Believers and Neighbors: “Huaycán Is One and No One Shall Divide It”
Contrary to the argument that evangelical Christianity is inherently apolitical or conservative, evangicals in a new pueblo on Lima’s periphery extended political mobilization to negotiating with municipal authorities, Catholic neighbors, and even Sendero Luminoso to define political and ideological space in the new neighborhood. Yet differences within and among denominations kept them from permanently coordinating their political activism. This case highlights the nature of citizenship building and political participation for evangicals in Peru.

Rethinking Transnationalism: Reconstructing National Identities Among Peruvian Catholics in New Jersey
Transnationalism has made significant contributions to the study of immigration, but it has failed to recognize the importance of the multiethnic, multicultural context of host societies in the construction of immigrants’ identities. Two Peruvian Catholic religious brotherhoods in Paterson, New Jersey, illustrate individual and collective identities that transcend traditional notions of nationality through complex relations with Latino immigrants from other nations. Religion contributes to the articulation of a pan-Latino identity in the host society.

Popular Religions and the Building of Democracy in Latin America: Saving the Tocquevillian Parallel
Do Latin America’s popular religions contribute to the formation of citizens and the development of civil society—the infrastructure of democracy—in ways that parallel the operation of the religious factor in the development of North American democracy as perceived by Tocqueville? Examining evidence prompting both negative and positive responses, this essay argues that Catholicism, Pentecostalism, and Afro-Brazilian Spiritism all contain tendencies that contribute to the development of pluralist democracy in the Latin American republics.
On July 15, 1984, two thousand families grouped into 23 associations of residents from the eastern edge of Lima moved onto the land around Huaycán ravine, located off kilometer 16.5 of the nation's central highway, to create the asentamiento humano (human settlement) of Huaycán. The occupation had the approval of the Provincial Municipality of Lima, led by Mayor Alfonso Barrantes of the United Left coalition. This was a project of urban joint management, through which the leftist municipal government responded to the demands of the residents of the city's eastern zone for a place to live.

Moved by the promise of attaining a dignified way of life, thousands of residents, migrants' children born in Lima, embarked on the adventure of building a new community. Among them were evangelical Protestants who, with their Catholic and "nonbelieving" fellow settlers, were willing to work to achieve their dream of owning a home. The new settlers in Huaycán came from popular (working-class) neighborhoods where diverse Christian beliefs had coexisted for the last 20 or 30 years; that is, the residents' "common sense" had allowed for the existence of religious differences. That common sense, however, was far less charitable toward the expansive missionary zeal of the evangelical residents and their criticism of Catholic beliefs and customs.

For the evangelicals, this presented a predicament. To secure their ideological and political space in their new neighborhood, evangelicals had to define themselves against the dominant Catholic culture. They had to go against the common sense that finds it "natural" to set aside sites for Catholic churches among the public institutions when planning a new community. Indeed, Protestants could not request assignment of a public area because they were not considered a neighborhood service, as was the Catholic Church. Today, 15 years after their arrival, evangelicals have achieved a certain degree of success, founding 35 temples throughout Huaycán. But the process has been gradual.

Huaycán developed under precarious social, political, and infrastructural conditions. Those conditions, and the evangelicals' participation in that development, brought them together to negotiate the
recognition of their religious differences within the new political-secular community. Yet although they shared common demands and valued collective action, the evangelicals had difficulty consolidating a permanent level of coordination that would allow them to present their claims in a way that would produce lasting results.

This point is important because it sheds light on the process of citizenship building for evangelicals in Peru. The Peruvian Constitution recognizes the right to religious differences, but at the same time it maintains a preferential relationship with the Catholic Church. Although the evangelicals feel comparatively excluded, however, it is still hard for them to take concrete actions that would turn their experiences of exclusion into a concerted set of demands on the state.

The political participation of evangelicals in Latin America has received much attention of late. Earlier studies that emphasized evangelicals' apolitical or conservative nature have given way to more nuanced views. For example, Burdick's 1993 study of Pentecostals in Brazil has shown that in some settings, Pentecostals are just as likely (and perhaps even more likely) to become involved in progressive political movements as are members of Catholic base communities. Similarly, Ireland (1997) argues that different Pentecostal logics can inform at least three types of citizenship, including a "critical citizenship" that encourages civic engagement. Nevertheless, Ireland points to the limitations of such involvement beyond the local level (see Ireland and Vásquez in this issue). This study of evangelical politics in Huaycán adopts a similarly nuanced view, demonstrating both the possibilities and the limits of evangelical political participation.

A local pastor estimates that the evangelicals in Huaycán constitute approximately 2 percent of the population. This figure is low, considering that in the entire Ate-Vitarte district, where Huaycán is situated, evangelicals are about 6 percent of the population. However, the dynamism of evangelicals seeking, in recent years, to legitimize their presence in a mainly Catholic environment makes them seem more numerous to their Huaycán neighbors. Unlike the Catholic residents, evangelicals have felt the need to reiterate that they are "part of the neighborhood."

