International Journal of Latin American Religions (2023) 7:181–206
https://doi.org/10.1007/s41603-023-00199-5

ORIGINAL PAPERS

Faith in Peacebuilding Assemblages in Colombia and Peru

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Received: 23 January 2023 / Accepted: 6 April 2023 / Published online: 8 May 2023

Abstract
This article offers two case studies of faith-based organizing and programming in Colombia and Peru to better understand the peacebuilding work of Latin American evangelical Christians and how their identification as faith-based actors impacts their work. Evangelical Christians are understudied actors in the peacebuilding field, and our cases illustrate the need for careful sifting within this particular Christian movement. We draw on assemblage theory to delineate the particular religious logics, civic commitments, and organizational practices employed by faith-based NGO leaders to sustain broader projects of transformation in Colombia and Peru.

Keywords Evangelical · Peacebuilding · Religion · Colombia · Peru · Assemblage

Introduction

In 2016, ina national referendum, Colombian voters rejected the peace deal negotiated between the government, led by President Juan Manuel Santos, and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Armed Revolutionary Forces of Colombia, FARC). The "no" vote won by a slim margin of 50.2%. Many analysts point to the influential, if not decisive, role of the evangelical[1] Christian vote in the defeat of

[1] The authors recognize that there is no consensus regarding the differences between evangelicals and Protestants, and that distinguishing them is even harder in Latin America. In this paper, however, we follow the definition offered by Britannica, and use the term "evangelical" to refer to churches that "stress the preaching of … personal conversion experiences, Scripture as the sole basis for faith, and active evangelism." https://www.britannica.com/topic/Evangelical-church-Protestantism. Therefore, we consider evangelicals within the broader category of "Protestants," which also includes Anabaptist and other historical non-Roman Catholic congregations.

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the referendum which asked, "Do you support the final agreement to end the conflict and construct stable and lasting peace?" (Beltrán and Creely 2018; Mazo 2019; Hays 2020). Yet, not all evangelicals rejected the deal. Followers of grassroots peace work in Colombia might be surprised at the result of the referendum, given the rich history of diverse Protestant groups involved in a broad spectrum of peacebuilding work in Colombia dating back several decades. There is clearly more to the story of how Protestants have engaged in peacebuilding[2] in Colombia.

Nationwide in Colombia, the peace agreement was hampered by concerns of letting the FARC "off the hook," with too little accountability for their past activities. This concern of impunity for the guerrillas was a factor in the evangelical vote. Another factor was fear that the land restitution provisions of the treaty would lead to a Venezuelan-like leftward lurch in Colombia (Hays 2020). A third factor explaining the peace deal rejection by evangelicals, and the one that seemed to receive the most attention from the press, was fear-mongering about an LGBTQ agenda and gender ideology related to the peace agreement.[3] It is believed that large urban churches, many of them Pentecostal megachurches, were more likely to vote "no" than churchgoers in rural areas where the violence was more felt. Pentecostals in rural areas, which had suffered most from the violence, as well as historical Protestant denominations such as Lutherans, Mennonites, and Methodists, tended to vote "yes" on the referendum (Beltrán and Creely 2018: p. 426; Hays 2020). With no precise numbers on voting demographics available, there is some speculation about exact results though it is clear that "there is certainly no single Protestant view of the violence in Colombia" (Hays 2020).

In neighboring Peru, the engagement of Protestant Christians in post-conflict, peacebuilding work suggests another complicated picture. On the one hand, the support for political candidates with a fairly dismal human rights record is a dominant pattern of political behavior expressed by evangelicals in the bigger cities. This was the case, for example, with the sequential presidential candidacies (2011, 2016, and 2021) of Keiko Fujimori, who widely exploited her "faith commitment" and "conservative values" to garner the support of many evangelical pastors and congregants.[4] Yet there is not a single Protestant voice in Peru. Some evangelical

[2] The authors understand peacebuilding as referring to a wide range of activities that include supporting displaced groups, pursuing justice, upholding human rights, promoting dialog, etc., that could occur at any phase of a conflict (not limited to post-conflict activities). As an example of this use of the term, see Lederach.

[3] Mazo also notes the role of Catholics in this, whose more neutral stance did not help counter the No campaign (p. 127).

[4] Keiko Fujimori is the daughter of authoritarian president Alberto Fujimori. To see an example of Keiko Fujimori's use of religious discourse, see: "*¿Qué significa Dios en la vida de Keiko Fujimori? Pastores evangélicos apoyan a Keiko*." ("What does God mean in Keiko Fujimori's life? Evangelical pastors support Keiko." https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=evangelicos+apoyan+a+keiko+fujimori+peru&docid=607997099785997095&mid=193ED044CAD59053FE9B193ED044CAD59053FE9B&view=detail&FORM=VIRE).

Also, during the run-off election in April 2021, WhatsApp groups in Peru were inundated with short videos in which evangelical leaders explained why Christians should support Keiko Fujimori. The *Con mis Hijos No te Metas* (Don't Mess with My Children) campaign mobilized many ultra-conservative Catholic and evangelical groups, further galvanizing support for the Keiko Fujimori campaign. Fujimori narrowly lost the election.

pastors working in poor provinces, for example, voiced their support for leftist Pedro Castillo when he was a presidential candidate.[5]

These two examples represent the notable influence that Protestant Christian groups exercise in the political arenas in both countries, a pattern that is found elsewhere in Latin America. They also underscore the complex, and often contradictory, inner workings and impacts of Protestant Christianity in the region. A central objective of the discussion that follows is to highlight such complex and contradictory processes by describing how Protestant, faith-based non-governmental organizations (NGOs) engage in peacebuilding work in Colombia and Peru.

Exceptional Cases of Protestant Peacebuilding: Our Argument and Methodology

Churches and faith-based organizations affiliated with diverse Protestant Christian movements in Latin America have been active in peacebuilding since the late twentieth century. This paper profiles two exceptional cases of faith-based organizing around peacebuilding programming in Colombia and Peru. Our designation of these cases as exceptional is not prescriptive. Rather, it connotes their relative uniqueness within larger patterns of social and civic behavior exhibited by Latin American Protestant Christians in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. An important empirical goal of our case studies is to better understand the peacebuilding work of Latin American Protestants, and in particular evangelical Protestant groups, and how their identification as faith-based actors impacts their work.

We pay attention to two specific questions: (1) How do these faith-based NGOs understand peacebuilding work and its relationship to their own faith and organizational mission? and (2) What other actors—domestic and transnational—do they partner with and how are these partnerships assembled and maintained either through shared faith commitments, pragmatic goals, or other factors? By answering these questions, this article makes a novel empirical contribution to the underexplored area of faith-based actors in peacebuilding work in Latin America. Most social scientific research on the topic has understandably focused more on the involvement and contributions of Catholic religious actors. Our project reorients the focus towards religious actors who have been a part of the so-called conversion of the continent (Steingenga and Clearly 2007). The increased influence of evangelical groups in social and political life across the region merits greater study.

We write this article as relatively immersed participants in the work of faith-based peacebuilding programming in the Americas. Gerstbauer was involved with the Sal y Luz initiative, the focus of our first case study, as a campus organizer in

[5] As left-leaning newspaper *La República* has reported, small civic groups affiliated with evangelical Christianity, such as the Committed Christians Collective and the Christian Citizens Collective for Development and Good Living, also called on Peruvian Protestants to vote without fear, arguing that "*Fujimorismo* does not guarantee a clear democratic practice." (Authors' translation). https://larepublica.pe/elecciones/2021/05/28/elecciones-2021-lideres-evangelicos-divididos-por-respaldo-a-pedro-castillo-y-keiko-fujimori-pltc/

Minnesota. Balmaceda currently serves as president of Peace and Hope International (PHI), a sister organization to Paz y Esperanza (PyE) in Peru, which is detailed in the second case study. Balmaceda and Huff also serve as members of PHI's Board of Directors. We are aware that our positions as "observing participants"—meaning, as researchers who study a group to which they belong—can generate both insights and blindspots (Kirner and Mills 2020: p. 71). Our status as cultural and organizational insiders reminded us to be critically aware of the assumptions we brought to the entire process of researching and writing about peacebuilding work; and we welcome the perspectives of colleagues whose outsider status generates insights that challenge our own.

