

**EVANGELICAL CONFESSIONS:
AN IDEOLOGICAL STRUGGLE OVER EVANGELICAL POLITICAL IDENTITY**

Amy Laine King

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Communication Studies.

Chapel Hill
2009

Approved by:

V. William Balthrop

Carole Blair

J. Robert Cox

Lawrence Grossberg

Christian O. Lundberg

Randall G. Styers

ABSTRACT

Amy King: Evangelical Confessions: An Ideological Struggle Over Evangelical
Political Identity
(Under the direction of V. William Balthrop)

For the last several years, conservative evangelicals have been aligned with a conservative political agenda. Advancing an alternative view, progressive evangelical voices have consistently objected to this partisan expression of evangelical faith, a position that is finally resonating with a significant portion of evangelicals. Evangelical political identity is currently experiencing an ideological struggle as conservatives and progressives argue over rhetorical approach, public policy, and political priorities. This dissertation will critique selected rhetorical texts of conservatives and progressives, situated within the history of evangelical political participation in the United States. The genre of prophetic rhetoric, Kenneth Burke's notion of mortification, and Maurice Charland's conception of constitutive rhetoric will be used to interpret the rhetorical styles represented by conservative and progressive evangelicals. I will specifically consider the dialectics of climate change, gay marriage, and compassion to illustrate that although both formations of evangelicalism appropriate elements of the prophetic tradition, progressives do so more consistently. Moreover, by engaging in culture war rhetoric, conservatives contradict their prophetic consciousness. Ultimately, I will argue that the radical reform advanced by progressives is inspiring a transformation of evangelical

political identity as they seek to rearticulate evangelical discourse and therefore constitute a transformed evangelical subject.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First I must thank my family who kept me sane during this arduous process. To my husband, Vance Burleson, I cannot express my gratitude sufficiently for your support during these challenging years. I could not have completed this project without the serenity of knowing that our children were well taken care of, which you provided. To my son Noah, I want to thank you for being patient with me when I was unavailable and overwhelmed. To my other son Jude, I thank you for being such a happy baby and a pleasure to be around. I love all of you very much!

I must also thank my professors at UNC-Chapel Hill, especially my committee: Bill Balthrop, Carole Blair, Robbie Cox, Larry Grossberg, Chris Lundberg, and Randall Styers. Both through my coursework and your participation on my committee, you all contributed uniquely and substantially to my academic growth, and accordingly, this project. Specifically, I must thank Bill Balthrop, who worked incredibly hard to provide feedback and direction, and undoubtedly directed me toward a far better dissertation than I would have ever completed otherwise.

Lastly, I must thank my God, who grounds me and gives me the strength to accomplish this task. Additionally, I ask, “Make it clear to me, physician of my most intimate self, that good results from my present undertaking. Stir up the heart when people read and hear the confessions of my past wickednesses, which you have forgiven

and covered up to grant me happiness in yourself, transforming my soul by faith and your sacrament” (Saint Augustine 180).

Works Cited

Saint Augustine. *Confessions*. Trans. Henry Chadwick. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter		
I.	THE RHETORICAL STRUGGLE FOR EVANGELICALISM.....	1
	Justification for the Study.....	2
	A Rhetorical Perspective.....	6
	Chapter Outline.....	7
II.	NARRATIVE OF REBIRTH.....	14
	Definition.....	14
	History.....	32
III.	SACRED DIALECTIC.....	57
	Conservatives.....	57
	Progressives.....	72
IV.	RHETORICAL PERSPECTIVES TOWARD EVANGELICAL RHETORIC: PROPHETIC TRADITION, MORTIFICATION, AND CONSTITUTION AUDIENCES.....	90
	Prophetic Rhetoric.....	92
	Kenneth Burke.....	97
	Constitutive Rhetoric.....	103
V.	CREATION ETHIC: STEWARDSHIP COVENANT.....	107
	Evangelicals and Global Warming.....	108
	Ideological Struggle.....	117

VI.	GENESIS EXEMPLAR: MARRIAGE COVENANT	131
	Dr. James Dobson.....	132
	Sexuality and Gender Roles.....	135
	Dobson and Sexuality.....	143
	Progressives and Sexuality.....	145
	Marriage Under Fire.....	149
VII.	COMPASSION INJUNCTION: LOVE COVENANT.....	171
	Evangelicals and Compassion.....	172
	Brian McLaren.....	179
	Everything Must Change.....	183
VIII.	AWAKENING: IDEOLOGICAL TRANSFORMATION.....	196
	Election 2008.....	197
	Political Priorities.....	201
	Considerations About the Future.....	208

CHAPTER ONE

THE RHETORICAL STRUGGLE FOR EVANGELICALISM

For the last quarter of a century, evangelical politics has most frequently been associated with a conservative Republican agenda. Forming in the late 1970s and solidifying in 1980, social conservatives, comprised mostly of evangelical Christians, became a solid constituency of the Republican Party contributing to a conservative rise to power. Evangelicals became an essential asset to the GOP, and this also facilitated a religiously based, conservative social agenda. This alliance resulted in 20 years (out of 28) of Republican presidencies, and even a GOP led congress for a considerable portion of the time. While there have been some protests to this relationship all along, they were overpowered by the vast majority of evangelical leaders and followers voting for Republicans. In the last few years, Republicans have lost the presidency and congress, but not the evangelical vote. There does seem to be a softening, however, of the evangelical endorsement of the Republican agenda. Progressive evangelical voices have become more prominent and there is evidence pointing to changing trends among, especially young, evangelical voters. Recently, a significant movement has developed within the political discourse of evangelicals seeking to distance themselves from and to critique the rhetoric of the Christian Right. As Newsweek author Lisa Miller observes, an “evangelical identity crisis” is currently taking place. She writes, “For the first time in a long while ... there is a serious rethinking of the politics of Jesus in America—or at least

the efforts of different elements in the country, from believers of progressive, moderate and conservative bents, to claim they are acting in his name in the public sphere” (34). This movement includes political activists, pastors, theologians, and others who find themselves uncomfortable with the direction taken by the Christian Right in the name of the evangelical Christian faith. This confrontation between the Christian Right and more progressive and socially conscientious evangelicals is an important moment in history that will shape the direction of evangelical politics in the future.

The purpose of this dissertation is to investigate the current conflict manifesting as an ideological struggle over evangelical political identity. This study will compare conflicting contemporary evangelical discourses and situate the selected texts within the historical context of evangelical political participation in the United States. While many are already observing shifting ground within evangelicalism, this project will seek to offer a unique interpretation of the different rhetorical styles of progressive and conservative evangelicals and the social implications of the clash resulting from the remarkably contrasting discourses.

JUSTIFICATION FOR THE STUDY

Evangelicals represent a significant portion of the population, and because their faith inherently encourages activism, they are an extremely influential group in the United States. Therefore, the ramifications of this struggle go far beyond the evangelical community. There is currently a collaborative effort to take back evangelicalism from the Christian Right. While there have always been dissenting voices within evangelicalism, both the breadth and the force of the opposition to the singular

representation of evangelicals as right-wing ideologues has recently peaked. One example is political activist Jim Wallis, who has for many years sought to place evangelical political priority on the poor. He has recently been an outspoken critic of the war in Iraq and a defender of the environment. Specifically, he proposes a prophetic politics in contrast to the current articulation of evangelical political values. He describes this approach in his book *God's Politics*:

I believe there is a “fourth option for American politics which follows from the prophetic tradition we have described. It is traditional or conservative on issues of family values, sexual integrity and personal responsibility, while being very progressive, populist, or even radical on issues like poverty and racial justice. It affirms good stewardship of the earth and its resources, supports gender equality, and is more internationally minded than nationalist—looking first to peacemaking and conflict resolution when it come to foreign policy questions. The people it appeals to (many religious, but others not) are very strong on issues like marriage, raising kids, and individual ethics, but without being right-wing, reactionary, or mean-spirited or scapegoating against any group of people, such as homosexuals. They can be pro-life, pro-family, and pro-feminist, all at the same time. They think issues of ‘moral character’ are very important, both in a politician’s personal life and in his or her policy choices. Yet they are decidedly pro-poor, for racial reconciliation, critical of purely military solutions, and defenders of the environment. (74)

Wallis carves out a unique space for progressive evangelicals that does not fit neatly into a political package. Randall Balmer, professor, author, and editor-at-large for *Christianity Today*, most recently authored a book critiquing the Christian Right for what he considers its distortion of the Christian faith. In the book, *Thy Kingdom Come*, Balmer seeks to “reclaim the faith from the Religious Right” (XII). For instance, he challenges the Christian Right’s position on the environmental movement, which is sometimes apathetic and sometimes in opposition to it. Noting the shifting attitudes of evangelicals on environmental protection, Balmer hopes, “It is here, on the issue of the environment, that maybe, just maybe, the Religious Right will lose its hammerlock on

America's evangelicals, who in turn will summon the courage to reclaim the faith from hard-right zealots. The religious and political effects of that reclamation could be seismic" (164). Another dissenting evangelical is Gregory A. Boyd, former professor and current pastor. In his book, *The Myth of a Christian Nation*, he argues that the U.S. has never been a Christian nation and that the pursuit of worldly power is, in fact, contrary to the Christian faith. He writes, "I believe a significant segment of American evangelism is guilty of nationalistic and political idolatry. To a frightful degree, I think, evangelicals fuse the kingdom of God with a preferred version of the kingdom of the world" (11). Incidentally, he notes that when he preached a sermon series on this topic, 20 percent (1000 people) of his congregation left the church (10). A much publicized example of an evangelical political operative who became disillusioned with both President George W. Bush and the Republican Party is David Kuo, formerly part of the Bush administration's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. In his book, *Tempting Faith*, he describes the process of his disillusionment and eventual exit from right-wing politics. He offers a rare perspective based on his experiences working as part of the Republican Party. These are just some of the many voices of protest among evangelicals uncomfortable with the Christian Right's representation of their faith. Because this is a growing movement and is potentially revolutionary in terms of evangelical political practice, it is an extremely worthwhile subject of study.

The significance of this struggle extends beyond evangelicalism because evangelicals represent a significant portion of the United States population and registered voters, and are an influential social group. Because the definition of evangelical varies and is contested, it is difficult to pinpoint the exact number that they represent. This

identification is also affected by whether individuals are self-identified or are labeled by those studying them. Gallup Polls find that the number of Americans identifying themselves as born-again or evangelical fluctuates between 33% and 47% (Institute). However, according to the Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals, “recent studies and surveys by sociologists and political scientists that utilize more complex definitional parameters have estimated the number of evangelicals in the U.S. at about 25 – 30 % of the population, or roughly between 70 and 80 million people.” It is important to note that this does not include African-Americans, which would add significantly to the numbers. Another important number is the percentage of registered voters that evangelicals comprise. Again, because pollsters cannot agree about what constitutes an evangelical, this ranges from 8% to 42% of all voters, depending on how conservative the definition is and whether the participants are allowed to define themselves (Gonzales). Therefore, it is difficult, based on current methods, to accurately estimate the number of evangelicals in this country and how much of the voter population they represent, however, it is clear that they represent a sizable margin that can either serve as a base for one of the parties or a swing vote.

Evangelical political behavior has been consistently conservative over the last 25 years and this has contributed to a Republican power structure and, in some cases, narrow victories. Therefore, even if a small percentage of evangelicals shift their political affiliation, there could be significant political ramifications in the U.S. The progressives’ challenge to the representation of evangelical faith by the Christian Right is building momentum and resonating with even mainstream evangelicals. Accordingly, this

struggle will be explored through specific texts that illustrate the contrasting rhetorical styles of progressives and conservatives.

A RHETORICAL PERSPECTIVE

While this is a subject matter relevant to many academic disciplines, rhetorical theory offers a salient perspective with which to interpret this historical moment. First, a rhetorical approach encourages the identification of specific texts and provides a method to analyze them. Maurice Charland describes the unique contribution of rhetorical theory to social criticism: “Rhetorical theory directs the cultural critic to the study of the publicly articulated motivations and reasons for actions, institutionalized practices, and relations of power. Furthermore, rhetorical theory provides the critic with the analytic machinery to deconstruct the sense of these articulations and so provides the possibility to chart their possible reconstruction” (467). In this particular project, a rhetorical theoretical approach helps identify key texts of evangelical political discourse and provides methods with which to understand them. Furthermore, according to Charland, “Rhetorical theory’s particular contribution, as one of the human sciences is to reveal the structure of reasons in discourse motivating political power and collective action. Consequently, interpretive analysis of the discourse of public power and real politics will tread along rhetoric’s path” (468). Rhetorical theory offers an explanation for communication resonating on a public level. This particular project will locate specific evangelical texts within their history, theological foundations, and power structures.

Specifically, theories on prophetic rhetoric, victimage, and constitutive rhetoric will inform this project. Both conservative and progressive evangelicals will be shown to

appropriate elements from the prophetic rhetorical tradition, albeit less consistently by conservatives. Moreover, victimage manifests differently for the two groups. Progressives demonstrate mortification through self-sacrifice, while conservatives have established a defensive posture seeking to protect their way of life from what they perceive as a hostile enemy. Analysis of these contrasting styles of discourse will illustrate the considerable distinction between conservative and progressive evangelicals and how this ideological struggle will influence both evangelical political identity and American public policy.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

Narrative of Rebirth

The next chapter of this dissertation will contextualize American evangelicalism theologically and historically. The first part will be important in defining what it means to be evangelical, informed through definitions provided by scholarly sources and self-identified participants of the faith. Also, distinctive characteristics of American evangelicals will be outlined. The next part will consider the history of evangelicalism in the United States starting with the Puritans and the settling of the country. Important events and theological developments such as the Great Awakening, Second Great Awakening, Social Gospel, fundamentalism, and neo-evangelism will be considered in terms of their impact on evangelical political expression. Important and influential evangelical leaders will be identified, such as George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, Dwight L. Moody, William Jennings Bryan, Billy Graham, and others. Theological

transformations will be considered, along with how the politics of evangelicals have been shaped both by their faith and the surrounding culture.

Sacred Dialectic

The third chapter will historicize and differentiate the two relevant evangelical social movements. The first part will encapsulate the inception and establishment of the Christian Right, and its relationship with the Republican Party. Important issues will be summarized, along with key individuals, groups, (such as the Christian Coalition,) and important events. The next part in this chapter will be a history of the progressive evangelical movement, which began as a response to the perceived evangelical withdrawal from social justice. Important documents, formations, and political priorities will be considered, along with other developments, such as the emerging church movement, in terms of their impact on the contemporary evangelical political experience.

Rhetorical Perspectives Toward Evangelical Rhetoric: Prophetic Tradition, Mortification, and Constituting Audiences

The fourth chapter in this project will summarize the methodology that will be used to critique the selected rhetorical texts. First, I will summarize the genre of prophetic rhetoric as described by James Darsey, supplemented by the theoretical stance of Walter Brueggemann. A theory of victimage will be provided by Kenneth Burke to illustrate the way that evangelical rhetoric manifests as various forms of mortification. This concept will be extended through Robert Ivie's summary of American war rhetoric.

Lastly, a theory of constitutive rhetoric will be offered as explained by Maurice Charland. Together, these theories will provide a comprehensive understanding of the rhetorical situations taken up by this project.

Creation Ethic: Stewardship Covenant

The fifth chapter will take up the issue of climate change and the direct clash between conservatives and progressives that it represents. This chapter will evenly compare statements on both sides of the debate and observe the transformation currently taking place within evangelicalism on the subject of global warming. Evangelical Climate Initiative's statement, "Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action," calls for evangelicals to take action and respond to the serious problem of global warming as commanded by their faith. They ran the statement in *Christianity Today* and the *New York Times*, and it is currently available on their website. A counter position was expressed in, "An Open Letter to the Signers of 'Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action' and Others Concerned About Global Warming," signed by many evangelical members of the Christian Right, calling themselves the Interfaith Stewardship Alliance. The dialectic between conservatives and progressives on the issue of climate change is an explicit example of the ideological struggle taking place within evangelicalism. The stakes of this debate are substantial, and it is here, that transformation of evangelical political identity can undoubtedly be observed as taking place.

Genesis Exemplar: Marriage Covenant

The next chapter of this dissertation will take up a Christian Right rhetorical text representative of the defensive approach of their political discourse. I have chosen to explore a James Dobson text because of his influence with evangelicals and conservative political leaders. I selected the issue of gay marriage because it has become Dobson's focal point, and is a potent political matter manipulated by the Republican Party. Furthermore, it provides the most poignant illustration of culture war rhetoric and will be contrasted extensively with prophetic counter narratives. The book I have chosen, *Marriage Under Fire*, is a proclamation on the importance of preserving marriage as only heterosexual. First, I will summarize Dobson's role in the evangelical community and his involvement in political discourse. Secondly, I will establish the complexity of the gay marriage issue, utilizing a Foucaultian perspective of power relations, and ultimately linking the evangelical opposition to gay marriage with the desire to maintain traditional gender roles. Finally, I will analyze the Dobson text by evaluating does or does not conform to the different elements within the genre of prophetic rhetoric, and explain it as functioning through Burke's notion of scapegoat. The text will be interpreted as a rhetorical act of war against gays, informed by Robert Ivie's description of American warfare rhetoric, all the while juxtaposing it with progressive texts. Dobson, himself, frames the issue as a war that "threatens the very existence of our society. This struggle is not being fought with guns and bombs, but with ideas, with creative uses of the law, and with methods of intimidation. It is a battle for the very soul of the nation" (31). Dobson utilizes the two topoi outlined by Ivie, victimage and savagery, in the war he wages on gays. He has been a crucial factor in the elevation of this issue to the top of the

priority list for evangelicals. Dobson's rhetoric represents a prevalent rhetorical strategy employed by the Christian Right in their constituting political difference as a culture war, and progressives counter this with a more prophetic rebuke.