A wide spectrum of Protestant churches are represented in the area. Among them, the Assemblies of God of Peru and the Evangelical Church of Peru (Iglesia Evangélica Peruana, IEP) have been prominent for their dynamic outreach and pastoral efforts. The Assemblies are a Pentecostal denomination whose first church in Peru was founded in 1922 by a North American missionary. Since the 1970s, however, Peruvian pastors, or "brothers" (hermanos), have been in charge of the denominational structure. It is the largest Protestant denomination in Peru. In Huaycán the Assemblies have five churches.
The second-largest Protestant group, the IEP, is a non-Pentecostal denomination organized in Peru in 1922 through the efforts of a foreign missionary group in which Scottish Presbyterians were prominent. From the Presbyterians the IEP derives its doctrinal orientation and organizational structure. The church administration is now in Peruvian hands. In Huaycán four churches have been established.

The social composition of the Assemblies and the IEP is similar: they both have a strong national presence, especially among the lower-middle and poorer sectors of the population. During the last two decades, the Assemblies have maintained a strong pattern of growth while IEP has followed a more moderate course.

Because of these churches' growth and vitality, this study of evangelicals' political participation concentrated on these two denominations. The research was conducted between August 1997 and February 1998. Fifteen of the 35 churches of Huaycán were visited, and the more intensive work was carried out in three congregations of the Assemblies of God and three of the IEP. Testimonies gathered in the six churches were selected by means of open-ended, confidential interviews with a total of 15 people, 8 men and 7 women. Subjects were asked about their religious beliefs and practices and their involvement in community organizations, with the aim of finding links between religious affiliation and political action.

The subjects were between the ages of 30 and 45. Most of them had participated in the initial occupation of Huaycán on July 15, 1984, except four who had arrived during the next three years. Only two had not finished their elementary education. Eight had secondary education, and five had some type of higher education. Today, four of the interviewees are pastors, five have some pastoral responsibility in their respective churches, and three hold leadership positions in local social organizations. In order to corroborate the findings, informal interviews were also conducted with other members of the churches visited. Selections from those interviews are quoted in this article.

HUAYCÁN IN THE EYE OF THE STORM

During its first years, the Huaycán settlement was the focal point of conflicting expectations and diverse, even antagonistic projects. One was the political expectations of the first leftist municipal government of Lima, the national capital. Another was the political-military project of Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path), the powerful Maoist guerrilla insurgency that terrorized the country from 1980 until 1992, to occupy the capital. A third was the demands of an increasingly dissatisfied urban population for land, housing, and amenities.
With Huaycan, the municipal government was realizing a proposal to meet the population's demands through legal means, taking advantage of its authority to administer uncultivated land belonging to the state. By doing this, the municipal government hoped to prove its capabilities to large sectors of the population, demonstrating that it could manage the city and respond to public demands without resorting to illegalities. Expectations were high, particularly in light of the presidential elections of 1985, when the United Left saw the municipal government as a step toward the presidency of the republic.

Because of this context, the occupation of the land in Huaycan was backed by a written agreement between the associations of residents and the municipality (see Calderón and Olivera Cárdenas 1989; Municipalidad de Lima 1984). According to the document, the residents agreed to abide by the urban planning design proposed by the municipality, and in return, the municipality agreed to support their settlement legally. To achieve the expected goals, a technical team was put in charge of negotiating the joint management of the project with the residents.

The urban plan for the municipality proposed the active participation of the population, organized in units of 60 families, not only in the planning stage but also in the provision of facilities. As such, the plan required a tight-knit management organization. At the same time, it opened the door for the different political groups in Huaycan to compete for control and management of the project.

The process of establishing the organization, however, was directly affected by Peru's environment of political violence. Situated on the central highway, the route that connects Lima with the Andean regions to the east, Huaycan was strategically important to Sendero Luminoso. This is the route that links Lima with the interior of the country, along which travel most of the food supplies to the capital and the mineral production from the sierra. For Sendero, to control this area meant the possibility of controlling one of the main arteries to the city. Soon after Huaycan's neighborhood organization had been established, Sendero decided to establish a "base of resistance" in Huaycán as part of its strategy to "surround the city." This was among the first sections of Lima that Sendero occupied, with the goal of establishing "support bases" in others.

The expectations of Huaycan residents were also high; their hopes for progress were at stake. Residents of the popular neighborhoods on Lima's eastern edge and children of migrants joined groups of public school teachers and urban employees to fight for their interests. According to a self-conducted census in 1985, the residents were a young population with some urban experience: 48 percent of the heads of household had been born in Lima, 49 percent were younger than 18, and 35 percent were between 19 and 35 (Asociación de Pobladores 1986).
These were mainly poor people who hoped to own a parcel of land. Although they needed housing, they were used to having some of the basic services, such as electricity, water, transportation, schools, and medical clinics, although these may have been inadequate and insufficient. Having grown up in the city, many had political experience and were ready to demand that the municipality fulfill its agreements. The municipal project for Huaycán appeared capable of satisfying these demands; but although the Lima Municipality planned to carry out the agreements promptly (especially to give title to the lots and provide electricity and water), it took some years to attain its goal, and development was piecemeal.7

All these circumstances caused dissatisfaction and uncertainty for Huacán’s residents. The paradoxical combination of dreams of progress, discontent, and uncertainty also reflected the economic and political crisis of the period. Between 1985 and 1990, the percentage of households defined as poor in metropolitan Lima—that is, the families that could not meet the minimum nutritional requirements—increased from 16.9 percent to 44 percent (Blondet 1992). The government of President Alan García (1985–90), which began its tenure with high expectations for more equitable economic development, ended in economic turmoil and an annual inflation rate of over 2,000 percent. The structural adjustment program implemented by the succeeding government of Alberto Fujimori only aggravated poverty without providing a social compensation plan to make it bearable.

