

**An American Evangelical Perspective On Civic Engagement**  
**Christianity Today's Discourse**

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**Abstract**

This study analyzes religious discourse and its relation to civic engagement values will investigate focused in the case of *Christianity Today (CT)* Magazine, an influential publication into American protestant Movement. This study is particularly relevant because religious factor has played an important role in different moments of American political life. Also, evangelical organizations, networks and leaders have been involved in diverse actions related to civic engagement (CE). However, it is necessary to explore and know what are the conceptions and focus that guides the reflections and practices of evangelicals with regard to CE. Precisely, this qualitative study explores the discursive orientations about civic engagement values of evangelical sector represented and portrayed in the discourse of CT. The findings indicate that CT depicts a certain evangelical tendency with regard to public incidence, community participation, involving in social problems and relationships with political leaders and actors of civil society.

**KEY WORDS:** Civic engagement, religious discourse, media religion, public sphere, Political American context, social capital,

## **1. Focus and context of the investigation**

The present research will analyze religious discourse and its relationship to civic engagement values. We will investigate the case of *Christianity Today (CT)* magazine, an influential evangelical publication addressed to the American Protestant community. This publication was founded in 1956 by leaders within the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) as an advocacy publication to give a voice to evangelical concerns and help define what it means to be an evangelical. This magazine has become the foremost representative of evangelical thoughts and ideas in the United States of America and represents pathway for evangelicals into majority consciousness. The relation between public participation and evangelical discourse has a special relevance today in the American context. One reason for the visibility of the evangelical community is their size and vitality, but another is the recent re-engagement of evangelicals in civic affairs, from social services to electioneering (Cromatie (ed.) 2003). Scholars such as Robert Putnam (2002) and Robert Bellah (1996) argue that evangelical influence in American civic and political life is significant because they have acquired an important social capital to political participation. However, evangelicals have always had diverse views on how their faith should be applied to understanding and practice on civic engagement. Precisely, evangelical media such as periodicals have constituted in one of mediating spaces that allow us to know and understand the tendencies and focuses within vast American evangelical community. Publications such as *Christianity Today* are not the only mechanism through which evangelical elites communicated with local evangelical opinion leaders. They became also public spaces of ideological discourse reproduction of

an American evangelical sector. (Farley, 2006). Quentin Schultze (1990), a leading scholar of religious communication, describes religious monthly or biweekly journals of comment and opinion as the most significant religious media in the United States during the twentieth century. He asserts that periodicals are important tools by means of which religious groups can establish common agendas for discussion and coordinate their thinking for collective political action.

In this sense, *CT* represents an important mediating space for exploring the way that an evangelical sector conceives and assumes its role in the public realm. Precisely, this study analyzes the connection between religion and public life to examine aspects of civic engagement values that are considered in the religious discourse of this publication.

## **2. Research questions**

My research will attempt to respond to these questions:

Duty:

2.1. Does *CT* assume CE as a religious or as a civic duty?

Nature

2.2. Does *CT* reflect an “individualist moral culture” or a “communitarian social culture” in relation to civic engagement?

Origins

2.3. Does *CT* assume public problems as a consequence of moral crisis or political-structural one?

Strategy

2.4. Does *CT* depict a “bonding” or “bridging” perspective about CE?

### 3. Conceptualization

In order to avoid certain dispersion during the discursive analysis of the articles of this publication, I have chosen four categories:

- a) **Duty.** It is referred to assumption of civic engagement's practice from perspective of commitment to someone or something. In this category my interest is to identify the goal of public involvement and more specifically if articles of Christianity Today correspond to religious duty or civic one.
- b) **Nature.** It is referred to the diverse manifestation's forms of civic engagement practice. At this point, my interest is to define the discourse of this publication taking into account two sub-categories:
  - Conception about CE: individualism/ communitarian culture.
  - What kind of problems are important (poverty, political corruption, pollution, family crisis)
- c) **Origin.** It is referred to the causes that determine discourses and actions on Civic engagement. Here, I have defined the following sub-categories:
  - Causes of problems: bad public administration (structural) / moral crisis (religious) / citizenship unconsciousness.
  - Responsible actors of problems: state / citizens / organization of civil society / local church
  - Ways of solution: proclaim special values / to solve specific problems / transformation of society

d) **Strategy.** It is referred to different type of tactics, policies, and plans that guide the Civic engagement's practice. The sub-category in this item is:

- Forms of participation: Conveying of values / involving in social networks / participation in specific communal actions / prayer.