Compassion Injunction: Love Covenant

The next chapter will focus on a progressive evangelical text that will illustrate the conflicts over the question of poverty. I have chosen a selection from Brian McLaren's book, *Everything Must Change*, which I will argue is consistently illustrative of prophetic rhetoric, and contrast it with conservative economic philosophy. In 2005 *Time* magazine identified McLaren, (along with Dobson,) as one of the 25 most influential evangelicals calling him a "paradigm shifter" and the "elder statesman" of the emerging church movement. McLaren initially entered the public eye as a spokesperson for the emerging church, which is a post-modern version of evangelicalism. According to Scot McKnight, there are five themes/streams of the emerging church; it is prophetic, postmodern, praxis-oriented, post-evangelical, and political. Whether the emerging church is enduring or fleeting, it represents a changing worldview of young evangelicals that challenges the traditional evangelical tendency to promote a homogeneous interpretation of faith. My rationale for choosing McLaren as a contrast to Dobson is that he represents a new kind of thinking among, especially younger evangelicals, which calls into question the conservative interpretations about how faith should interact with social concern. His prophetic approach could not differ more from the culture war mentality. Moreover, McLaren is characteristic of a new evangelical social ethic that is broader and

more intellectually complex than what is currently expressed by the Christian Right. A large part of this is his emphasis on the politics of alleviating suffering.

Rather than engaging in a culture war buttressed by religious beliefs, McLaren's emphasis is on the urgency demanded by the physical affliction that exists in this world. He contends that relief of this suffering should be of the highest priority for evangelicals eclipsing any other social concern. Moreover, McLaren submits that there needs to be a revolution among people of faith reorienting them in how they understand the way their faith should relate to the rest of the world. This is prophetic in that it suggests radical reform. Unlike the majority of the rhetoric of the Christian Right which tend to be self-oriented, progressives, and most specifically McLaren, challenge their listeners sacrifice their worldly comforts and commit themselves to a political agenda more consistent with the prophets of the Old Testament and the life of Jesus.

In summary, this dissertation project will seek to theorize about the ideological implications of a potential rearticulation of evangelical political identity, situating contemporary evangelical rhetoric within the context of evangelical political discourse in the United States. While there is no doubt that a significant conservative element, operating most commonly as culture war rhetoric, still functions within evangelicalism, there is an increasing dialectic that challenges the traditional interpretation of certain issues and the rhetorical style with which they are addressed. The progressive voice of evangelicals is becoming significantly more resonant and increasing numbers of evangelicals are beginning to be self-reflexive. This is a crucial moment for evangelical social discourse and the implications are considerable.

Works Cited

- Balmer, Randall. *Thy Kingdom Come*. New York: Basic Books, 2006.
- Boyd, Gregory A. *The Myth of a Christian Nation*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005.
- Charland, Maurice. "Rehabilitating Rhetoric: Confronting Blindspots in Discourse and Social Theory." *Contemporary Rhetorical Theory: A Reader*. Ed. John Louis Lucaites, Celeste Michelle Condit, and Sally Caudill. New York: The Guilford Press, 1999.
- Cornwall Alliance. "An Open Letter to the Signers of 'Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action' and Others Concerned About Global Warming." 10 April 2009 <<http://www.cornwallalliance.org/docs/an-open-letter-to-the-signers-of-climate-change-an-evangelical-call-to-action-and-others-concerned-about-global-warming.pdf>>.
- Dobson, James. *Marriage Under Fire*. Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah, 2004.
- Evangelical Climate Initiative. "Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action." 10 Apr. 2009 <<http://christiansandclimate.org/learn/call-to-action/>>.
- Gonzales, Nathan L. "Beware: Evangelical Polling Ahead." *Roll Call* 20 Aug. 2008. 10 March 2009 <http://www.rollcall.com/news/27454-1.html?type=printer_friendly>.
- Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals. 10 Mar. 2009 <http://www.wheaton.edu/isae/defining_evangelicalism.html>.
- Kuo, David. *Tempting Faith*. New York: Free Press, 2006.
- McKnight, Scot. "Five Streams of the Emerging Church." *Christianity Today* Feb. 2007: 34 – 39.
- McLaren, Brian D. *Everything Must Change*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007.
- Miller, Lisa. "An Evangelical Identity Crisis." *Newsweek* 13 Nov. 2006: 30 – 37.
- Van Biema, David, Cathy Booth-Thomas, Massimo Calabresi, John F. Dickerson, John Cloud, Rebecca Winters, Sonja Steptoe, Amanda Bower, Rita Healey, Sean Scully, Elaine Shannon. "The 25 Most Influential Evangelicals in America." *Time*. 7 February 2005: 34 - 45.
- Wallis, Jim. *God's Politics*. New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005.

CHAPTER TWO

NARRATIVE OF REBIRTH

Because of the inconsistencies of the meaning of evangelical, it is difficult to say exactly how many can be counted in the United States. Nevertheless, it is clearly a significant number and they exert a tremendous amount of influence and receive a notable amount of media attention. The purpose of this chapter is to explore the definition of evangelicalism: scholarly and self-identified, describe the characteristics of American evangelicals, and summarize the history of evangelical political participation in the United States.

DEFINITION

There are many different interpretations and misconceptions regarding the meaning of evangelicalism. As it will become apparent, evangelicalism is, in some ways, an unsettled and contested concept that is loaded with significant implications. Nevertheless, it is important to observe specific themes and draw certain conclusions regarding the term in order to discuss the people that it represents.

Biblical Authority

Because biblical authority plays such an important role within the definition of evangelicalism, it is necessary to differentiate between different conceptions before exploring the intricacies of the definitions. While all evangelicals view the Bible as the only sacred text in Christianity, they differ in terms of the level of its authority. Some view it as inerrant, others as infallible, while still others only as inspired. Stephen Prothero defines biblical inerrancy as the “Christian belief, common among fundamentalists, that the Bible is entirely without error, not only in theology and ethics but also in history, geography, and science” (*Religious Literacy* 188). The prominence of the profession of inerrancy by evangelicals originated as a seminary debate in response to modernism. George Marsden traces the beginnings, writing, “With the rise of higher criticism in America in the late nineteenth century ... interest in using the assent to ‘inerrancy’ as a test for defining the community of true believers had been growing” (*Reforming Fundamentalism* 112). It became a way for fundamentalists to distinguish themselves from the rest of the culture amidst modernism. Marsden continues, “Prior to 1870, inerrancy, while often assumed, was not often used as a test of orthodoxy. But with the rise of higher criticism in America it had indeed become central.... Conservatives widely believed that any weakness regarding inerrancy would leave an opening through which liberalism would inevitably rush in” (214). Thus, inerrancy became a central tenet of authentic evangelical faith. Mark Noll also notes that inerrancy was not a qualification of evangelical faith until fundamentalism. He writes, “when fundamentalists defended the Bible, they did so by arguing for the inerrancy of Scripture’s original autographs, an idea that had been around for a long time but that had

never assumed such a central role for any Christian movement” (*Scandal* 133). Beginning in the seminaries, the antagonism over the authority of the Bible led to a split between fundamentalists and non-fundamentalists. Marsden writes:

The doctrine of inerrancy was thus functioning at several levels at once. At the most academic level, many conservatives saw it as simply a logically necessary doctrine of the faith. Many progressives, on the other hand, viewed it as confusing, misleading, or simply wrong. But the academic discussions were seldom simply academic. The doctrine also functioned at ecclesiastical and para-ecclesiastical institutional levels. That in turn meant that it was becoming the chief symbol for party divisions within institutions. (227)

These divisions were the beginnings of the reformation of fundamentalism which ultimately led to the formation of neo-evangelicalism (which I will take up at length in the next part of this chapter). Nevertheless, there are still remnants of this debate that exist in varying forms of evangelicalism today. Marsden describes contemporary fundamentalistic evangelicals as typically emphasizing the inerrancy of Scripture (*Fundamentalism and American Culture* 234). Belief in inerrancy is a lasting legacy of fundamentalism but does not represent the mainstream of evangelical thought. For example, Billy Graham has distanced himself from the extremism of inerrancy. He is quoted as saying, “I believe the Bible is the inspired, authoritative word of God... but I don’t use the word ‘inerrant’ because it’s become a brittle, divisive word” (Woodward 88).

Many evangelicals believe in a limited inerrancy, or what many of them call “infallibility” (Davis 32). Stephen Davis explains the difference, “The Bible is *inerrant* if and only if it makes no false or misleading statements on any topic whatsoever. The Bible is *infallible* if and only if it makes no false or misleading statements on any matter of faith and practice” (23). Therefore, a proponent of infallibility may acknowledge that

historical and/or scientific errors exist in the Bible. It is, however, without error regarding issues of faith. Marsden, using Fuller Seminary as an example, describes their dominant view of limited inerrancy: “The Bible is the inspired Word of God, not mistaken in its teachings, but is not always to be taken literally in its statements concerning matters of science, historical reporting, etc” (*Reforming* 269). Fuller serves as an example of how the debate ended in most seminaries. Mark Noll explains his evangelical view on inerrancy:

What is essential to Christianity ... is a profound trust in the bible as pointing us to the Savior and for orienting our entire existence to the service of God. The purpose of the Bible is spelled out quite clearly in the Bible itself, as in John 20:31: “These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” Even the classic passage in 2 Timothy 3, which includes a description of Scripture as “God-breathed,” emphasizes the saving and orienting purposes of the Bible much more than the bible’s potential to serve as an immediate source of detailed knowledge. “But as for you [Paul writes to Timothy], continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (vv.14 – 17). When evangelicals more consistently use the Scriptures to explain “salvation through faith in Christ Jesus: and to outline what it means to be “thoroughly equipped for every good work,” then evangelicals will be concentrating on what is essential about Scripture. And then the life of the mind may have a chance. (*Scandal* 244).

Noll poignantly explains this different approach to Scripture as truth revealed by God through humans. This has all sorts of implications for the worldview of evangelicals based on biblical interpretation such as women in ministry, marital roles, sexuality, and others. Nevertheless, it is also important to acknowledge that simply to affirm inerrancy does not always translate into a consistent interpretation of the Bible. Generally, few

apply inerrancy to the entire Bible, emphasizing certain scriptures while overlooking others that may not be as easily applied to an American lifestyle. This differentiation will become more apparent throughout this project.

Scholarly Definitions

Leading scholar and evangelical, Mark Noll, explains that the word “evangelical” is rooted in its etymological meaning of “good news” (*The Rise of Evangelicalism* 16). Furthermore, the word comes from a “transliteration of the Greek noun *evangelion*, which was regularly employed by the authors of the New Testament to signify the glad tidings—the good news, the gospel—of Jesus who appeared on earth as the Son of God to accomplish God’s plan of salvation for needy humans” (16). Thus, the evangelical version of the Christian faith has always focused on the “good news” of salvation accomplished by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Noll 16). This is arguably one of the most significant and foundational elements of the meaning of evangelical. Further, it is probably the least contested and most universally understood by both evangelicals and non-evangelicals. While there may be some differences in how this manifests itself in practice, (as evangelism or service,) a general sense of duty is held by believers to share their faith in some way. Evangelicalism is more than just a set of beliefs about a divine entity. It is a larger commitment of extending what they believe to be the meaning of life and salvation with the rest of the world. It inherently demands action of its followers. At its very basic form, evangelicalism compels believers to make available to others the source of spiritual life they believe they have discovered. Noll

identifies four ingredients of evangelicalism as outlined by British theologian David Bebbington:

- Conversion, or “the belief that lives need to be changed”;
- The Bible, or the “belief that all spiritual truth is to be found in its pages”;
- Activism, or the dedication of all believers, including laypeople, to lives of service for God, especially as manifested in evangelism (spreading the good news) and mission (taking the gospel to other societies); and
- Crucicentrism, or the conviction that Christ’s death was the crucial matter in providing atonement for sin (i.e., providing reconciliation between a holy God and sinful humans). (19)

In other words, at the core of evangelical faith is the conviction that authentic faith must begin with a conversion experience, a moment when the believer acknowledges their sin, repents for that sin, and accepts Jesus as their savior consequently being forgiven which leads to eternal life. Some call this being born-again or being saved. Second, the Bible is the only authoritative book for evangelicals, and at the very least they believe it to be inspired by God. Some believe it to be inerrant, without error and/or any human contribution. This is probably the most contentious part of this definition. The responsibility to reach out to the world is another area, and also one in which evangelicals differ. Some see this obligation as being called to serve the poor, oppressed, or suffering. Others understand this merely as evangelism, “saving souls”. Finally, evangelicals tend to be focused more on the death and resurrection of Jesus than on His teachings. Other versions of the Christian faith focus more on following the teachings of Jesus. Religious Studies scholar Stephen Prothero also relies on Bebbington’s conceptualization of evangelicalism by defining it as “theologically conservative Protestants who stress the experience of conversion (being ‘born again’), view the Bible as the inspired and authoritative Word of God, emphasize evangelism, and believe that salvation comes by

faith in the atoning death of Jesus Christ” (*Religious Literacy* 177). Thus, it would seem that this conception of evangelicalism has a certain level of scholarly agreement.

Another scholar, Randal Balmer, identifies elements such as sharing the good news and spiritual rebirth, also noting that some insist on a “literalistic hermeneutic for understanding the Bible” (*Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory* xvi). Additionally, Balmer adds, “Part of what defines an evangelical, however, transcends mere doctrine or belief; in greater or lesser degrees, evangelicals place a good deal of emphasis on spiritual piety” (xvi). This can be described as the compulsion to live lives set apart from the world – to be different. To some this may appear to be holiness, (living lives dedicated to God,) while to others it is legalism, (being defined by the law). Nevertheless, this may be mostly superficial since when it comes to sociological data, evangelicals do not seem to be so very different from the larger American culture. According to research conducted by the Barna Group,

In virtually every study we conduct, representing thousands of interviews every year, born-again Christians fail to display much attitudinal or behavioral evidence of transformed lives. For instance, based on a study released in 2007, we found that most of the lifestyle activities of born-again Christians were statistically equivalent to those of non-born-again. When asked to identify their activities over the last thirty days, born-again believers were just as likely to bet or gamble, to visit a pornographic website, to take something that did not belong to them, to consult a medium or psychic, to physically fight or abuse someone, to have consumed enough alcohol to be considered legally drunk, to have used an illegal, nonprescription drug, to have said something to someone that was not true, to have gotten back at someone for something he or she did, and to have said mean things behind another person’s back. (Kinnaman and Lyons 47)

It would seem, however that evangelicals at least desire to present the image that they are different from the rest of the world. Nevertheless, these scholars do provide functional

themes that will prove useful in identifying the evangelical culture within the United States.

Evangelical Self-Definitions

It is important to also consider how evangelicals define themselves. To outline and distinguish evangelical self-identifications I will rely on the statements of faith offered by three of the largest evangelical organizations: the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), the Billy Graham Evangelical Association (BGEA), and the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). The NAE's statement of faith is as follows:

We believe the Bible to be the inspired, the only infallible, authoritative Word of God.

- We believe that there is one God, eternally existent in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- We believe in the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, in His virgin birth, in His sinless life, in His miracles, in His vicarious and atoning death through His shed blood, in His bodily resurrection, in His ascension to the right hand of the Father, and in His personal return in power and glory.
- We believe that for the salvation of lost and sinful people, regeneration by the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential.
- We believe in the present ministry of the Holy Spirit by whose indwelling the Christian is enabled to live a godly life.
- We believe in the resurrection of both the saved and the lost; they that are saved unto the resurrection of life and they that are lost unto the resurrection of damnation.
- We believe in the spiritual unity of believers in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Some version of most of the four elements outlined by Bebbington exists in this statement of faith, without necessarily being explicit, most likely to relate inclusiveness among contrasting biblical interpretations among evangelicals. Utilizing the words “salvation” and “saved” imply a need to experience some kind of sanctifying moment.

The Bible is identified as inspired, infallible, and “the Word of God”. However, note the absence of inerrant which often engenders disagreement and division. It is clear that they see Jesus Christ’s life, death, and resurrection as the core of individual salvation and regeneration. One thing that is missing is evangelism. However, this is covered in their mission statement: “The mission of the National Association of Evangelicals is to extend the kingdom of God through a fellowship of member denominations, churches, organizations, and individuals, demonstrating the unity of the body of Christ by standing for biblical truth, speaking with a representative voice, and serving the evangelical community through united action, cooperative ministry, and strategic planning.” Furthermore, they list their values as growing Biblical faith (proclaiming the message worldwide,) witness to society, attending to human concerns, maximizing resources (stewardship,) fostering cooperation (among evangelicals), ministering to the poor, nurturing communications, and cross-cultural involvement. All of this conveys some form of the four elements though somewhat vague in areas. In addition, they outline some essentials of the Christian faith such as the trinity.

The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association’s statement of faith declares:

- The Bible to be the infallible Word of God, that it is His holy and inspired Word, and that it is of supreme and final authority.
- In one God, eternally existing in three persons-- Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- Jesus Christ was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary. He led a sinless life, took on Himself all our sins, died and rose again, and is seated at the right hand of the Father as our mediator and advocate.
- That all men everywhere are lost and face the judgment of God, and need to come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ through His shed blood on the cross.
- That Christ rose from the dead and is coming soon;
- In holy Christian living, and that we must have concern for the hurts and social needs of our fellowmen.

