to New Spain’s economy and political life during the colonial period. With the reform instituted under the Bourbon king Charles III (1759–1788), separate administrative districts (intendances) were formed in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Honduras, while Guatemala retained the superior rank of a captaincy general. These administrative districts eventually formed the basis of the emerging nations of the nineteenth century. With the coming of independence from Spain in 1821, Spanish and creoles struggled to create new alliances to govern the territory.

For a brief stint the Central American territory remained loyal to the Iturbide regime of Mexico. But upon the collapse of the Mexican empire in 1823, the Central American elite formed an all-too-fragile Central American federation. Wars soon tested this alliance, and not until the victory of the Honduran Francisco Morazán in 1829 did the federation secure a certain stability essential to its governance.\textsuperscript{13}

The years of Morazán’s federation have received much attention from historians. Classic liberal policies and incipient state formation characterized nineteenth-century Latin America. Guided by the European notions of citizenship and representative government, Morazán and his ally Mariano Gálvez in Guatemala sought to bring the Central American federation into
the league of nations through modernization. The colonial religious institution felt the immediate blow of Morazán’s policies of secularization as he exiled the archbishop to Havana, closed down most male and female regular orders, suspended the collection of the tithe, and expropriated clerical property. Marriage soon became a civil ceremony, with divorce proceedings permitted in civil court. A modern judicial system was implemented in Guatemala with the hopes of promoting trial by jury. Development of the nascent state’s infrastructure—road and jail construction—fell too quickly on the underclass of poor ladinos and Indians.14

One of the most devastating chapters of this story, when combined with other top-down policies, led to the 1837 insurrection. With hopes of furthering Guatemala’s ties to Europe and attracting more European settlers to the isthmus, the Gálvez administration gave away large portions of Guatemala’s arable land to a fly-by-night British colonization company. The company failed miserably, but this could not overshadow the implication of the state-initiated policy: foreigners—Protestant by faith—were making headway in an area where arable land was growing scarcer by the day.15

The 1837 cholera epidemic became the flashpoint for popular demands. Rising from the eastern mountains of Guatemala, rebels from Mataquesquintla led by the former pig-herder Rafael Carrera challenged the legitimacy of the Gálvez state in June 1837. Although the capital elite attempted to calm the fears of the insurrectionists through last-minute legal measures ceding to the demands of the rebels, Carrera’s insurgents continued their march toward the capital, occupying it in February 1838. Carrera forced Gálvez to resign from the presidency. Due to the commotion in the capital city, a sixth Central American state—Los Altos, made up of Quezaltenango, Totonicapan, Sololá, and the province of Soconusco in Mexico—declared its independence from Guatemala.16

From February 1838 through March 1840, much blood was shed in Guatemala. Morazán rallied his forces from El Salvador to regain control in Guatemala, challenged Carrera successfully through 1838, and forced the peasant’s army into retreat and surrender by December. But following this retreat to his home base in Mataquesquintla, Carrera rebuilt his force and retook Guatemala City in April 1839, driving Morazán’s soldiers back into El Salvador. Morazán’s last military effort to overcome Carrera came in March 1840, when he and his troops made up principally of Salvadorans and Hondurans attacked Carrera’s forces in Guatemala City. With his final defeat in the plaza of Guatemala City, Morazán’s hopes of a Central American federation folded. As Morazán fled the country toward El Salvador, Carrera turned
on the breakaway state of Los Altos and brutally suppressed the white elite into submission.17

Although Carrera did not formally assume the presidency until 1844 he basically ruled Guatemala. He initiated the restoration of the Catholic church, invited the exiled archbishop to return from Havana, made way for the return of the regular orders, and approved the recommencement of the dreaded tithe. Still, relations between Carrera and church leaders were quite shaky during the first decade of his rule.