## **4. Operationalization**

### **4.1. Method chosen**

The methodology for this study is textual analysis. It allows us to explore themes or topics treated in opinion sections in this publication. This qualitative method allows us to know and understand not only if this religious sector considers civic engagement values in its discourse, but also to observe its approach and conception of civic engagement. Textual analysis is the most appropriate methodology for this investigation for two reasons:

- a) It allows taking into account all aspects of content (including omissions).
- b) These unique qualities make textual analysis effective for examining latent meanings and discursive strategies that may emerge during the analysis.

In addition, textual analysis was chosen as a method for this study as it offers the possibility of investigating implicit assumptions –latent content– about civic engagement alongside explicit statements –manifest content– in the treatment of religious information. In this sense, a textual analysis can help to reveal the connotative meanings and flesh out why the text includes and excludes the material it does. Accordingly, this is not an audience analysis; it does not consider how others interpret *Christianity Today*

magazine. As a close reading and interpretation of the text, textual analysis solidly engages with both the manifest and latent content, meaning both the apparent and underlying or insinuated themes present.

#### **4.2. Sample**

This study will examine 12 issues of this publication from January to December 2007. The main reason for selecting this publication is because *CT* is the most influential magazine among evangelical leaders in USA. Also, the discourse of this publication depicts the opinion and perception of an important conservative sector of American Protestant religion, and analyzing *CT* will help us understand the relationship that this publication builds between its religious principles –based on a certain moral ethos –and CE values. On the other hand, *CT* depicts the position and views on American social and political reality of an important sector of civil society.

#### **4.3. Units of analysis**

The units of analysis in this study will be the *opinion articles* of *CT*, which include the *editor column* and the *columnists' section*. The columnists' section includes different articles written by journalists of this magazine. I have chosen these two elements as units of analysis because these sections portray more clearly the opinion or conception of this publication about themes related to civic engagement. In addition, the editor column deals with topics that are contained in other sections.

## **5. Procedure**

For my textual analysis, we followed the data analysis methods in Lindlof and Taylor (2002). The method follows these steps:

5.1. I will read the articles of the selected issues of the publication. We will make notes based on the literature review and defined categories.

I will read all the selected texts in order to develop first-order categories.

5.2. I will analyze the readings line by line, marking sections of text that suggest a category.

5.4. I will create a codebook considering files that will allow us to sort the data by categories and subcategories.

5.5. Interpretation: I have constructed an interpretation strategy by tying concepts together at both the category and subcategory level. We have considered keywords and phrases to help the interpretation of data. We have used the concepts developed in our literature review to connect our research questions. The goal of our interpretation of the texts is not to prove a single “true” interpretation, but to point out certain discourses about public concerns, how these are articulated, and how they could be interpreted.

## **6. Literature review**

In this section is important to develop a theoretical framework that allow us understand both the connection between media and religion and the relationship between religious field and civic engagement approach.

## **Connections between Media and religion**

Important studies about the relationship between media and religion contend religious groups have had a close relation to the media. In the American context, the media played an important role especially in the revival of the evangelical movement and the church's strategies in using media to convey the spiritual message to the audience. (Hoover 1998, Peck 1993, Horsfield 1984) The first studies contend that the uses of media by religious groups were marked by an instrumental conception, in which the media are viewed as instruments in the conveyance of faith messages. In other words, they have been based on what James Carey has called the "transportation" model of communication, where communication is thought only in terms of its causes and consequences for known autonomous and independent actors and receivers (Hoover, 2002).

From a more critical standpoint, Janice Peck uses a more anthropological focus to study the intersection between media and religion. She argues that "religion is explicitly concerned with both ontological and experienced dimensions of existence—with being and meaning. "Religion provides a meaning for individual existence by grounding it in a larger, cosmic, framework of significance" (Peck, 1993). For this reason she believes that religious movements arise to negotiate such crises of meaning.

Stewart Hoover places the public emergence of the concept of "electronic church" in the context of the transformational process of the American evangelical movement. From his standpoint, "the electronic church has helped modern evangelicalism move into the secular public arena in a way that is relevant to its followers...Its ultimate meaning for secular society is further enhanced for viewers by the social and political program of



reform that has been shaped and project by the para-church and the electronic para-church” (Hoover, 1988). In this same way, ten years later Hoover and Abelman (1990) assess that “the [mediated church] represents a new center of social and political power, one which is radically based in nothing more than its presence in the media.” This approach places this phenomenon in the social and political sphere.