Economic crisis, combined with political violence in the sierra, fueled massive migration to urban areas. Settlements on the periphery of Lima, like Huaycán, experienced explosive growth. Groups displaced by the violence began arriving in 1986. These new settlers were poor rural peasants, some of them Quechua-speaking Indians knowing little Spanish, lacking urban experience, and bearing the stigma of coming from “red zones” (areas already controlled by Sendero). Ironically, Huaycán itself bore the same label while Sendero held power in the area.

Lima’s municipal government was ill prepared to deal with the increasing influx of migrants, which taxed the city’s already inadequate infrastructure. Life in the new settlements was characterized by high levels of unemployment, a lack of basic services, housing shortages, violent crime, and infectious diseases. Although community-based movements were instrumental in pressuring the government to improve conditions, the disintegration of the United Left by 1990 deprived them of an important source of support (Stokes 1995).

The established political parties also lost legitimacy with the public during the economic crisis, if they did not collapse altogether. Whereas during the 1980s the traditional parties regularly polled more than 80 percent of the total vote in elections, by 1995 their combined vote had
fallen to less than 15 percent. Cameron argues that the collapse of traditional parties was related to the crisis of the formal economy and the growth of the informal sector, which

undertook partisan loyalties, broke the tenuous linkages between parties and civil society, interrupted the traditional channels of communication between ruling elites and masses, and weakened the class cleavage by reducing the militancy of workers, undermining organization, and inhibiting collective action. (1997, 42)

Increasingly, poor Peruvians turned to independent candidates and became less inclined to participate in public demonstrations or state-directed petitions sponsored by political parties or movements (Dietz 1998).

Sendero Luminoso took advantage of the increasing discontent and uncertainty, alternatively challenging and negotiating with leaders of the various leftist groups in communities like Huaycán. Sendero sought confrontation with the government; to accomplish this, it tried simultaneously to convince and intimidate residents. Sendero fueled conflicts and exploited the weaknesses of Huaycán’s neighborhood organizations; for example, the struggle between late-arriving settlers, who had to scramble for patches of land, and nonresident builders and cooperatives that had entered during earlier phases (Smith 1992, 137). In response, leftist leaders, competing among themselves, vacillated in their demands on the government, at times publicly demanding the fulfillment of agreements made with the municipality, at other times calling for tight controls over neighborhood activities. This complex power struggle forced residents to align themselves with one or another of the groups. For those who served as community leaders, the struggle between Sendero and local leftist leaders turned their job into a political minefield. To make the situation more unsafe, Huaycán was subjected to successive military operations.

Between 1988 and 1990, Sendero concentrated all its efforts toward taking over the central management of Huaycán. It was defeated, however, by the residents, a majority of whom, in the neighborhood elections, backed a conglomerate of the United Left and APRA (the American Popular Revolutionary Alliance). Sendero thereby lost its chance at political hegemony in Huaycán, even though it maintained a presence and some influence in the area.

This is the setting in which the evangelicals had to build a place for themselves in Huaycán, to demonstrate that they were part of the population, and thereby gain the right to have their differences recognized.
FINDING UNITY IN NEIGHBORHOOD

“Huaycán is one and no one shall divide it!” With this slogan the residents marched through the center of Lima to demand basic services. With the same theme, they remember today the epic of building the neighborhood.

The evangelicals and their neighbors interviewed for this study were convinced that Huaycán, contrary to other similar urban settlements, had “progressed” in only 13 years. In their opinion, this happened through the unity they all achieved to press for the provision of facilities; this, they believe, is why today they have basic services. They also are convinced that their solidarity was nourished by their own neighborhood efforts and the spirited work of all, even though the right to occupy a lot for residence depended on participation in the assemblies of residents and the public protests—a strategy and duty established by the neighborhood leadership. According to one interview subject, “the [neighborhood] leaders also put pressure on us. Because we did not have a title on which to rely, they would tell us, when we needed to go to a march, ‘if you do not go, if you do not protest, tomorrow I will get you out of your lot and you leave.’” This enforced responsibility to participate in a political act is valued today, in hindsight, as necessary to the extent that it was successful. In the words of one evangelical:

We have had to take by force, march so that we are heard . . . a baby cries because he is hungry, if he does not cry and is quiet, the mother does not remember. We have had to employ this tactic so that we are heard.

In their interpretation of their neighborhood participation, evangelicals associate the effectiveness of the political action with the lessons learned in the neighborhood organization. “[The organization] is what has taught us to unite . . . . and that unity also puts pressure on the authorities, that is what it has taught us, what is lacking in other places.”

