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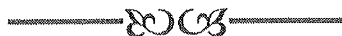

A Moving Faith

Mega Churches Go South

Edited By
Jonathan D. James

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List of Abbreviations

ABN	African Broadcasting Network
ACI	Action Chapel International
ABCFM	American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions
AICs	African Independent Churches
AMEN	Adoration Ministries Enugu Nigeria
AoG	Assemblies of God
BCs	Backward Classes
CBCP	Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines
CHAI	Church History Association of India
CMS	Church Missionary Society
CONEP	National Evangelical Council of Peru
CoP	Church of Pentecost
CSI	Church of South India
EATWOT	Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians
HMA	Hillsong Music Australia
IBGE	Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estadística
ICGC	International Central Gospel Church
IMC	International Missionary Conference
IPC	Indian Pentecostal Church of God
KICC	Kingsway International Christian Center
LCI	Lighthouse Chapel International
LCWE	Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization
MDCC	Musama Disco Christo Church
MFM	Mountain of Fire and Miracle Ministries
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization
PICC	Philippine International Cultural Center
RCCG	Redeemed Christian Church of God
SC	Scheduled Caste
STBC	Samavesham of Telugu Baptist Churches

9

Evangelical Representations in the Public Sphere: The Peruvian Case

Rolando Pérez

This chapter[1] seeks to understand the contemporary public practices of Evangelicals, mainly Charismatic and neo-Pentecostal groups—many classed as mega churches[2]—through the assumptions and perceptions of their leaders, who are leading collective forays into the public sphere. I will analyze how public participation shapes and re-signifies the religious identity of Evangelicals, especially with regard to the changes in institutionalized religion. In this sense, I will discuss what kind of negotiation or resistance is taking place in the relationship between the public empowerment of religion and institutional religious authority, as the dynamics of *sacrality* and secularity are seen in the public and the private spheres.

In particular, the chapter addresses issues pertaining to how mediated religion facilitates the creation of new meanings, forms, and approaches of public engagement. It is particularly relevant because the public participation of conservative Evangelical groups—linked to the Charismatic and neo-Pentecostal sector—is spurring the development of new leaderships, representations, and relationships beyond the boundaries of institutionalized religion. In this way, it is also relevant to observe what kind of negotiations (or resistance) is happening in the relationship between religious public empowering and institutional religious authority.

Evangelical Presence in a Pluralistic Latin America

Since the mid 1980s, the Latin American political and religious landscape has changed drastically. The statistical information allows us to picture quantitatively the shifts of the Latin American religious map.[3] Frances Hagopian asserts, "[S]elf-identified Protestants now comprise roughly one-fifth of the population of the region, about one in ten Latin Americans

identify with no religion at all, and only about 70 percent of the population is nominally Roman Catholic" (Hagopian, 2009: 2).

Several studies (Bastian, 2001; Freston, 2008; Levine, 2009; Parker, 2009) turned their focus toward the contemporary process of religious pluralism and plurality[4] that characterize the religious beliefs and practices in Latin America. It entails—as Levine observes—not only a multiplicity of voices speaking *in the name of religion*, but also conflicted voices within specific religious denominations and confessions (Levine, 2009). In Freston's words, "a plurality of voices can be heard within both the Catholic and Protestant camps: different organizations, groups, and programs, often with autonomous resources and international funding" (Freston, 2008: 210).

The new religious discourses and practices show us that this continent is passing "from being a 'Catholic continent' to being an increasingly religious pluralist region"[5] (Parker, 2009: 31).

Levine describes the characteristics of this new religious face:

> The contrast with the traditional face of religion reflects a net of related changes. Where there was monopoly, there is now pluralism; where a limited number of spaces were once officially reserved for religious practice (with a limited number of authorized practitioners), there is now a rich profusion of churches, chapels, and mass media programming, not to mention campaigns and crusades that carry the message to hitherto 'profane' spaces... Instead of limited number of voices 'authorized' to speak in the name of religion, there is now a plurality of voices, not only from among distinct denominations but within churches as well. (2009: 406)

This internal pluralism within religious confessions or denominations is not necessarily new. What is new is that this pluralism, within and among religion, is affecting the political life and other public processes related to the Latin American democratic transitions and the rearticulations of civil society (Romero, 2009).

Hence, the contemporary religious face is characterized by "pluralism instead of monopoly, a plurality of voices, not only from among distinct denominations but within churches" (Levine, 2009: 406).

This religious scenario is relevant because other religious groups are competing to gain symbolic power, political and social recognition, moral authority, and public legitimacy. One of the prominent non-Catholic groups that is gaining public power is the Evangelical Church.

Today, although Catholicism still remains the only officially recognized religion, Evangelical Churches are becoming more socially and culturally embedded. This phenomenon is producing, on the one hand, new dynamics among religious actors as well as reconfigurations of the relations between the religious practices and the ordinary structures of power and identity in the contemporary society. On the other hand, the democratic transition is generating new processes that have led to the public empowering of non-Catholic groups.

The decline of institutionalized Catholicism's authority has been paralleled by the increase in other religious expressions in which Evangelical groups have gained public visibility. As Parker points out, "in the last three or four decades the alternative to Catholicism has come not mainly from the growth of nonbelievers and atheists but from the expansion of Evangelicals, in particular Pentecostals" (2009: 131).