Carrera’s supporters grew weary of the caudillo’s politics, which appeared to favor the city elite, and by October 1847 open rebellion erupted once again in the eastern highlands. In August 1848 Carrera exiled himself for a year to the indigenous highlands of Mexico in Tuxtlá Gutierrez while Guatemala began to disintegrate. The department of Chiquimula became an autonomous military district; several mountain caudillos vied for power in the eastern highlands. A shaky coalition governed the capital of Guatemala and soon fell prey to warring factions. Los Altos again briefly attempted to break away, but all such plans were scuttled by the returning Carrera who, backed by a strong indigenous force, reentered the capital and took control in August 1849, this time for good. By the beginning of 1851, Carrera had soundly defeated the various factions, although some of his disgruntled opponents joined forces with the invading troops of El Salvador and Honduras for a final showdown at La Arada in February 1851. Carrera’s impressive military victory silenced most opposition for the next fifteen years.18

The early 1850s were boom years for the cochineal industry in Guatemala, and Carrera’s popularity soared. By 1854 he had been appointed president for life and had arranged a concordat with Rome granting him patronage rights over the Catholic church. The caudillo consolidated control over the whole country, and even the devastating 1857 cholera outbreak did not catalyze any popular movement to oust the military dictator. The pinnacle of Carrera’s presidency came with the resounding defeat of liberal El Salvador in October 1863, when Carrera attacked his ideological opponents, invaded El Salvador, and removed its president from power. Carrera returned in triumph as his achievement was hailed as a glorious victory for the country.

Carrera’s life came to an abrupt end by natural causes on Good Friday; in April 1865 he was buried amid much pomp and circumstance.19 His successor, Vicente Cerna, who had governed Chiquimula as its chief magistrate, moved to carry forward a country that was now switching from a colorant-based economy to one relying on the export of coffee. Military challenges
based in the western highlands soon threatened the conservative government, as liberal elites led by Serapio Cruz, Justo Rufino Barrios, and Miguel García Grenados led a series of efforts to oust the government. Although Cerna’s forces fought loyally in battle, his charisma was no match for the newly imported repeating rifles that carried his opponents to victory.20

The conservative decades ended as liberal ideologues resurrected the failed hopes of the Morazán years. Once again liberals suspended the tithe, closed down most regular religious orders, and exiled the archbishop. The Barrios state moved quickly to assure secure land for coffee growers and a reliable, coerced workforce. The Indians, who had enjoyed a limited autonomy in Guatemala under Carrera’s supervision, were now forced to accommodate to changing circumstances. Communal land suffered a systematic attack as the Barrios government definitively linked Guatemalan economy to the world market. Integration, not autonomy, became the political creed as the dominant group sought to transform the Indians into Spanish-speaking ladinos. Yet Barrios’s dream of unifying Central America never materialized. The conservative contribution remains unaltered to this day: the formation of the Guatemalan nation.21

**Historiographical Analysis**

The role of Carrera in nineteenth-century Guatemala and the working relationship Carrera maintained with the multifaceted Catholic church has evoked much passionate and at times demagogic historical analysis. By his vitriolic critique of the Carrera period and the clerical role in that conservative regime, the nineteenth-century Guatemalan Lorenzo Montúfar determined how much of Guatemalan history would be written with a negative eye toward Carrera and the Catholic church.22 In the last twenty years a number of insightful studies of the Carrera insurrection in the late 1830s have reappraised the Carrera phenomenon and, thereby, reshaped much of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Guatemalan historiography. Ingersoll, Miceli, Palma Murga, Solórzano, Woodward, and Burns have challenged those Guatemalan histories that bury the insurrectional and popular character of the Carrera revolt. They shed new light on Carrera’s victorious challenge to the liberal federation, which had instituted reform with little popular support and alienated a majority of the indigenous and growing ladino population.23

This historical research has also raised more questions concerning the role of the church, challenging the traditional anticlerical perspective ac-
ccording to which the "ignorant" Carrera was a mere tool of the priests. Ingersoll contrasted the rural clergy's support of Carrera with the hierarchy's fearful and resistant acquiescence to the powerful caudillo. Woodward and Solórzano expanded Ingersoll's analysis by focusing on the religious dimension of the popular 1839 insurrection, but they did not examine the multi-faceted nature of clerical response. Woodward noted that the priests "were in the vanguard of the uprising" of a "revolution that became a religious crusade"; Solórzano concluded that religion served as the uprising's "catalytic ideology." Palma Murga undermined Montúfar's image of a powerful church and subservient Carrera by focusing on the church's shaky economic recovery during the Carrera years.