Being regarded as residents of a “red zone” also united evangelicals with their neighbors. Today it reminds them of the injustice of being rejected for jobs or sometimes even detained as presumed terrorists because of where they lived. Today, evangelicals associate the “red zone” with the courage of their neighborhood organization, their leaders’ ability to minimize the effective presence of Senderistas, and, once again, the importance of unity as a way to see their demands met.

[We] were putting pressure on the government in a united way; for this reason we would get results. Then people from the outside would brand us: ‘that town is rebellious, that town is red,’ [but] thanks to our unity we achieved everything.

A crucial element for the evangelicals was, however, the legal justification of their participation. “Defending a just cause and rights cannot be terrorist, [but] because of that many branded Huaycán as terrorist,” said
one. The “just cause and rights” were defended, on the one hand, because the settlement of Huaycán “was not like an invasion. Many claim Huaycán residents are squatters, [but] we have occupied this land with the authorization of the municipality.” On the other hand, it was established that “we own this place because it has cost us many sacrifices . . . for these reasons we feel the right to protest.”

In the tension between the anxiety of being branded as “reds” and the certainty of occupying the territory legally, having forged their right to possession through their work, the evangelicals understood their neighborhood participation as Christian testimony.

OBLIGATION TO GOD AND SOCIETY

“Even though we are evangelicals, we have never been isolated . . . we have always participated,” says a leader of the Vaso de Leche (Glass of Milk) program of her evangelical brothers and sisters. It could be argued that they participated solely because they were forced to, but this does not seem to be the case. While evangelicals did not join the various neighborhood organizations under the label of a particular church, their participation had two points of reference: the conviction of their right to be there and their faith. In the words of a former neighborhood leader who today is a pastor,

we also teach our brothers that if there is a job to be done to benefit our organization or the community, we need to participate willingly, because that is the duty of the Christian, to participate for the self-improvement of our community, for the betterment of our people; that is, like a Christian, not as if you are afraid of someone but as if it needs to be done! With pleasure as if for God, that is what is practiced.

These ideas of self-improvement and the Christian duty of service to the community have guided evangelicals in assuming leadership positions in their neighborhood organizations. Some volunteered; others were nominated by their neighbors. Many rose to intermediate-level positions, which required them to assume leadership in tasks involving political negotiations within Huaycán.

This role was not simple for Huaycán’s evangelicals. Helping to manage the conflict for control of the neighborhood required them to work with the various political groups, each of which pressured them to support its particular project. On the one hand, the evangelicals risked adopting the positions of the extreme left or even the Senderistas. On the other hand, they were subject to the negative views held by those same groups about religion in general and the evangelicals in particular. Sendero disparaged religion as the proverbial “opiate of the people”; leftist leaders assumed that the evangelical churches taught their followers to abstain from political participation. Both these groups thought, moreover, that the evangelical
message could weaken their legitimacy with a sector of the population. Meanwhile, the evangelicals, motivated largely by the need to define themselves, understood their neighborhood participation in terms of a testimony of Christian life, trying to distance themselves from “the political” by means of being “an example.”

We do not consider this in a political manner, we do not see it from that point of view, but we understand, on the contrary, that we Christians have to be examples . . . [have to] comply with our [neighborly] duties, we also need to be at the assemblies . . . [to] fulfill our responsibilities to society. God also commands this.

The evangelicals were reticent to participate as political leaders: “the leader has been appointed to serve and assist the people, not for the leader to serve himself and live off the people.” Therefore they configured their own neighborhood participation as a service, an “example.”

Behaving as an exemplary Christian is a difficult task. An exemplary Christian does not just abide by the leaders’ decisions; “to serve the people,” an exemplary Christian must discuss the proposals presented by the different political groups, reject “radical” proposals, denounce bad administration, and overcome fear, threats, and criticism.

We need to be an example in the good things but not the negative things. We always had to put a stop to the things we were not in agreement with . . . [to] become strong; just because you are an evangelical you don’t have to be subjugated, trampled on.

In their neighborhood participation, the evangelicals tested their traditional public image as good neighbors, moderate and discreet. This image was challenged when they tried to behave in exemplary fashion.

[Just] because we are Christians . . . we don’t need to be crouched in a corner, without saying “This is my voice!” We are individuals also, and . . . I believe that wherever it is just we always need to say “this is my voice” . . . that is the way we have always participated here.

In addition to their belief that they had earned the right to their place in Huaycán, evangelicals also emphasized their conviction of having served the community as neighbor-believers. The feeling of belonging to the Huaycán community was rooted in these two claims. Participation in neighborhood management, moreover, exposed them to arguments (from the left) about equality and the legitimacy of demand and protest; it also taught them that through protest and negotiations it is possible to achieve demands. Consequently, it is worth asking if the experience of exclusion, which they attributed to their status as evangelicals, forced them to develop new methods of coordination that would allow them to solve their own common problems and accomplish medium-term projects.