More precisely, the public emergence of Evangelicals is producing, within the Catholic Church, an intense debate about the strategies to avoid the increase of catholic migration toward Evangelical congregations. José Luis Pérez Guadalupe, an influential Catholic thinker, has suggested that in the Peruvian context, the Catholic Church should take into account the Evangelical Church's evangelization strategies to recover the trust of its believers:

> We [Catholics] have to go out and reach the people, like Evangelicals do. They have got rid of its sect image. Formerly, people were born as Latin American, Third World citizen, mestizos and Catholic. But, not now ... Today there is a gap between one´s birth identity and sacramental identity. After 500 years of becoming accustomed to people to come to us, we have taken it for granted and now we do not know how to reach them. Twenty years ago there were no Evangelical temples in middle and upper class areas; today, there are. They have people in every social class, with every kind of professional background, as well as in politics and management. They have become diversified and have changed that image of 'poor people' who let others brainwash them. (Pérez-Guadalupe, 2007: 3)

The public emergence and cultural empowerment of Evangelicals has generated a crucial debate about the new configurations of religious actors, discourses, and representations. In his remarkable book, *Is Latin American turning Protestant?: The Politics of Evangelical Growth*, Stoll (1990) provoked an important debate around the public irruption of Evangelicals.

His investigation aroused great interest regarding the political and social implications of political participation of Protestants and Catholics in Brazil and Chile. At that time, Stoll revealed that Protestants were far more likely than Catholics to participate in religious organizations, where civic skills may develop along political engagement.

The contemporary scenario shows that Evangelicals are playing a significant role beyond the religious domestic sphere: "They open public life to hitherto excluded groups and silent voices, and together represent the creation of a series of spaces of public life" (Levine, 2006: 406).

Sources and Trends in the Evangelical Public Representations

Evangelical groups, networks, and congregations linked to the mega churches in Peru are re-elaborating their religious discourse and their representations in the public sphere.

This Evangelical public involvement is characterized by diverse kinds of public engagements and efforts that occur beyond the traditional political spaces. Most of these groups are participating and interacting within diverse public spaces, such as civil society-based movements, inter-faith networks, and official commissions named by governmental institutions.

It shows that many emergent movements linked to these Evangelical groups are rethinking their biblical assumptions on public participation and political engagement, as well as their active role in the social change process. In the past, many conservative Evangelical leaders and lay believers criticized and refused individual participation and collective involvement in the political processes because they assumed the public realm to be incompatible with spiritual matters.

Now, however, contemporary Evangelical public engagement reveals that the public sphere is considered an appropriate field to gain political power and public influence, as well as an avenue to change society according to their (conservative) theological and ideological views.

The theological conception that supports the public involvement of these groups is based on the Bible's mandate for the restoration of society. Based on this principle, the leaders conceive public participation as a strategic way to have influence in different public spaces in order to restore and reconstruct the nation, and to develop it upon the base of Biblical principles and Evangelical morality.

Bernardo Campos and Oscar Amat y León contend that this kind of Evangelical perspective on public engagement is based on the idea of getting "power to reign instead of power to govern which means that the conservative evangelical sectors enter into politics based on a theocratic vision of power" (Campos & Amat y Leon, 2007: 25). This worldview is closely connected to the American Reconstructionist perspective[6] that proposes a theocratic view of political participation.

Hence, the idea of the restoration of society is an important aspect in the pastoral agenda of leaders of this sector because they view society as a space where Christian values are not taught and lived rightly. As David Cauracuri, president of Peruvian Fraternity of Evangelical Pastors, asserts: "There is a social crisis in our country; there is no message of hope, with principles, with values. We think we are the ones who have to lift up this message" (David Cauracuri, personal interview, May 19, 2009).

Another important motivation for participating in the public sphere is related to the particular interpretation of the biblical command that Christians are responsible for establishing godly authority in all aspects of the life, thus entailing efforts to gain a privileged position in influential spaces of the public sphere. Most of the Charismatic and neo-Pentecostal leaders mention that they are working in the public because they believe God has commanded them to be in the world not as the tail, but as the head.[7] As Soria, leader of Union of Peruvian Evangelical Christian Churches, contends:

> Two months ago I began to share the vision of a culture of truth as a principle of the Kingdom applicable to all of society... I think that our leaders have the tools to prepare the church people, instruct them in these principles and share them with the society so they can be 'the head, not the tail' (Eliazar Soria, personal interview, May 20, 2009).

In the same way, Daniel Vega, vice president of Peruvian Fraternity of Evangelical Pastors, asserts:

> In politics, if you know how to handle power, you can get things done in a positive way, but also in a negative way. But, power resides with the

majority. That's why we have to be the head and not the tail, because if you are the head, you have the bull by the horns. On the other hand, when one becomes part of the power establishment, you have a quota of power (Daniel Vega, personal interview, May 27, 2009).

This conception implies a kind of appropriation of important aspects of American Reconstructionism[8] (Amat y León, 2004; Campos, 2009; Freston, 2001) which assume that "Christians have a moral imperative or 'cultural mandate' to extend their religious dominion over the earth" (Pottenger, 2007: 77).