Other studies of the Catholic church in Guatemala have bypassed the conservative years. Mary Holleran's 1949 analysis of church-state issues merely noted the resurgence of Catholic power during the Carrera years. Hubert Miller's *La iglesia católica y el estado en Guatemala, 1871–1885* initiated his research with the advent of the second repression endured by the church under Justo Rufino Barrios in the 1870s. David Chandler studied the elite Juan José de Aycinena and delved into some of the theoretical underpinnings of this influential priest's work but provided no overall analytical framework necessary for an understanding of the Catholic church during the Carrera years.

Other historical works have filled some missing holes. Agustín Estrada Monroy's three-volume work on *Datos para la historia de la iglesia en Guatemala* provides a perspective on mission activity and conflicts in the Guatemalan Catholic church. Portions of rare church documents published in his three volumes facilitate an apologetic history of the church. Despite these pioneering works, the quantity of historical analyses dealing with the Catholic church and the Carrera regime is remarkably small. One new perspective anchored in liberation theology has produced some valuable contributions to the study of the church in Central America. Enrique Dussel's series on the *Historia general de la iglesia en América Latina* includes an invaluable volume dedicated exclusively to the Central American church from the colonial period through the revolutionary 1970s and 1980s. Recently opened Catholic archives provide the opportunity to address anew the many historiographical questions associated with the nineteenth-century Catholic church.

Past research has dealt with the question of the emerging nation and national discourse in Guatemala by focusing on either the 1830s liberal Gálvez administration or the triumphant Barrios regime in 1871, bypassing the Car-
rera regime altogether. The Guatemalan Julio Pinto Soria tackled the failed liberal project of the Central American nation. Pinto Soria’s work embodied certain “Morazan” aspirations by analyzing state-formation within the large territory of Central America and not delving into why the fragmentation of this geopolitical space led to the formation of seven different states. Severo Martínez Peláez in his classic _La patria del criollo_ completely skipped the Carrera years in his concluding analysis. In his significantly titled work “A Liberal Discipline: Inventing Nations in Guatemala and Costa Rica, 1870–1900,” Palmer pondered why “nationalism did not occupy a privileged realm of political and cultural discourse in either Guatemala or Costa Rica until nearly fifty years of post-colonial existence had passed.” He concluded that creoles made no effort to “foment a sense of shared identity in a trans-local manner” because they had no nationalist vision. 29

Although Ralph Woodward accepted “Central America” as his unit of analysis, in _Central America, a Nation Divided_, he initiated the break with classic liberal ideology by proposing that the foundation of the Guatemalan nation rested with the conservative Carrera period. Woodward concluded that “Carrera’s emphasis on state nationalism and autonomous government survives to the present day, the one great victory of nineteenth-century Conservatism.” 30 Carrying forward this initial insight, Woodward later completed his exhaustive study of _Rafael Carrera and the Emergence of the Republic of Guatemala, 1821–1871_. In this monograph he accounted for the balkanization of Central America and the development of authoritarian and militarist patterns common to contemporary Guatemala. He argued that the political power of the regime hinged almost exclusively on the caudillo and a force of rural peasants. Limited by the inaccessibility of archives in the Catholic church, Woodward could only sense the religious fervor cultivated in eastern Guatemala during the Carrera years. 31