For our two case studies, we draw from various primary and secondary sources. This includes information gathered from formal interviews with organizational and contracted staff, from participant observation in meetings, events, and planning sessions associated with the Sal y Luz initiative in Colombia, from direct observation of interactions between government officials, NGO staff and volunteers, and congregational leaders in Peru, and from the careful review of organizational documents.

The paper begins with a brief review of literature examining the contributions of faith-based actors to peacebuilding work. We then turn to consider some of the broader changes that have occurred in Latin American Christianities at the end of the twentieth century, with a specific emphasis on what national survey data suggests about how Protestant Christians in Colombia and Peru understand the role that their churches play in addressing wider social and political problems. Following this, we introduce and explain the concept of assemblage, which serves as an analytical frame for explaining the peacebuilding programming detailed in our case studies. The paper then develops two case studies of faith-based initiatives and campaigns for peacebuilding in Colombia and Peru to provide an in-depth analysis of our research questions. To conclude, we offer some closing thoughts on why faith remains both an important and contradictory element in the formation of peacebuilding assemblages in Latin America.

The Broader Context of Faith-Based Peacebuilding Work

Scholarship exploring religion and religious actors' contributions to peacebuilding has expanded tremendously in the last quarter century. An early example of this work was Johnston and Sampson's edited volume on the fundamental roles that religious and spiritual communities have played in resolving conflict and promoting peaceful change (1994). Volume contributors documented the considerable experience, capacities, and know-how possessed by religious actors related to peacebuilding work, which include "an established record for humanitarian care and concern; a respected set of values, including a reputation for trustworthiness; unique leverage for promoting reconciliation between conflicting parties; a capability for mobilizing community, national and international support for a peace process; and an ability to follow through locally in the wake of a settlement" (Johnston and Sampson 1994: p. 262).

Researchers have noted how the credal content of religious communities, including their theologies, religious teachings, values, normative social behaviors, and ethics, can also be resources for peacebuilding work (Wald 1997: pp. 28–30). Gopin, for example, lists the peace-related values that religion offers as empathy, an openness to strangers, suppression of ego and inquisitiveness, articulation of human rights, unilateral gestures of forgiveness and humility, interpersonal repentance and acceptance of responsibility for past errors, and a drive for social justice (1997: p. 2). These theological resources influence the religious actors' peacebuilding frameworks and methodologies (Sampson 1997: p. 307).

How religious actors engage in peacebuilding work ranges from more informal and ad hoc involvements to the development of more programmatic and ongoing peacebuilding roles and strategies (Sampson 1997: p. 273; Natsios 1997: pp. 352–356; Garred and Abu-Nimer 2018). For example, peacebuilding is a core strategy of all of the relief and development programming of the Mennonite Central Committee, an international NGO affiliated with Anabaptist Christian movements and founded in 1920. Since the 1980s and 1990s, other relief and development NGOs (both religious and secular) that have worked in conflict zones have generated and sustained programs that focus on conflict amelioration (Anderson 1999). Two of the world's largest faith-based NGOs, World Vision International and Catholic Relief Services, were influenced by their experiences in Rwanda and subsequently created peacebuilding programs.

More recent literature on religion and peacebuilding continues to offer a rich analysis of the field, with one major theme being "the instrumental role of 'religious networks' in the dynamics of conflict and peacebuilding" (Omer 2015: p. 4). New scholarship also argues for care in sifting within religious traditions and shying away from simplistic dichotomies of, for example, "good Christians" and "bad Christians." Notably, the *2015 Oxford Handbook of Religion, Conflict, and Peacebuilding* says relatively little about evangelical Protestants within or outside of Latin America. Evangelicals are an understudied actor within religious peacebuilding, and our cases illustrate the need for careful sifting within the tradition.

Changing Religious Demographics in Colombia and Peru

For most of the twentieth century Christians in Peru and Colombia identified themselves as Catholics. The religious landscape in both countries, however, has transformed significantly since the 1960s, as an increasing number of Peruvians and Colombians have affiliated with Protestant Christian groups and movements.[6] According to the Pew Research Centre's *Religion in Latin America* report, the

[6] In this section, we present data from the Pew study which notes the following about the terms "Protestant" and "evangelical": "Protestants in Latin America, like Protestants elsewhere, belong to a diverse group of denominations and independent churches. But unlike in the United States, where the labels 'born again' and 'evangelical' set certain Protestants apart, in Latin America 'Protestant' and 'evangelical' are often used interchangeably" (Pew Research Center 2014: p. 7).

movement "away from Catholicism and toward Protestantism in Latin America has occurred in the span of a single lifetime" (Pew Research Center 2014: p. 5). Such change has been especially notable in Colombia and Peru where 74% and 66% of Protestants, respectively, observed that they were raised Catholic (Pew Research Center 2014).

Most Colombian and Peruvian Christians presently identify as Catholics. As of 2014, approximately 79% of Colombians were Catholic and 13% identified as Protestant. In Peru, the numbers were fairly similar, with ~ 76% of Christians identifying as Catholic and 17% identifying as Protestant. A widespread and notable feature of the growth of Protestant Christianity in both countries, and in Latin America in general, is that it has been generated largely by groups and denominations affiliated with the Pentecostal Christian movement. Nearly half of all Colombian Protestants in 2014, for example, belonged to a Pentecostal church or group. Likewise, in Peru, a relatively large number of Protestants attend a Pentecostal congregation.[7] While most Latin American Christians continue to identify as Catholic, the movement towards Protestantism has prompted many social scientists to examine how such changes are influencing broader patterns in social attitudes and political perspectives of those who affiliate with Protestant groups.

The Pew study sheds light on a handful of attitudinal patterns among Colombian and Peruvian Christians that are worth noting. A first pattern concerns the behaviors that Protestant Christians identify as normative relative to helping and caring for the poor. More Colombian Protestants (51%), for example, prioritized proselytization (e.g., "bringing the poor and needy to Christ'") over charity work (21%), and advocating for the rights of the poor (20% affirmed the statement "persuading government officials to protect the rights of the poor" as their top choice) (Pew Research Center 2014: p. 195). A similar pattern of response was also provided by Peruvian Protestants, with 55% affirming proselytization as the most important practice for helping the poor.[8] From this same group, 30% selected charity work as the preferred way to help the poor, and 11% designated influencing the government to protect the rights of the poor as the top priority. The priority that Colombian and Peruvian evangelicals give to such conversionary practices is significant. As we discuss later, it is one of the many religious logics that faith-based NGO leaders manage and, most notably, hold in tension as they attempt to mobilize local churches to engage in peacebuilding work.

A second and related pattern from the Pew study concerns the kind of work that churches ordinarily carry out to address the needs of the poor in their communities.

[7] The presence of Pentecostal and charismatic forms of Christianity is not limited to Protestant churches. In both countries, a small number of Catholic survey respondents also identified as Pentecostals (5% in Colombia and 6% in Peru).

[8] Colombian and Peruvian Catholic respondents indicated a different pattern of priorities. Colombian and Peruvian Catholics designated charity work (47% and 53%, respectively) as their top choice. Twenty-six percent of Colombian Catholics identified advocacy work and another 11% selected "bringing the poor and needy to Christ" as their preferred strategy. The opposite order was true for Catholics in Peru. There 24% prioritized proselytization, whereas 20% identified engaging government officials on behalf of the poor as their top choice (Pew Research Center 2014).

The study queried respondents about their church's engagement in three different kinds of activities related to poverty alleviation, including providing food and clothing for people in need, helping people find employment, and persuading government officials to defend the rights of the poor. Protestants in both countries indicated that their congregations engaged in all three activities. At the same time, survey responses demonstrated that significantly more churches focused on relief and aid activities than on engaging in human rights or advocacy work. For example, 87% of Colombian Protestants and 76% of Peruvian Protestants indicated that their churches provided food and clothing to people in need, whereas 51% and 33%, respectively, reported that their congregations persuaded government officials to defend rights of the poor.