In this way, media and religious studies focused its understanding of media as spaces of cultural interaction—hence social practices—and religion as a cultural discourse intertwined with individual and collective processes that supposed the “recognition that there is a fundamental interaction or relationships between practices of mediation and practices of religion” (Hoover, 2006). This approach is bound up with a new conception in which religion is not limited to what happens in a ‘sacred’ realm, traditionally conceived, but is that part of culture that persuasively presents a plausible myth of ordering of existence. In this sense, culture and religion are inseparable. (Hoover & Clark, 1997). In this same sense, Janice Peck considered that “religion is explicitly concerned with both ontological and experiential dimensions of existence –with being and meaning. Religion provides meaning for individual existence by grounding it in a larger, cosmic framework of significance (Peck, 1993). These approaches contribute to the assumption that

realms of both “religion” and “the media” are themselves transforming and being transformed. Religion today is a much more public, commodified, therapeutic, and personalized set of practices than it has been in the past. At the same time, the media (movies, radio, television, **print**, and electronic media, and more) are collectively coming to constitute a realm where important projects of “the self” take place—projects that include spiritual, transcendent, and deeply meaningful work...Media and religion are meeting on a common turf: the everyday world of lived experienced. (Hoover, 2002)

Meaning-making's focus has an important influence in this approach, which understands religion and media in the context of the cultural meaning practice. This notion is rooted in the tradition of cultural studies.

To Hoover, the “practice of identity construction...is an articulation between the context of individual experience and broader contexts of social and cultural life, including claims made by the culture about symbolic meaning” (Hoover,2006). It implied, in the words of Hoover, “seeing religion as something that is generated in the experience, practice and aspirations of “lived lives”:

The focus on identity implies that adherents to this new form of religion “achieve” is in part a new sense of themselves as religious or spiritual beings, a formation of their religious or spiritual identities. This poses a perspective qualitatively different from previous scholarly which is bounded up to Symbolic-interactionist theory which provide a theoretical foundations in order to understand the interaction between individuals and cultural objects in the context of the construction of meaning and identity. Those interactions involve a kind of conscious self-construction and self-representation. (Hoover, 2002)

These studies conceive the sacred beyond the spiritual collective experience institutionalized. For them, it means a cultural shared experience through which the transcendental is a social construction of reality.

Hoover poses a set of questions is related to representations of religious practice in the public sphere:

How are we to conceive of the [re] presentation of the religious and sacred in the public sphere in an area of radical pluralism that is suspicious of civil religions and equally suspicious of denominational revivals and other cultural revitalizations movements? The other group of questions is related to meaning-making focus. Three kinds of questions are important in this way. First is the question of what symbols or scripts are available in the media environment, what we might call the “symbolic inventory” out of which individuals make religious or spiritual meaning. Second are the

practices of consumption, interaction, and articulation through which those meanings are accessed, understood, and used. And third is the centering of this in the experiences of the individuals who are doing the consuming and meaning making. (Hoover 2006)

### **About religion and civic engagement**

Broadly, many scholars (Brind & Levy 1999, Edwards 2001, Putnam 1993) concur that civic engagement refers to the activities of citizens, emphasizing “a normative position, a broad (rather than narrow) and objective (rather than self-interested) orientation to the needs of the civilized political community. This definition of civic engagement implies that citizens are participating in civil society institutions such as nonprofit organizations to serve general social goals. For example, donating goods or serving in the soup kitchen at Poverty Prevention helps prevent hunger and alleviate poverty, which in turn should assist the poor in participating in civil society through work or school as it improves their general quality of life.

However, for this study is relevant the contribution of Robert Putnam (2000) who incorporates to the debate the notion of social capital. Putnam sees social capital as inextricably linked to civic engagement. He overlooks the fact that people can belong to the same organization and not develop trusting relationships. Furthermore, the specific trust of social capital does not necessarily lead to generalized trust characteristic of civic engagement. In this sense, civic engagement contributes to social capital and to development efforts through the channels of voice, representation and accountability. This link between civic engagement and development can be organized in a variety of ways, both formal and informal. The latter refers to processes that may complement the

formal processes of electing officials or making development plans in a consultative manner.