- We must dedicate ourselves anew to the service of our Lord and to His authority over our lives.
- In using every modern means of communication available to us to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the world.

All of the elements of Bebbington's definition of evangelical are clearly represented in this statement of faith. That "men everywhere are lost and face the judgment of God, and need to come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ through His shed blood on the cross" expresses the belief in the necessity of a conversion experience. The Bible is represented as infallible and the inspired Word of God, but again, the word inerrant is not used.

"Using every modern means of communication available to us to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the world" clearly articulates the importance of evangelism.

Finally, the significance of Jesus Christ's death on the cross and resurrection to the faith is represented in several of the statements. Also, certain foundational beliefs of traditional Christianity are presented as well.

The Southern Baptist Convention is both the largest Protestant and evangelical denomination in the United States. Their statement of faith also confirms all aspects of evangelicalism while differing slightly regarding the Bible. On their website, they are quite explicit about the conversion experience:

Regeneration, or the new birth, is a work of God's grace whereby believers become new creatures in Christ Jesus. It is a change of heart wrought by the Holy Spirit through conviction of sin, to which the sinner responds in repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Repentance and faith are inseparable experiences of grace. Repentance is a genuine turning from sin toward God. Faith is the acceptance of Jesus Christ and commitment of the entire personality to Him as Lord and Savior.

Southern Baptists have specific expectations about how a conversion experience happens.

They also believe in the inerrancy of the Bible. While they do not use the word

“inerrancy”, it is clear that is what is intended in their statement of faith. Regarding Scripture they maintain, “It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter. Therefore, all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy”. That would seem to include all matters of spirituality, history, and science. They also make clear the importance of evangelism to their faith, proclaiming, “The Lord Jesus Christ has commanded the preaching of the gospel to all nations. It is the duty of every child of God to seek constantly to win the lost to Christ by verbal witness undergirded by a Christian lifestyle, and by other methods in harmony with the gospel of Christ”. Thus, international missions and/or evangelism in the believer’s daily life is mandated as part of the true faith. Finally, their crucicentrism is represented by the statement, “There is no salvation apart from personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord.” It is clear that the crux of their faith is the belief in Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection as the foundational belief of Christianity. While the Statement of Faith includes much more than this, they affirm all the elements of Bebbington’s definition of evangelicalism.

While it is clear that several of the elements hold true for all evangelicals, there is some space for debate on the issue of biblical authority. To illustrate a theological approach that does not hold to either biblical inerrancy or infallibility, but still exists within the confines of evangelicalism, I will explain an emerging view of faith represented by Brian McLaren. First, however, it must be clarified that he does qualify as evangelical based on the scholarly definition. McLaren identifies himself as an Anabaptist and states that “Anabaptists emphasize personal commitment”... no one is born an automatic Christian. One becomes a Christian through an event, process, or both, in which one identifies with Jesus, his mission, and his followers” (229). He also

identifies Jesus Christ as central to his faith, arguably even more so than other evangelicals. “While some Protestants seem to let Jesus be Savior, but promote Paul to lord and teacher, Anabaptists have always interpreted Paul through Jesus and not the reverse” (231). This includes the teachings as well as the death and resurrection of Jesus. McLaren describes evangelism as missional faith which “asserts that Jesus came to preach the good news of the kingdom of God to everyone, especially the poor. He came to seek and save the lost. He came on behalf of the sick. He came to save world. His gospel and therefore the Christian message, is good news for the whole world” (120). Furthermore, for McLaren, evangelism goes far beyond saving souls, but meeting people’s basic needs. He summarizes “this is what it means to be a missional Christian: to join Jesus in expressing God’s love for the whole world, to follow Jesus in his mission of saving love for the world. More important to me than the hell question, then, is the *mission* question” (125). Lastly, McLaren distinguishes himself the most with his views of the Bible in that he confronts traditional interpretations. He labels himself as biblical and professes that the Bible is “a gift from God, inspired by God, to benefit us in the most important way possible: equipping us so that we can benefit others, so that we can play our part in the ongoing mission of God. *My regard for the Bible is higher than ever*” (178). However, McLaren approaches his understanding of the purpose of the Bible quite differently than more conservative evangelicals. First, he acknowledges that there is a human element to its creation, observing, “it was very obviously written by one human being to another, in a certain time and place, dealing with certain situations and needs, bearing all the marks of Paul’s humanity, including his personal opinions (e.g., 1Corinthians 7:12) and biases (e.g., Titus 1:12-13)”. He further clarifies the fact that

many words or phrases used to describe the Bible are not even used in the Bible to describe itself such as “word of God”, inerrancy, infallibility, and literal (181, 182). Instead, McLaren posits, “*The purpose of Scripture is to equip God’s people for good works*” (183). Furthermore, according to McLaren, the Bible can be used in unintended ways. He writes, “we have languished and wandered when we have used the Bible as a weapon to threaten others, as a tool to intimidate others and prove them wrong, as a shortcut to being know-it-alls who believe that Bible gives us all the answers, as a defense of the status quo—none of these being the use Paul the apostle wanted Timothy, his protégé, to make of the Scriptures” (183). McLaren also problematizes certain uses of the Bible:

I need to be forthcoming, though, and admit that the Bible has not only been an inestimable blessing to me: it has also been a problem. The more I learn from Jesus, the more I cringe when I read passages in Exodus or Joshua where the God of love and universal compassion, to whom Jesus has introduced me, allegedly commands what today we would call brutality, chauvinism, ethnic cleansing, or holocaust. I ache when biblical passages are used to reinforce an escapist deterministic, or fatalistic view of the future, to assert the subjugation of women by men, or to justify a careless attitude toward our beautiful God-given planet. (185)

Thus, while McLaren relates his unease with particular parts of the Bible, he ultimately focuses the problem on interpretation. He argues, “the problem isn’t the Bible; it’s our modern assumptions about the Bible and our modern interpretive approaches to it. I try to explain that there is a better way to understand and apply the Bible, a largely new and unexplained way that can be summarized like this: *We need to reclaim the Bible as narrative*” (185). This conflicts with the traditional evangelical approach interpreting (at least some parts) literally and applying them to modern situations. McLaren explains, “The Bible is a story, and just because it recounts (by standards of accuracy acceptable to

its original audience) what happened, that doesn't mean it tells what should always happen or even what should have happened" (185). Thus, he unequivocally distances himself from the understanding of the Bible as inerrant, infallible and certainly from the perspective that it should be understood literally. He does not, however, deem it as simply a human text with little use, but acknowledges there is much truth and wisdom in its pages. Moreover, in the past, Christians have used the Bible in a way outside of its rightful purpose – to justify patriarchy, oppression, etc. While in certain ways McLaren shares many of the goals of other evangelicals, his understanding of the Bible sets him apart quite distinctively.

American Evangelicalism

In addition to the definition of evangelicalism, certain characteristics of American evangelicalism should be observed. The first is that evangelicalism in the United States is uniquely American. This means, evangelicals in this country have developed within the confines of American democracy and republicanism. In the book, *American Jesus*, Stephen Prothero argues that Americans have essentially understood Jesus in their own image. He observes, "Jesus has no doubt transformed the nation, but the nation has also transformed him" (297). Specifically, "the emphasis on a personal relationship with Jesus, so highly prized in born-again circles today is a mid-nineteenth-century innovation. Even fundamentalism is an American invention, and a recent one at that, since fundamentalists did not articulate the unchanging articles of their faith until the early twentieth century" (298). In other words, the individualism of American culture has facilitated how evangelicals have understood their relationship with Jesus as being

personal and unmediated. Mark Noll makes the argument that “the formal thought of evangelicals – that is, the consideration of nature, society, history, and the arts – weakened throughout the early history of the United States because evangelicals adapted their Christian convictions uncritically to American ideals” (*Scandal*). The Christian faith experience was shaped by American values. George Marsden is even more specific observing that, “The characteristic American response to secularization was to bless its manifestations—such as materialism, capitalism, and nationalism—with Christian symbolism” (49). Furthermore, Marsden more critically describes American fundamentalistic evangelicals:

There are not many other material aspects of the American dream that most adherents are expected to give up. Rather, it is usually assumed, and sometimes advertised, that the comforts of the suburbs, ability to vacation in exotic places, and economic security may well be added benefits of “seeking first the kingdom of God”.... Fundamentalistic evangelicals’ emphasis on conservative politics as a means of working for a secure and prosperous America are of a piece with this emphasis on this-worldly comforts, even while they also preach the otherworldly message that eternity depends on one’s relation to Christ and that the true Christian must give up the pleasures of the world. (254)

The values of American evangelicals are clearly, at least in part, shaped by the values of their country. This has lead to more capitalist inclinations.

Another characteristic of American evangelicalism is that it has adapted to and appropriated certain aspects of modern society. Marsden writes, “When looking at relational teachings of recent evangelicalism, including major Pentecostal and charismatic strands, one not only again finds countless varieties, but many of them appear to be a characteristically modern American to the degree that their appeal involves the promise of a contemporary form of self-fulfillment” (253). Again, the modern/American priority of individualism manifests in Christian individual faith. Christian Smith takes up

this issue quite thoroughly in his book, *American Evangelicalism*, where he explains why modernism has created the circumstances in which evangelicalism thrives. He argues that the fact that evangelicalism is flourishing can be explained by the “subcultural identity theory” which “maintains, essentially, that religions can survive and thrive in pluralistic, modern society by situating themselves in subcultures that offer morally orienting collective identities which provide their adherents meaning and belonging.... Those religious traditions will be stronger which better possess and utilize the cultural tools need to create both clear distinction from and significant engagement with other relevant outgroups” (120). In other words, because in modern times, individuals are detached, and are therefore seeking meaning and belongingness, evangelical Christianity offers this and therefore modernism creates the conditions under which evangelicalism resonates with isolated individuals seeking belonging.

Another characteristic of contemporary evangelicalism is that it is more populist and less intellectual. Nathan Hatch explains in *The Democratization of American Christianity*:

Christianity was effectively reshaped by common people who molded it in their own image and who threw themselves into expanding its influence. Increasingly assertive common people wanted their leaders unpretentious, their doctrines self-evident and down-to-earth, their music lively and singable, and their churches in local hands. It was this upsurge of democratic hope that characterized so many religious cultures in the early republic and brought Baptists Methodists, Disciples of Christ, and a host of other insurgent groups to the fore. The rise of evangelical Christianity in the early republic is, in some measure, a story of the success of common people in shaping the culture after their own priorities rather than the priorities outlined by gentlemen such as the framers of the Constitution....

The democratization of Christianity, then, has less to do with the specifics of polity and governance and more with the incarnation of the church into popular culture. In at least three respects the popular religious movements of the early republic articulated a profoundly democratic

spirit. First, they denied the age-old distinction that set the clergy apart as a separate order of men, and they refused to defer to learned theologians and traditional orthodoxies....

Second, these movements empowered ordinary people by taking their deepest spiritual impulses at face value rather than subjecting them to the scrutiny of orthodox doctrine and the frowns of respectable clergymen. (9 – 10)

As it has become more populist, evangelicalism has become less interested in theologically complex issues. Prothero observes that, “Pop psychology has elbowed biblical exegesis out of many born-again pulpits (including some of the most successful megachurches), self-help books outsell theological works in most Christian bookstores, and loving Jesus has replaced affirming the Westminster Confession as the soul of evangelical piety” (*Religious Literacy* 35 – 36). This trend began with the Second Great Awakening. Prothero notes that for the populist preachers and their audiences, “rational debates about doctrine were beside the point and theological education was useless. The urgencies of the age were feeling and acting: a heartfelt relationship with Jesus and practical action to reform sinners, missionize the heathen, and otherwise save the world” (106). Accordingly, expression of evangelical faith became a more emotional experience, rather than intellectual or theological. Prothero continues, “This legacy is with us today in the narrative preaching style, which according to one historian of the sermon now aims ‘to achieve a happening rather than an understanding.’ It is with us as well in ‘seeker-sensitive’ megachurches, many of which have decided to stop preaching the basic teachings of the Christian tradition because marketing research has indicated that ‘seekers’ find that kind of thing to be a turnoff” (110). Prothero ultimately argues that religious illiteracy, which has increased significantly, (even about Christianity,) “is a product of the Second Great Awakening” (112). Thus, a cultural shift in the favor of the

common people has had contemporary implications. Hatch observes, “Modern American populist religious leaders such as Billy Graham, Kathryn Kuhlman, Oral Roberts, Robert Schuller, Jimmy Swaggart, Jerry Falwell, and Pat Robertson continue a long tradition of democratic religious authority. The significance of these individuals is less their own rise to prominence and more the decentralized, grassroots, and populist religious cultures of which they are the most visible representatives” (211).

Mark Noll makes the argument in his book, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, that American evangelicalism has become so populist that it has resulted in intellectual stagnation. He notes that in antebellum America, “with the rise of the new university, evangelical thinking, which had previously existed in the tension between academic and populist styles, became almost exclusively populist” (114). Before this, there was an intellectual rigor among evangelicals. Furthermore, the notion of biblical literalism “that gained increasing strength among evangelicals toward the end of the nineteenth century” resulted in “reduced space for academic debate, intellectual experimentation, and nuanced discrimination between shades of opinion” (124). This was the beginning of the fundamentalist phase of evangelicalism. The important thing to note at this point is that “the fundamentalist movement reinforced the dogmatic power of populist teachers. With the universities and their formal learning suspect, the spokesperson who could step forth confidently on the basis of the Scriptures was welcomed as a convincing authority” (Noll 125). Thus, it was no longer necessary to be trained academically to be an authoritative voice among evangelicals. In fact, they tended to be suspicious of those who were. This has had repercussions on evangelical political identity to the present day. Noll writes, “Evangelical political reflection has drawn upon intuitive conceptions of justice because

evangelicals in general have trusted their sanctified common sense more than formal theology, systematic study of history, or deliverances from academically trained ethicists” (160). This legacy of this way of thinking has led to little academic output by evangelicals and, instead, intellectual sterility.

Ultimately, evangelicalism in the United States is a distinctive worldview that has manifested religiously, culturally, and politically throughout the centuries. The scholarly definition that defines evangelicals in terms of believing in the necessity of a conversion experience, the Bible as the only authoritative text, the charge to share the good news, and the focus on the death and resurrection of Jesus as central to the faith, creates a working definition that outlines boundaries for the study of this group of people. Furthermore, evangelicalism in the United States is a unique religious experience influenced by American cultural values such as individualism. Their expression of faith is democratic, modern, and populist. While there are important differences that exist among evangelicals, there are certain themes that can be observed as well. It is necessary to identify those themes for the purpose of study, but eventually, the differences will culminate in conflict resulting in an ideological struggle among evangelicals.

HISTORY

United States history has been significantly influenced by evangelicalism in numerous ways and American evangelicalism has been largely shaped by the distinctive culture of the U.S. This section will summarize the history of Christianity in the United States that is relevant to this study including the faith of the Puritans, the Great Awakening, the Second Great Awakening, the Social Gospel, fundamentalism, neo-

evangelicalism, and relevant moments of evangelical faith as they intersect with political discourse. The purpose of this section is two-fold: to observe the consistent presence of evangelical faith in U.S. history and to establish the context for the current struggle over evangelical political identity. To do this, we must start from the beginning.

Puritans

Evangelicalism originated with the Reformation and a new understanding of the Christian faith. The new form of Christianity that emerged as an alternative to Catholicism gave individual believers more control over how they practiced their faith. This resonated in a more personal experience of salvation – one that didn’t require mediation by the church. The first European settlers in North America, particularly the Puritans, brought with them exceptional religious convictions. Mark Noll describes them as the “immediate ancestors of American evangelicals” and explains, “We know them as the Puritans because they attempted to purify England’s state church, purify the nation, and purify themselves as individuals. The English Puritans who migrated to Plymouth, Boston, New Haven, and other North American sites did so in order to continue the efforts to purify self, church, and society that were being frustrated in the mother country” (*Scandal* 40). One of the reasons for the settling of this country was unhindered religious expression. Edwin Gaustad and Leigh Schmidt also observe that the Puritans came to North America “for the freedom to practice their religion” (54). Moreover, the Puritans “came to prove that one could form a society so faithful, a church so cleansed, that even old England itself would be transformed by witnessing what determined believers had managed to achieve many thousands of miles away. That was the vision to

be steadily pursued, without weakening or wavering, without transgressing or backsliding, without ever forgetting the awesome obligations of a covenant with God” (54). In summary, at least one major reason for the creation of this new culture was to practice their religion and allow it to influence their society without restriction. Noll describes the beliefs of the Puritans:

Puritans believed that humankind must depend entirely upon God for salvation. Like Martin Luther and John Calvin, Puritans were Augustinians in theology. They held that humans are sinners who will not choose to be reconciled with God unless God initiates the process of their salvation. The Puritans went beyond the Continental Reformers in their emphasis on conversion, however....

Second, the Puritans emphasized the authority of the Bible. Specifically, they believed that the Bible exerts a “regulative” authority, which means that Christians, so far as possible, should do only what the Scriptures explicitly direct....

Third, Puritans believed that God created society as a unified whole. Church and state, the individual and the public, are not unrelated spheres of life but are complementary, intimately connected by God’s acts of creation and his continuing providence. This conviction lay behind the Puritan effort to reform all of English society. It also provided the stimulus for Puritan effort to fashion colonies in the New World in which all parts of colonial life would reflect the glory of God....

Finally, Puritans believed that God always works with people through covenants, or solemn agreements....