Such self-reported data has its limitations. Nevertheless, it offers helpful insights into the logic and practices that guide local congregations' social engagement and public advocacy. As our case studies suggest, the logics and practices that faith-based NGO leaders promote often contrast and are sometimes at odds with the logics sustained by Colombian and Peruvian evangelical churchgoers. This is especially true for our case from Peru, where a Protestant, faith-based human rights organization (PyE) has worked to mobilize evangelical Christians to advocate for the rights and well-being of political violence victims since 1996. As will be shown, many congregations remain suspicious of human rights work and have not robustly supported the organization's work there.

It should be remembered, then, that the organizations we profile, and the international and national organizational networks they belong to and participate in, promote logics and practices of social engagement that are exceptional within the larger evangelical Christian movement of which they are a part. The question of how organizational leaders attempt to forge and sustain alignments with religious and non-religious actors who hold diverse—and sometimes opposing—priorities and strategies for projects of social and political change is at the heart of our research project. Before turning to consider the work of Sal y Luz and Paz y Esperanza, we offer a brief explanation of the concept of assemblage, which frames our analysis of each case.

Peacebuilding Programs as Assemblages

In this paper, we use assemblage as an analytical tool to describe and make sense of peacebuilding programs that are mobilized by faith-based NGOs working across the Americas. What is an assemblage? Assemblage is one among many terms and concepts used by theorists to "refer to the way in which heterogeneous elements including 'discourses, institutions, regulatory decisions, laws … moral and philanthropic propositions' are assembled to address an 'urgent need' and invested with strategic purpose" (Li 2007: p. 1; Foucault 1980: p. 194). Various social scientists have productively used the concept of assemblage to make sense of wide-ranging phenomena, including government improvement programs, globalization, nation-states, and urban social movements, among many others (Ong and Collier 2009; Nail 2017; McFarlane and Anderson 2011; McFarlane

2009; Li 2007). While different "traditions of usage" exist for the term across and within these disciplines, many scholars orient their research around certain core assumptions (McFarlane 2009: p. 4). Such logics do not treat objects of study as an "organic unity" composed of essential, enduring qualities; rather, assemblage is understood to be a "multiplicity" and it refers to emergent phenomena that are more like events, which are always contingent and incomplete processes (Nail 2017: pp. 22–24).

McFarlane (2009) notes that assemblages emphasize three interrelated processes, which we consider in our examination. First, the term signals processes of "gathering, coherence, and dispersion" (McFarlane 2009: p. 4). Of particular interest to our discussion is how faith-based NGOs working in Colombia and Peru attempted to create connections among very diverse elements across time and space in order to sustain peacebuilding programming. For example, what were the elements that faith-based NGOs foregrounded in their work and identified as shared, common, and even Christian, among the people and groups they attempted to assemble? And which elements were minimized, or even erased, so as to avoid dismantling the assemblage? We note too how such connections and alignments were always on the verge of disassembly. In fact, the various gatherings we document in our case studies have dispersed in one way or another since their formation.

A second characteristic feature of assemblage is that it connotes "groups, collectives, and, by extension, distributed agencies" (McFarlane 2009: p. 9). Our case studies clearly draw attention to the work of particular agents—namely, Protestant faith-based NGOs and churches—in the larger assemblage of peacebuilding programming. This focus offers one vantage point (among many possible others) to describe the "hard work required to draw heterogeneous elements together … and sustain these connections in the face of tension" (Li 2007: p. 2). Of particular interest to our analysis is the work that these faith-based NGOs performed to hold the peacebuilding assemblage together. Closely related to this second characteristic of assemblage is a third and final aspect. The term implies "emergence rather than resultant formation" (McFarlane 2009: p. 5). This means that we avoid treating peacebuilding programs in Peru and Colombia as static products. Instead, we analyze them as a set of dynamic relations consisting of "doings, performance, and events" that required faith-based NGO staff to exercise "different kinds of labor" at different points in time (McFarlane 2009: p. 6).

Our research examines how the work performed in the Sal y Luz initiative (Colombia) and by Paz y Esperanza (Peru) operates within a larger assemblage of faith-inspired social change in which organizational leaders and staff "intervene in social processes to produce desired outcomes and prevent undesired ones" (Li 2007: p. 7). Peacebuilding work is a set of complex interventions. Our study attempts to delineate the particular religious logics, civic commitments, and organizational practices employed by faith-based NGOs to sustain broader projects of transformation. To be sure, their engagements are only some of the elements that comprise the larger assemblage of peacebuilding programming at work in Peru and Colombia. In this article, we aim to better understand how faith-based organizations draw on and incorporate certain religious logics in order to mobilize very diverse actors around the work of peacebuilding.

The Case of Sal y Luz Colombia[9]

Colombia in recent decades has experienced some of the longest running and devastating political violence in Latin America, resulting in some 250,000 deaths and over seven million displaced persons. The half-century conflict involved drug traffickers, multiple guerrilla groups, paramilitary self-defense groups, and the Colombian armed forces. At the national level, successive governments stumbled through multiple failed attempts at negotiating an end to the conflict. Those working for peace and human rights are often victims of violence; Colombia has been a dangerous place to be a peacemaker.

Sal y Luz

In 2004, Lutheran World Relief (LWR), an international relief and development NGO, began a peacebuilding initiative in Colombia. They facilitated the formation of a partnership between peace sanctuary churches in Colombia and six communities of faith in the upper Midwest of the USA, coordinated by LWR staff. This partnership, called Sal y Luz (Spanish for "salt and light") had the goal of education and advocacy both in Colombia and in the USA.

As initially funded by the Ford Foundation, the Sal y Luz project was titled "Developing a Framework for Linking Local Peacebuilding to National and International Policymakers." The idea was to draw from the experiences and knowledge of local-level peace sanctuary churches in Colombia to inform policy-making and high-level negotiations about Colombia, both in Colombia and in the USA. The local peace sanctuary churches had made significant advances in preventing violence and responding to the needs of affected populations, and yet their achievements were not well known. Here was grassroots peacebuilding taking place—what could be learned from it and how might it be viewed as an alternative to the dominant military approaches to ending Colombia's conflict?

Sal y Luz would serve three main goals: (1) to take the grassroots knowledge of the Colombian peace sanctuary churches and document and refine it (helping them to improve their peacebuilding practices); (2) to use the experiences of the churches to inform the policy process in Colombia; and (3) to use the experiences of the churches to inform and mobilize US faith communities to advocate for a change in US foreign policy toward Colombia. This would require a cooperative relationship between those churches in Colombia and US Lutherans.

Peace Sanctuary Churches in Colombia

Peace sanctuary churches are communities that decided to denounce violence and refused to align themselves with any of the armed actors in Colombia—guerrilla,

[9] Other aspects of this case are featured in Gerstbauer (2009).

paramilitary, drug trafficker, or the state military.[10] The work of peace communities has been well documented though fewer studies have focused on their religious components.[11] Three churches were chosen for participation in Sal y Luz: Remanso de Paz (Haven of Peace) in Sincelejo, Peniel ("Face of God" in Hebrew) in Zambrano, and Cristo El Rey (Christ the King) in Tierralta.

Remanso de Paz church originated in the 1990s when evangelical communities worked on road improvements and other development projects in what was largely a farming area. When violence escalated, evangelical groups were accused of being on one side or the other, and some had to relocate to cities for protection. Eventually threats from guerrillas increased such that in October 2000, a large group relocated to Sincelejo and organized a congregation. They were aided by the Mennonite group Justapaz and other organizations, as they resettled and adjusted to a more urban existence and started a soup kitchen to aid displaced peoples.

Founded in 1997, Peniel is a FourSquare Gospel church (a type of Pentecostal congregation). Suffering from drug trafficking and the associated violence related to guerrilla/trafficker conflict, the church began work in social services. The church members have witnessed many violent attacks on their community and setbacks to their work.