Putnam draws a crucial distinction between “bonding” and “bridging” social capital. *Bonding social capital* refers to an exclusive perspective on participation in the community life in which activities are inward looking and tend to reinforce exclusive identities and homogeneous groups, creating potential barriers to democratic participation, and cooperative behavior, whereas *Bridging social capital* refers to reciprocal, enforceable ties among people from different communities, such as relationships that cross class, racial, or gender boundaries. Unlike bonding social capital, bridging one may involve horizontal ties among different communities, for example, connections among faith communities to promote interfaith understanding or engaging in civil activities such as supporting Poverty Prevention.

Another important contribution in the debate about civic engagement is related to the distinction between communitarism and individualism. In this sense, there are two major schools of thought about what types of moral cultures should matter for civic engagement and why. The first comes from so-called “communitarian” political and social theory, which shares a common skepticism about the ability of an individualistic ethos to generate public commitment. Among sociologists, this intellectual tradition found its most well-known expression in *Habits of the Heart* (Bellah et al. [1985] 1996). *Habits* articulated grave concerns about the impact that the growing “culture of individualism” would have on public commitment. As Bellah and colleagues (1996 ) argue, “the very language [of individualism] seems to undercut the possibility of other

than self-interested relationships,” while the biblical and civic republican alternatives they outline “are capable of ... nurturing both public and private life” (p. 139, 143).

At this point, it is important to incorporate the notion coined by Kraig Beyerlein and Stephen Vaisey (2007) about ethics of community related to civic and religious moral cultures. They contend that it may motivate different *types* of engagement because the ethic of community looks outward to others, and its propositional and affective content should tend to foster volunteering that serves those in the larger community or to produce what others have called bridging social capital (Putnam 2000). On the other hand, the moral ethic of divinity perspective is associated with maintaining inward purity and avoiding pollution, those who invoke it as their “first moral language” may focus on civic engagement that benefits one’s own in-group. Thus we expect that they will be most likely to engage in activities that primarily support and serve their own religious community rather than the broader society. In this sense, the ethic of divinity is to be associated with the production of bonding social capital (see Putnam 2000).

In this context and connecting the interest of this study, it is very important to discuss how religious media, especially the print one, portray the relationship between religious practice and civic engagement values because there are different standpoints and conceptions about this kind of religious practice. Erick Uslaner contends that “Religion has complex relationships to civic engagement. Members of liberal (or non fundamentalist) denominations are likely to reach out beyond their own faith community to work with others and to help people in need who are different from themselves. Fundamentalist will respond to the spiritual demand to do good works, but will focus their efforts on people like themselves.” (Uslaner, 2002) On the other hand, American

churches have also been more likely to stress moral ideals and voluntarism, stemming from the individualism that has played such a large role in the American political culture (Hartz 1995)

Michael Cromartie poses two important hypotheses that are useful for this study. “[F]irst, evangelicals are now open to a broad scope of civic engagement, including political action. This openness is strongest among evangelical elites, significant minorities of whom favor political engagement over other forms of civic engagement, and also de broad political goal of transforming society. Second, individualism is still an important feature of evangelicals’ approach to civic engagement. Most evangelicals still have a preference for helping individuals solve their own problems in one form or another.” (Cromartie 2006)

## **6. Findings**

### **6.1. About Themes prioritized**

From 55 articles analyzed, I found that only six articles related to spiritual or internal church problems. The dominant topics are related to different aspects of social and political problems such as prostitution, poverty, public schooling affairs, religious freedom, human rights, global warming, justice, abortion, violence, pollution, immigration, family, and racism. This reveals that public problems are part of the editorial agenda of this publication. This reflects the fact that themes, problems or realities related to public affairs are part of discursive agenda of this publication.

However, it is important to mention that these topics are dealt with in relation to the moral concerns of the American evangelical community and the problems related to

American political interests. Also, this publication deals with the realities of other countries, but only when the situations or problems reported have a connection with American political or religious concerns.

These topics have been chosen taking to account their relationship with interests, actions, declarations or events where evangelical leaders, churches or organizations are involved. However, some issues that do not have a direct connection with evangelical actions are considered because they are part of moral principles of evangelical doctrine. This is the cases of themes such as abortion, bioethics or family.

## **6.2. Findings for each selected category**

### **6.2.1. About Duty**

*CT consider that evangelicals must be involved in community life as part of their religious duty to help and support people and community, more than as a way of creating permanent engagement with others, in terms of a civic approach.*

CT does not disdain participation in the life of the community. However, it considers this civic action to be a part of ethic-religious responsibility, alongside that of assisting people in need and those who are suffering. But, this attitude is classified as a mercy action rather than as active involvement in community life, or collaboration in the collective process of solving social problems.