The secret of understanding the Puritans lies in realizing not only that energies from private religious life flowed readily into church and society but also that they flowed in the other direction as well. (*History* 32 – 35)

This interconnectedness of religious faith and social practice of the Puritans was the beginning of a long tradition of American evangelical discourse.

The Great Awakening

After the arrival of the Puritans, the next significant moment for evangelicalism in American history was the Great Awakening, which occurred in the middle of the 18th

century. Noll explains, “The colonial revival was called a *great* awakening because it touched so many regions and so many aspects of colonial life. Although the Great Awakening represented more a general upsurge of revivalistic piety than a distinct event, it was vastly important for both the churches and American society” (*History* 91). Two leaders that emerged during this time were George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards. George Whitefield was an “ordained minister of the Church of England” and “the most important preacher of the Great Awakening” (Noll 91, 95). Furthermore, Noll posits that despite being a Calvinist, “the realities of heartfelt conversion Whitefield facilitated, even more than the extensive changes he brought to the practices of religion, are why he was such an important figure in his age and why his legacy has remained at the heart of the history of Christianity in America” (95). Whitefield made a significant impact on the development of evangelicalism in the U.S. and conversion would continue to be one of the major elements of American evangelicalism.

Jonathan Edwards was a New England theologian and the Great Awakening’s “most important apologist” (Noll 95). Noll explains, “It was Edward’s narrative of revival more than the theology he himself presented as its foundation that most fired the evangelical imagination” (*Rise* 91). This salvation narrative would become a dominant theme of evangelicalism. More specifically, Noll describes, “Of first importance was Edward’s stark depiction of the damning reality of human sinfulness... and his equally powerful account of the palpable reality of divine salvation.... Of nearly equal effect was Edwards’s description of the changes wrought upon converts by the Spirit of God” (91). Therefore, Edwards’ also message resonated with evangelicalism because of his emphasis on conversion. Gaustad and Schmidt also note that Edwards was important

because he “joined Puritan theology to evangelical piety and practice, and that made for a forceful blend that long shaped the religious and intellectual life of New England” (59).

Edwards’ legacy would influence American religious experience for centuries.

Ultimately, the Great Awakening had significant and enduring consequences. According to Noll, “The evangelicals who emerged from the Great Awakening took it upon themselves to create their own communities; at first they sought to remake the churches, but then (in the United States) they set their sights on creating a Christian nation.... After the Great Awakening, the evangelical tendency increasingly was to seek leaders distinguished by charismatic power” (*History* 104 – 105). The religious impact is inextricably linked to the political ramifications. Moreover, Stephen Prothero writes that the Great Awakening put “the experience of conversion front and center in American Protestant life” and introduced “a more extemporaneous and emotional style to both sermon and worship” (*Religious* 184). This distinct style of religious expression resonated with the members of the colonies. Consequently, Prothero maintains that the Great Awakening “helped to turn revivalism into a key component of American religion and to make evangelicalism the nation’s dominant religious impulse. In the political realm the Great Awakening served to knit Americans of all colonies into one people—a perspective that contributed greatly to the coming American Revolution” (184). Thus, the experience of conversion throughout the colonies resulted in a perception of belonging to one religious family – one that was separated from England. This religious consciousness, in part, led to a desire to be unencumbered and therefore independent of England. The Great Awakening shaped the future of evangelicalism but also had specific political ramifications as well. One major effect of the Great Awakening was the

creation of unity among the colonists which led to the desire for independence from England. Noll recounts:

Before and during the Revolutionary War, Christian faith played a political role for patriots on two levels. It contributed to the content of the period's dominant political ideology, and it was also a significant force in the actual outworking of the war. Most significant in this regard was the relationship between the Puritan tradition, which was evolving into a uniquely American form of evangelical Protestantism, and the ideology that would justify a break from Britain. (115)

This incipient religious faith and expression was one justification for the split from Great Britain. Furthermore, according to Noll, "republican and Christian points of view began to merge during the Revolution, especially since a general Puritan influence remained strong in America. It was only a small step, for example, to expand concern for the glorious liberty of the children of God into concern for the glorious freedoms imperiled by Parliament" (*Scandal* 70). It is evident that both the settling by the Puritans, and the move for independence resulting in the founding of the United States, were both, at least in part, motivated by an early version of evangelical faith.

The Second Great Awakening

The next significant moment in U.S. history for evangelicalism was the Second Great Awakening, which occurred at the end of the 18th, and beginning of the 19th centuries, which was "the most influential revival of Christianity in the history of the United States" (Noll *History* 166). The Second Great Awakening differed from the first Great Awakening in several ways. According to Noll,

Where Congregationalists (Jonathan Edwards), Anglicans (George Whitefield), and Presbyterians (Gilbert Tennet) had spearheaded the first Awakening, Methodists, Baptists, and Disciples (Barton Stone and Alexander Campbell) rapidly came to dominate the second. The second

Awakening also left a more permanent legacy than did the first. The great profusion of voluntary societies that sprang up in America in the first third of the nineteenth century can be traced directly to the energies of the Second Great Awakening.

The theology of the Second Great Awakening also differed from the earlier revival tradition. Stressing God's sovereignty in all things, Edwards and Whitefield had emphasized the inability of sinful people to save themselves. The theology of leading revivalists in the nineteenth century, both North and South, suggested that God had bestowed on all people the ability to come to Christ. This shift in perspective was related to the larger political and intellectual developments we have already noted, but it also arose from a widespread desire for a theology of action that could encourage and justify the expanding revivals of Christianity. (169 – 170)

Stated simply, the Second Great Awakening differed theologically, and left a more enduring heritage than the first. The elements of evangelicalism, defined in the previous section, were gradually becoming more and more prominent. Noll notes that the Second Great Awakening “revived commitment to Christianity, drove church expansion to unprecedented levels, and went a considerable distance toward Christianizing many of the institutions and social habits of the new nation” (*Rise* 212). Thus, Christian sentiment was woven into the fabric of the United States. While the first Great Awakening planted the seed connecting religious faith and social practice, the Second Great Awakening brought this concept to fruition. Prothero also observes that the Second Great Awakening “injected ecstasy and emotion into American Protestantism” and that “it solidified the position of evangelicalism at the center of American religious life. And it motivated Protestants nationwide to work for a wide variety of social reforms in nondenominational organizations such as the American Anti-Slavery Society and the American Temperance Society” (221 – 222). Furthermore, it was the Second Great Awakening that initiated the populism that now characterizes evangelicalism. Nathan Hatch writes, “In the era of the Second Great Awakening, the most distinctive feature of American Christianity was not

the surge of an impersonal force called revivalism, descending like manna from heaven, but a remarkable set of popular leaders who proclaimed compelling visions of individual self-respect and collective self-confidence. This story is not one of established clergy fretting about loss of social authority but rather the demand of religious insurgents to be recognized as the latest advance of Christ's kingdom" (56). Thus began the distinctive American experience of populist evangelicalism.

The most important individual in the Second Great Awakening was Charles Finney, who emerged, according to Noll, as the "best-known revivalist in the United States" (*History* 174). Moreover, "More than any other individual of his day he succeeded in joining evangelical religion to social reform.... Finney's theological emphases on the Moral Government of god, the power of the human will, and the state of entire sanctification played a key role in the evolution of American Protestant theology" (174 – 175). Since Finney's time, evangelicals have frequently associated their faith and their positions on public policy. Furthermore, his Arminianism left a lasting legacy among evangelicals as well. Noll writes, "He was a perfectionist who believed that a permanent stage of higher spiritual life was possible for anyone who sought it wholeheartedly" (177).¹ American evangelicals have since tended to be more inclined toward an Arminian theological disposition, emphasizing the individual's agency in accepting salvation.

Abolition

At the end of the Second Great Awakening, the first major political involvement of Christians (both evangelical and non-evangelical,) was regarding the issue of slavery,

though geography strongly influenced which position they assumed. According to Noll, the Second Great Awakening inspired “the drive to abolish slavery” in the North (314).

However, in the South:

Stung by abolitionist attacks from the North, revivalistic Protestants, who earlier had equivocated on slavery, came to defend the institution. They saw in slavery a means of converting blacks (who would otherwise have languished in heathendom) and preserving the virtues of Christian order. Growing numbers of Protestants in the South believed that Northern attacks on slavery threatened not just a general way of life but specifically religious underpinnings for faith as well. (315)

This conflict within Christianity led to denominational splits, particularly for the Methodists and the Baptists (Noll 316). For the Baptists, this ultimately led to the creation of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1845, which is currently the largest Protestant denomination in the U.S. Both sides of the debate appropriated their faith as rationale for their position on slavery.

The Social Gospel

The next significant moment for evangelical faith after the Civil War was the Protestant Social Gospel movement which transpired at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries. During this time, many Christians felt compelled to participate in social reform as morally obligated by their faith. Noll explains, “The origins of the Social Gospel were both domestic and foreign. The strong link in the American revival tradition between personal holiness and social reform contributed to the genesis of the movement, as did a newer concern for the scientific study of social problems that accompanied the rise of the modern American university after the Civil War” (305).

Thus, the Social Gospel was partly a result of the Second Great Awakening and partly an

application of modern thinking about social issues. The Social Gospel movement was rooted in the work of Charles Sheldon, “whose best-selling novel *In His Steps* (1897) presented a picture of what could happen in a community torn by social dissension if Christians would only ask themselves at every moment, ‘What would Jesus do?’” (Noll 306). This question, of course, has been taken up recently by evangelicals and related to all sorts of political views, including the environment. Also, according to Noll, “The most important exponent of the Social Gospel was Walter Rauschenbusch (1816 – 1918), a German-American Baptist who ministered for ten years in New York City’s ‘Hell’s Kitchen’ before becoming a professor of church history at Rochester Seminary in upstate New York” and “a convinced critic of the established order” (Noll 306). One specific social movement that took place during this time was Prohibition. This movement was one of the direct successors of abolition (Noll 296). Prohibition, like the Social Gospel, was a Protestant movement, within which evangelicals played a prominent role. It resulted in the 18th amendment which prohibited the manufacture and sale of alcohol in 1920. Noll writes that the Prohibition movement “illustrated the power of the nation’s public Protestants – generally evangelical, almost all white, largely of British background – in translating their moral vision into the law of the land” (299). It also illustrated the willingness of evangelicals and non-evangelical Protestants to come together to affect social change.

The Social Gospel mentality, however, was short-lived among evangelicals. They began to become suspicious of what they perceived as a liberal worldview and diluted gospel. Noll writes, “The more self-consciously evangelical groups within American Protestantism had begun to make a distinction between the application of the gospel to

society and gospel defined by the social needs of the period” (*Scandal* 163). They worried that evangelism was being compromised by serving society without emphasizing the gospel, resulting in the Great Reversal. According to Marsden, “The ‘Great Reversal’ took place from about 1900 to about 1930, when all progressive social concern, whether political or private, became suspect among revivalist evangelicals and was relegated to a very minor role” (86). This trend was led by the fundamentalists.

Fundamentalism

Fundamentalism emerged in the 1920s as a response to modernism. According to George Marsden, fundamentalism “was militantly anti-modernist Protestant evangelicalism. Fundamentalists were evangelical Christians, close to the traditions of the dominant American revivalist establishment of the nineteenth century, who in the twentieth century militantly opposed both modernism in theology and the cultural changes that modernism endorsed” (4). The primary theological concern for fundamentalists was the higher criticism of the Bible (Marsden 120). Because a consequence of modernism had been to approach the Bible as a human document, fundamentalists responded by promoting the notion of inerrancy, the belief that the Bible possessed a divine origin and was without error. Despite the fact that “fundamentalism” was not coined until the 1920s, its conceptualization began to take shape in the latter part of the 19th century (Marsden 119). According to Marsden, Dwight L. Moody was one of the primary progenitors of fundamentalism. “He believed in Biblical infallibility and premillennialism” (Marsden 33). Mark Noll refers to Moody as the best known evangelist of the second half of the 19th century (*History* 288). Premillennialism is a form of

eschatology that believes that Christ will return to earth and then reign for a thousand years. Moreover, there are signs that will predict His return. Because most premillennialists believe this will happen soon, it has affected how they approach the world, in that saving souls, and therefore evangelism, is the highest priority, (rather than, for example, serving the poor). Moody played a substantial role in leading evangelicals away from social reform based on his premillennialist views. Marsden explains that Moody:

dropped direct social involvement for the same reason that he avoided controversial theology—both threatened to distract from his primary concern for evangelism. In his mind it was certainly not a question of condoning lack of compassion for the poor; rather he was convinced that the most compassionate possible care was for a person's eternal soul. Furthermore, evangelism was, according to his theology, the best way to meet social needs. (37)

Premillennialism has had an enduring influence on many strands of evangelical thought and, therefore, evangelical political involvement.² Noll relates at length:

On predispositions in the use of Scripture, we should remember that, after the Bible, the best-selling book of any sort in the United States during the 1970s was Hal Lindsey's *Late Great Planet Earth*, a populist interpretation of world events in terms of historicist dispensationalism. The evangelical predilection, when faced with a world crisis, to use the Bible as a crystal ball instead of as a guide for sorting out the complex tangles of international morality was nowhere more evident than in responses to the Gulf War in early 1991. Neither through the publishing of books nor through focused consideration in periodicals did evangelicals engage in significant discussions on the morality of the war, the use of the United Nations in the wake of the collapse of Communism, the significance of oil for job creation or wealth formation throughout the world, the history of Western efforts at intervention in the Middle East, or other topics fairly crying out for serious Christian analysis. Instead, evangelicals gobbled up more than half a million copies of several self-assured, populist explanations of how the Gulf crisis was fulfilling the details of obscure biblical prophecies. The systems of biblical interpretation promoted in those best-sellers were all variations on dispensational theology. (*Scandal* 140)

Dispensational-premillennialism is an eschatology that manifests in contemporary evangelical political views. This is also bolstered by the success of the *Left Behind* series that has the theological perspective as its foundation.

The term fundamentalist is based on a collection of 12 volumes called *The Fundamentals* published from 1910 – 1915 (Marsden 118). Marsden writes, “In *The Fundamentals* the movement’s interests were focused on a broad defense of faith. Perhaps one third of the articles defended Scripture, typically with an attack on the foibles of higher criticism. Another third dealt with traditional theological questions—apologetics, the nature and work of each of the persons of the Trinity, the doctrines of sin and salvation. The remaining articles are more difficult to classify” (119 – 120). Fundamentalism initially began as a theological debate within seminaries. Noll observes, “Modernism has had a long-lasting influence on the academic study of religion. Especially in its desire to translate the dogmatic and sectarian elements of classical Christian faith into more generic religious terms has set an important precedent for study of religion in colleges and universities” (376). Nonetheless, he notes that “ironically, modernists may have had the greatest impact on their polar opposites, the fundamentalists, who were intensely preoccupied with the effort to refute the modernist reinterpretations of the faith” (376). He cites fundamentalist academics such as J. Gresham Machen who fought against modernism in the seminary (376). Ultimately, however, the fundamentalist/modernist debate was destined to overflow into the larger cultural arena.

The most historically significant moment in the debate between fundamentalists and modernists occurred in the Scopes Trial in 1925, over the teaching of evolution in

public schools. The attorney for the prosecution was William Jennings Bryan, who while being atypical, was a fundamentalist nonetheless. According to Marsden, “Bryan represented the culturally dominant evangelical coalition which took shape in the first half of the nineteenth century. In it, the ideals of Christian piety went together with the ideals of the progressing and democratic American nation” (132). Noll also notes that Bryan “saw politics as a forum for promoting principles of a morality both Christian and American. Bryan took a special interest in the welfare of farmers and workers who were suffering from the grasp of manipulating financiers and overweening industrialists” (300). While Bryan had fundamentalist religious views, they manifested in his politics in exceptional ways. Marsden differentiates him with other fundamentalists such as Billy Sunday, who “was a premillennialist, whereas Bryan’s basic optimism about the progress of the kingdom in American culture amounted to a very vague sort of postmillennialism” (135). Postmillennialism maintains that humans will build the kingdom of God and then Jesus will return, which materializes more as a social gospel. Despite his differences, Bryan represented common themes observable in evangelical politics throughout the 20th century. Mark Noll identifies these as “activistic, intuitive, populist, and Biblicist” (*Scandal* 161). Regardless, Bryan’s articulation of the fundamentalist position in the Scopes Trial had, many argue, detrimental effects on the way fundamentalism was perceived by the larger public.

While technically achieving a victory in the trial, many contend that it was a cultural defeat. Bryan’s rhetoric positioned the Christian faith as good against the evil of evolution. He proclaimed, “The case has assumed the proportion of a battle royal between unbelief that attempts to speak through so-called science and the defenders of

the Christian faith, speaking through the legislators of Tennessee” (Gaustad and Schmidt 298). He further stated, “If the law is nullified, there will be rejoicing where God is repudiated, the Saviour scoffed at, and the Bible ridiculed” (Gaustad and Schmidt 298). Bryan set it up as an epic battle that would have a considerable impact on the culture. Noll poignantly observes that, “creationism must be understood for what it is – a political religious protest” (*Scandal* 198). Despite winning the case, Bryan’s representation of the Christian faith was not perceived as a victory for fundamentalism. Gaustad and Schmidt write, “The law was upheld, Scopes was fined one hundred dollars, and the country went on with its business: a nominal victory for fundamentalism. Nominal, because in much of the national press the town of Dayton was portrayed as a rural backwater, fundamentalism as know-nothing absurdity, and the trial itself as part carnival and part farce” (298). Nonetheless, they do not argue that it was a defeat either. Fundamentalism would go on to battle against modernists and still impact cultural debates, albeit in different ways. After the Scopes trial, fundamentalists went on to build a strong subculture. Hatch explains:

Antagonistic to modern intellectual and institutional arrangements, populist Protestants built their own extensive networks of seminaries, liberal arts colleges, Bible schools, youth organizations, foreign mission boards, publishing houses, conferences, and camps. These vital subcultures nourished communities of believers as cognitive minorities, self-consciously standing against the bastions of high culture but thoroughly in tune with the attitudes of average Americans. Above all, the leaders of these movements excelled as communicators and entrepreneurial organizers. In spite of its aloofness from twentieth-century thought and its disparagement of church traditions, populist Protestantism was immensely energetic, resourceful, and inventive; in an increasingly bureaucratic society, it grew in response to the appeals of inspired individualists. (216 – 217)

This subculture would later prove invaluable when evangelicals began to mobilize politically.