Juan Carlos Solórzano determined that a “proto-nationalism” was at work in the 1837 insurrection when “a nationalist sentiment accompanied a religious emotion.” 32 Lowell Gudmundson picked up on this notion and pondered just why members of the Liberal party were so incapable of developing “a series of images, an identity, a discourse capable of galvanizing mass support.” Gudmundson concluded that “Catholic discourse appeared more credible” and that church leaders and conservatives developed a “rudimentary national consciousness.” 33 Carol Smith asserted, in her “Origins of the National Question in Guatemala,” that Guatemala under Carrera was unified nationally as never before in Central America. 34 Through coercive methods and popular support, she argued, Carrera impeded complete creole con-
trol of the political economy. Still, Smith claimed that Carrera did not develop a coherent populist ideology. She missed Gudmundson’s insight that many of the leading Catholic clerics did this for him, developing a nationalist discourse during the thirty-year conservative regime, especially after the bloody confrontations of 1847–1851 in Guatemala’s eastern region.

Carrera came to depend upon, even demanded, that clerics occupy parishes in war-torn areas in order to pacify the region. He assumed that the priestly message and vision would convince and unify the disparate factions dismantling Guatemala. In response, the clergy invented and elicited a nationalist notion of Guatemala during the Carrera period, especially among ladinos in eastern Guatemala.

Several important theoretical issues arise as a part of this investigation, and they require clarification, especially since an essential part of the historian’s task is to arrive at some general conclusions based on the evidence of the particular. Reading the historical text, specifically society’s text as it occurred one hundred and fifty years ago, requires historians to engage in hermeneutics, that is, in interpretation, “not a simple return to the past, but a new event of disclosure.” Historians do not “objectively” reconstruct the past, but they engage the past and bring to the engagement many presuppositions. These operating assumptions become the very bridge through which communication takes place. The old notion of a subject-object dualism that posited a pristine, unbiased event beyond the historian and the social text has long been challenged. Today, historians must acknowledge their prejudices and use them positively to enter the multiple layers of meaning embodied within the historical event.

The theoretical dualism that long sustained historical and sociological research consequentially reduced religion to its source in order to understand the “true” nature of the forces gripping the individual. The classical theoreticians of religion Marx, Durkheim, and Weber, each wrestling in diverse ways with the task of explaining the nature of the religious event, fundamentally agreed on their common goal: to discover the basis of religion in economics, society, and ethics. Religiosity reflected individual attempts to understand or cope with large social forces. Religion thus became a “false” or “naive” understanding of the forces affecting the individual. Other theoreticians, basing themselves on philosophical hermeneutics, have rejected this reductionist approach and considered religion integral to humanity’s quest for meaning. Striving for the “thick descriptions” of symbols in the societal text, theoreticians such as Clifford Geertz, Paul Ricouer, and Victor Turner refused to reduce symbolism to any other aspect of reality and ventured in
quest of interpretations that explore the wealth of meaning contained in each particular situation.\textsuperscript{37}

Yet some pitfalls surround the investigation of meaning. Consistency and replicability have been the hallmarks of empirical positivism, where the work of a historian withstands the cross-examination of colleagues as they work with the same texts. Those concerned exclusively with meaning fall short in this respect. As Robert Wuthnow wrote, one individual’s understanding of an event changes often and is too idiosyncratic. Unless they can be linked to broad trends, generalizations based on individuals do not hold much weight. How then do historians move from the individual to the more observable features of culture? Wuthnow suggests in his analysis that “discourse, communication, and the dramatization of power through the symbolic aspects of social institutions” provide an appropriate means by which one can enrich and deepen the search for meaning.\textsuperscript{38} In a similar vein Roger Chartier concludes in his analysis Cultural History: Between Practices and Representations that historians are thus freed to ponder “how, in different times and places, a specific social reality was constructed, how people conceived of it and how they interpreted it to others.”\textsuperscript{39}