The focus of the article about the Virginia tech massacre is a good example to use to observe this approach where the political action of contributing to solution of the social causes of violence is not considered in the churches' participation agenda.

Tragic events call us to grasp opportunity without being opportunistic...  
Let be know for active love –for blessing those who mourn –and not for  
promoting agendas. (Editorial, June, 2007)

Likewise, it is interesting to note the absence of references to the involvement of American evangelical churches and organizations in communitarian social programs. The third national Survey of Religion and Politics from the University of Akron (Cromartie, 2003) reported that among religious groups, evangelicals had the highest score with regard to engagement in social programs. Scholars such as Robert Putnam (2003, pag. 119) recognize that a major part of the social capital of the American evangelical community comes from its participation in social projects such as helping poor families and needy communities. The absence of coverage of this kind of evangelical's civic engagement in *Christianity Today* is notable. Also noteworthy is the lack of coverage of evangelical protests against the war in Iraq<sup>1</sup> in the articles analyzed for this study. From this perspective, civic engagement appears to be associated with religious duty as expressed through altruistic actions of service to the community but only as long as they avoid the “polluting” influence of that which is non-Christian. In this sense, CE is more an expression of moral than civic responsibility.

### **6.2.2. About Nature:**

*Individualism moral culture as a conception of participation practice is an important feature of CE's approach of Christianity Today.*

CT assumes CE as a way to alleviate people's individual problems. Here the essentially private nature of the faith is understood to have social consequences through

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/4896>



the agency or individual believers. It supposes that redemption of individuals is in part the redemption of society. This attitude is noticeable, for instance, in an analysis CT made about The Virginia Tech massacre of April 16, 2007:

Christians are realistic about human nature and the presence of evil society. The human heart is profoundly wicked. "There is no one righteous, not even one." The Bible teaches us that the evil we see in others exists in our hearts as well. ...We refuse to be paralyzed by questions about free will and determinism...Christian ministry should be transformed from leisurely activity to a vocation of unceasing service. We are most ourselves when we are helping someone.... Tragic events call us to grasp opportunity without being opportunistic... Let us be known for active love –for blessing those who mourn –and not for promoting agendas. (Editorial, June, 2007)

This conception of public participation is related to the religious concern regarding conversion of people, which is implicitly assumed as one of the main motivations for participation in actions or giving an opinion on public affairs. CT holds that religious conversion<sup>2</sup> is most efficacious in solving social problems, and therefore places special value on proclaiming Christian values and spreading the gospel, rather than on a structural transformation of society. From this perspective, the redemption of individual is an essential condition for the redemption of society; Hence CE is properly limited to generating believers and encouraging them to live according to their beliefs (Gushee, 2000).

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<sup>2</sup> Within the Christian faith, conversion is intended to involve more than a simple change in religious identity. It means "going the other way." The convert, therefore, is expected to renounce sin and personally commit to a life of righteousness as defined and exemplified by Paul of Tarsus (Acts 3:45). In some Protestant traditions, this is called "accepting Christ as one's Savior and following him as Lord."

### **6.2.3. About origins**

*CT often assumes public problems are part of moral crises rather than having political-structural causes.*

An import commonality in most of the articles analyzed is the absence of critical analysis with regard to the structural causes of problems in American society. These problems are assumed to exist as a consequence of moral degradation of society. For instance, with regard to the problem of sexual trafficking, the columnist suggests that the church has a responsibility only to provide attention to the victims of this crime. There is no mention of the necessity of advocacy actions to diminish the weaknesses of a political system that allows the increasing of this problem.

A great need of sexually exploited individuals is for healthy, trusting relationships with people who care about them. That's something every church has the capacity to provide. (Morgan, Timothy, January 2007)

In other cases, the social problems are assumed to be a consequence of perversity, idolatric beliefs or sin.