Founded in the late 1970s, Cristo El Rey grew quickly, and decided to reach out with social provisions in their community, beginning with the establishment of a school. With the help of World Vision, the church began a nutrition program for children and helped build settlements for church members and migrants. In 1996, the church welcomed 64 families displaced by violence and continued aiding displaced families through the 2000s. Tierralta was the site of peace talks with the paramilitaries, and on occasion, a church member was threatened, harassed, or accused of being on the side of the guerrillas.

All three churches expressed that their understanding of peace and their work is based on their identity as Christians, and the centrality of God's love through Jesus and the forgiveness of sins. God's love compelled them to love their fellow human beings. This included an attitude of compassion and willingness to dialogue with those who perpetrate violence in their communities. It also included providing refuge to victims of the violence, whether they were members of the church community or not. They described their approach as holistic—responding to both the spiritual and physical needs of their community.

The churches, to varying degrees, also engaged in mediation and dialogue with armed groups, with the results of decreased violence, release of captured civilians, and restoration of safe transit routes. Much of this arose out of necessity from their displacement and due to threats or killings of family and community members. All three of these churches developed a vision and action for peacebuilding based on their own experiences with violent conflict and exile, ultimately transforming their churches which had previously been focused almost exclusively on evangelization.

[10] There were other peace sanctuary communities in Colombia, one famous one being San Jose de Apartado. See: Naucke (2017).

[11] See Naucke (2017: p. 146) for examples. Also, Plata and Mateus (2015).

Lutheran World Relief's Peacebuilding Work

Like many relief and development NGOs, LWR was founded in the aftermath of World War II. LWR works with partners in 35 countries and has a staff of about 150. LWR was one of the first relief organizations to locate an office in Washington DC dedicated to advocacy work. It is this advocacy work which provided the umbrella for LWR's work in peacebuilding. LWR President Kathryn Wolford claimed that LWR has been doing peace-related advocacy work since its founding. The work in Colombia, however, was a new innovation for LWR's advocacy, incorporating citizen activism from the grassroots into peacebuilding work.

With Sal y Luz, LWR would mobilize their constituency in the USA to take a stand for peace in Colombia as many churches had done regarding Central America and South Africa. Colombia was a natural fit for citizen advocacy in the USA because of the complicity of US foreign policy in fueling the conflict. From 1999, the US government dedicated US$ multiple billions in military and police assistance via Plan Colombia which many human rights and relief organizations believe only exacerbated the violence. The USA also had multiple interests in Colombia, including counter-narcotics, oil, counterterrorism, and an ally in Latin America. With a clear US policy connection to the Colombian conflict, there was an opportunity for US citizen advocacy efforts to make a difference.

Thus, LWR's Sal y Luz program sought to connect LWR's base in the USA to the local peacebuilding work of the churches in Colombia. LWR focused its US efforts on Lutheran communities in the Midwestern states of Minnesota, South Dakota, and Iowa. They hired a grassroots organizer to coordinate the work across the tri-state area. Through a process of contacting church leadership and presidents of Lutheran colleges and seminaries, six communities were identified to partner with three Colombian peace sanctuary churches.[12] These communities in the USA, like their Colombian counterparts, were inspired in part by their faith commitments. In a Minnesota Public Radio interview about Sal y Luz, Kathryn Wolford repeatedly emphasized the faith-based nature of LWR's work, including the call to citizen activism as faith in action.

LWR held together a triangular set of relationships involved in Sal y Luz. The three legs were as follows: (1) in the Midwest, the six communities and one grassroots organizer hired by LWR; (2) LWR's Baltimore and Washington DC staff, particularly in LWR's Public Policy office; and (3) in Colombia, JustaPaz, one local staff person, and the peace churches. The Colombia work was LWR's biggest advocacy campaign at the time, lasting for at least 6 years, and had a wider scope than Sal y Luz, including a working group on Colombia that LWR coordinated with other relief and development organizations. This wider sphere of work was largely not on the radar of active Sal y Luz participants and is not the focus of this study.

[12] The six Midwestern sites were in Southeastern MN; Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN; St. Peter, MN; Freeman, SD; Sioux Falls, SD; and Iowa City, IA.

How the Sal y Luz Partnership Worked

We focus on three components of how the partnership worked. First, Sal y Luz was a dynamic partnership of actors whose peacebuilding work was rooted in their faith commitments and in their non-adversarial and holistic approach.

As noted, the peace sanctuary churches rooted their work in the centrality of Jesus, believing that the love and forgiveness of God had given them the ability to overcome the bitterness of their own losses and that Christians are called to be involved in their social context. They specifically noted how their own experience of living through conflict had changed their churches to believe that more than just evangelization, they are called to transform their communities. LWR's messaging and leadership reinforced the faith-rootedness of their own peacebuilding work, and this resonated with their grassroots constituency within the USA. One active participant in Minneapolis called her journey "one citizen's faithful advocacy in US foreign policy" (personal communication with author). Sal y Luz advocates were encouraged to exchange prayers with the peace sanctuary churches and to "creatively bring the message of peace inspired by the words of Jesus."

Sal y Luz involved a mixed group of Protestants; the groups in Colombia were Pentecostals and more conservative theologically and with different lived faith experience than the Lutheran constituents in the USA. The shared positive work for peace and the use of the term "peace sanctuary churches" without disclosure of denominational ties helped avoid clashes of doctrine within the partnership. At one retreat in the USA, the organizer acknowledged that it was remarkable that US Lutherans (who would not identify as evangelicals in the USA) were partnering with charismatic Pentecostal churches in Colombia (who are evangelicals). He then noted that he, a LWR staff member, was Buddhist.

Differences in religious belief and practice were minimized. LWR did not explicitly advertise the denominations of the churches in Colombia to their Midwest Lutheran audiences. Distance and language barriers, along with the presence of other more obvious differences (culture, social context), also obscured deeper theological divides that might have hindered partnership. The differences of Pentecostals and mainstream Lutherans barely registered in the work. Meanwhile, shared religious experience and beliefs were emphasized. All churches involved were open to working with other church groups and fellowshipping with those outside their denominational structures. Even across denominational lines, churches have common institutional structures and practices such as prayer, rituals, and texts. LWR does not choose partners based on creed or beliefs, but churches are regular and natural partners for their work. Within their own constituency, LWR noted the advantage of working via US congregations: individuals who might not "care" about Colombia, got involved because their church community was involved. The peace sanctuary churches, by the time they were joining Sal y Luz, had already been transformed by their experiences with conflict and displacement. This affected not only their calling to social action, but also their understanding of peacebuilding. The shared faith commitments within Sal y Luz not only were a root motivation, but also helped foster a common understanding and approach to the work of peace that was both non-adversarial and holistic.

LWR's Public Policy Office director noted that LWR takes radical stances in moderate ways. They worked largely through sometimes quite conservative Lutherans and Colombian government officials, and were careful not to align themselves with either extreme on the political spectrum (in the USA or in Colombia) (interview with author). LWR's peacebuilding in Colombia was based on a positive and hopeful message that peace is possible from the grassroots. This is particularly noteworthy in the relationships that were cultivated with elected representatives in the USA to advocate for a change in US foreign policy to Colombia. The direct advocacy work within the USA involved LWR sending out action alerts for the Sal y Luz communities on particular issues. More importantly, the advocacy involved forging relationships with Congressional offices to inform and build goodwill. Former Republican Senator Norm Coleman's staffer expressed to the Sal y Luz participants that this was "citizen advocacy at its best" (personal communication to Sal y Luz participants). This relationship building and positive messaging seems to have paid off in changes in votes and increased support for a more peaceful Colombian policy by these politicians. In their evaluations, LWR was able to point to eight representatives shifting or maintaining their opposition votes on Plan Colombia as well as work by representatives on the McGovern amendment, seeking to reduce military aid to Colombia.