This investigation proposes to do just that: to study how elite religious discourse and ritual constructed and imparted meaning to the masses during the crucial nation-building period; and to examine how and to what extent that message was popularly appropriated, shared, or rejected. Methodological questions immediately arise in light of such a proposition. How can one talk of observable features of popular appropriation or rejection if a majority of the populace was illiterate or did not have the technological means to communicate through the printed medium? To be sure, empirically verifiable written material produced by the masses does not exist. Yet the nature of conflict and elite response to any type of social breach becomes itself a medium of expression. Revolts against the relocation of cemeteries outside the village become the focal point of protest during the implementation of the Gálvez social policies in the 1830s. Riots and destruction of the new cemeteries are themselves “texts” written by the masses. Cholera epidemics become the match for the combustible fuel of tense social relations in 1837 but do not bring about a similar sustained revolt in 1857. In the same way, Carrera’s ability to mobilize an army to invade El Salvador in 1863 becomes another expression of popular support. Even though no one will ever know just exactly what a peasant soldier was thinking on the eve of battle, the fact that he participated represents a certain victory for the dominant group who welcomed his support.
E. J. Hobsbawm analyzed "nations" and "nationalism" in light of the "invented tradition." He wanted to uncover how dominant groups create a link with the past in order to legitimate the present through rules and rituals. "Historical novelty implies innovation" and the historian's task is to delve into the dynamics of this social invention. Ernest Gellner concluded that such innovation may imply the destruction of other communities. "Nations," added Gellner, "as a natural, God-given way of classifying men, as an inherent political destiny, are a myth; nationalism, sometimes takes pre-existing cultures and turns them into nations, sometimes invents them, and often obliterates pre-existing cultures; that is a reality." Gellner and even Hobsbawm weakened their formulation by implying that the exercise of nation formation requires in all instances a certain fabrication, that true community is not the nation.

Here, Benedict Anderson's definition of the nation goes beyond their conceptualization. Anderson perceived the nation as an "imagined political community." Anderson thus emphasized the act of creation in nation formation and did not limit it exclusively to an act of falsification. The community is imagined, since no single member can know every member, and it is imagined as communal because, "regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship." In his study of nations and nationalism Anderson queried why "over the past two centuries, so many millions of people have been willing to die for such limited imaginings?" Florencia Mallon responded indirectly to this question in her work "Nationalist and Antistate Coalitions in the War of the Pacific." She analyzed how peasants from the central highlands of Peru fought the foreign invaders from Chile in order to defend their homes and fields. She defined these movements as nationalist because "they fought against a foreign invader, calling on an alliance of classes to join together in defense of a common interest they termed Peruvian." Mallon concluded that a sharpened sense of belonging to a community occurs when one group wishes to appropriate its neighbor's resources.

In *Creating the Nation in Provincial France: Religion and Political Identity in Brittany*, Caroline Ford pondered why historians have been so quick to accept the implicit bias of modernization theory, which posits an urban elite modernizing the backward and rural population into "modern forms" of political behavior. Also building upon Anderson's thesis, Ford demonstrated how peripheral regions in France did not uniformly adopt ideas emanating from the capital. Rather, the peripheral region contributed, through the im-
petus of religious values and leaders, to the creation of new political and cultural forms grounded in local tradition, and it thus redefined the republic.\textsuperscript{47}

For the purpose of this work, Anderson's definition of nation as an imagined political community enables the historian to understand the formation of the Guatemalan nation during the Carrera years. The essential dynamic relevant to this analysis becomes the community's identification over and against the foreigner, whether it be a Protestant colonist seeking land or the Salvadoran foot soldier threatening to pillage a village's resources. Ladinos in eastern Guatemala, motivated by fear and religious conviction, participated in the making of the republic.