However, unlike the American experience, this Reconstructionist model has some particular characteristics. First, the Peruvian case reveals that the public representation of this movement is more engaged with the public platforms. In order to attain political power and have a privileged and legitimized place in the public sphere, they have built alliances not only with conservative organizations within the Evangelical community, but also with civil society-based networks.

Second, the Peruvian Reconstructionist model has incorporated secularized issues in their public agenda. Unlike the past, they are talking not just about *conservative religious concerns*, such as, abortion, homosexuality, family crisis, or religious discrimination. Rather, they are raising their voice on politically controversial issues, such as, domestic violence, political corruption, and even structural poverty. As David Cauracuri, president of Peruvian Fraternity of Evangelical Pastors, argues:

When we give a message against corruption, or against injustice or against inequality, these ethical principles lead us to (keep others from) running over our principles and it does not make any difference who is in the government. We cannot be silent (David Cauracuri, personal interview, May 19, 2009).

Another relevant aspect that characterizes this tendency is related to a re-signification of conversion and salvation that goes far beyond the individualistic view, traditionally expressed in public Evangelical discourse, as noted by Stoll and Levine:

The key premise is the Evangelical belief in the power of moral transformation, of individuals being regenerated or 'born again.' To change society you have to start by changing the hearts of individuals, Evangelicals leaders argue. Change enough individuals, they believe, and you will change

society .... paying to 'raise up a nation' is an attempt to turn a gospel of personal empowerment into a language for building confidence of fair play among diverse social groups. (1995: 12)

We observe that contemporary Evangelical leaders in this sector are talking now about evangelization more in terms of influence rather than conversion. As Robert Barriger, senior pastor of *Path of Life Church*, sees it:

... some people use influence for good, and others for evil. Now we are trying to influence the influential for positive change. In this sense, we need to enter into dialogue and conversation with decision-makers (Robert Barriger, personal interview, June 4, 2009).

In the same way, Miguel Bardales, coordinator of Thanksgiving Ministry, asserts:

The self-esteem of evangelicals is changing. People believe that we can do anything. If we have been able to preach to the whole country, we can keep doing that. It is like a wave of optimism, an improvement of our image....I am very excited that everything we are as evangelicals, connects immediately with the sensibilities of the population... We can preach to the whole country; we can talk with government ministers, mayors or ambassadors (Miguel Bardales, personal interview, May 29, 2009).

However, this strategic change does not imply a denial of the traditional *conversionist* approach; rather, in this case, the concept of conversion is being re-signified. In doing so, when these Evangelical groups talk about public influence, in essence, they are talking about the conversion of structures and cultural spaces, as well as mentalities.

It is important to note that some Evangelical leaders of this sector base their conception of public participation on the theological understanding of the so-called *spiritual territorialization* (Freston, 2001), by which they believe that it is important not only to influence the mentality of political leaders, but also to fight against the spirits that are contributing both to the demoralization of society and obstructing the prosperity and progress of the nation.

Finally, we must point out that even though these new Evangelical leaders agree that they share an exclusive calling to restore—spiritually—the nation, they express different understandings and views of the practical implications in the current Peruvian context.

I observe three worldviews among these leaders. On the one hand, many believe that the restoration of the nation will be possible if Christian Evangelicals participate actively in governmental spaces, and take control of social and political power. As Márquez, coordinator of Evangelical Public Workers and Servants Networks, points out:

> I think that we have moved from seeing Evangelicals as only needing to pray for authorities so that they might stay on the straight and narrow, to thinking that we can be those authorities and keep all of society on the straight and narrow. This is a huge step. (Márquez, personal interview, May 26, 2009)

On the other hand, other leaders believe that the most important role of Christian believers is related to the *shepherding* of political and social leaders. This view is based on the idea that the restoration of the nation will come through the spiritual change of these leaders. Finally, another group is working with the logic of promoting religious ritualization within governmental spaces. Based on this view, many leaders are deploying efforts to organize public rituals, such as *Evangelical Te-Deums*[9] with the participation of political leaders or prayer services in state institutions. Such actions grow out of their understanding that: "reduces the solution of political problems to ritualism; complex power relations embedded in political systems are ignored in favor of expressive solutions related to territorial spirits" (Freston, 2001: 315).

Institutional Religious Authority in the Public Sphere

The emergence of diverse forms of Evangelical public representation constitutes, on the one hand, a new re-configuration of institutional representation. For many years, Peruvian Evangelical leaders understood the historical National Evangelical Council of Peru (CONEP) to be the unique and official voice of the Peruvian Evangelical community. Today, even though Evangelical leaders agree that CONEP played an historical leadership role, they hold that the Evangelical sector now is more plural and diverse. They attribute a certain level of authority or legitimacy to traditional organizations. But, at the same time, they are building other ways of representation that are connected to more fluid interaction with diverse agents in the public sphere.

One can observe, here, a process marked by intense competition to gain power in the public sphere. In this context, shifting loyalties and commitments is part of intense processes of negotiation among Evangelical actors who are trying to obtain public legitimacy.