Exemplary Christians also obey God, however, by building churches and preaching to expand their congregations’ influence, thereby gaining recognition through their evangelical identity. Because pastoral work was
always plagued with difficulties, it is also worth asking whether their civic
experiences had a bearing on the way the evangelicals established their
churches in Huaycán.

**EVANGELICAL UNITY**

Initially, in 1984, only one group of the Assemblies of God could negotiate
with Huaycán's leaders for a parcel of land for its church (on what is called
"the business strip" in the center of Huaycán). It was "the first church, along
with the Catholic church," says one of its members. For this reason, it was
the meeting place of the first evangelical settlers in Huaycán. Believers
from different denominations congregated there because it was practically
impossible to travel to their home districts to attend services; the settlement
lacked public transportation.

Some brothers came from different churches, Chosica, Vitarte, Naña,
Morón; that is, all had their meeting place in this church. But because
they came with different points of view, unity was not seen there; they
came with their point of view: "No, I am from the Assemblies [of God],"
or another would say, "I am Pentecostal," "I am from the Peruan
[IEP]."

These members of disparate Pentecostal churches had to learn to
"praise the Lord" in a style that would let all of them feel recognized.
Although they accepted each other as evangelicals, they brought with them
different denominational experiences. Each group recognized the need to
bring new members to its specific church and, to a certain extent, knew
the theological and liturgical differences that divided them. Under these
circumstances, it was not easy to reconcile all of them in one common
service and even more difficult to organize them as a single congregation.

This collective experience lasted a short time, however, true to the
sectarian pattern common to evangelicals. As they found each other,
believers of the same denomination began to congregate independently,
generally at a member's home. All the evangelicals recall this period in
positive terms as a common starting point.

If sharing a roof was problematic, preaching and conversion were
worse. The neighborhood requirement of carrying out their assigned tasks
and attending meetings in the evening and on Sundays left little time for
pastoral and ritual activities. There was also the ominous presence of
Sendero Luminoso, which disapproved of prayer meetings or bible study.
On various occasions, Sendero threatened evangelicals for congregating
during its "armed strikes" (paros armados), but they sought strength in
their faith and overcame their fear.

We were threatened with death. Once the pastor was preaching and
they [Sendero] left a flyer that said: "If you quit preaching the gospel
nothing will happen to you, but if you continue preaching the gospel
and do not move to another place, you will have to face the consequences" . . . but it is there where we can see that God's word says "if for my sake you are killed, I will be with you every day until the end and only the brave will inherit the Kingdom of Heaven."

The evangelicals learned to defend their theological convictions even in front of leftists and nonbelievers who joined the congregations and participated in the religious meetings. These agents provocateurs questioned evangelical beliefs, seeking to discredit them in the eyes of the congregation.

A great part of the settlers who came here were persons who had other ideologies, they were atheists, did not have a god, they denied the existence of God, and we had to struggle against them, well, not through fistfights, but by prayer. We had to fast and pray so that we would have the strength to talk to them. But in spite of this difficulty, we have always tried to do outreach.

Because of the threat of violence, institutional ties between the churches in Huaycán and their regional counterparts were very weak at the beginning. Today, "the brothers" recall the times they went to churches outside Huaycán to request support for pastoral work. Their efforts were unsuccessful: because the petitioners lived in a red zone, the pastors of those churches, with few exceptions, were unwilling to venture into Huaycán. Other regional churches probably also decided that the effort was worth little because evangelicals in the settlement were few. Thus Huaycán's evangelicals were left to cooperate with each other to fulfill their pastoral requirements and increase their membership.

We mainly have tried to remain with the ones that are here, because I invited a brother from outside to give his support to us and he said, "No, brother, it is very dangerous." Then we were with God because whoever is with God fears nothing.

To all of this must be added the difficulty of securing land assigned for the evangelical temples. One pastor also served as neighborhood leader for many years, gaining great acceptance as a civic leader. According to his neighbors and other neighborhood leaders, this pastor had great influence and was capable of controlling meetings even when the Senderistas pushed their proposals. Nevertheless, he had to negotiate for three years to get a parcel of land, during which time his congregation was evicted from two other places. Finally, the congregation acquired a lot through a transfer (paying the owner for the right to occupy it). The pastor declared that his petition had found no support in the neighborhood meetings.

They did not want to have an evangelical church. That was the point: the people did not want it. In the first place, they said that this [lot] was for housing and there cannot be evangelical organizations . . . there was a rejection, they made it known they were Catholics, they made
it known they did not want anything to do with things of the [evangelical] church, that it was going to keep them from sleeping, that [the congregants] were going to make too much noise . . . some [leaders] belonged to the Left and [said that they] did not want anything to do with religion.

Huaycán’s urban plan did not provide for evangelical churches. Nor was it easy to obtain commercial lots, because these, unlike residential lots, required payment. In addition, the tenants had to demonstrate that the commercial lots would bring financial benefit to a family in need. Their best hope was to negotiate in the neighborhood assemblies for spaces designated for family houses. In all cases, evangelicals needed to procure an “exception” to the urban plan, which was obtainable only through the approval of the neighborhood leaders and their immediate neighbors. This was all the more difficult when the evangelicals were preaching against the Catholic faith of those neighbors. For this reason, most Protestant churches relied on land transfers to acquire lots.