Noll interprets the impact of fundamentalism on evangelicalism as negative. He explains, “fundamentalism created major problems in several ways for the life of the mind. First, it gave new impetus to general anti-intellectualism; second, it hardened conservative evangelical commitments to certain features of the nineteenth-century evangelical-American synthesis that were problematic to begin with; and third, its major theological emphases had a chilling effect on the exercise of Christian thinking about the world” (*Scandal* 115). Fundamentalism therefore led to intellectual deficiency among evangelicals. He further writes,

For the purposes of Christian thinking, the major indictment of the fundamentalist movement, and especially of the dispensationalism that provided the most systematic interpretation of the Bible for fundamentalists and many later evangelicals, was its intellectual sterility. Under its midwifery, the evangelical community gave birth to virtually no insights into how, under God, the natural world proceeded, how human societies worked, why human nature acted the way it did, or what constituted the blessings and perils of culture. (137)

Accordingly, fundamentalism’s legacy has not been one of intellectual rigor, and several consequences can be observed. One has been the promotion of biblical literalism or inerrancy which led to “reduced space for academic debate, intellectual experimentation, and nuanced discrimination between shades of opinion” (Noll 124). This perspective still informs many evangelical cultural positions. Another consequence is that “the fundamentalist movement reinforced the dogmatic power of populist teachers. With the universities and their formal learning suspect, the spokesperson who could step forth confidently on the basis of the Scriptures was welcomed as a convincing authority” (Noll 125). It was no longer necessary to be educated in theology to be considered an authority

on spiritual matters. It was merely necessary to be a true believer of the faith and for one's foundation of truth to be based in the Scriptures.

After the Scopes Trial, fundamentalism took a different shape. A segment of hard-core fundamentalists retreated from public debate. Marsden writes, "This grasping after scientific straws was a side effect of a serious intellectual crisis. The fundamentalists took it to be a crisis in common sense. Their worldview, which until recently had been generally considered both sacred and academically impeccable, was now becoming a laughingstock. This was a key part of the fundamentalist experience of social displacement" (218). Thus, fundamentalists were forced to reconfigure themselves. Marsden distinguishes between fundamentalists in the 1920s (as previously described,) fundamentalists in the 1950s – mid1970s, and what he calls fundamentalistic evangelicals in the late 1970s to the early 21st century. Fundamentalism in the 1950s – mid1970s "is used as a self-designation almost only by ecclesiastical separatists who break fellowship with [Billy] Graham. Almost all are dispensational premillennialists, as are some non-separating evangelicals" (235). Fundamentalistic Evangelicalism of the late 1970 to early 21st century is what Marsden refers to as "The Religious Right (which also includes Catholics and Mormons) includes 'fundamentalistic' militants who from not only separatist fundamentalist groups, but also from almost the whole spectrum of evangelicals, even though by no means all evangelicals, including self-styled fundamentalist, are politicized" (235). Therefore, whether good or bad, fundamentalism has had lasting cultural legacies. Nevertheless, this is predicated on a transformation of fundamentalist discourse.

Neo-Evangelicalism

The next significant moment when evangelicals entered significantly into the public sphere is the 1950s with the origin of “New Evangelicalism” (neo-evangelicalism). Evangelicals sought to differentiate themselves from fundamentalists due to the largely negative cultural opinion about fundamentalists after the Scopes Trial. Marsden explains: “‘New Evangelicals’ (eventually just ‘evangelicals’), most of whom have a fundamentalist heritage, form the core of a broad coalition that draws in related theological conservatives, ranging from pentecostals to Mennonites, who emphasize positive evangelism, best exemplified by Billy Graham” (235). In other words, while neo-evangelicals had the same core beliefs as fundamentalists, they approached the expression of their faith in entirely different ways. Marsden writes, “Their one impulse was to insist that the exact positions won in the fundamentalist stand against modernism were too important ever to abandon. At the same time, they clearly wished to purge themselves of all the unessential traits acquired during the fundamentalist era, especially the spirit of belligerence” (*Reforming Fundamentalism* 171). They wanted to keep much of the theology of fundamentalism without the negative connotation attached by the larger society because of their combative rhetorical style. Marsden goes on to describe the influence of Graham in establishing this movement, “The young evangelist was a purebred fundamentalist, but once he became a national celebrity in the 1950s he and his closest supporters began to reclaim the term ‘evangelical’ to describe their movement. While these ‘new evangelicals’ did not abandon their militancy, they tempered it in the interests of evangelism and in the hope to regain influence in the cultural and ecclesiastical mainstream” (*Fundamentalism* 233). There was, therefore, a semantic

change with long-term cultural repercussions. Marsden clarifies, “‘Evangelical’ became the usual term to refer not only to the more moderate heirs to the broader fundamentalist coalition, but also to conversionist Protestants of any heritage” (234). This enabled a broader coalition to engagement in cultural debate. William Martin offers his insight on the difference between the neo-evangelicals and fundamentalists:

In most respects, the basic theology of the two groups was essentially the same, but the New Evangelicals tended to be rather tolerant of minor theological differences among themselves, whereas fundamentalists felt compelled to withdraw fellowship from any suspected of even the slightest deviation from their orthodoxy. Both groups deemed modernist theology to be erroneous and threatening to true Christianity, but the opposition of the New Evangelicals lacked the hysterical brittleness characteristic of the fundamentalists. To the New Evangelicals, it was more important to proclaim the gospel than to defend it. (39 – 40)

Neo-evangelicals gained more credibility through their softer and less extreme rhetorical style. Martin also observes that “The New Evangelicals were also more positive toward social reform than fundamentalists had been during the previous twenty-five years. By the mid-1950s, with Billy Graham moving easily in the corridors of political power, they had begun to believe they might have an outside chance to regain a kind of cultural hegemony evangelicals had not known, outside the South at least, since the Civil War” (40). Their growing cultural authority was represented most significantly in Billy Graham.

Billy Graham began his path as an evangelist working for Youth for Christ International in the 1940s (Martin 25). He had a popular radio show and founded *Christianity Today* (Gaustad and Schmidt 336). He eventually began to hold the crusades for which he became famous. According to Gaustad and Schmidt, Graham came to

prominence during the Eisenhower era (1953 – 1961) as the “leading revivalist in the second half of the twentieth century” (335). They continue:

Emphasizing a gospel of individual repentance and conversion, Graham saw himself as an evangelist above all else, a “proclaimer of the good news” that Christ died for all and was prepared to redeem or save those that believed. The evangelist was not, Graham acknowledged, primarily a theologian or a social reformer, and the evangelist’s message was not the whole message of religion to a modern world.... First change the hearts of women and men, Graham argued (like Dwight L. Moody before him); then one may proceed to transform the world. (336)

Nevertheless, Graham eventually modified his approach. In 1960 he stated, “my belief in the social implications of the gospel has deepened and broadened.... The evangelist must not hedge on social issues” (Gaustad and Schmidt 336). He became one of, if not the, most significant leaders of neo-evangelicalism. Furthermore, he was more effective in articulating evangelical theology than the earlier fundamentalists. Gaustad and Schmidt observe, “Through a network of activities and agencies, Billy Graham helped created a real alternative between old-time fundamentalism and old-time liberalism” (336). Mark Noll also notes that despite little theological difference with earlier expressions of evangelicalism, Graham has had much more success. He writes, “Graham’s message is a modern variation of the message that evangelical itinerants have been preaching since the time of Whitefield. What sets Graham apart from other revivalists is his winning charisma and an unusual freedom from the eccentricities and incivilities with which other American itinerants have so often been marked” (*History* 510). Eventually, he would go on to have relationships with several presidents.

Billy Graham and the neo-evangelical’s most noteworthy political discourse was a crusade against Communism. William Martin writes that, “By 1947, warnings against communism began to be a regular feature of Graham’s preaching. As he noted the rapid

spread of the atheistic ideology, he announced that ‘unless the Christian religion rescues these nations from the clutches of the unbelieving, America will stand alone and isolated in the world’” (29). This became a recurring theme among Christian spokespersons. A former communist and convert to Christianity, Whittaker Chambers expresses the anti-communist position from a Christian perspective:

Communism is what happens when, in the name of Mind, men free themselves from God. But its view of God, its knowledge of God, its experience of God, is what alone gives character to a society or a nation and meaning to its destiny. Its culture, the voice of this character, is merely that view, knowledge, experience of God, fixed by its most intense spirits in terms intelligible to the mass of men. There has never been a society or a nation without God. But history is cluttered with the wreckage of nations that became indifferent to God, and died. (Schneider 148)

This perspective framed a battle between democracy as good, and communism as evil.

Catholic William F. Buckley, Jr. also called Communism “satanic utopianism”

(Schneider 196). Thus, regardless of affiliation, much of the rhetoric against

Communism was articulated in Christian spiritual terms. In summary, it would certainly seem that the evangelical faith’s participation in public policy was much more influential under the neo-evangelicals than the fundamentalists. Despite sharing much of the same theology, neo-evangelicals were able to engage the American culture in ways that were much more effective than fundamentalists. This transformed version of evangelical political rhetoric continued to grow stronger into an even more influential articulation.

Evangelicalism in the U.S. as we now understand it has been taking shape throughout the last few centuries beginning with the Puritans and developing into a distinctively defined expression of faith. Moments such as the Great Awakening, the Second Great Awakening, the Revolutionary War, the Civil War, and others allowed

evangelicals to engage the political culture based on their religious faith. All the while, significant political movements, based on their application of Christianity to public policy, were taking shape. Starting in the 1970s, evangelical involvement in politics became more prominent, (both on the left and the right,) and that is what shall be considered in the next chapter.

Works Cited

- Balmer, Randall. *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.
- Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. 15 Jun. 2007 <www.billygraham.org>.
- Davis, Stephen T. *The Debate about the Bible: Inerrancy Versus Infallibility*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977.
- Gaustad, Edwin, and Leigh Schmidt. *The Religious History of America*. Revised ed. New York: HarperCollins, 2002.
- Hatch, Nathan O. *The Democratization of American Christianity*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989.
- Kinnaman, David, and Gabe Lyons. *unchristian*. Grand Rapids: BakerBooks, 2007.
- Marsden, George M. *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 2nd edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Marsden, George M. *Reforming Fundamentalism*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987.
- Martin, William. *With God on Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America*. New York: Broadway Books, 1997.
- McLaren, Brian D. *a Generous Orthodoxy*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004.
- National Association of Evangelicals. 15 Jun. 2007 <www.nae.net>.
- Noll, Mark A. *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992.
- Noll, Mark A. *The Rise of Evangelicalism*. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2003.
- Noll, Mark. *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994.
- Prothero, Stephen. *American Jesus*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2003.
- Prothero, Stephen. *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know—and Doesn't*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2007.

Schneider, Gregory L., ed. *Conservatism in America Since 1930*. New York: New York University Press, 2003.

Southern Baptist Convention. 15 Jun. 2007 <www.sbc.net>.

Smith, Christian. *American Evangelicalism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.

Woodward, Kenneth L. "The Split-Up Evangelicals." *Newsweek* 26 Apr. 1982: 88.

¹ This is in contrast to Calvinism which believes that only individuals predestined by God could be in relationship with Him.

² Dispensationalism is a related concept that believes that the ages are divided into seven dispensations. They believe we are currently in the sixth, “the church age”, which is, according to Noll, the age “in which believers are to evangelize, separate from ungodliness, and prepare for the return of Christ” (*History* 377).

CHAPTER THREE

SACRED DIALECTIC

This chapter will outline the two contemporary evangelical political movements, both originating around the same time (1970s). Conservative evangelicals, also called the Christian Right, have enjoyed more discernible success in mobilizing voters and influencing partisan politics. This cannot be separated from the rise of the political Right that occurred at the same time, and that was facilitated, in part, by social conservatives. As the culture seems to be questioning that hegemonic power, progressive evangelicals are enjoying a new found platform promoted by the desire for a new political direction, culminating in the election of Barack Obama. This chapter will detail the history of the two evangelical social movements in order to contextualize the selected rhetorical texts.

CONSERVATIVES

As it was established in the previous chapter, evangelicals have maintained a consistent presence in public policy debate in the United States during the past centuries. Nevertheless, more recent evangelical political movements have coalesced around a set of political topics constructing contemporary social movements. One of the most significant manifestations of evangelical political activity has resulting in the Christian Right. Sara Diamond observes, “what makes the Christian Right such a potent political

force is not just the numbers of supporters or hard-core activists. It is the availability of a consistently large segment of the population ready to vote as a bloc around salient profamily issues” (8). It is not being the most vocal that defines the Christian Right, but the breadth and enthusiasm represented by its members. Moreover, Diamond cites a Pew study that found that, “regardless of denomination, the more committed evangelicals are to their religion, the more likely they are to be politically conservative. Thus, it is the strength of evangelicalism as a cultural phenomenon that gives the Christian Right an enduring base of political support” (9). In this chapter, I will analyze the formation of the Christian Right which has effected the alignment of evangelical Christian politics with the conservative wing of the Republican Party. I will detail the inception, rise, and current status of the Christian Right, and consider what specific issues, such as abortion and gay rights, seem to resonate most with conservative evangelical voters.

The Ascent of the Christian Right

The Christian Right began to form in the 1970s as a reaction to cultural issues such as the legalization of abortion, Equal Rights Amendment, and gay rights. One of the most significant influences in raising evangelical political awareness was theologian Francis Schaeffer, who introduced to many Christians the concept of secular humanism as a threat to the Christian way of life. Mel White claims that it was Schaeffer’s “call to overthrow the ‘tyranny of secular humanism’ that helped mobilize millions of fundamentalist Christians to become political activists for the first time” (32). While the fundamentalism of the earlier part of the century was an assertion of faith into political debate by preachers and intellectuals, Schaeffer initiated the process of mobilizing the

average evangelical. Humanism, according to Schaeffer, involves “the placing of Man at the center of all things and making him the measure of all things,” as opposed to a worldview with God at the center (*A Christian Manifesto* 23). Clearly a reaction to modernity, Schaeffer constructed two opposing worldviews that had much at stake for evangelical believers and their families. White observes, “Schaeffer’s book *A Christian Manifesto* (1981) sold more than two million copies and mobilized masses of conservative Christians to become politically active” (33).

In the 1974 book, *How Should We Then Live?*, Schaeffer outlines how western philosophy and culture has over time become antagonistic to the Christian worldview. He ultimately proclaims, “This book is written in the hope that this generation may turn from that greatest of wickednesses, the placing of any created thing in the place of the Creator, and that this generation may get its feet out of the paths of death and may live” (258). Schaeffer implores Christians to no longer tolerate the degradation of their religious values. He follows up this thinking with *A Christian Manifesto* where he frames the conflict with culture war rhetoric. With the deepest sincerity, he describes the struggle as one that must be won for the future of the Christian faith and culture. Moreover, Schaeffer constructs a clear dichotomy: “It is not too strong to say that we are at war, and there are no neutral parties in the struggle. One either confesses that God is the final authority, or one confesses that Caesar is Lord” (116). This mindset subsequently penetrated the evangelical community and transformed their political discourse.

The political issue that most inspired Schaeffer was abortion, which he considered medically and legally arbitrary (*How Should We Then Live* 220). He proposes that the Christian community should oppose abortion on four fronts:

First, we should aggressively support a human life bill or a constitutional amendment protecting unborn children.

Second, we must enter the courts seeking to overturn the Supreme Court's abortion decision.

Third, legal and political action should be taken against hospitals and abortion clinics that perform abortions....

Fourth, the State must be made to feel the presence of the Christian community. (*A Christian Manifesto* 118 – 120).

This fervor has been consistently represented by evangelicals until this present day.

Since the formation of the Christian Right, opposition to abortion has been a central tenet of the evangelical political agenda. Susan Friend Harding summarizes the history of the pro-life issue within the political agenda of evangelicals:

The born-again pro-life tradition came together in three overlapping stages and venues. The first was the ... internal debate among evangelical scholars and intellectual leaders that heated up after the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision.... The second stage, the effort to convert conservative Protestant leaders more generally to a stricter anti-abortion position was launched in 1975 when Billy Graham convened a two-day leadership meeting to “determine a proper Biblical response to abortion-on-demand.” Perhaps the most important event in this second stages was the production and distribution in 1978 of the five-part film series *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?*. The film and an accompanying book with the same title were written by Francis Schaeffer IV and C. Everett Koop..... Schaeffer and Koop starred in *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?* which was scripted and directed by Francis Schaeffer's son Franky, and it is widely credited with turning the tide of popular evangelical opinion against abortion.... The personhood of the fetus, according to Schaeffer, logically follows from the facts of God's existence and his nature, and because all persons are made in God's image, abortion, like the killing of any other innocent person, violates God directly. (191 – 192)

Since this time, opposing abortion has regularly been maintained as a top priority for the Christian Right. Schaeffer also attempted to persuade many evangelicals that humanism was a very dangerous force that Christians were compelled to confront.