Can the West be re-evangelized? Only if we unlearn our default ethnocentric assumptions about "real" Christianity (our own) and unlearn our blindness to the ways Western Christianity is infected by cultural idolatry. (Wright, Christopher J.H., January, 2007)

We tend to equate justice with punishment. But a better understanding of justice sees the importance of prevention: establishing a context in which right relationships and fairness can grow, be maintained, and be restored among sinful people— especially those sinners who are attempting to live for Jesus Christ. (Gushee, David P. May, 2007)

Pro-life advocates treat women as a largely cynical means to the end of outlawing abortion. There can be no repentance without knowledge of sin. We cannot lose our moral compass in a mountain of sociological data. We cannot lose our faith in the power of God's Spirit not only to convert people. (Guthrie, Stan. May, 2007)

On the other hand, it is interesting to observe in most of the articles a negative critique of progressive theological approaches or Christian leaders:

A few years ago, political observers were convinced that South America's poor would embrace liberation theology with its Marxist promises of justice and wealth redistribution. But to their surprise, the people rejected it. The reason: They knew governments were corrupt, and they distrusted political messiahs. They chose instead Pentecostalism and conservative Christianity. (Colson, Charles & Anne Morse, August, 2007)

About the new book *–Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid* –written by ex-president Carter... this book is misleading and dangerous... The Carter presidency was disappointing to many. He seemed unable to cope with the crisis of 1979, and soviet invasion of Afghanistan. (Aikman, David, April, 2007)

In contrast, when columnists refer to American conservative evangelical leaders, the reference has a more positive connotation. In this case, CT assumes the political position of this class of leaders or organizations as part of the editorial line.

Protestant thinkers such as Reinhold Niebuhr knew better. A leading American critic of Hitler's Germany, Niebuhr called it "sheer moral perversity" to equate the failings of democratic states with the atrocities of fascist dictatorships. (Loconte, Joseph, February, 2007)

The last Friday in October, I joined five other evangelical protestant leaders for an intense and rewarding half-hour conversation with Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. Our goal was to assure her of our support as she navigates the treacherous waters of Middle East politics– particularly as the Bush Administration tries to lay a foundation for an enduring, peaceful two-state solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict. (Neff, David, editor in chief of CT, December, 2007)

#### **6.2.4. About strategy**

*CT portrays the evangelical community as a social sector that expresses a "bonding" more than a "bridging" form of civic engagement.*

Christianity Today (CT) conceives the public sphere as an important space where churches or Christian believers can be involved. However, its understanding of political engagement is based on the messianic conception, whose implicit goal is to bolster the influence of the evangelical morality in the social, cultural and political spheres which implies the building of relationships into community as a strategy to support specific problems. The processes for building relationships with members or leaders of community in terms of creating sustainable collective process to solve problems beyond every single emergency situation.

The majority of the articles reflect a constant concern about the social and political situation of Muslim countries. However, problems such as poverty, violation of human rights or limitations of religious freedom that exist in other developing countries are absent in the content of the articles. For example, with regard to the Iraq war, more than one columnist expounded their analysis of the situation that religious minorities are undergoing there:

At least the strategy must be employed to prevent that pursuit of religious freedom for Christians and other religious minorities in Iraq. This is a crucial missing link in peacemaking regionally and internationally. Robust freedom to believe must not be lost amid strategies for a military victory... The Bush administration and Iraqi leaders should stop discrimination in aid grants by naming a special aid coordinator in Iraq to insure that Christians and other minorities receive a fair share of international assistance. (Editorial, February, 2007)

Tragically, Christians in Iraq are currently at the greatest risk... Christians by the tens of thousands are among the 2 million Iraqi refugees in Jordan and Syria. It is one of the great unintended consequences of the war in Iraq that the U.S., a Christian-Majority nation, led its military forces to liberate a Muslim nation, leading to a dramatic drop in religious freedom for this nation's Christian minority. (Aikman, David, December, 2007)

In this case the concern about these problems is only a pretext, because the real concern is related to provoking changes in a certain American religious and political perspective. Implicitly, civic engagement is properly limited to generating believers and encouraging them to live according to their beliefs. It presupposes that if religious people are to engage in public affairs, then it should be only to fight or avoid evil. From this perspective, the root of all social problems lies in the spiritual factors. For this reason, CE assumes that Christian believers of churches have the best solution for social crises.

What might this mean in terms of engagement by evangelicals? We must help redefine human rights for the broader political community. We can remind decision makers that democratic rights owe a great debt to the Judeo-Christian conception of human dignity. We can explain why the fundamental rights of life, liberty, and freedom of worship are essential to our God-given nature. (Loconte, Joseph, February, 2007)

## **7. Discussion**

It is clear that CT is not only an important representation space of political discourse of an American evangelical sector but also this publication has developed into a religious institution because they consider themselves as part of the leadership of this American religious sector. Also, the discourse of CT indicates that political and social issues are part of their agenda; hence it means that the evangelical sector depicted in this publication is interested in the problems of society. But, their interest is marked by a conception about CE based in the logic of religious duty. Also, individualism moral is a central feature of their conception of involvement in CE's actions. This conception is associated to their understanding that social problems are caused by moral crises more

than structural ones. According to Putnam's approach, this worldview expresses a "bonding" more than a "bridging" form of civic engagement.