In this context, even though historical Evangelical organizations might not agree with the motivations of the new Evangelical movements, they are setting up alliances with them because they recognize their connections with political mediators, such as, politicians, governmental organizations and political parties, and with public *legitimators*, such as, the media, journalists, and opinion leaders. On the other side, the new movements avoid breaking their ties with historical organizations because they have recognized that historical institutions, such as CONEP still play the roles both of legitimator within the Evangelical community and interlocutor with many state institutions.

Hence, the current landscape of Evangelical public representation reveals that Evangelical institutional authority is not concentrated in one institution alone, as occurred traditionally. What is important to observe is that these multiple Evangelical public voices are legitimated not only as a function of their interaction with traditional interdenominational *ministries*, or support of an influential institution, or network within the larger Evangelical community, but also through their outward interactions within state, media networks, and civil society.

This case shows, as Freston (2001: 293) observes, that they can be empowered in the public sphere "without the help of doctrine or tradition, assuming public roles based on their dynamic profile as private religions of salvation. Private success underlies their public role, whether as substitutes-in-waiting for the old publicly dominant religion or, more modestly, as recipients of largesse from the state."

In this way, it is interesting to observe that while traditional denominations and organizations linked to the CONEP try to maintain an organizational dynamic based on a certain kind of vertical and formal authority, the Charismatic- and neo-Pentecostal-based movements are building their legitimacy based both on an organizational structure and doctrinal flexibility, as well as a more pragmatic political strategy.

These two views of ecclesiastical structure have repercussions in the relations that they build in the public sphere. Non-traditionalists more rapidly stake out a presence in the public spaces through the media, civil

society networks, and secularized public events because in their understanding, it is important to seize the opportunity to have greater public presence and power.

Using this tactic they have, for instance, obtained the official support of the Peruvian government to establish the religious service called *Evangelical Te Deum*. As mentioned above, for five consecutive years, as part of Peru's Independence Day celebrations, President Alan García, the first lady, state ministers, the chief of the Military Political Command, members of the Congress, and other political leaders attend on 30 July, each year, the *Service of Thanksgiving for Peru*. This liturgical event has been organized by the *Thanksgiving Ministry*, promoted by leaders of diverse Evangelical denominations, and mostly linked to Charismatic and neo-Pentecostal mega churches and ministries.

This liturgical event demonstrates how an emerging sector of Evangelical leaders has been able to surpass the authority of traditional leaders, since they are acquiring power in the public sphere and building more fluid relationships with public figures that have been legitimated by the media and entities that have political power. It also plays an important mediating role restoring "the dominance of symbol ...and sentiment, all wrapped in ... authority and transcendence" (Smith, 2001: 8).

Here, it is important to recognize the emergence of a new organization beyond the large interdenominational institutions. Miguel Bardales, coordinator of the *Thanksgiving Ministry*, asserts that they act as individuals, rather than as representatives of their respective denominations or of the large Peruvian Evangelical movement:

> My responsibility is to teach, to sow principles. I do not represent any evangelical institutions. My approach to the public sphere is not to fight for the interests of the evangelical church .... Ten years ago, never in my life would I have dared to express an opinion without the support of an organization. (2009)

Even though the institutional legitimacy of the non-traditional Evangelical Movement still lies in the authority of a Charismatic leader, they have configured what Berger (1967) calls *plausibility structures* which contribute to the continuity of religious socialization and the maintenance of their world view in the new space and time, beyond the domestic sphere (Cornwall, 1987).

In this case, it is important to notice how public interaction and engagement produces intense processes of negotiation and transactions within the large Evangelical community in order to keep or strengthen their public authority. Even though the diverse evangelical sectors tend to construct an image of unity and cohesion, their public discourse and practice reflect diverse *representations of legitimacy* through "new forms of social organizations, new leaders, [as well as] new ways to express their hopes..." (Stoll, 1990: 331).

At the political level, we can observe that "the traditional negotiating capacity of Protestant leaders and their skill at transforming their religious clientele into a political clientele" (Bastian, 1993: 51) propel them to create new interactions and negotiations into the corridors of power. At social and cultural levels, they construct a leadership model based on less rigid religious discourse, opening a relationship culture, a dialogue of goodwill, and debate on public secularized issues.

However, this landscape does not necessarily reveal a process of de-institutionalization of the religious field, but instead a kind of re-institutionalization, since the emergent Evangelical groups and networks are building new institutional structures that contrast with the hierarchical model of traditional institutions:

> In the Peruvian case, this new movement has a more Episcopal style, more charismatized. They express Evangelical re-institutionalization, the change in Evangelical institutionalization, because even though they do not claim the name of *evangélico*, but of Christian communities, they are building a new project in contrast the ecclesiastical old model. They want to be different than the traditional Evangelical. Their model is characterized by non-rigid moral norms (Bernardo Campos, personal interview, May 2, 2009).

Social and Cultural Interactions in the Secular Public Sphere

Strategically, one may notice that many of the groups linked to the Charismatic and neo-Pentecostal sectors have developed diverse tactics and strategies to set up close relationships and sustainable interactions with influential social and political agents. These strategies are based on the idea

that interaction with *public legitimators* is the best way to be recognized in the public sphere, and to have a legitimated and influential presence in the public sphere and the political arena. Many of these organizations actively participate as members or interlocutors within *secular* organizations and movements. Even though many of the principles of these civil society-based organizations contrast with the moral assumptions of Evangelical groups, the Evangelicals do not consider this as a problem because their strategic aim is to gain public and political power, to be recognized, and to play a visible role as legitimate claim-makers on social problems.