In the face of these difficulties, an agenda of common demands began to take shape as evangelicals began to coordinate their activities. The process resembled that followed by other Protestant groups in Lima, but the singularity of Huaycán is that when remembering and evaluating these activities (in particular those conducted up to the 1990s), evangelicals recognize them as part of a shared history, emphasizing that their true significance lies in how they disregarded the intradenominational boundaries.

Thus a second milestone in the collective memory is the first evangelizing campaign, in 1986. “At the height of terrorism we organized an evangelical campaign,” remembers one brother. The campaign included fasting and prayer meetings to gain strength and overcome fear. In that way, and in the dark—Huaycán still had no electricity—they gathered the courage to venture, for the first time, into all populated areas, preaching from house to house, putting themselves at risk to try to convince even “persons who had other beliefs or were atheists.” Various denominations participated,

not because they were going to preach their institutional beliefs, but because we were going to preach the gospel. Everyone supported this, they knew that there was going to be a campaign and all would go. No one said: “I belong to the Assembly [of God],” or “I am Pentecostal.” No, all were in support. Because of this, I can see the unity there.

United in their evangelizing efforts, residents with different ecclesiastical and social backgrounds identified themselves as part of a common project. Their differences faded, and they shared their demands as evangelicals. In this manner, evangelicals forged their own presence in Huaycán, combining periods of unity and cooperation with periods of competition, centering on the development and consolidation of the
various congregations. Through this tense combination of unity and competition the number of evangelicals grew, as new temples sprang up (especially those of the Independent Pentecostal Churches). The Assemblies of God and the IEP obtained sites in various parts of the district. Their ties with their regional institutions outside Huaycán also strengthened, partly because of their growth in numbers but mostly because of Sendero Luminoso’s loss of hegemony in the area.

In these improving circumstances, in 1992 and 1993, the evangelicals launched a second campaign, this one a daring public effort to pressure Huaycán’s local government to recognize them as “neighbor-believers.” No longer the timid settlers of 1986, the evangelicals had learned to negotiate amid political conflicts, handle the leftist discourse of equality, and obtain homes and land for their churches.

The local Assemblies of God organized the public campaign in mid-1992, supported by regional churches, IEP congregations, and various independent Pentecostal churches. Coordinating their tasks, the churches carried out a myriad of initiatives ranging from small campaigns lasting several months in particular locations to evangelization from house to house year-round to a major public event in the center of Huaycán.

Recognizing the energy and expectations generated by this mobilization, the pastors of 11 participating churches agreed to join together as the United Evangelical Church of Huaycán. The group comprised pastors and members of the IEP and independent Pentecostal churches. The United Church appointed a board of directors. The presidency fell to a member of the IEP, who was also an ex-member of the Central Executive Council of Huaycán’s neighborhood government.

According to some “brothers,” pastors from the Assemblies of God also participated initially. Even though everyone desired unity in principle, however, the Assemblies of God churches withdrew from the new association, disapproving of the unified church. Initially, unity was a strategy to sustain and coordinate the campaign the Assemblies had convened, but later, the initiative became institutionalized in a format that seemed to contradict the Assemblies’ own interests. The name “United Evangelical Church” suggested the integration of the various churches into one single “church,” all under the control of whoever happened to preside over the directorate. This also privileged the association’s leaders, making them seem to represent the evangelical “community” of Huaycán as a whole. In particular, the Assemblies of God pastors did not trust the president of this “United Evangelical Church,” with his government experience; they feared he would utilize the church as a personal platform.9

Despite this setback—or maybe precisely because of it—in mid-1993 the directors of the new evangelical association asked the Huaycán neighborhood government to include evangelicals in the annual July 15
celebration commemorating the first settlement. The negotiations required courage, for evangelicals rarely demanded a place beside the Catholic Church in public celebrations. The association president took the initiative.

[I asked] one of the central directors if they practiced democracy, and he said, "of course." I said [that] well after the mass, after the religious ceremony of the mass, which was conducted by the Catholic Church, that they should give us an opportunity because we are also part of the town! And he said, "That is not a problem, we will give you a place."

The political significance of demanding participation in this symbolic act is clear, given that in Peru, traditionally, public or state celebrations, such as the commemoration of national independence, always include events organized by the Catholic Church.

To the surprise of many, on July 15, 1993, at center stage, beside district and neighborhood authorities, a pastor addressed the gathering in the name of the United Evangelical Church of Huaycán. Afterward, in the parade, behind groups from the area's social organizations and civic institutions, marched the evangelicals: youth, children, and adults, following a banner that also read “United Evangelical Church of Huaycán.” In the words of one interview subject, “all of us singing with our bibles [held] high arrived at the stage, and to the authorities we presented full bibles, and we were well received.” The Assemblies of God did not participate in this activity as a denomination, but some of its members marched in the parade.