The first notable contemporary evangelical participation in politics around this time was in 1976 when most evangelicals voted for Jimmy Carter, who was an evangelical himself (Micklethwait and Wooldridge 83). Nevertheless, evangelicals were quickly disappointed by several things said or done by Carter, such as his support of abortion rights and his interview with *Playboy*, in which he confessed to experiencing lust. John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge observe that, “They were particularly incensed when, in 1978, Carter’s director of the Internal Revenue Service threatened to deprive all private schools started after 1953 of their tax-deductible status on the grounds that they were presumed to be discriminatory” (83). Since many private schools were Christian, they perceived this as a personal attack. Micklethwait and Wooldridge note that, “When the Reverend Tim LaHaye, one of the founders of the Moral Majority, left Carter’s office after a particularly unproductive meeting, he bowed his head and prayed: ‘God, we have got to get this man out of the White House and get someone in here who will be aggressive about bringing back traditional morals’” (83). Despite the fact that the Carter election initially mobilized evangelicals, his administration eventually contributed to their alienation from the Democratic Party.

The IRS issue was one that led to an alliance between evangelicals and some Catholics in the formation of one of the first significant Christian Right organizations, the Moral Majority. Catholic, Paul Weyrich, in fact, coined the term “Moral Majority” when

he established the organization with Jerry Falwell in 1979 (Micklethwait Wooldridge 84).

Jerry Falwell describes the moral majority's goals in his book, *Listen America!*:

To exert a significant influence on the spiritual and moral direction of our nation by: (a) mobilizing the grassroots of moral Americans in one clear and effective voice; (b) informing the moral majority what is going on behind their backs in Washington and in state legislatures across the country; (c) lobbying intensively in Congress to defeat left-wing, social-welfare bills that will further erode our precious freedom; (d) pushing for the positive legislation such as that to establish the Family Protection Agency, which will ensure a strong, enduring America; and (e) helping the moral majority in local communities to fight pornography, homosexuality, the advocacy of immorality in school textbooks, and other issue facing each and every one of us. (Martin 201)

Thus began the Christian Right's articulation of their political agenda. Harding describes the nascent movement explaining:

From a "religious" angle, Falwell, Schaeffer, and other conservative Christian leaders argued for a wider definition of the mission field and of witnessing for Christ. From a "political" angle, they argued for a wider definition of the arena of politics and of what counts as political action. Either way, throughout the 1980s they and their allies encouraged and enabled a kind of born-again Christian cultural diaspora, a movement out of exile and into the world, giving them access to and voice in the broad spectrum of middle-class institutions that shape and produce American culture, society, and politics. (147)

The initial focus, for Falwell, was the corruption of the American culture and its need for a Christian presence. His political rhetoric manifested as the traditional jeremiad, which "laments the moral condition of a people, foresees cataclysmic consequences, and calls for the dramatic moral reform and revival" (Harding 161). Falwell's rhetoric positioned distinctive insiders and outsiders to the Christian faith. Harding continues, "Unlike witnessing rhetoric, which both constitutes 'lost' outsiders and invites them in—indeed, steadily paves the way and prepares a house for them—Falwell's Moral Majority rhetoric brooked no liminal listeners. It was advanced industrial strength, conservative born-

again Christianity. No lost souls, only the saved and surrendered need apply” (156). Nevertheless, as indicated by the name, there was the assumption that they spoke for a majority of Americans who had lost their voice to the secular minority over the years. Ultimately, Christian Conservatives began identifying and therefore associating with the Republican Party during the 1980 presidential election, due in part to the Republican Party’s willingness to embrace conservative positions on social issues, and also, evangelical leaders’ blessing on Republican politics.

Reagan

The presidential campaign of 1980 was extremely significant because evangelicals abandoned Carter, and instead, supported Ronald Reagan for president. Reagan made every effort in his campaigns to court evangelical voters by taking stands on issues important to them, especially abortion. During the 1980 campaign for President, Reagan famously stated to religious conservatives, “I know you can’t endorse me, but I want you to know that I endorse you” (Diamond 68). After being elected with the support of the newly formed Christian Right, Reagan continued to attempt to appeal to religious conservatives. In a speech to the National Association of Evangelicals in 1983, Reagan remarked, “Human life legislation ending this tragedy will some day pass the Congress, and you and I must never rest until it does. Unless and until it can be proven that the unborn child is not a living entity, then its right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness must be protected” (Schneider 356). Despite not making it a legislative priority, Reagan clearly manipulated the abortion issue to gain evangelical support. He also used spiritual rhetoric to justify his foreign policy, stating, “Yes, let us

pray for the salvation of all of those who live in that totalitarian darkness—pray they will discover the joy of knowing God. But until they do, let us be aware that while they preach the supremacy of the state, declare its omnipotence over individual man, and predict its eventual domination of all peoples on the Earth, they are the focus of evil in the modern world” (Schneider 360). Reagan was masterfully able to express his agenda in ways that would resonate with evangelicals, and therefore enjoyed their support throughout most of his presidency. Since Reagan, every GOP nominee for president has on some level appealed to the Christian Right. This has solidified the Christian Right as a powerful wing of the Republican Party.

Christian Coalition

In 1988, apparently dissatisfied with the representation of evangelical values by other Republicans, Pat Robertson ran for president. Nevertheless, he got little support from most of the Christian Right due to his less mainstream faith (charismatic) and lack of electability. The important effect of his campaign came through his introduction to Ralph Reed, founder and president of the college political organization Students for America, and their subsequent establishment of the Christian Coalition (Martin 299).

William Martin describes the early Christian Coalition’s strategy and style demonstrated through their approach:

Volunteers were urged to hold preliminary meetings in churches other than their own, to avoid the appearance of proselytizing; to reserve rooms half the size of the expected crowd, to create an appearance of an unanticipated groundswell of interest and enthusiasm; and to make sure that name tags were written in bold block letters, to enable leaders to call people in the first few rows by their first names, creating a greater sense of community. (307)

The Christian Coalition was truly a grassroots organization that effectively mobilized their voter base. In addition to their effective strategy at organizing voters, they also broadened the agenda of the Christian Right. For example, they “called the campaign against health care reform its ‘number one legislative priority to 1994’” (Diamond 97). The peak of their influence came that year. Martin observes, “By 1994, Christian Coalition reportedly had close to a million members and an annual budget in excess of twelve million dollars, most of it provided by regular members who contributed modest amounts each month, and Ralph Reed’s name and boyish face had become increasingly familiar to most Americans who paid even minimal attention to politics” (339). This success was short-lived and both Robertson and Reed eventually distanced themselves from the organization. Many were critical of the organization’s ties to the Republican Party and what was seen as compromise of more socially conservative issues. In 1996 they were sued “for allegedly illegal campaign contributions, in the form of voter guides and coordination with GOP candidates” (Diamond 103). The Christian Coalition is nonetheless still working to influence elections with, however, less fanfare.

Culture War

Despite the fact that the first President Bush was by no means an ideal candidate for the Christian Right, the 1992 GOP convention seemed to be overtaken by social conservatives. “An estimated 47% of the delegates were self-described born-again Christians” (Diamond 94). Martin recounts:

The convention itself has often been described as having been “hijacked” by the Religious Right, referring not only to that movement’s influence over the platform, but preeminently to the hardline speeches by Pat Robertson, Marilyn Quayle, and, most famously, Pat Buchanan, who

declared, “There is a religious war going on in this country. It is a cultural war as critical to the kind of nation we shall become as the Cold War itself. This war is for the soul of America. And in that struggle for the soul of America, Clinton and Clinton are on the other side, and George Bush is on our side.” (325)

Clinton, of course, went on to win the presidency for the next two terms. While certainly the social conservatives did not play as dominant a role in the 1996 GOP convention, they still exercised some power over certain aspects of the campaign and platform.

Martin writes, “James Dobson, Ralph Reed, and [Gary] Bauer, speaking for his Family Research Council, all warned that any attempt to remove or water down the strong anti-abortion plank in the Republican platform or for nominee-apparent Bob Dole to choose a pro-choice running mate... would result in widespread defection from Republican ranks by evangelical voters, quite possibly in support of a third-party or independent candidate” (357 – 358). Because the Christian Right had become such a reliable voting block for the Republican Party, the Party was careful to avoid alienating them. The Christian Right’s influence on the Republican Party climaxed with the presidential election of one of their own in 2000.

George W. Bush

George W. Bush has been one of the most outspoken presidents in recent history on the role his faith plays in his life. Gaustad and Schmidt maintain that, “Bush is clearly the most powerful ally that the Christian right has had since Reagan. George W. Bush, unlike his father, shares the conversionist vernacular of popular evangelicalism and speaks it fluently. ‘My relationship with God through Christ has given me meaning and direction,’ he told a church group in 1999. ‘My faith has made a big difference in my

personal life and my public life as well” (411 – 412). Bush clearly obtained the support of evangelicals in the elections as evidenced by polling data. Micklethwait and Wooldridge observe, “When the Republicans pored over the 2000 election results, they discovered one horrifying statistic: some 4 million Christian conservatives who voted in 1996 failed to vote in 2000. The return of these Christian conservatives to the fold in 2004 was a big reason Bush won reelection” (185). Other than two conservative Supreme Court justices, it is questionable whether evangelicals got what they wanted from Bush. Micklethwait and Wooldridge note that, “The program that flowed most directly from Bush’s religiosity—compassionate conservatism—unraveled quickly. The idea of ‘faith-based’ solutions to problems that had eluded the welfare state offered a way of luring Catholics and blacks into the Republican coalition. But it fizzled out nevertheless” (148). Of course, for most in the Christian Right, the paramount issues are abortion and homosexuality, or as they would verbalize it, protecting the family.

I would argue that preserving traditional notions of the family is the dominant issue of the Christian Right today. “Family Values” was the slogan that dominated the 1992 Republican convention and the concept has become increasingly influential. Lawrence Grossberg writes, “The notion of the traditional family is central to the struggle over ‘family values.’ It serves as a crucial rhetorical appeal, harking back to a more idyllic time when a stable sense of the family was part of a larger social totality in which we did not confront the entire array of social problems of the contemporary world” (100 – 101). In other words, when social conservative talk about family values, they mean preserving the traditional notion of family, which is the patriarchal nuclear family. Moreover, this concept relates to a time with traditional gender roles, and racial

inequality and segregation. Michael Lienesch also observes that “the family is considered by religious conservatives to be the most important of social institutions” (52). He goes on to describe this traditional family as one in which “men rule, women submit, and children obey” (53). Thus, every political view is couched as one in which they are only attempting to protect the family unit. This conception of the family resonates with evangelicals in powerful ways. Additionally, new faces have arisen as leaders of the Christian Right. It is no longer Jerry Falwell, Ralph Reed, and Pat Robertson.

James Dobson

Psychologist James Dobson has in recent years emerged as one of the most influential leaders of the Christian Right. Before his entrance into political debate, Dobson was well-known as a successful evangelical author and radio show host. Dobson’s influence is far greater because many evangelicals respect his guidance on family and spiritual issues, and are therefore receptive to his political views as well. He gains their trust through his familial advice and then introduces his political agenda. Ann Burlein observes, “Dobson’s soft-sell style exploits connections between the boom in pop spirituality and the boom in pop psychology/self-help, both of which are related in complex ways to the stress of living in postmodernity” (127). For the most part, he simply offers advice on marriage and raising children, and that has served him well in the eyes of the evangelical community. Intersperse that with a political agenda and he gains tremendous power. Because of this, Dobson has much influence with the Republican Party. For example:

In March 1995, after Republican National Committee Chairman Haley Barbour declared that the party's "big tent" was large enough to include a considerable range of opinions, including those who disagreed with its platform's hard-line position on abortion, Dobson sent an eight-page letter to his 2.1 million supporters and, in a special mailing, to 112,000 clergy, 8000 national and local politicians, and 1500 members of the media. He informed them that "a struggle [is] under way for the soul of the party, [and] I am committed never again to cast a vote for a politician who would kill one innocent baby." Of this effort, he was quoted as saying, "If that doesn't change some hearts and minds at [the Republican National Committee], then we'll launch a second, third, and fourth wave to generate support." At about the same time, Gary Bauer and Ralph Reed hinted they might align with a third party if the GOP softened its stand on abortion. Dobson's threat got the response he sought, as virtually every Republican presidential hopeful besides Steve Forbes either traveled to Colorado Springs to seek his blessing or, in the case of Bob Dole and Newt Gingrich, welcomed him warmly when he came to Washington. (Martin 343)

GOP politicians are well aware of the authority he has with many evangelicals and therefore seek his approval. On the issue of abortion, the Christian Right has not had tremendous success in significantly altering legislation, but the issue of gay rights is another story.

No Gay Rights

Opposing gay rights is predicated on the belief that in Genesis, God created man and woman to be together. This was His divine plan and anything that goes against this is antithetical to the Christian faith. Based on this, and various other verses in the Bible, which most evangelicals interpret to mean that homosexuality is a sin, any law sanctioning the non-traditional family is morally inferior and, in fact, evil. This translates politically into opposing civil rights for gays that would protect them from discrimination, and opposing the legalization of gay marriage. Furthermore, the antigay rhetoric of the Christian Right goes even further by opposing even the notion of same-sex

orientation as legitimate. Put another way, they do not even want their children taught in schools that being gay is an acceptable alternative to heterosexuality. Michael Lienesch contends that, “Of all the social specters... the most terrifying to the Christian conservatives is homosexuality. In and of itself, homosexuality is an abomination to them” (84). Homosexuality is a threat most significantly to what evangelicals understand as family ordained by God, mainly the patriarchal household.

James Dobson has been one of the most outspoken evangelicals against homosexuality. His intention, he argues, is simply to protect the family structure ordained by God. He then describes the war that must be fought to protect this family from homosexuals:

For nearly sixty years, the homosexual activist movement and related entities have been working to implement a master plan that has had as its centerpiece the utter destruction of the family. Now the final battle is at hand: The institution of marriage and the Christian church are all that stand in the way of the movement’s achievement of every coveted aspiration. Those goals include universal acceptance of the gay lifestyle, the discrediting of Scriptures that condemn homosexuality, muzzling of the clergy and Christian media, granting of special privileges and rights in the law, overturning laws prohibiting pedophilia, indoctrination of children and future generations through public education, and securing all the legal benefits of marriage for any two or more people who claim to have homosexual tendencies. (19)

Being an interlocutor in this debate is Dobson’s primary purpose in life at this time. One way he attempts to assuage his hostile rhetoric is by making the common evangelical claim to “love the sinner and hate the sin.” By promoting ex-gay ministries he purports to show compassion for gays. Dobson’s ethos is enhanced by, not only his evangelical credentials, but also his degree and expertise in psychology. To the typical evangelical, his perspective is highly educated and spiritually credible.

The alignment of evangelical politics with the Republican Party is an interesting example of political alignment, at least for a particular period in time. The evangelical wing of the Republican Party has become both an influential and necessary aspect of Republican success. Moreover, the role allotted to evangelicals in the Republican Party has given them unprecedented power in national politics. Obviously, there are Republicans who are not social or religious conservatives, and there are evangelicals who are not political conservatives and/or Republicans. However, this brief, but impactful, alliance of the two has resulted in political manifestations. Nevertheless, as will be examined later, antagonisms within evangelicalism are threatening the solidarity of this alignment.

Beginning in the 1970s, evangelicals coalesced around certain cultural changes that they interpreted as a threat to their way of life and faith. The Republican Party capitalized on this and mobilized the Christian Right as an effective limb of their party. With some focusing on abortion and gay rights, while others identify with the majority of the platform of the Republican Party, evangelicals have become a reliable voting block that one might argue, has resulted in many victories for the party. Many, however, have predicted the political reign of the Christian Right is coming to an end, by pointing to the congressional elections of 2006 which resulted in a Democrat controlled congress. But, as recently as 2004, it would seem that the Christian Right still owned much influence. Nevertheless, the 2008 Republican presidential candidate only received lukewarm support of evangelicals. Moreover, like never before, a respectable segment of evangelicals have been challenging the Christian Right's representation of an evangelical political agenda and questioning the priorities of the Republican Party. With many of the

Christian Right leaders passing away, and others rising up to take their place, it is reasonable to expect a change in direction for evangelical politics, and that will be the subject of the next section.

PROGRESSIVES

Despite the fact that they have received less attention and have exhibited less political effectiveness, a more progressive group of evangelical political figures assembled around the same time as the Christian Right. They started to form as a political group in the 1970s as a reaction to the evangelical apathy and withdrawal from social justice. Generating less fanfare than the Christian Right and representing only a minority of evangelicals, progressives have still maintained a consistent voice over the last decades. This has finally culminated, resulting in more media attention and, therefore, they have become a realistic alternative to the Christian Right for evangelicals. In this section, I will outline the origin of the progressive evangelical movement, identify key figures and issues, and explain the various approaches to politics that exist among progressives. This group of evangelicals is building momentum and support and threatens the dominance of the Christian Right over evangelical political identity. Ultimately, progressives object to the conservative Republican political platform as being truly representative of a Christian social policy. This has manifested in antagonisms over the political priorities of evangelicals and how those are revealed through their political participation.