However, their discourse and practice demonstrate that these contemporary Evangelical leaders are not necessarily interested in building a movement for civic engagement; rather they are working to establish a recognizable political voice and power in the wider public sphere to influence public policy from their conservative *religious agenda*.

This is particularly relevant because many groups that in the past focused their political engagement on institutional politics, are now moving toward other civil society-based spaces in the public sphere. This reallocation is producing new scenarios where Evangelical leaders begin to see themselves as citizens and as social actors with their own voice,[10] and to set up strategic relationships with nonbelievers. Even though many conservative Evangelical groups, especially neo-Pentecostals and Charismatics, continue to adhere to messianic and millenarian doctrine, it is important to notice that many conservative Evangelical groups are moving from their relatively isolationist traditions into the frontier of public and diverse political engagement.

This new scenario allows us to observe, for instance, that "the concern of Protestant morality is shifting from pietistic preoccupation with private morality .... to public morality" (Tusalem, 2009: 884).

However, it is important to note that many conservative groups are constructing their public engagement from the perspective of *redemptive discourse* which means, on the one hand, that the main way to change society is based on the individual conversion as a point of departure. On the other hand, the presence of born again Christians is one of the sine qua non conditions for producing changes in the nation.

This contrasts with groups that employ a transformative approach which includes not only institutional empowerment in the public arena but also civic engagement practices, and proclaims the need for changing social structures.

It is important to observe in this case that although the emergence of religious publics implies that "religion takes part in the ongoing process of contestation, discursive legitimation, and redrawing of the boundaries" (Casanova, 1994: 66), it does not necessarily imply that religion has abandoned its place in the private sphere. Rather, I have observed a dialectical process of interaction between the two. Many moral issues that Evangelical groups place in the public sphere are raised from collective discussion in the private and domestic religious spheres. In this way, the private religious field is one of the key mediating spaces that influence many political decisions and public actions in which Evangelicals collectively participate.

New Forms of Evangelical Mediatization[11]

The history of Latin American Protestantism has been marked by the use of local media to convey the Evangelical message. Usually, local churches and interdenominational ministries used the media—such as radio, magazines, and bulletins—to reinforce the spiritual life of their members. Nevertheless, in the 1980s, the televangelism phenomenon produced a noticeable change with regard to the Evangelical media strategy.

In this process, especially notable has been the influence of the US electronic church[12] movement offering serious competition to local churches in Latin America. Smith (2001) coordinated a study of the impact of US religious broadcasting on Central America's active Christians. He and his colleges found that 70 percent of the sample found the teachings of televangelist Jimmy Swaggart to be more useful in their daily lives than those received in their local parish. They characterized the benefits of such programs as "spiritual blessing," "consolation," "healing," and "blessing for family life" (Smith, 2001: 7).

Along with televangelists Jimmy Swaggart and Pat Robertson, Spanish language preachers Luis Palau[13] and Hermano Pablo[14] created a media evangelization style characterized by a message designed for *converting the unbelievers* and for reinforcing the identity of the Evangelical Movement. These programs also represented both the conservative and messianic view of Evangelicalism. Such televangelists—Hoover argues—feel that they are recovering authentic religious faith and community (Hoover, 1988: 208).

Latin American investigators (Assman, 1987; Gogin, 1997; Pérez, 1997; Smith, 2001) agree with Stewart Hoover that these televangelistic programs provided "symbols, codes, and leaders that speak to the crisis of modernity and thereby revitalize fundamentalist values" (Hoover, 1988: 216).

However, as Smith observes, the dominance of the US media evangelists was short-lived.

> A combination of the personal and legal problems suffered by Jimmy Swaggart and Jim Bakker in 1987 and 1988, the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989, and innovations in the marketing of symbolic goods developed by the Brazilian media evangelists in the 90's led to the end of the US monopoly on electronic religion in Latin America (2001: 5).

In this context, US Evangelical media organizations helped to setup Evangelical TV and radio stations in many Latin American countries. Trinity Broadcasting Network has been a key player in these initiatives. In this sense, the 1990s saw the emergence not only of national and local Evangelical media production and media entrepreneurs, but also of Latino *media Evangelists*. Churches moved from program production or an occasional appearance in the media to the commercial appropriation of mass media which implied setting up and running their own communication enterprises, entering into direct competition with commercial media, and becoming creators of mass cultural identity (Pérez, 1997; Smith, 2001).

In many countries, Evangelical radio played an important role in strengthening the ties among Evangelical denominations. For instance, *Radio del Pacífico*, an Evangelical medium, founded in Peru, in 1963, by US missionaries, established a close cooperation with American ministries, such as Christian Broadcasting Network, Focus on the Family, *Hermano Pablo* Ministries, Campus Crusade for Christ, etc. In the last decade, *Radio del Pacífico* has become an influential institution among Peru's Evangelical denominations and interdenominational organizations.

Mostly Evangelical TV and radio in Latin America has not strayed substantially from their instrumental view of the media or from their traditional theological commitments. Thus, "[P]roducers of evangelistic messages for the electronic media came to conceive of religious conversion in reductionistic, individualistic terms as demanded by the principles of marketing" (Smith, 2001: 6).