The peace sanctuary churches also maintained a non-antagonistic approach to their work. They credited this approach as gaining the trust of local government actors in Colombia. They believed that their most valuable tool is the daily, practical testimony of the church and its members, winning goodwill and trustworthiness. The peace sanctuary churches in Colombia defined peace holistically as not just an end to violence, but also the implementation of truth, justice, compensation, and restoration. They actively sought to meet community needs for psychosocial rehabilitation, offer feeding programs for children, and work with victims and perpetrators of violence. Similarly, LWR's peace work was deeply integrated with their relief and development work. Sal y Luz was a chance for LWR to "harness the constituency for peace work"—to deliberately cultivate advocacy skills within their constituency and to have its constituents feel invested in peacebuilding work as part of a bigger scheme of development work.

A second component of the partnership was learning together. A key principle of LWR is "learning together" and working in partnerships. The core of Sal y Luz was that grassroots peacebuilding was taking place through the churches in Colombia. If their work can be magnified within Colombia and in the USA, the conflict in Colombia might be transformed. A very deliberate goal from the initial Ford Foundation grant was to link the experience and knowledge of local level peace sanctuary churches with international policy-makers.

This would happen via a documentation process. A central component of LWR's Ford Foundation grant proposal was the creation of documents telling the story and practice of the peace sanctuary churches. These documents would then be shared with US audiences to aid in the advocacy work. This aspect of Sal y Luz was fraught with difficulties, most of them due to some cultural differences, staffing, misunderstandings, and delays in completing it on the Colombian side. Ultimately, LWR decided education and preparation for advocacy work could go forth in the USA

without the documents. The long delay in completing the documents was more of an impediment on the Colombian side, as the churches were hoping to learn from this process, and via reflection and feedback, to refine their peacebuilding practices and the ability to share their story with an external audience.

Cooperative learning together was likely facilitated by the fact that actors in Sal y Luz were mostly what John Paul Lederach has described as mid-level leaders (pastors, community leaders, an academic department chair) (Lederach 1997: p. 41). Though power disparities exist across international boundaries, there was a mutual willingness to listen, to receive advocacy training from LWR, and to adjust processes along the way. Compartmentalization of roles sometimes helped. Peace churches in Colombia shared their stories and the partners in the US communities advocated for a change in US foreign policy toward Colombia. Interestingly, the advocates in the USA faithfully represented the voice of their Colombian partners, even when there might have been an easier path. A clear message of the peace sanctuary churches was that the military aid of the USA (constituting 80% of Plan Colombia aid) was not bringing peace to their country. They advocated a cut in military aid and an increase in humanitarian aid. An easier sell to the US audience would have been the cut only. At other times, there was role confusion and debates about advocacy strategy. LWR's work coordinating so many actors was more art than science. An attitude of learning and dynamic change was prevalent in Sal y Luz. This would not have been possible without relationships of trust.

The final component of the partnership's functioning was relationship building. LWR recognized the importance of building relationships in the transnational partnership. According to LWR's Sal y Luz project summary, one of the core activities planned for the Sal y Luz partners was 'to exchange prayers, stories, photographs with your partner.' A chief goal was to establish a sense of friendship and community between the peace sanctuary churches and the six communities in the USA. Ultimately, this proved to be difficult due to language barriers, even though some of the peace sanctuary church leaders had access to email. However, over time, relationships were built through delegations sent to visit one another's towns and homes. LWR's grassroots organizer initiated these delegations as a necessary way to put a face on the advocacy work. There was one official delegation from Colombia in March 2005 and one official delegation of twelve Americans to Colombia in February 2006. Three Colombians came again in March 2006 to visit some of the Midwestern sites. These meetings, while infrequent, achieved a sense of connection that was crucial to the advocacy efforts and the motivation for them. Forging meaningful connections among the groups through shared commitments and joint learning in action was key to making the peacebuilding concepts and practices easily comprehensible to broader audiences in the South and North.

Congressional representatives were also invited to be part of the relationship building by attending a delegation to Colombia facilitated by Sal y Luz. There was a big push to have Congressional staffers participate in the February 2006 US delegation to Colombia, alongside their district constituents (the Sal y Luz group members). Through the relationship-building efforts of the six midwestern communities, LWR was able to confirm commitments from four Congressional Staffers to travel to Colombia. Unfortunately, this effort was upended by the Jack Abramoff scandals in

early 2006. Abramoff, a Washington lobbyist, had funded trips and perks for members of Congress, and as the scandal broke out over his dealings in early 2006, members of Congress felt it prudent to pull out of the LWR-funded trip to Colombia lest it be seen in a similar light.

Maintaining Transnational Linkages

Sal y Luz built relationships among mainstream Lutherans in the US and Pentecostal churches in Colombia, with primary links forged by a LWR organizer, and united in an even larger assemblage of faith-based actors in Colombia, especially the Mennonite group Justapaz. How could such a partnership of actors function? While we have attempted to break down the workings of Sal y Luz into the three areas of their faith-rooted understandings of peacebuilding, learning together, and relationship building, these three areas are inseparable.

The whole point of Sal y Luz was forging relationships of learning among faith-based actors to promote peace. "Transformational spaces"—dynamic spaces capable of adapting over time, that build and sustain relationships of trust—were created by joint learning in action.[13] Obstacles to forging relationships abounded—communication across national borders and language barriers, lack of knowledge in the USA about the conflict in Colombia, missteps in the documentation process for the churches, and lack of training in peace work or advocacy work—to name a few.

The transnational linkages would not have survived without the work of LWR staff to hold them together.[14] LWR's program evaluations reveal the essential role of the community organizer, whose sole job was to foster linkages (communicate, train in advocacy work). LWR and its organizational staff and resources maintained the assemblage and framed the work of Sal y Luz. Dynamics of relational exchanges, learning over time, and adaptability (in the face of slow documentation, Abramoff scandal, etc.) also shaped Sal y Luz.

The transnational linkages were also crucially held together by the faith identities of the actors and their particular understandings of peace work. Peacebuilding was motivated by faith, and yet, interestingly, the particulars of the faith identities were not deeply explored within Sal y Luz. LWR literature documents strong faith identities of the actors involved, and yet open discussions of religious motivations and callings were not a central part of the transnational relationships. Faith identities provided common language, practices (worship, prayer, Bible verses), and institutions (churches) of connection that created an underlying basis for trust and mobilization in which differences of Lutheranism versus Pentecostalism remained hidden in the background.

[13] The Ford Foundation grant proposal refers to John Paul Lederach's conflict transformation work in describing this, specifically (Lederach 1997: pp. 46–51).

[14] In fact, Sal y Luz relationships ended when LWR staff no longer supported the program.

The Case of Paz y Esperanza in Peru

Our second case study turns to Peru and the work of the Paz y Esperanza Diaconal Association, a Protestant NGO that was founded in 1996 as a human rights organization. In contrast with the Sal y Luz transnational partnership, PyE is a Peruvian NGO.

Between 1980 and 2000, Peru experienced a period of severe internal political violence. The armed conflict impacted most of the country, but the indigenous communities in the Andes and the Amazonian regions disproportionately suffered the impact of the violence. In a context where historical differences in social and economic power and racial discrimination deeply separated villages in the Andes and in the Amazonian regions from those in the coast, the armed conflict particularly affected Andean peasant communities and impoverished jungle villages, many of whom were victimized by the rebels as well as by government forces. In response to that situation, the *Concilio Nacional Evangélico del Perú* (National Evangelical Council of Peru, CONEP) established an internal office in 1984 called the *Comisión de Acción Social Paz y Esperanza* (Peace and Hope Commission for Social Action, COMPAZES), under the leadership of CONEP's executive secretary Pastor Pedro Arana. The office focused on addressing the urgent needs among evangelical victims of the war, especially in the Southern Andes. The Commission's specific aim was to investigate what was happening and to support evangelical families who were suffering the direct impact of the armed conflict between the Peruvian armed forces and rebel armed groups such as the Shining Path (SP) and the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA).