The participants agreed that appearing in the parade was important to show the Huaycán community “the existence of people of God.” The evangelicals differed, however, in their interpretation of the parade's deeper meaning. Some emphasized the aspect of conversion: parading was “a manner in which one is making it known that God has acted upon us”; that is, a way of proclaiming that even when “all are created by God, few are God's children.” In this sense, they publicly distinguished themselves from their neighbors who had not yet opted to “give themselves to God.” Others stressed evangelicals' desire to be included—in their difference—as Huaycán residents, “at least being considered part of the anniversary program,” and demonstrating their solidarity.

These different emphases did not automatically correspond to denominational differences, for members of all the churches echoed both responses. The different interpretations do, however, appear to be linked with the experience of neighborhood leadership. This, in turn, corresponds with ways of dealing with exclusion or injustice and living as a Christian example. Those who offered the first interpretation had not occupied leadership positions; for them, evangelicals must denounce (levantar sus voces) situations of exclusion and injustice. This denunciation is predicated on the conversion experience and on evangelicals' self-
distinction from worldly affairs. The second group believed that evangelicals must act, becoming more directly involved in the secular world. Said one,

The Bible says that if for preaching the Word of God someone slaps my face, I should offer my other cheek, but the Bible says that if there is an injustice, I am not going to offer the other [cheek], I am going to give him a beating, because God is fair and as God’s children we are not going to allow injustices.

Participating in the parade, using the banner and the Bible as identifying symbols expressed a deliberate attempt to construct a “community of belonging.” As Cohen (1985) observes, the community is a symbolic configuration that selects some common traits, with which all members identify, to show differences from others, while at the same time emphasizing the group’s uniqueness. Cohen adds that the effectiveness of the chosen symbols stems from the different ways they can be interpreted; they can evoke the myriad experiences of the participants without dividing the group. In this manner, the community can embrace differences by integrating them through a common reference point. In Huaycán, the notion of a “Unified Evangelical Church of Huaycán” served all those purposes. The complex combination of unity and difference explains why all the evangelicals interviewed agreed that “when there is unity everything is accomplished.” Many can therefore remember the parade as the pinnacle of Huaycán’s evangelical unity.

The success of the parade appearance convinced the United Evangelical Church that it was possible to organize evangelicals around a strong idea: from sharing a history, evangelicals could expand their range of influence and thereby strengthen their position to demand recognition in community affairs.

To begin increasing their influence, the church leaders arranged for a donation of bibles from the Gideons and staged a massive distribution campaign. Fifteen thousand New Testaments were distributed in the schools of Huaycán and the adjacent urban settlements of Horacio Zevallos, El Descanso, and Santa Clara. To carry out this undertaking, the congregations in Huaycán coordinated their actions and enlisted the help of evangelical teachers working in the district public schools. The impact of this undertaking must have been unusual, for even people who, as youths during that time, supported the work of the Catholic base communities vividly remember the power of the campaign.

Despite this and other successes, however, the evangelical association had a relatively short life. The United Evangelical Church participated in the July 15 parade for two more years and continued to convene joint services once a month. Attendance at these services declined, however, and the United Church thereby lost strength among its own flock. Eventually, the association also lost its legitimacy as a mediator for negotiating the evangelicals’ specific local demands.
What lessons about the relationship between religion and politics can we draw from the case of Huaycán? More specifically, what is the impact of affiliation with, and participation in, evangelical Protestantism in settings like Huaycán, characterized by poverty, violence, and fragmentation?

We might argue that what happened in Huaycán fits the tendency among evangelicals to unite in conversion or healing campaigns and to disperse afterward. That is, we can understand the events in purely strategic terms: evangelical Protestants create a sense of unity principally in response not to secular politics but to a dominant Catholic environment (Kamsteeg 1993). This reading makes sense for Huaycán: unity came when the evangelicals needed to put aside their differences at particularly difficult junctures in their struggle to carve out their own legitimate space in the religious environment. Subsequent disunion or dispersion corresponds to periods of “normalcy,” moments when members focused on the daily lives of their own congregations.

This interpretation, however, is insufficient for Huaycán (and similar cases in Peru) because it neglects an important dimension: the Catholic Church’s privileged place in relation to the Peruvian state and the public sphere. In this context, actions taken to strengthen the evangelical churches’ position in the religious field potentially will have political implications, affecting the configuration of the local civil society. The United Evangelical Church had a dual purpose: to expand its scope of influence and to negotiate its public recognition. Thus, it was not only a matter of promoting conversions or creating a symbolic community but also of giving a public orientation to that constructed community. Articulating a public orientation, in turn, required evangelicals to develop a voice (or voices). Here a theology built on the certainty of election, on having a duty sanctioned by God, and on moral rectitude plays an important role. In this sense, the evangelical church can potentially play the same role that Catholic base communities have played during the democratic transition: that of forming members confident and capable enough to voice their needs and aspirations (Levine 1992).

To the extent that we can extrapolate from the case of Huaycán, we might say that politics, for evangelicals, is neither a primary concern nor an overarching horizon of praxis. Instead, political mobilization flows from evangelicals’ earnest search for salvation and their concern to lead exemplary Christian lives before suspicious neighbors. In this religious framework, the impact of political mobilization will tend to be restricted to the local, to the politics of community and self.