Progressive Evangelical Movement

At the same time as the Christian Right, the progressive evangelical movement started to form in the 1970s. Mainstream evangelicals had come to focus primarily on evangelizing the lost and believed that personal conversions would solve society's problems. One of the most outspoken leaders of these progressive evangelicals is progressive Jim Wallis, founder of Sojourners (a progressive evangelical political organization and publication). One of Wallis's earliest books, *The Call to Conversion*, written originally in 1981 and republished in 2005, addresses this concern. He laments the fact that the church in the U.S. has in recent years refrained from social justice issues, and that much of the world perceives that Christians do not care about them (xviii). But rightly so, argues Wallis, "our self-centered culture has produced a self-centered religion. Preoccupation with self dominates the spirit of the age and shapes the character of religion. Modern evangelism has played right along with this central theme. The most common question in evangelism today is, 'What can Jesus do for me?'" (23). Evangelical Christianity in the U.S. has become defined by personal faith and thus, lacks the passion for serving others that characterized evangelicalism in the 19th century. Politically, according to Wallis, "twentieth-century evangelicalism in the United States came to identify thoroughly with the mainstream values of wealth and power. As the country became rich and fat, so did its evangelicals, who soon replaced the good news of Christ's kingdom with a personal piety that comfortably supported the status quo" (55). The central argument in his book is that conversion should be about more than just personal commitment to the Christian faith, but should also be historically situated. Wallis argues that part of that conversion should be a concern for social justice. He writes, "The goal

of biblical conversion is not to save souls apart from history but to bring the kingdom of God into the world with explosive force; it begins with individuals but is for the sake of the world” (9). Thus, while conversion begins on the individual level, it should transform into a concern for others. Christians are therefore called to more than a personal relationship with God, also a meaningful existence in the world around them and it is this attitude that led to the formation of the progressive evangelical movement.

Jim Wallis

Jim Wallis began his politics of protest during the 1970s opposing the Vietnam War. In 1971, while at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, he, along with others, formed Sojourners, whose mission is to “articulate the biblical call to social justice, inspiring hope and building a movement to transform individuals, communities, the church, and the world” (Sojourners). In 1975, Sojourners moved to Washington, D.C. The organization publishes a periodical by the same name and works to influence politics on various issues of social justice. They seek to defend the rights of minorities, the poor, immigrants, and are anti-war. Jim Wallis has recently received much media attention for his criticism of the Bush administration on such issues as the war in Iraq, the budget, and immigration reform. They stage protests in Washington and attempt to hold the government morally accountable for legislative policies. More recently, they hosted a presidential debate, televised on CNN, involving the Democratic Party’s nominees for president.

Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern

One of the first important documents created by the progressive evangelical movement was the Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern in 1973. Wallis explains that its purpose was to express “rising evangelical social conscience over such fundamental issues as poverty, racism, sexism, and war” (*Who Speaks for God* 18 – 19). The declaration is an admission of guilt and repentance for evangelical apathy toward war, racism, sexism, and poverty. The organization Evangelicals for Social Action (ESA) was consequently formed from the Chicago Declaration by current president, Ron Sider, professor of theology at Eastern Baptist Seminary. He has, as has Wallis, participated in many public debates with Christian Right representatives such as Jerry Falwell. From ESA, *Prism Magazine*, a progressive evangelical voice, was conceived in 1993. ESA describes themselves as an “association of Christians seeking to promote Christian engagement, analysis and understanding of major social, cultural, and public policy issues” and they emphasize “both the transformation of human lives through personal faith and also the importance of a commitment to social and economic justice as an outgrowth of Christian faith”. Furthermore, according to their website, they have “promoted international economic sanctions against apartheid, supported a multilateral rather than unilateral U.S. foreign policy, and endorsed many efforts to reduce poverty, promote racial justice and care for creation.” The official statement of faith for ESA is the Lausanne Covenant, another important document created in 1974 and signed by more than 2300 evangelicals. The Covenant states, “The results of evangelism include obedience to Christ, incorporation into his Church and responsible service in the world.” Further, “evangelism and socio-political involvement are both part of our Christian duty,”

which includes “liberation of men and women from every kind of oppression.” For these evangelicals, faith extends beyond personal spirituality and simple evangelism. It morally obligates them to care for the needs of others around the world, especially those who are marginalized. Despite representing a minority of evangelicals, progressives have remained in the political scene since the 1970s, and are finally making their voice known in politics and the media in a more profound way than ever.

Rebuking the Christian Right

Most recently, progressive evangelicals have attempted to define themselves as an alternative voice of Christian faith by distancing themselves from the Christian Right – understood by the larger culture as the political representative of most evangelicals. Because of the perceived influence and accompanying controversy of the Christian Right, this approach attracts publicity. Tony Campolo, evangelical professor, author, and popular speaker, distinguishes progressives from the Right:

I always try to point out to critics of evangelicalism that many of us do not fit their stereotypes. While we do tend to be overwhelmingly pro-life, when it comes to other issues, a significant minority of us are not part of the religious right. We are critics of the Bush tax cuts, which we see as a bonanza for the rich that necessitates cutting services to the poor (e.g., ending after-school tutoring programs for half a million children). We want universal health care, advocate legal protection for homosexuals, oppose what we see as a growing militarism in America, and are appalled by this administration’s environment policies. (*Speaking my Mind* 26)

It is crucial for progressives to highlight their differences with the Christian Right in light of mainstream evangelicalism’s notoriety. Jim Wallis’s book, *God’s Politics*, was written for the purpose of offering an alternative evangelical political voice. He laments parts of the Christian Right’s agenda, such as the lack of “concern for the poor and racial justice”

and “the appeals of the movement’s leaders to affluent self-interest over biblical imperative” (82). This leads him to the revealing question, “How did tax cuts for the rich become a religious imperative?” (82). He questions the Christian Right’s uncritical association with the Republican Party. His scathing critique goes much further in an earlier published book, *Who Speaks for God?*, where he writes:

It is important to recognize what a historical aberration the Religious Right represents. For a biblical religion to be put at the service of the rich instead of the poor, the powerful instead of the oppressed, of war instead of peace, turns Christian teaching upside down. For evangelical religion to be used to fuel the engines of racial and class division, to block the progress of women, to undermine care for the creation, to fight the banning of assault weapons, to end public legal services to those who can’t afford them, and actually encourage public policy that abandons our poorest children runs counter to Christian Scripture, tradition, and history. The Religious Right has accomplished an almost complete reversal of Christian teaching and all in the name of God. (17 – 18)

Wallis offers scripture after scripture to construct his position that the Christian Right is completely out of step with God’s will as described in the Bible. One example he offers is that, “in the debate over much-needed welfare reform, the Christian Coalition supports cutting support to single mothers and their children, despite the fact that these women and children are the modern-day equivalents of the ‘widow and orphans’ for whom the New Testament shows such special concern” (20). For example, James 1:27 states, “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress”. The seeming lack of compassion for single mothers and their children would be contradictory to this particular theme expressed throughout the Bible.

Call to Renewal

A related attempt to counter the Christian Right was the formation of Call to Renewal in 1995, which was a response to the Christian Coalition's Contract with the American Family, which progressives perceived as demonstrating no concern for the way conservative economic policies impact the poor. Wallis expounds, "Our purpose was twofold: to lift up a visible alternative to the Religious Right and to help lay the foundation for a 'new politics' in America—rooted in spiritual values and beyond the old categories of both the Right and Left" (*Who Speaks for God?* 189). The organization eventually merged with Sojourners. Call to Renewal served to hold the Christian Coalition's political agenda accountable for promoting policies detrimental to the poor.

Red Letter Christians

In 2006, another grouping of progressive evangelicals came together and renamed themselves, "Red Letter Christians". Tony Campolo writes, in his book by the same name, "Given the general contemporary meanings and connotations ascribed to the word 'Evangelical,' a group of us who are speakers and authors and who share an evangelical theology got together and confessed that we have a hard time applying the label to ourselves anymore" (21). He explains how the name came about: "Actually, the name was first used by a secular Jewish country-western disc jockey in Nashville, Tennessee. During a radio interview with Jim Wallis, the DJ tried to nail down Jim's particular breed of Christianity and finally said, 'So, you're one of those Red Letter Christians—you know—who's really into those verses in the New Testament that are in red letters.' "Jim answered, 'That's right!' And with that, he spoke for all of us" (21). Progressives have

sought to redefine themselves primarily because of the negative connotation of evangelical and the misguided priorities represented by conservative evangelicals. This effort to rename politically involved evangelicals came as a response to the desire to distance themselves from the seeming lack of compassion and intolerance associated with the evangelical political agenda. Many notable figures have identified themselves as Red Letter Christians such as Jim Wallis, Tony Campolo, Brian McLaren, Ron Sider, and Randall Balmer.

Evangelicalism Emerging

Another evangelical movement that can be identified as more progressive and finds its identity challenging more traditional versions of Christianity is the emerging church. Scot McKnight writes in *Christianity Today*, “The emerging movement is a protest against much of evangelicalism as currently practiced. It is post-evangelical in the way that neo-evangelicalism (in the 1950s) was post-fundamentalist” (38). These evangelicals have reoriented their faith position from a postmodern perspective. Rather than blindly accepting the traditional or conservative evangelical political ideology, they engage politics and faith in new ways. Brian McLaren explains this disposition in his book *a Generous Orthodoxy*:

We must continually be aware that the “old, old story” may not be the “true, true story.” In other words, we must be open to the perpetual possibility that our received understandings of the gospel may be faulty, imbalanced, poorly nuanced, or downright warped and twisted. Here we must retain the good Protestant, evangelical, and biblical instinct to allow Scripture to critique tradition—including our dominant and most recent tradition, and including our tradition’s understanding of the gospel. In this sense Christians in missional dialogue must continually expect to rediscover the gospel. (294)

This approach is founded upon a different understanding of the authority of the Bible. While McLaren believes that the Bible is inspired by God, he also believes it is currently being misunderstood and inappropriately applied by many Christians. McLaren differs fundamentally with certain evangelical Christians and this resonates in his politics as well.

In his book, *A New Kind of Christian*, McLaren introduces the radically alternative approach of emergent faith to Christianity. In the fictional story, a disillusioned pastor has a life-changing conversation with his daughter's high school science teacher, Neo. The character of Neo introduces the pastor with a new way of understanding Christianity in contrast to the modern perspective. He states, "modern Christianity has too often acted as if the only kind of righteousness that mattered was the kind of righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees—the righteousness of nice clean, legalistic monads who managed to stay disconnected and disinfected on the other side of the street" (101). Furthermore, through his exploration of this new way of approaching his faith, the pastor decides, "If I could live another life, I think I would devote it to ecology, because I also believe that this is a truly spiritual and Christian work. Genesis begins with our mandate to take care of God's creation, and never has our failure to do so been more acute than now. Learning to live as caretakers of creation and friends to our fellow creatures must be at the core of a new kind of Christianity" (119). Thus, this attitude manifests politically as a progressive politics. McLaren differentiates the emerging approach from the more conservative evangelical political agenda. He problematizes the right-wing evangelical political approach:

Unfortunately, so much of what we're currently fighting against ("we" meaning the church in America for starters) isn't the real enemy,

and so much of what we're fighting for isn't the real prize. Largely we're fighting to get something back – a lost status as the civil religion of the West, control (political, too often) over things that are out of our control, a privileged position as the favored religion of the Empire, protection of the middle class from the lower and upper classes, and so on. These are futile fights.

We're also focused on fighting symptoms like abortion, promiscuity (hetero or homosexual), divorce, and profanity. We might add terrorism to the list. But these are not the disease. These are in many ways the symptoms of the very disease that we inadvertently tend to support, aid and abet, defend, protect, baptize, and fight *for* – a system sick with consumerism, greed, fear, violence, and misplaced faith (in the power of the Economy and the State and its Weapons). (*A Generous Orthodoxy* 207 – 208)

Instead, McLaren posits that a new kind of faith prioritizes creation and the people in it.

Too often, evangelicals have become a part of the problem, especially when their politics impinge on the rights and/or experiences of others.

Poverty

For most progressives, their critique of the Christian Right centers on the belief that they (the Christian Right) are privileging the wrong issues and ignoring other more important issues. It not that they necessarily conflict on all the issues, but feel that an evangelical political agenda should be broader than abortion and gay marriage. For example, most progressive evangelicals argue that legislation affecting poverty is the most urgent political issue facing evangelicals should concern themselves with. This is based on their position that the Bible consistently calls Christians to serve the poor. Poverty is perhaps the definitive issue for progressive evangelicals in observance of the fact that alleviating poverty is one of the strongest themes in the Bible. Tony Campolo points out that there are “almost two thousand references in Scripture that admonish us to reach out to the poor with love and sacrificial giving” (*Speaking My Mind* 123).

Furthermore, he distinguishes his view from the common conservative perspective that argues it is the church's responsibility, rather than government, to aid the poor. He writes, "we must know that the church by itself lacks the financial resources to meet all the needs of those who are in desperate straits. There is not enough money in the offering plate to care for the needs of those who, in the race for the American dream, fall by the wayside. And the Democrats are right in telling us that the government has a responsibility to help these unfortunate people" (*Is Jesus a Republican or a Democrat?* 5). Thus, he articulates a compassion that extends beyond charity and acknowledges that systemic solutions are required to engender change. Jim Wallis is even more derisive when he juxtaposes the needs of the poor with tax cuts for the middle class and rich. He laments, "Our hope is others' despair; our good life perpetuates their misery. The question to be asked is not What should we give to the poor? but When will we stop taking from the poor? The poor are not our problem; we are their problem" (*The Call to Conversion* 43). Unfortunately, sharing the wealth with the poor would call for sacrifices on the part of the privileged and this is not a sacrifice many evangelicals are willing to make. Therefore, according to progressives, they possess moral responsibility for the situation of the poor.

Environment

Another issue that resonates with progressive evangelicals is environmental protection. Most progressives (along with many mainstream and even some conservatives) acknowledge the importance of environmental consciousness among

evangelicals, usually describing it as good stewardship of the earth. Many well-known leaders such as Jim Wallis, Ron Sider, Brian McLaren, along with many others, signed the Evangelical Climate Initiative's statement, "Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action," calling for evangelicals to take action and respond to the serious problem of global warming. This prompted a response from more conservative evangelicals calling themselves the Interfaith Stewardship Alliance, which released their own statement in response to this creating doubt about the need to prioritize protection of the environment. Thus, this is clearly a struggle over ideology in evangelical politics.

Progressive evangelicals seek to distinguish themselves from the Christian Right in its apathy toward environmental degradation, which is ultimately rooted in economic and political ideology. McLaren explains:

The surface causes of environmental carelessness among conservative Christians are legion, including subcontracting the evangelical mind out to right-wing politicians and greedy business interests. Too often we put the gospel of Jesus through the strainer of consumerist-capitalism and retain only the thin broth that this modern-day Caesar lets pass through. We often display a reactionary tendency to be against whatever the "liberals" are for. These non-green shoots are resourced by deeper theological roots of environmental disinterest. Fortunately, other root systems are spreading beneath the surface, and signs of an environmental spring are breaking through the formerly barren soil. (*Generous* 264)

This is resonating among some evangelicals as a green politics. Former president Jimmy Carter, enjoying a successful post-presidential career, describes the "proper stewardship of God's world" as a "personal and political moral commitment" (177). This is the task of progressive evangelicals: to convince the rest of the faithful that caring for the environment is a moral issue that should be prioritized.

Transcending Partisan Politics

In addition to these issues, progressive evangelicals tend to be anti-war, pro-racial justice, sympathetic to AIDS victims, and less hostile toward gay rights than the Christian Right. Nevertheless, they purport to be non-partisan and do not desire to be called the Religious Left. Tony Campolo writes that a core belief should be, “That we preach a Christ who transcends all political parties. That we welcome Christians of various political persuasions and that we carefully consider the platforms of each party to determine those parts that are in harmony with the teachings of Scripture and those parts that we find in conflict with biblical teachings” (*Speaking My Mind* 224). Logically, it would be highly improbable that a secular political party would be consistent with all components of a religious faith, despite the recent alignment of the GOP and evangelicalism. Campolo questions the uncritical association of Christians with particular parties, writing:

I believe Christians should not simply align themselves with a given sociopolitical stance and then make all their decisions on the basis of what will fit into an already-established mind-set. Instead, we need to bring to each and every social concern and ethical issue a deep commitment to finding out what the Bible has to say about the topic at hand. Through prayer, reflection, and study, each of us is called upon to work out his or her own salvation with fear and trembling. (*Is Jesus* 172)

This may mean, of course, opposing a particular party’s ideology, questioning governing policies, and challenging cultural values if need be. It is not about accessing power, but influencing governmental policies based on faith rather than party affiliation. Wallis furthers this notion clarifying, “the alternative to the Religious Right is not the Religious Left. That is still a mistake that many who oppose the Religious Right are making. It’s time to transcend the old ideological polarities that control our public life. We need

something deeper. We need a new and different kind of politics—a politics whose values are more spiritual than ideological” (*Who Speaks for God?* 35).

There are also progressive evangelicals who think that seeking political power is inherently antithetical to the Christian faith. Gregory Boyd argues that, contrary to what many evangelicals believe, the United States is not, nor has it ever been, a Christian nation. He problematizes Christians seeking power:

In fact, a kingdom-of-God citizen could (and should) argue that the Christian version of the kingdom version of the kingdom of the world was actually the *worst* version the world has ever seen. For this was the version of the kingdom of the world that did the most harm to the kingdom of God. Not only did it torture and kill, as versions of the kingdom of the world frequently do—it did this under the banner of Christ. If violence and oppression are demonic, violence and oppression “in the name of Jesus” is far more so. The church of Christendom thereby brought disrepute to the name of Christ, associating his kingdom with the atrocities it carried out for centuries. The resistance most Islamic countries have to Christianity today, in fact, is partly to be explained by the vicious behavior of Christians toward the Muslims throughout history. (81)

Boyd is especially critical of the U.S. involvement in Iraq arguing that Christians should be pacifists.