The current geopolitical boundaries of the Guatemalan nation are not an unquestionable fact. The social groups who imagine political communities often make claims to territories that exceed the boundaries of their real communities. In short, the relationship between those people who identified themselves as Guatemalans and the geopolitical territorial unit known as Guatemala varied. During the Carrera years, multiple claims by different social actors were made upon the territorial resources in Guatemala. Yet those who engaged in battle against El Salvador and Honduras originated principally from the central and eastern highlands and developed a keener nationalist sense of being Guatemalan. The indigenous communities did not participate in overwhelming numbers against the Salvadoran troops. Rather, their territorial claims pitted them against creoles and ladinos. These communities saw in Carrera an ally against the white settlers, and they proved the backbone of Carrera's troops in the 1837 insurrection and in Carrera's pacification of the rebellion during Guatemala's civil war (1848–1851). Carrera, a "man-god" figure for many of these groups, became the medium by which these groups identified with a larger space than the one they lived in. A "protonationalism" and a "nationalism" developed jointly in Guatemala. Two different regions, with different but similar pressures, were linked to the caudillo in the formation of the Guatemalan nation.\textsuperscript{48}

One last theoretical consideration concerns the sociological dynamic of secularization and sacralization. Anderson sees secularization as an innate part of the nation-building process. Dynastic realms and religious communities lost their cohesiveness when impacted by economic changes, social and scientific discoveries, and technological innovations (for example, the printing press). The written script was no longer a possession of the privileged alone but became more available to the common person; hierarchical orders were subverted with notions of common citizenship; and the inseparability
of cosmology and history gave way to competing understandings rooted in the notion of progress. 49

With the fall of the Spanish crown, and the rise of social groups looking to form some type of political community, liberals who defended the Central American federation of the 1820s and 1830s heralded the commonality of all citizens, public discourse, and the secularization of the state apparatus previously so closely allied with the Catholic church. Indeed, the sacred gave way to the secular. But the collapse of this political community and the rise of several nations from the ashes of the Central American federation suggest a sacred/secular dialectic. Although religion as an institution loses its hegemony to the emerging secular state, religion as a cultural force continues to wield power in society. The shift from a kind of theocracy (the Spanish monarchy ruling with divine sanction over an empire) to a nation that is divinely chosen evidences this fascinating dialectic between secularization and sacralization. 50

This investigation will show the influence of religion on the formation of the Guatemalan nation by examining the relationship between Carrera and the church and the religious discourse supporting Carrera’s nation-building regime. A topical approach to the research illuminates the historic dynamics of continuity and discontinuity within the institutional church, among indigenous and ladino peoples as they responded to the cholera epidemics of 1837 and 1857, within religious discourse itself over a forty-year period, and in a crucial analysis of caudillo politics and religious fervor in Guatemala’s eastern highlands. Chapter 2 is an institutional analysis of the Catholic church’s attempt to revitalize itself after a decade of repression prior to Carrera. The church was partially successful in reconstructing its institutional base in the key eastern highlands where Carrera, tested by the civil war of 1847–1851, came to depend upon the pacifying message of the clergy. Chapter 3 addresses popular protests during the liberal and Carrera years by examining cemetery revolts and cholera rebellions. In most instances, liberal failure and Carrera’s success depended upon the relationship between the church and those in power. Whereas the liberal federation alienated itself from popular religiosity, Carrera and the clergy worked toward a creative blend of religious “revivals” and caudillo politics. Chapter 4 examines how the Guatemalan clerics invented and evolved the nationalist notion of Guatemala during the Carrera period, how elite and popular challenges to this discourse emerged, and how the church propagated its religious and political message through pastoral visits. Chapter 5 examines how church work-
ers, who initially resisted an alliance with the caudillo, moved to provide the military strongman the backing essential to the preservation of the republic in the face of external liberal threats. The crucial constituency within the eastern highlands demonstrated a nationalist fervor when confronting the “foreigner” in war and responded favorably to Carrera and to the church. Building upon the previous chapters, the final chapter examines how the conservative regime fell to a liberal regime of “Remingtons and Winchesters” in 1871. Although defeated, the ladinos in eastern Guatemala never yielded their popular religiosity. Bishops and clergy would soon be exiled, but the liberal regime was forced to repress and hold in check the “religious fanaticism” of Guatemala’s eastern highlands.