In Huaycán, however, this complex link between religion and politics was further complicated by other factors. First, the Assemblies of
God's withdrawal from the United Evangelical Church undermined the symbolic power behind that unified image. Yet that refusal came primarily from the Assemblies' leadership. The followers, by contrast, felt free to participate in various events, such as the July 15 parade. Thus the members of the various congregations were able to display their "public orientation."

Second, the insertion of politics into the "evangelical community" was contested, particularly the United Church president's congressional candidacy. He was criticized for "mixing religion with politics"; even some members of his denomination who sympathized with his leftist views criticized his "hastiness." Those who questioned him affirmed, however, that a "Christian can participate in politics"; only people who represent the evangelical community should not participate in politics. Here evangelical perceptions of politics became explicit: because politics is considered a game driven by financial interests or personal benefit, a "representative" of the evangelical community, who by definition must behave like an "exemplary Christian," should avoid the danger of contamination by unwholesome things. (Large sectors of the secular population shared this negative view of politics.)

The social and economic differences among denominations and within congregations were another impediment to effective political action. In the routine activities of the church, evangelicals did not see themselves as sharing the same circumstances. Evangelicals in poorer areas of Huaycán complained of not receiving consideration or good treatment from the more "affluent" brothers of their church; others charged that the competition for conversions by better-equipped churches was unfair. The combination of these problems hindered the attempt to coordinate the interests of evangelical settlers in order to negotiate their recognition.

Cleary claims that Pentecostals participate in politics when they consider that the benefits they will obtain outweigh the costs of political participation (Cleary and Stewart-Gambino 1997, 13). This formula could help explain the experience of the "United Evangelical Church of Huaycán" and its consequences. Simply as settlers, however, Huaycán's evangelicals had simultaneous demands for recognition both of their material needs and their specific faith. For this reason, their claims were at the same time both political and religious. That situation problematized the path from the public sphere to the political arena.

The directors of the United Church were certain that evangelicals shared a history and an agenda for the future. They thought that by basing their proposal on these experiences, they could stabilize coordination among the churches and present medium-term projects. They assumed the epic myth of the unity of Huaycán and thought that to face an adverse, mainly Catholic environment, evangelicals might achieve a similar unity. This has never been accomplished. Organizing different visions of what an
evangelical should be, denominational differences, and economic and social disparities around the demand for collective recognition has turned out to be an extremely complex task.

NOTES

1. Asentamiento humano is the official designation for these urbanizaciones populares, or urban mass settlements. The term was part of the neighborhood association's official name until about 1990, when it was changed to Comunidad Autogestionaria de Huaycán (self-managed community of Huaycán), to symbolize both the culmination of a political contest within the neighborhood association and the community's political victory over Sendero Luminoso, which was active in the area. Sendero opposed the change because autogestionaria implied that the residents were taking charge of their own development (e.g., working with the state to install basic services like electricity and water), thereby removing Sendero as their "instrument" of confrontation with the state.

2. In this regard see Marzal 1989, which studies the evangelical presence in the neighborhood of El Agustino, a ward that forms part of Lima's eastern zone.

3. Although the 2 percent figure may be unreliable, it can serve as a point of reference. In the National Census of 1993, evangelicals were only 5.74 percent of the population for the district of Ate-Vitarte, which subsumes Huaycán. INEI 1993.

4. According to data provided by the National Evangelical Council, the Assemblies of God of Peru represent 19.77 percent of the evangelical population of Lima. They are followed by the Iglesia Alianza Cristiana y Misionera (Christian and Missionary Alliance Church) with 16.82 percent. The same source has the IEP in sixth place, with 4.94 percent of the total evangelicals in Lima. PROMIES 1993.

5. The study draws from 30 surveys among the 6 churches selected. For this essay, the material of these polls is considered only as reference.

6. According to the documents of Sendero Luminoso circulating at the time (see Degregori 1991), in 1984 the group began to reorganize and strengthen its Metropolitan Committee in Lima.

7. The original core settlements took five to six years to establish their basic infrastructure, while the most recent settlements were still struggling for basic services at the time of this study. Despite the municipal government's initial support, successive administrations failed to fulfill the commitment; meanwhile, Huaycán's population grew from 22,000 in 1985 to about 70,000 by 1990. Nevertheless, Smith notes, "Huaycán consolidated its basic infrastructure almost twice as fast as other spontaneous land seizures and avoided the pitfalls common in shantytowns" (1992, 137).

8. El Vaso de Leche was an organization of poor women that the Left promoted in the Lima municipality. It was one of Peru's strongest female social organizations of the 1980s and early 1990s.

9. While the United Church was being organized, the president agreed to be included on the list of Izquierda Socialista Party candidates for the October 1992 elections of the Democratic Constituent Congress (convoked by Fujimori to reform the Constitution). During a radio interview, he stated that his candidacy had the support of the United Evangelical Church of Huaycán. The Assembly of God
pastors criticized this at the time, but the criticism did not prevent the United Church from pursuing its activities or the faithful of the different denominations from participating in its meetings. This occurred even though the Assemblies' criticism was widely available to the faithful when the United Church leaders presented their goals.

REFERENCES