In the months following President Alberto Fujimori's auto coup on April 5, 1992, his regime co-opted the public apparatus and further undermined an already weak justice system. Fujimori imposed draconian laws and with help from his intelligence advisor, Vladimiro Montesinos, the regime tightly controlled public discourse on the internal armed conflict (Conaghan 2005, Burt 2007). Between 1981 and 2000, the government of Peru had a dismal human rights record due to the violent repression carried out by the government and associated paramilitary forces trying to defeat the subversive groups.

The independence of the judiciary was severely undermined during Fujimori's rule. Most judges were subject to removal at any time due to the Fujimori administration's decision to give them only provisional status. Lower-level judges and district prosecutors (*fiscales*) were frequently removed from their cases for political reasons. Even the National Prosecutor's Office at the Public Ministry (*Ministerio Público*), which had been an autonomous office with authority to prosecute government officials, was stripped of its powers when the government created the Executive Commission of the Public Ministry, a body directly controlled by Fujimori and Montesinos. One of the most egregious violations of legal due process was the establishment of military courts to prosecute individuals accused of terrorism and even treason. Civilian courts became faceless courts—the identities of the judges were kept secret—to try other types of terrorism-related crimes. In this

context, virtually all basic guarantees of due process were eliminated. The number of people detained on terrorism charges multiplied very quickly.

The COMPAZES team included a core group of university students and young professionals, many of whom were evangelical Christians. The students, which included Alfonso Wieland, Germán Vargas, José Regalado, Roger Mendoza, and Ruth Céspedes, worked for the commission voluntarily for nearly 12 years. They joined Ruth Alvarado and Norma Hinojosa, who served as an attorney and a social worker, respectively, for COMPAZES. Eventually the group would denounce the CONEP administration for the mismanagement of relief funds designated for people impacted by the armed conflict; CONEP responded by suspending the group. On January 19, 1996, Wieland, Vargas, Alvarado, Vinces, Céspedes, Regalado, and Hinojosa, established PyE as an independent human rights NGO. The founders worked as PyE volunteers for more than a year, and they eventually received support from Tearfund UK, an evangelical relief and development organization. PyE adopted the mission of providing legal, psychological, and material support to the victims of violence and other forms of injustice in Peru. Like many faith-based NGOs in Latin America, PyE has received grants from international organizations and donations from churches to support their work. Tearfund UK remained a partner for two decades until the organization decided to leave Peru to focus its efforts on other countries. Churches and foundations in the USA and other countries in the Global North have continued supporting PyE, especially its programs that focus on the prevention of sexual and domestic violence and support for survivors. The international support does not determine but reaffirms the areas where PyE works.

Paz y Esperanza's Understanding of Faith and Peace

PyE is a faith-based organization with evangelical roots. The founders of PyE shared a commitment to practically embodying their Christian faith, and this commitment remains a core aspect of its organizational identity. Most of the current leaders recognize PyE as a Christian human rights organization inspired by the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. Many are also members of local evangelical churches in Peru. They avoid expressing their Christian faith in a sectarian way, but instead promote a posture of openness and a commitment to collaborating with people from different Christian faith traditions. The International Coalition of Sites of Conscience recognizes PyE as an organization dedicated to the "defense and comprehensive care of people and communities living in situations of injustice; taking part in strengthening democracy and reconciling the country; promoting capacity development for the empowerment of the population in defense of their rights and in promotion of a culture of peace; bringing together local actors with an intercultural and gender perspective; and ensuring the sustainability of their proposals and promoting the comprehensive mission of the evangelical churches."[15]

[15] https://www.sitesofconscience.org/membership/asociacion-paz-y-esperanza-peru/

As a group of young professionals, which at the beginning consisted mainly of human rights law students, lawyers, and psychologists, the PyE founders recognized the need to hire professionals with expertise in communication, social work, and pastoral care. According to co-founder Alfonso Wieland, the Old Testament teachings on the Jubilee were the inspiration for the work of PyE.[16] For Wieland, these teachings directed PyE leaders to focus less on securing political power and more on collaborating with different civic actors for the liberation of victims of systematic injustice. Recognizing the precariousness that exists in every human social system, PyE leaders understood peacebuilding as a holistic action in favor of the most vulnerable individuals, families, and communities, and especially ones that are affected directly or indirectly by violence and other forms of injustice. Peace was not simply the end of armed conflict, although they understood this to be an essential step. Rather, they held that true peace required the creation of conditions that are needed for human beings and the rest of creation to flourish. Peace, in their view, is best expressed in the biblical concept of shalom, which is inseparable from the pursuit of justice in holistic terms.

During the 1990s and early 2000s, the leaders of PyE were particularly interested in the legal needs of the people affected directly by the distortion of due process guarantees in the criminal justice system, which disproportionately victimized Quechua peasants and other people in condition of poverty. As they met with the victims, they realized that, while legal aid was desperately needed, their defendants were also in need of psychological and socio-economic support. They had been traumatized by violence, many of them from both sides of the armed conflict. Several of the PyE founders had learned about the theology of integral mission during their university studies, but they did not know how exactly to apply it.[17] So, they had to articulate their holistic approach while they were offering support and legal defense to victims of widespread violence.

Assembling Partners for Peacebuilding

When the PyE founders started working independently from CONEP, the NGO was very small. The leaders clearly understood the need to collaborate with other organizations. As they were building relationships with some Protestant congregations and colleagues working in the human rights field, this assemblage included three

[16] The teachings of Jubilee are a group of Old Testament laws designed to limit political and economic power, and seek to do justice in a world that is inclined to abuse power (see Leviticus 25); Jesus of Nazareth identified with this mission in Luke 4, verses 16–20.

[17] The Spanish and Portuguese phrases *misión integral/missão integral* were coined by the leaders of the Latin American Theological Fellowship, René Padilla, Samuel Escobar, and Pedro Arana, to refer to the mission of the Christian church as a holistic ministry. The Latin American theology of integral mission emphasizes God's activity through the church to meet people's needs in a multidimensional way. Padilla (2021) says of integral mission that it is the way God intended to carry out his purpose of love and justice revealed in Jesus Christ, channeled through the church and displayed in the power of the Holy Spirit (pp. 17–18).

different types of partnerships: (1) with Protestant churches; (2) with Catholic colleagues; and (3) with secular human rights organizations.

The first group of partners in PyE's assemblage were evangelical congregations. As one of the co-founders noted, "We always have had the commitment to work primarily with the evangelical churches. It is our desire to accompany the congregations and to serve them because we have always assumed this as part of our faith-based organizational identity." (German Vargas, personal interview, July 11, 2022). This was, and continues to be, a mainly informal partnership, not governed by contracts or covenants between PyE and specific Protestant congregations.

Building on the previous work they had done under CONEP, the PyE staff and volunteers continued networking with some congregations in Lima and in the highlands of Peru during the 1990s. These networking efforts included collaborations with pastors and members of Presbyterian, Methodist, Nazarene, Pentecostal, and Baptist congregations. For example, PyE was intentional in cultivating relationships with Presbyterian and Assemblies of God local churches in Ayacucho, the region most affected by the internal armed conflict. PyE offered pastoral, legal and psychological support to pastors and congregants in Huanta, Ayacucho's capital city, and its neighboring areas. In collaboration with the Presbyterian Church of Ayacucho, PyE human rights attorneys and other professionals offered a weekly radio program at the Amauta, a Quechua-speaking radio station run by that church in the 1980s and 1990s. The Presbyterian church in Huanta provided its infrastructure for events where PyE offered legal and other services. During PyE visits, people from local districts and remote villages came to share information about the violent attacks by subversives as well as by Peruvian military forces that were taking place in their villages. This type of work proved very fruitful when Peru's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established in 2000. PyE was able to submit valuable information to the Commission based on their work with local Protestant congregations and other communities in the Southern Andes.[18]

While local congregations did not provide economic support to PyE staff and volunteers, a few of them offered pastoral support, and partnered with PyE in accompanying the direct victims of the violence, many of whom were members of these same local congregations or the same church denomination. Several congregations offered prayer support for the PyE team, whose work was particularly dangerous, given the hostility of the government forces and the threat from subversive groups. PyE staff members were among the very few, and sometimes the only people from Lima, Peru's capital city, who showed any interest in their plight. The Andean communities, and many communities in the Amazon forest, were trapped between opposing forces, while most people in the capital city and the coastal region ignored their predicament.