Today, there are more than 30 radio stations that have adopted the theological and communicational perspective of *Radio del Pacífico*. Even though many Evangelical leaders assume that these media enterprises reinforce the public presence of Evangelicals, some studies (Gogin, 1997; Pérez, 1997) have showed that their real impact and influence is relegated to the Evangelical community.

In the past, Evangelical radio stations played an important legitimizing role. Pastors of churches, leaders of interdenominational organizations, and lay leaders considered these radio stations as spaces not only for evangelization, but also to strengthen Evangelical community life.

Today, we can observe that Charismatic and neo-Pentecostal media have changed their strategy in two important ways. First, contemporary media preachers are "simplifying the message, eliminating doctrine and reducing the message to a commercial transaction of symbolic goods" (Smith & Campos, 2005: 62).

Second, in many places, the *Evangelical media* still fulfills the key functions of strengthening the spiritual life of believers. Now, there is an added emphasis: They also help to create a sense of community and interdenominational cooperation.

However, the public emergence of Evangelical groups and movements is creating new forms of mediatization in which traditional *evangelical media* are being reshaped and replaced. Many Evangelical leaders consider that traditional Evangelical broadcast media are not strategic resources for acquiring a more effective presence and legitimacy in society. In the past, most of them assumed that evangelical radio, for instance, was the effective *public window* to a greater presence in society. Now, they consider that their own media are insufficient for building effective influence in the public sphere.

Media as Spaces for Reinforcing Boundaries

This new mediatization process reflects that evangelical groups are conceiving of media less in terms of an *indoctrination tool,* and more as a space from which it is possible to build socialization webs beyond the church. In this sense, the use of the media is not restricted to the production of *Evangelical programs* or diffusion of evangelistic media products. Rather, they are producing public events designed to catch the eye of the secular media, as well as cultivating social networks through the internet. Many

groups maintain an active presence on social networks, such as Facebook and Twitter.

Jorge Márquez, leader of the Evangelical State Servants Network, has created a site on Facebook, and has a Yahoo-groups list called AEQUUS about news and reflections on Evangelicals and civic participation. Six thousand leaders receive news, reflections, and interviews through his mailing list which is connected to his blog and Facebook site. Márquez and his team use this media platform not only to convey their views as Evangelicals on social debates and political events, but also to legitimize the faces and voices of the Evangelical sector that they represent.

What is interesting to observe is that these organizations produce information not only related to Evangelical events, but also about diverse secular social activities. This strategy reveals that their goal is not only to get an influential presence within non-Evangelical spaces and population, but also to dialogue with the secular voices as well as help to their seekers to interpret current events from the Evangelical view.

In this case, as Horsfield (1997) observes, media acquire a central hermeneutic dimension of culture to which all other social institutions have to adapt themselves. This process constitutes a kind of re-mediatization of Evangelical religiosity that

> impels churches not only to compete—even over their 'own' symbols, functions, services and heritage—, but moreover, the media, as the central hermeneutic dimension of culture, function as a matrix for values and meaning and as a lens or framework through which we see and experience any other social collective. (De Feijter, 2006: 94)

Another aspect in this topic is related to the discursive negotiations that the interaction between religious authority and media authority produce. Evangelical groups that are interacting within secular media spaces are in permanent confrontation between their points-of-view and the nonreligious perceptions of social problems, political struggles, and moral debates. In this case, we can observe "that media not only have taken over the function of ritual and sacred symbolism, shaped by the process of mediation, but also define social and personal ethical issues, in a discourse churches cannot control" (ibid., 97). This new scenario, as De Feijter warns, compels religious groups to compete over their own *core business*, with media determining its position in the web of culture (ibid.).

Media as Sources for Legitimating Public Authority

Many of the Evangelical leaders who are actively boosting social efforts in the public realm perceive the *secular media* as fundamental sources of legitimacy. As we have mentioned, in the past, most of them assumed that their *inner* legitimacy, based on the support of their local churches or the Evangelical media, was sufficient for them to properly fulfill their role in society. Nowadays, they agree that one of the key aspects of their strategy for public empowerment is the construction of close relationships with opinion leaders legitimated by the media.

In this sense, it is important to observe, on the one hand, that Evangelical groups are more embedded in media institutions and their cultural commodities (Hoover, 1997). On the other hand, they are aware that the secular media become a privileged mediating space to construct public symbols of authority (De Feijter, 2006).

Many of the Evangelical leaders see the secular media as a direct challenge to their authority because, on the one hand, they make boundaries between a sacred culture inside the faith and a profane culture outside increasingly relevant (Hoover, 2008: 13). On the other hand, they are aware that the existence of the media in the public sphere validates authority and relevance; in contrast, "the absence of church in the public realm of the media diminishes people's perception of the relevance of faith to their everyday existence" (Horsfield, 1997: 179).

In this sense, a challenge being faced by churches is:

> to rethink the public relevance and applicability of their ideology in a situation in which almost every function that the church used to serve is now alternatively available as an often more attractive consumer commodity, in which they can no longer control how they are represented or how their symbols are used. (ibid.)