These findings indicate that political affairs are part of the agenda of an important evangelical sector depicted in the discourse of CT. It entails that evangelical leaders frame the performance of civic duty as part of the obligation of being a Christian, because they believe it is important for Christian voices to be heard in public life. This civic encouragement involves urging people to participate in political affairs. However, it is important to notice that the sense or orientation of public involvement is connected to the moral approach or theological focus about issues such as democracy, human right, religious freedom, sexuality, and so forth. In addition, the analysis about causes and consequences of political and social problems is determined by religious worldview of society and the system. This evangelical sector assumes that all problems have their central cause in spiritual factors; hence they make a religious analysis of political problems. This disengage produces an evident reductionism in the proposals to solve the political and social problems. This biased view is one of the reasons that they do avoid or do not consider the importance of structural causes of the problems. From this perspective, as mentioned, CE is properly limited to generating believers and encouraging them to live according to their beliefs. Broader social engagement or "bridging" civic actions is viewed with certain skepticism, although the readers are often encouraged to involvement in specific social actions.

In methodological terms it is important to make the following evaluation. First, an important strength is related to theoretical framework. The previous studies and readings about the relationship between religion and civic engagement constituted an important

support to build the categories and read the results. Within American context, the contributions of scholars such as Robert Putnam and Robert Bellah contribute to avoid reductionist readings and conceptions of religious phenomenon in the CE's field. Second, the main limitation of this study is related to the lack qualitative studies on religious publications as well as ethnographic studies on the American evangelical experience in the CE field. This methodological antecedent was very necessary to build the methodological framework for our analysis. Third, this study constitutes an important base from which to investigate other type of religious discourses and their relationship with CE values. The categorization that I have built for this study could be useful for comparative studies. For instance, it should be valuable to investigate two publications of different American religious traditions in order to observe similarities and differences in religious media representation with regard to on CE.

APPENDIX

Table 1

Themes/ problems

<i>Topics</i>	<i>No. of articles</i>
Religious freedom	8
Human rights / justice	6
Poverty	6
Spirituality	5
Abortion	4
Prostitution/ Sexual trafficking	4
Environmental	4
Violence/Terrorism	4
Schooling affairs	3
Immigration	3
Bioethics	3
Family	3
Racism	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>51</b>



Table 2  
**Summary of contents**

Category	Title / Date	Content
<b>Duty</b>	An Upside-Down World/ <i>January</i>	“What must we learn, and unlearn, to be agents of God’s mission in the World” / “...Western Christianity is infected by cultural idolatry”
	The United Nations’ Disarray/ <i>February</i>	We can remind decision makers that democratic rights owe a great debt to the Judeo-Christian conception of dignity.
	The slope Really is Slippery/ <i>March</i>	In vitro fertilization... is an abuse of biotechnology... it opens the floodgates for commercializing human life.
	Graveyards Came First/ <i>May</i>	Despite its growing economy, Vietnam remains a repressive state.
	One-Size Politics Doesn’t Fit All/ <i>April</i>	It’s necessary the creation of Evangelical climate initiative... no can doubt our responsibility to be steward of God’s creation.
<b>Nature</b>	Give Parents a Say/ <i>January</i>	“High school seniors were protesting a federal judge’s order barring a spoken prayer at the ceremony”
	A community of Broken/ <i>February</i>	An essential Christian conviction is that the Church is to express the Kingdom in the community
	The Joy of Policy manuals/ <i>May</i>	We tend to equate justice with punishment
<b>Origins</b>	Sex Isn’t work / <i>January</i>	A great o sexuality exploited individuals is for healthy, trusting relationship
	Desire Happens/ <i>May</i>	The Shiites has a ethic problem about polygamy
<b>Strategy</b>	Surprised by friendship / <i>January</i>	I want to help the one-sixth of humanity living without basic food, water, and shelter
	What Iraq’s Christians Need/ <i>February</i>	The Bush administration and Iraqi Leaders should: a) Stop discrimination, b) Implement a homeland for Christians, c) To provide more care for Iraqi refugees.
	The United Nations’ Disarray/ <i>February</i>	When human rights are confused with social economic goals, human dignity is debased –and basic rights become more politically tenuous.
	Reporter Bites Source/ <i>April</i>	Journalist was impressed of Arab hospitality
	One-Size Politics Doesn’t Fit / <i>April</i>	Evangelicals feel called to engage in social justice.. Bur determining priorities and strategies is a matter of prudential judgment.