The second partner in PyE's assemblage was the Catholic Church's *Comisión Episcopal de Acción Social* (Episcopal Commission for Social Action, CEAS) in Peru. The leaders of both entities met in maximum security prisons, as both groups

[18] The Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Peru acknowledged COMPAZES and PyE's contribution to its mission in Volume III, Chapter 3, Sect. 3.3.2.

were visiting incarcerated people accused of terrorism. Over time, professionals from both entities established a relationship of collaboration and friendship. Instead of competing against each other for converts, they decided to join efforts to better serve the population in the prisons. Rolando Pérez remembers the years of close collaboration with CEAS to serve incarcerated innocent people describing those efforts as, "an ecumenism of the way … That was the most real ecumenical experience we ever enjoyed. We encountered each other in service to people who were suffering so much. We joined efforts to accompany the victims in a more effective manner. That was how we decided to walk together on this difficult path." (Rolando Pérez, personal interview, 2022).

The two teams worked on specific legal cases and in supporting the victims in prison and their families in the highlands. Attorneys from both organizations worked closely together as a team, and social workers also collaborated regularly in trying to respond to the growing needs of the affected families. Through this relationship, PyE leaders discovered the potential of working in partnership with Catholic groups, despite their doctrinal differences. This was important in a context of internal armed conflict and the increased government hostility against human rights advocates, even after the most important subversive leaders had been captured by the government forces.

This type of ecumenical practice was not planned from the beginning by the PyE team. Some of the founders, who were members of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students (IFES) ministry during their university studies, had learned to dialogue with individuals from other Protestant denominations. However, they had little to no experience of working with Catholics. In fact, some founders had belonged to conservative, evangelical congregations, where they learned that Catholics needed to convert to evangelical Christianity to become "true Christians." As these same PyE leaders began working with their CEAS peers, a new understanding started to take shape.

PyE and CEAS leaders were trying to respond to multiple needs in the prisons by working together in a number of ways: by providing legal aid and establishing contact with the inmates' families in the highlands or in the Amazonian region; through offering emotional support and spiritual accompaniment; and by organizing prayer and worship opportunities inside the maximum-security prisons where inmates suffered inhumane conditions. Based on this ecumenical partnership, in 1998, PyE and CEAS launched an annual prayer campaign, which invited Catholic and Protestant churches to fast and pray for the victims of the armed conflict who were imprisoned. These national solidarity campaigns continued annually until 2003. Silvia Alayo, CEAS Executive Secretary in 2022, refers to the 1995 and 1996 annual national prayer campaigns for imprisoned people as "the seeds that contributed to launching the campaign for the liberation of the unjustly imprisoned persons and the resulting establishment of the Presidential Pardon Commission." (Zoom presentation at *Tertulias de Paz,* July 11, 2022).

The third and final key partner in PyE's assemblage was the Human Rights National Coordinator Office (*Coordinadora Nacional de Derechos Humanos*, CNDH), an umbrella organization for human rights advocacy groups working in Peru. In the 1980s, the core group of volunteers and young professionals who

were serving under COMPAZES had encouraged CONEP leadership to support the CNDH. The mutual distrust between many evangelical leaders and human rights activists meant that CONEP would only participate as an observer in CNDH meetings. As soon as PyE became an independent organization, it formally joined the CNDH and soon became a leader among its members. Under CNDH's auspices, PyE has collaborated very closely with secular human rights organizations such as the *Associación Pro Derechos Humanos* (Pro Human Rights Association, APRODEH), the *Comisión de Derechos Humanos* (Human Rights Commission, COMISEDH), the *Fundación Ecuménica para el Desarrollo y la Paz* (Ecumenic Foundation for Development and Peace, FEDEPAZ), and later with other organizations such as the *Asociación Nacional de Familiares de Secuestrados, Detenidos y Desaparecidos del Perú* (National Association of Families of Kidnapped, Detained and Disappeared victims of Peru, ANFASEP), the *Instituto de Defensa Legal* (Institute for Legal Defense, IDL), and Amnesty International, among others. PyE continues to be one of the leading members of the CNDH, presiding over several of its working groups.

The Partial Outcomes of PyE's Peacebuilding Work

PyE maintained partnerships with the preceding groups of actors to mobilize various national campaigns to promote peace in Peru. Between 1992 and 2000, and in the context of Alberto Fujimori's authoritarian government, PyE worked closely with CEAS and secular human rights groups affiliated to the CNDH to advocate for respect for the rule of law, for human rights, and for a peaceful return to a democratic system of government. PyE staff also tried to mobilize Protestant churches in its advocacy work during that time. The staff soon discovered that most of their local evangelical church partners were more interested in continuing their proselytization efforts and occasionally engaged in charity work to support the victims of the armed conflict, and especially victims who belonged to their respective denominations. The collaborative work between PyE and local congregations in its early years focused on helping evangelical victims of the armed conflict. As PyE became more engaged in the mid-1990s to advocate for respect for the rule of law and for the establishment of a Truth Commission, no Protestant churches joined in these broader efforts. Only a handful of pastors became involved with these advocacy efforts. The achievements of PyE's advocacy efforts at the national level were the result of its partnerships with other kinds of actors, not churches. To demonstrate the partial outcomes achieved by PyE's assemblage, we highlight a few of those campaigns next.

Feeling encouraged by the appointment of Jorge Santistevan de Noriega as the first Human Rights Ombudsman of Peru in 1996,[19] a group of human rights organizations, including PyE, sought to pressure the government to revise the thousands of unjust life sentences for terrorism and for treason. According to the Goldman Commission members that visited Peru in September and December of 1993, the

[19] Several years after the Ombudsman was included in the Peruvian Constitution, Jorge Santistevan de Noriega was finally appointed the first human rights Ombudsman of Peru by the Peruvian Congress in September 1996, due to a combination of international and internal pressure by human rights groups.

"administration of justice in terrorism and, especially, treason cases is seriously flawed and at odds in many key respects with Peru's international legal obligations." (Goldman Commission, 59. See also Human Rights Watch 1995). By 1994, too many prisoners had already been condemned and had final sentences. According to the IDL, in 1996, there were more than 3000 innocent people in Peruvian prisons. It was impossible to review those cases under Peruvian law and most of the inmates were suffering imprisonment under inhumane conditions. PyE, CEAS, and other organizations affiliated to the CNDH joined efforts to launch a public advocacy campaign demanding the release of people who had been unjustly accused of terrorism. This was the Campaign for the Freedom of Unjustly Imprisoned Persons.[20]

The Campaign focused on demanding that the government recognize the violations of due process committed by the courts due to the lack of respect for the fundamental rights of the accused and that a legal formula be found to release the people who had been unfairly condemned under terrorism and/or treason charges. After months of negotiations, the Human Rights Ombudsman and President Fujimori agreed to use the presidential pardon formula, which existed in the Peruvian Constitution.[21] The Commission was led by Ombudsman Santistevan, successive Ministers of Justice, and Father Hubert Lanssiers, a highly respected Catholic priest as a presidential representative. They had the responsibility to select inmates they believed to be innocent, so that they could receive a presidential pardon. Even when this solution was counterintuitive, what mattered the most at the time was that the inmates could recover their freedom. PyE, together with other CNDH organizations, actively cooperated with the Commission, providing information on many cases.[22]

The following year, PyE and CEAS launched *La Verdad Nos Hará Libres* (The Truth will Set us Free) national campaign, to join efforts with other campaigns from secular human rights organizations demanding the establishment of a truth commission in Peru. This partnership contributed to the establishment of the Comisión de la Verdad y la Reconciliación (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, TRC), under the leadership of Salomon Lerner Febres, President of the Pontifical Catholic University of Peru at the time. Among the 12 TRC commissioners was a representative of the Protestant community of Peru, Pastor Humberto Lay from Iglesia Emanuel, an upper-class Pentecostal congregation in Lima. For the first time in the history of Peru, a public entity of such stature formally included an evangelical representative.