Another important aspect is that global media platforms have made it possible for many Evangelical groups to construct active relationships with similar transnational and global movements. For instance, they are participating more fluently in global advocacy campaigns fostered by international Evangelical ministries. Such experiences constitute a kind of de-territorialized religious practice. But these groups are also experiencing

an intense process of re-territorialization because, at the same time, they are embedded in local and national cultural and political processes.

Mediatized globalization has created not only new media and communication strategies, but also new discourse characterized by the construction of linkages with globalized networks which are used as important capital to gain authority both among believers and secular organizations.

In this case, globalization has not constituted a threat to the identity of these groups. Instead, they have gained advantage because globalization has reinforced an important aspect of the traditional Evangelical mentality: to be part of the wider community of believers. In this way, global platforms are providing cultural resources for the construction of this imagined and decentralized religious community.

In light of the fact that Peruvian Evangelical groups are deploying efforts to leave behind material and symbolic marginality, local and transnational media play a key role by creating a new space in which religious actors can reimagine their presence and develop new interactions, as well as produce new discourse beyond the local and domestic religious spheres.

Hence, the public representation of contemporary Peruvian Evangelicals constitutes mainly a mediatized practice. In this sense, media spaces and media culture are shaping the logic, discourse, and practice of public engagement-based Evangelical movements and organizations. I have found evidence that shows that these groups are not only using media technology to gain more visibility and to communicate their religious values, but also have developed strategies to appropriate media culture to interact more fluently in the secularized public sphere.

In this sense, the Peruvian case reveals that, on the one hand, the public emergence of Latin American Evangelical groups—linked to the mega church networks—is increasingly embedded into the public sphere. In this process, media institutions and platforms are playing a significant role.

On the other hand, this mediatized public engagement is creating a less hierarchized form of religious power and authority. It also confirms that the rapid emergence of contemporary Evangelical groups is re-signifying the authority and legitimacy of traditional ecclesiastical institutions.

Finally, such mediatized public engagement confirms what several scholars in this field (Hjarvard, 2008; Hoover, 2009; Livingstone, 2009; Martin-Barbero, 1988) have long affirmed: that mediated religion is constructing not only new forms and logics of religious ritualization, but also

a new form for understanding and assuming religious authority as well as a sense of institutional belonging and representation. Clearly, contemporary Charismatic and neo-Pentecostal groups are building their public strategy of evangelization, and social and political influence taking into account the logic of contemporary media culture.

In summary, contemporary Evangelical groups, especially Charismatics and neo-Pentecostals, derive their legitimacy from factors, such as their capacity to engage in mediated discourse, their relationship with and closeness to political power and opinion leaders, the construction of a secularized image, their insertion into the larger religious marketplace, and their elaboration of a moral discourse linked to the construction of political power by the articulation of public claims about social problems.

Notes

1. The analyses and reflections in this chapter are part of the findings of the study led by the author on the public participation of Evangelical groups—mainly Charismatic and neo-Pentecostals sector—in Perú. In this sense, we have observed the practices, as well as collected the perceptions of the main leaders of the following organizations: Union Nacional de Iglesias Cristianas Evangélicas del Perú (Union of Peruvian Evangelical Christian Churches), Confraternidad Peruana de Pastores Evangélicos (Peruvian Fraternity of Evangelical Pastors), Ministerio de Acción de Gracias (Thanksgiving Ministry), Red de Funcionarios y Servidores Públicos Evangélicos (Evangelical Public Workers and Servants Networks). These organizations represent the main churches and ministries linked to the mega churches platform in Perú.
2. In the Peruvian context, it is mainly Charismatic and neo-Pentecostal congregations that are adopting the key characteristics of mega churches. This is the case of congregations, such as Iglesia Camino de Vida (Path of Life Church), Centro Evangelistico Rios de Agua Viva (Evangelistic Center *Rivers of Living Water*), and Iglesia Tabernaculo de Fe (Faith Tabernacle Church). The common characteristics of these congregations are: They want to portray what they do as more vital than other traditional congregations; they are connected to the larger fraternity of global Charismatic and neo-Pentecostal organizations; their missiological practice is based on a conservative theological approach; most of them are including the *apostolic model* in their ecclesiastical structure; they are embracing modern architectural forms and a contemporary worship format; even though the main pastor is the central figure in the life of the congregation, they encourage lay leaders to be part of the pastoral team; they intentionally present themselves as non-bureaucratic, non-hierarchical, and non-traditional entity; they build a kind of congregation open to engaging social and cultural dynamics beyond the inner life of the church.
3. With regard to the Peruvian case, according to the Public Opinion Institute of Catholic University of Perú, the population of believers is 91 percent, the percentage of non-

believers is of 4.23 percent, and the percentage of indifferent is 4.72 percent. Among the believers, 79.2 percent are Catholics (less than the report of 2007 Census), 12.8 percent are Evangelicals or Pentecostals (slightly similar to the 2007 Census), 3.7 percent are Adventists, Jehovah Witness, Mormons, or Israelites of the New Universal Pact, and other 3.19 percent are people who consider themselves as believers with no religion. According to the last national census, the total population in Perú is 28,220,764 inhabitants, and according to the 2007 national census, 16,960,443 citizens profess Catholic religion, which is 81.3 percent of the population. The second important is the Evangelical religion which reached 2,606,648 people, that is, 12.5 percent of the population. The 3.3 percent (679,807 people) profess other religions and the 2.9 percent (608,770 people) do not have any religion.