Category	Title / Date	Content
Duty	The Joy of Policy manuals/ <i>May</i>	A better understanding of justice see the importance of prevention: establishing a context in which relationships and fairness can grow, be maintained, and be restored among sinful people.
	Old-fashioned Creation Care/ <i>July</i>	Christians should preserve the health of our planet.
	Attack Dogs of Christendom/ <i>August</i>	None of the figures of American Protestantism in the past have been spared from attacks.
	Promises, Promises/ <i>August</i>	Christians have a duty to be the best citizens, bringing concerns of justice and righteousness into public life.
	Blessed Are Those Who Hunger / <i>August</i>	... Thus, so long as you act righteously, you do not fear poverty or tremble at hunger.
Nature	Don't Cede the High Ground/ <i>May</i>	[About abortion] We cannot lose our moral compass in a mountain of sociological data. We cannot lose our faith in the power of God's Spirit.
	Where we Stand/ <i>June</i>	Christians are realistic about human nature and the presence of evil society... The human heart is profoundly wicked.
	Stumbling after Jesus/ <i>July</i>	
	Promises, Promises/ <i>August</i>	Christians should practice about tolerance and mercy.
	What It Means to Love Israel/ <i>August</i>	While political obsession may be entertaining, the people are the ultimate losers.
Origins	Brave New Salvation/ <i>June</i>	Optimism for a negotiated solution to Israeli-Palestinian tensions... But Christians must hope in God's covenant faithfulness.
	What To Do About Nukes/ <i>August</i>	Religious groups disagreed fiercely over what constituted sin. Wars are stupid and can therefore only be caused by people who are more stupid.
Strategy	Testing a New Relationship/ <i>June</i>	We may become more than a market segment and begin to engage in serious dialogue about our vision of America society and culture
	Where we Stand/ <i>June</i>	Tragic events [as Virginia Tech's massacre] call us to grasp opportunity without being opportunistic... Let be know for active love –for blessing those who mourn –and not for promoting agendas.

Category	Title / Date	Content
Duty	The Good Life/ <i>September</i>	To love God with all your heart, all your soul and your entire mind, and to love your brother and your sister as yourself.
	When Red Is Blue/ <i>October</i>	How we vote as Christians may differ, and that's okay. But let's not insist that we are somehow above the political fray.
	More Free At Least/ <i>November</i>	Many Black Christians open themselves up to God to one another so totally, and so freely admit their great need for both divine and human help.
Nature	The Good Life/ <i>September</i>	A fundamental part of Christian growth depends on teaching believers not only to do good, but also to distinguish between various good.
	When the Lights Go Out/ <i>October</i>	Divorce is not God's will / Churches are learning that a young Bible Study leader struggle with homosexual urges long after his conversion.
	Puncturing Atheism/ <i>October</i>	The atheist is back. Not just back, but globally paradigm in triumph across TV, bookstore, and internet.
	Missions Isn't Safe/ <i>November</i>	Since 9/11 we all live in a more dangerous world. We all must address whether or under what circumstances a ransom will be paid.
Origins	When Red Is Blue/ <i>October</i>	While Christians should not be beholden to any political party, our politics must be informed by our faith.
	More Free At Least/ <i>November</i>	Racial reconciliation is making some unexpected demands on me.
	Suffocating the faithful/ <i>December</i>	Tragically, Christians in Iraq are currently at the greatest risk.
Strategy	Puncturing Atheism/ <i>October</i>	We evangelicals, in our advocacy for the gospel, also have no need for blunt weaponry.
	Community of Memory/ <i>October</i>	We have already seen what relativism and radical individualism have done to the family, which is so essential for the transmission of manners and morals from one generation to the next.
	How We fight Poverty/ <i>December</i>	We need the faith community to help be a voice to the voiceless people... We fight poverty through the agencies of the church on behalf of Christ for the reconciliation of everyone –not only to one another, but especially to God.
	Suffocating the faithful/ <i>December</i>	How best can American evangelicals respond to this historic decline of Christianity [in Iraq]? Building partnerships with local churches, schools, and ministries in the Middle East as possible.

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