Even though PyE is a Protestant human rights organization, its partnerships with Protestant, and specifically evangelical churches, are markedly fragile. The

[20] This campaign resulted in the release of nearly 2000 people who had been unjustly imprisoned (most of whom were people in conditions of extreme poverty), in addition to improving the prison conditions of those who remained in prison. The Commission worked until December 31, 1999, when the Fujimori-controlled Peruvian Congress decided not to extend its mandate.

[21] On August 17, 1996, President Fujimori enacted Law No. 26655 establishing an ad hoc commission in order to examine and recommend for presidential pardon cases of innocent inmates who had been condemned on charges of terrorism and/or treason (Article 1).

[22] To many human rights organizations, the idea of "collaborating" with the Fujimori regime was unthinkable. They finally agreed to support the Commission because the Human Rights Ombudsman office was involved, and the situation of the unjustly condemned inmates was desperate.

organization's advocacy and human rights work does not receive substantial financial and institutional support from evangelical churches in Peru. Just as in the Fujimori era, many evangelical churches remain suspicious of human rights activists and they generally have refrained from publicly critiquing alleged abuses of power by the current Boluarte administration. Another complicating factor in PyE's efforts to assemble diverse religious and civic actors for peacebuilding work has been the "Don't Mess with my Children," an internationally supported campaign mobilizing conservative evangelicals and Catholics with integrist tendencies.[23] The campaign mobilized many evangelical churches against the introduction of sexual education in Peruvian public schools, the legalization of abortion, and gay marriage. This movement has contributed to a growing distrust by evangelical church leaders with regard to PyE programs dedicated to increasing gender equality as part of their intervention methodology to decrease gender-based violence in the country. Notwithstanding these challenges, PyE continues to consider local evangelical churches as its most important partner in achieving its mission, and it remains focused on mobilizing churches that exist in economically and politically marginalized communities.

The PyE approach to peacebuilding is rooted in faith and it is deeply ecumenical, in contrast with the predominant competition and even adversarial environment that still exists between many Catholic and evangelical Christians in Peru. Twenty-seven years after its founding, PyE remains dedicated to sowing the seeds of peace and justice in collaboration with Protestant and Catholic Christians, and with faith-based and secular national and international organizations.

Conclusion

As noted, faith actors affiliated with evangelical Protestant Christianity are understudied in peacebuilding work in Latin America. This is not an entirely surprising omission, of course, especially given the larger patterns of civic and political behavior expressed by such actors in recent years. As our opening examples of recent political campaigns in Colombia and Peru indicate, many evangelicals remain opposed to peacebuilding work, which they often associate with leftist politics and gender equity campaigns. The case studies we present here demonstrate that evangelical Christian engagement with peacebuilding work in Colombia and Peru is in fact complicated. These cases do not represent a widespread pattern. Rather, the Sal y Luz initiative and the Paz y Esperanza campaigns show how faith-based actors form part of a larger peacebuilding assemblage. We have focused on how this assemblage brings together NGO leaders, staff, and volunteers who attempt to manage very dynamic relationships with diverse actors in order to sustain peacebuilding programming even as they look for ways to faithfully embody their core religious beliefs in the work they perform.

[23] Commonly referred to in conjunction with fundamentalist interpretations of the Bible, groups with integrist (or integralist) orientation seek to make such interpretations the basis for public law and policy in society at large. See for example Philip A. Egan (2009).

Our descriptions of the Sal y Luz initiative and of PyE's successive campaigns demonstrate what Tanya Li has identified as one of the key practices critical to the formation and maintenance of assemblages, namely that of "forging alignments, [or] the work of linking together the objectives of the various parties to the assemblage" (2007: p. 3). In both cases, staff and volunteers invested considerable time and energy in forging alignments with a particular stakeholder: local evangelical churches. The two cases differ in terms of the scope of the alignments that staff and volunteers sought to create and sustain with local churches. The Sal y Luz initiative involved the mobilization of Lutheran churches in the USA that, in turn, partnered with local Pentecostal churches to implement peacebuilding work in Colombia. The PyE staff and volunteers focused on mobilizing evangelical congregations located in specific communities in Peru, and namely ones that had been adversely impacted by years of armed conflict and state repression. In both cases, faith-based actors assumed that local evangelical churches should play an important role in mobilizing support for and participating in activities oriented towards securing peace.

With the Sal y Luz initiative, we see diverse Protestant Christians (US Lutherans, Colombian Pentecostals, and Mennonites) forming transnational linkages to amplify grassroots experience and knowledge for peacebuilding in Colombia. Key to the maintenance of these partnerships was a shared commitment to promoting peace to be sure. But other logics were utilized by initiative leaders to facilitate the work of forging alignments. Among these was the idea that peacebuilding was an essential expression of Christian faithfulness. The emphasis on learning together, moreover, was framed as a way to create linkages that leaders hope would influence US foreign policy. Relationship building was another logic employed by participants to sustain linkages across social differences and space. Participants invested considerable time in facilitating exchanges of photos and of stories, which ostensibly were used as a tool for creating more meaningful and presumably enduring relationships between US and Colombian stakeholders. Notably, the work of sustaining such alignments involved downplaying the denominational differences that existed among the different groups who were party to the peacebuilding assemblage.

PyE leaders focused much of their initial work on offering legal, material, and pastoral support to survivors of political violence in the Southern Andes region. This work was done in collaboration with evangelical churches that had been directly impacted by violence due to their vulnerable condition as members of peasant, Quechua-speaking communities. As Protestant organizations, PyE and local churches shared a common faith affiliation, which initially enabled the formation of local partnerships. Churches worked with PyE staff to give pastoral care, to provide food aid, and to perform other charitable acts to members of their own congregations and denominations. The forging of alignments in this case was based primarily on shared religious identity.

Concurrently, PyE reached beyond these local evangelical constituencies to work with Catholics and secular human rights groups, recognizing that these partnerships were crucial to advance national peacebuilding campaigns. The work of sustaining linkages with these parties required different logics of assembly. In working with CEAS, the PyE leaders openly affirmed their evangelical identity but emphasized a non-sectarian Christian commitment to advocating for the rights and well-being

of victims of violence. Likewise, with secular human rights groups, these same leaders utilized logics that affirmed the rights and responsibilities of evangelical Christians as Peruvian citizens. To this day, PyE remains a leading member of the CNDH in Peru. It should be noted that present in each of these alignments—with local churches, with CEAS, and with secular human rights groups—is the possibility of disassembly. When PyE expanded its peacebuilding campaign, for example, to include advocacy work and institution-building at the national level, such efforts did not align with many churches' religious logics of social engagement. The Peruvian case demonstrates clearly how peacebuilding assemblages are emergent, dynamic formations that require constant work to cohere distinct and sometimes diverging elements.

Religious logics were key to assemblage maintenance in both of these cases, yet they were also an important factor in their fragility. The transnational linkages forged in the Sal y Luz initiative were held together by the faith identities of the actors and their particular faith-based understandings of peace work. Peacebuilding was motivated by faith, and yet the particulars of the faith identities and understandings of peace were not deeply explored by assemblage participants. So even as faith identities provided common language, practices, and institutions of connection that facilitated the mobilization of peacebuilding activities, the differences of Lutheranism and Pentecostalism remained hidden in the background. PyE forged new territory in Peru as the first evangelical human rights organization on the continent; and the organization's work with CEAS, CNDH, and local evangelical churches continues to this day. Nevertheless, the emergence of ultra-conservative political orientations within many evangelical churches in Peru suggests that organizations like PyE will encounter strong opposition from participants who have been historically an important part of their peacebuilding work. Such realities not only demonstrate the dynamic character of peacebuilding work, but they also show the complex nature of evangelical religious groups, whose perspectives and actions matter for creating the conditions for peace in Latin America.

Acknowledgements The authors express thanks to the anonymous reviewers who offered very constructive and helpful feedback on an earlier draft of this article.

Declarations

Conflict of Interest The authors declare no competing interests.

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