4. Levine explains why contemporary Latin American religiosity reflects not only pluralism but also plurality:

> A Plurality of churches, social movements identified with religion, and voices claim the moral authority to speak in the name of religion; pluralism is increasingly evident in civil society and in lower barriers to entry into public spaces. Just as religious plurality and pluralism transform social and political life, putting more actors, voices, and options into play, so too the consolidation and expansion of democratic politics, the reduction of barriers to organization and access, and the gradual elaboration of practical rules of the game for a plural civil society have a visible impact of the daily life of religion and change the way religious institutions situate themselves in society and politics (2009: 407–408)

5. Contemporary studies reveal that Afro-Brazilian spiritist religions, New Ageism, Buddhism, and indigenous Creole faiths are also on the rise in many parts of the continent. The Incas, Mayas, Aztecas still maintain their own various ancestral folk beliefs and practices (Smith & Joshua, 1999: 1). In the same way, Martin (1990) has noted other varying religious expressions, such as South Asian immigrants who have come to Trinidad, Guyana, and Surinam, bringing forms of Islam and Hinduism with them. The same is true of Japanese immigrants settled in Perú and Brazil (ibid., p. 55). Parker (1996, 2009) analyzes the emergence of the new syncretisms, which aggregate traditional and historical forms. He observes that the new religious map is characterized by "[m]ultiple affiliations, interactions among religions, the neo-magic (hermetic and magico-ritual mysticism), all the Pentecostals (Catholic or Evangelical), ethnic shamanism and variety popular religions as well as new spiritualities" (2009: 167).
6. Reconstructionists emphasize, on the one hand, that the Biblical command to Adam to dominate the earth applies today to Christians:

> The Biblical law or covenant is that it constitutes a plan for dominion under God .... The purpose of God in requiring Adam to exercise dominion over the earth remains His continuing covenant word: man, created in God's image and commanded to subdue the earth an exercise dominion and regeneration. The law is therefore the law for Christian man and Christian society. (Pottenger, 2007:77)

7. It corresponds to the interpretation of the Bible reference at Deuteronomy 28:13: "The LORD will make you the head, not the tail. If you pay attention to the commands of the LORD your God that I give you this day and carefully follow them, you will always be at the top, never at the bottom."
8. It is important to observe that it is the same discourse that American movements, such as Moral Majority Coalition and Christian Coalition of America supported many of their political actions. Toulouse (2006) writes: "The mission of the Christian Coalition is simple," said Pat Robertson. It is to mobilize Christians – one precinct at a time, one community at a time – until once again we are the head and not the tail, and at the top rather than the bottom of our political system" (ibid., p. 80).

9. *Evangelical Te-Deum* constitutes an Evangelical version of the traditional Catholic service as part of the Peruvian Independence Day celebration.
10. The construction of this new public face is relevant because in the past many of these Evangelical organizations and church groups were seen as easily manipulated groups in favor of political interests and supporters of the political status quo. Bastian (1993) has observed that in the past, Evangelical leaders have been able to establish themselves in certain Latin American countries "as a political clientele of the authoritarian regimes in the traditional sense of corporatist mediator" (ibid., p. 50). He mentions two remarkable cases: The 1990 election of Alberto Fujimori in Peru supported by the majority of Evangelical denominations, and Jorge Serrano, the first democratically-elected Protestant Latin American President, in Guatemala, in January 1991.
11. The theoretical approach to religious mediatization assumes both media and religion as fields of social and cultural construction (De Feijer, 2006; Hoover, 2006; White, 1997). From this view, on the one hand, media constitute a "locus where cultural identities are created, communities are configured, and social actors are constituted" (De Feijer, 2006: 88). On the other hand, the media constitute "a kind of mirror of the culture, or even a cultural forum through which important relations in the culture is aired, articulated and negotiated" (Hoover, 2006: 10).
12. In his influential 1988 book on mass media religion, *The Social Sources of Electronic Church*, Hoover examines the social impact of the American electronic church. He argues that this religious phenomenon revealed that "Evangelical and Fundamentalist organizations were among the first to see the power of broadcasting as a proselytizing tool" (p. 49).
13. Luis Palau is an Argentinean Evangelist founder of the Luis Palau Association. He is best known for his worldwide Evangelistic festivals and his radio program, Luis Palau Responde (Luis Palau answers). His festivals combine popular music, action sports, family-friendly entertainment, and his evangelistic sermon.
14. Paul Finkenbinder (Hermano Pablo) is the director of the *Hermano Pablo Ministries*, a radio and TV broadcast ministry. His well-known radio and TV program Un Mensaje a la Consciencia (A Message to the Conscience) "is seen, heard, or read throughout 30 countries over 20,000 times per week and is in over 80 periodicals. Paul Finkenbinder (Hermano Pablo) began broadcasting in 1962. Paul is the board chairman, and he travels extensively across Latin America conducting seminars, conferences, and evangelistic crusades." Retrieved from http://www.ministrywatch.com/profile/hermano-pablo-ministries.aspx on October 14, 2009.

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