Another evangelical of interest is David Kuo, formerly of the George W. Bush administration, who wrote the book, *Tempting Faith*, after being disillusioned with his political experiences. He journeys through his spiritual walk while being involved in the Republican Party and ultimately concludes that political power is corruptive. Heading up the Bush administration’s faith based initiatives, Kuo describes the process of his disillusionment and claims that Bush and his aids were really only interested in faith-based initiatives only so much that it was politically profitable. They often took up causes that had little relevance but resonated with voters. He writes, “if the faith-based

initiative was teaching me anything, it was about the president's capacity to care about perception more than reality. He wanted it to look good. He cared less about it being good" (229). Furthermore, Kuo claims that the administration distorted facts to make Bush look as if he had done more on compassion programs than he had. He writes that the Bush administration "was deceiving the public, and in doing so it was mocking the millions of faithful Christians who had put their trust and hope in the president and his administration" (253). Kuo ultimately concludes that political power is intoxicating and Christians often lose sight of their faith when working in politics. He ends the book by suggesting Christians take a two year fast from politics. Thus, there is clearly an element among evangelicals that is, at the very least, suspicious of Christians becoming too involved in politics.

As has been explained, there is much political heterogeneity among evangelicals. Unfortunately, this reality is little understood among the general public and evangelicals tend to be stereotyped as right-wing fundamentalist Christians. Nevertheless, progressive evangelicals are finally exerting cultural influence. The most important task they can perform is to call into question the political policies and priorities of the Christian Right, and offer an alternative for people of evangelical faith seeking to find another way. Jim Wallis is one of the most unfaltering leaders and his work is finally coming to fruition with his relationship with more progressive political leaders. Brian McLaren offers evangelicals a new way of understanding their faith and this will undoubtedly affect how they conceptualize their politics. With many of the leaders of the Christian Right dying (such as Jerry Falwell and D. James Kennedy,) and others becoming marginalized (like Pat Robertson), there is an opening for evangelical leadership and the progressive voices

are ready to fill that void. The question is whether or not their message is actually resonating with the rest of the evangelicals and that shall be considered in the following chapters.

Works Cited

- Boyd, Gregory A. *The Myth of a Christian Nation*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005.
- Burlein, Ann. *Lift High the Cross*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2002.
- Campolo, Tony. *Is Jesus a Republican or a Democrat?* Dallas: Word Publishing, 1995.
- Campolo, Tony. *Red Letter Christians*. Ventura: Regal, 2008.
- Campolo, Tony. *Speaking My Mind*. Nashville: W. Publishing Group, 2004.
- Carter, Jimmy. *Our Endangered Values: Americas Moral Crisis*. New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2005.
- Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern. 1973. 18 Feb. 2009 <<http://www.esa-online.org/Display.asp?Page=About>>.
- Diamond, Sara. *Not by Politics Alone: The Politics of the Christian Right*. New York: The Guilford Press, 1998.
- Dobson, James. *Marriage Under Fire*. Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah, 2004.
- Evangelicals for Social Action. 21 Feb. 2009 <<http://www.esa-online.org/Display.asp?Page=About>>.
- Gaustad, Edwin, and Leigh Schmidt. *The Religious History of America*. Revised ed. New York: HarperCollins, 2002.
- Grossberg, Lawrence. *Caught in the Crossfire: Kids, Politics, and America's Future*. Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2005.
- Harding, Susan Friend. *The Book of Jerry Falwell*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.
- Kuo, David. *Tempting Faith*. New York: Free Press, 2006.
- The Lausanne Covenant. 1974. 18 Feb. 2009. <<http://www.lausanne.org/lausanne-1974/lausanne-covenant.html>>.
- Lienesch, Michael. *Redeeming America: Piety & Politics in the New Christian Right*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993.
- Martin, William. *With God on Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America*. New York: Broadway Books, 1997.

- Micklewait, John, and Adrian Wooldridge. *The Right Nation: Conservative Power in America*. New York: Penguin Press, 2004.
- McKnight, Scot. "Five Streams of the Emerging Church." *Christianity Today* Feb. 2007: 34 – 39.
- McLaren, Brian D. *a Generous Orthodoxy*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004.
- McLaren, Brian D. *A New Kind of Christian*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001.
- Schaeffer, Francis A. *A Christian Manifesto*. Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1981.
- Schaeffer, Francis A. *How Should We Then Live?* Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1976.
- Schneider, Gregory L., ed. *Conservatism in America Since 1930*. New York: New York University Press, 2003.
- Sojourners. 21 Feb. 2009 <http://www.sojo.net/index.cfm?action=about_us.mission>.
- Wallis, Jim. *God's Politics*. New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005.
- Wallis, Jim. *The Call to Conversion*. New York: HarperCollins, 1981, Revised 2005.
- Wallis, Jim. *Who Speaks for God?* New York: Delacorte Press, 1996.
- White, Mel. *Religion Gone Bad: The Hidden Dangers of the Christian Right*. New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher / Penguin, 2006.

CHAPTER FOUR

RHETORICAL PERSPECTIVES TOWARD EVANGELICAL RHETORIC: PROPHETIC

TRADITION, MORTIFICATION, AND CONSTITUTING AUDIENCES

Evangelical rhetoric has exhibited a variety of styles throughout the centuries. This discourse has manifested with varying amounts of militancy and political resonance. Predictably, evangelical rhetoric has represented spiritual themes, a moral tone, and religiously based judgment. Contemporary evangelical political discourse has materialized as two different formations positioned by their political orientation. While they share many theological principles and some rhetorical elements, progressive and conservative evangelicals differ significantly in their approach to political action. Cornel West describes the extreme approaches to politics as Constantinian and prophetic. He writes,

This battle between prophetic Christians and Constantinian Christians goes back to the first centuries of the Christian movement that emerged out of Judaism. The Roman emperor Constantine's incorporation of Christianity within the empire gave Christianity legitimacy and respectability but robbed it of the prophetic fervor of Jesus and the apocalyptic fire of that other Jew-turned-Christian named Paul. Until Constantine converted to Christianity in AD 312 and decriminalized it with the Edict of Milan in 313, and his successor Theodosius I made Christianity the official religion of the empire, the Christian movement had been viciously persecuted by the imperial Romans, primarily because the growing popularity of the Christian message of humility, and of equality among men, was understood as a threat to Roman imperial rule. (147)

West identifies the Christian Right as Constantinian Christians and argues that they are best confronted by prophetic Christians. “The battle against Constantinianism cannot be won without a reempowerment of the prophetic Christian movement, because the political might and rhetorical fervor of the Constantinians are too threatening; a purely secular fight won’t be won” (West 159). Therefore, the most effective response to the ideology of the Christian Right is a faith-based rebuke originating from the same theological foundation. The antagonism created by conflicting application of evangelical principles provides the best possibility for change. I will ultimately argue that the progressive evangelicals most consistently represent this prophetic voice in the spirit and tradition of the abolition, women’s suffrage, and Civil Rights Movement.

This chapter will explain the various theoretical perspectives that will be applied in my examination of the selected rhetorical texts. The first method that will be employed is to gauge the texts through the genre of prophetic rhetoric, as defined by James Darsey in his book, *The Prophetic Tradition and Radical Rhetoric in America*. His purpose is to demonstrate how American rhetorics of radical reform appropriate the biblical prophetic tradition. Darsey clarifies, “I am less interested in scholarly debates over the fine points of biblical criticism than I am in the prophetic tradition as it has been received and generally understood and imitated by Americans.... What is sought is an articulation of the direct relationship between prophetic rhetoric and the cultural assumptions that engendered it” (10). This method of rhetorical criticism could be applied to both religious and non-religious texts to determine how the rhetoric succeeds or fails based on its use or non-use of prophetic rhetorical strategies. It is especially insightful for the current project because of the subjectivity of the rhetors. Darsey

explains that the prophetic ethos “must have its roots in an extraordinary (re)birth or conversion” (93). Accordingly, a faith that is founded upon a conversion experience would gravitate toward a prophetic approach. Moreover, I will supplement this rhetorical theory with the perspective of Walter Brueggeman, (professor of Old Testament at Columbia Theological Seminary,) as defined in his book, *The Prophetic Imagination*, because he offers a more complex and thorough consideration of the theological context. Also, some theoretical concepts from the works of Kenneth Burke will be essential in identifying tensions within the discourse of evangelicalism. Specifically, his conception of victimage as mortification or scapegoat will be particularly useful. Furthermore, Robert Ivie’s extension of these concepts in identifying themes within American war rhetoric will be informative in understanding the conservative use of culture war rhetoric. Of particular importance will be his explanation regarding the tendency of American war rhetoric to justify its militant rhetoric through the topoi of victimage and savagery. Lastly, Maurice Charland’s explanation of constitutive rhetoric will be summarized and related to the constitution of subjectivity among evangelicals. His explanation of how rhetors call their audiences into being and how this makes ideological transformation possible will inform the current undertaking in terms of the struggle over the political identity of evangelicals. Together, these methodological perspectives will work to interpret the selected rhetorical texts.

PROPHETIC RHETORIC

One of the earliest voices of contemporary progressive evangelicalism is Jim Wallis. In his 1981 book, *The Call to Conversion*, Wallis posits that evangelical faith

should translate into a concern for social justice. The personal conversion that evangelicals experience should have social consequences. He explains that, “Our conversion, then, cannot be an end in itself; it is the first step of entry into the kingdom. Conversion marks the birth of the movement out of a merely private existence into a public consciousness” (10). This public consciousness is not merely a desire to see others convert to Christianity, but one that saves them from their despair. Wallis even suggests praying for adversaries rather than waging war on them. He writes, “To do violence to others, you must make them into enemies. Prayer, on the other hand, makes enemies into human beings” (103). This is clearly based on the teaching of Jesus to love enemies and pray for those who persecute you (Matthew 5:44). Rather than setting up the world as the opposition that Christians need to battle, Wallis calls God’s people into account for how they treat others. This rhetorical style typifies progressive evangelicalism, and as will be eventually argued, is far more prophetic than conservative evangelical rhetoric.

James Darsey explains that his purpose is to identify themes of the prophetic tradition represented in modern reform rhetoric. He writes, “Rhetorics of radical reform, in particular, exhibit similarities with the discursive tradition of the Old Testament prophets. Both have in common a sense of mission, a desire to bring the practice of the people into accord with a sacred principle, and an uncompromising, often excoriating stance toward a reluctant audience” (16). He then goes on to outline three themes of prophetic rhetoric. The first is what Darsey defines as prophetic logos, that “prophetic speech is incomprehensible except as the speech of a divine messenger; the prophet, properly understood, speaks for another. The prophets of the Old Testament were

spokesmen for Yahweh” (16). In other words, they are not representing their own perspective, but what God is speaking through them. Furthermore, “the word brought by the prophets was a reassertion of Yahweh’s covenant with His people and a reminder of Yahweh’s presence in the world, a reminder of God’s will, not a revelation or the presentation of a startlingly new claim” (17). Thus, their arguments are based on already established truths. Because of this, Darsey observes that, “prophetic discourse is thus highly enthymematic” (20). A second theme of prophetic rhetoric is what Darsey calls the pathos of prophecy, that “the historical requirement entails a time of crisis, from the Greek *krisis*, ‘decision,’ or ‘judgment’” (23). There is some sort of significant threat to the people. Furthermore, “the prophet is an accuser and judge; he is called into being when the law has been violated, a critical time. The prophet announces both the charges and the verdict of God or nature against the transgressors of the law” (24). The prophet clarifies what the people are doing that will lead to horrific consequences. Nevertheless, Darsey asserts, “The prophet, by his calling, becomes the vessel of Yahweh’s pathos, a symbol of divine compassion, and a vehicle for the reconciliation of humanity to God” (26). There is always a way out of the crisis offered in prophetic rhetoric. Finally, according to Darsey, there is the prophetic ethos. The prophet is one, chosen by God, and the prophet’s authority ultimately comes from God. He describes, “Consistent with the character of servitude, the message of the prophet must bear continuing testimony to his helplessness and loss of self, particularly self as conceived as a rational calculating faculty; through effacement of the self, the prophet strives to present the uncolored word of Yahweh” (32). The authorship of the prophetic text rests with God. The vessel must

ultimately forget his/her own self-interests and completely submit to this message he/she has been chosen to communicate. Ultimately, Darsey concludes:

The prophet is simultaneously insider and outsider; he compels the audience, but only by use of those premises to which they have assented as a culture. The discourse is, then, both of the audience and extreme to the audience. It might fairly be said that the prophet shares the ideals of his audience rather than the realities of its everyday life. He reminds his audience of the transcendental side of its culture that makes it larger than our individual wants and needs and aspirations and challenges us toward the achievement of that ideal. That effort requires exertion, sacrifice, and a renunciation of indolence, an exercise of virtue. Prophetic discourse seeks to reshape, to re-create the audience in accordance with a strict set of ideals as commanded by God, revealed in natural law, and assented to in principle but unrealized by the audience. (202)

The selected rhetorical texts will be interpreted by their consistencies and inconsistencies with the rhetorical genre of prophetic rhetoric. Both progressives and conservatives appropriate elements of prophetic rhetoric, but conservatives demonstrate the most inconsistency as will be explained in later chapters. But next, Darsey's methodology should be extended with another theorist to emphasize the radical nature of prophetic rhetoric.

Walter Brueggemann's conception of prophetic consciousness will be particularly useful to inform on how progressive rhetoric functions and to identify tensions within conservative rhetoric. He emphasizes that prophetic ministry is countercultural, and it speaks for those on the margins and against the dominant culture. Brueggemann proposes, "*The task of prophetic ministry is to nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us*" (3). Therefore, prophetic ministry evokes and forms an alternative community (4). He explains, "Prophecy is born precisely in that moment when the emergence of social political reality is so radical and inexplicable that it has

nothing less than a theological cause” (6). There are two elements of the prophetic consciousness, and they demonstrate the different strengths of progressives and conservatives:

The alternative consciousness to be nurtured, on the one hand, serves to *criticize* in dismantling the dominant consciousness. To that extent, it attempts to do what the liberal tendency has done: engage in a rejection and delegitimizing of the present ordering of things. On the other hand, that alternative consciousness to be nurtured serves to *energize* persons and communities by its promise of another time and situation toward which the community of faith may move. To that extent, it attempts to do what the conservative tendency has done, to live in fervent anticipation of the newness that God has promised and will surely give. (3)

Brueggemann uses examples from the Old and New Testaments to support his thesis.

For instance, “Moses dismantles the politics of oppression and exploitation by countering it with a *politics of justice and compassion*. The reality emerging out of the Exodus is not just a new religion or a new religious idea or a vision of freedom but the emergence of a new social community in history....” (6 – 7). Moses’ primary task is to free God’s people from slavery. Jim Wallis represents this radical nature of prophetic rhetoric:

One of the effects of such evangelism would be the spread of social deviance. The priorities of God’s kingdom are at such variance with the ruling assumptions and structures of our day that the simple proclamation of the kingdom could undermine the economic system and present the risk of being charged with political treason.... When the church dares to be the church, it becomes a self-conscious alternative to the mainstream culture. To the extent the church allows the gospel to intrude into its life, the church regains its distinct identity over and against the values of the world. (137)

It is apparent that from the beginning, progressive evangelicals have been attempting to distance themselves from the dominant culture in order to critique it from a prophetic stance. Also, Brueggemann posits that three elements of the dominant culture that prophets oppose are affluence, oppressive social policy, and static religion (28).

Unfortunately, the author observes that these elements are intensely reflected in this culture (36).

Brueggemann suggests that Jesus is the paradigm of social criticism. He writes, “In both his teaching and his very presence, Jesus of Nazareth presented the ultimate criticism of the royal consciousness. He has, in fact, dismantled the dominant culture and nullified its claims. The way of his ultimate criticism is his decisive solidarity with marginal people and the accompanying vulnerability required by that solidarity” (81 – 82). Brueggemann then goes on to give several examples of Jesus’ radical criticism. “**Forgiveness.** Jesus’ readiness to forgive sin (Mark 2:1-11), which evoked amazement (v. 12), also appeared to be blasphemy, that is to say, a threat to the present religious sanctions” (85). “**Table fellowship.** Jesus was willing to eat with outcasts (Mark 2:15-17), which threatened the fundamental morality of society” (85). “**Women.** Jesus’ association in public with women who were not his kin was a scandalous breach of decorum and a challenge to the gender boundaries of the first century” (86). The life of Jesus represents an explicit challenge to many aspects of the social order. Brueggemann considers the crucifixion to be the supreme prophetic act (94). He writes, “The cross is the ultimate metaphor of prophetic criticism because it means the end of the old consciousness that brings death on everyone.... The cross is the assurance that effective prophetic criticism is done not by an outsider but always by one who must embrace the grief, enter into the death and know the pain of the criticized one” (99). Furthermore, the resurrection of Jesus “is the ultimate act of prophetic energizing in which a new history is initiated. It is a new history open to all but peculiarly received by the marginal victims of the old order” (113). Thus, Jesus follows in the same tradition of the Old Testament

prophets but rises to a new level. Like the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, “Prophetic ministry seeks to penetrate despair so that new futures can be believed and embraced by us” (117). It is restorative and full of hope. Brueggemann envisions a prophetic consciousness that is far more complex than political participation. He stresses, “the prophetic purpose is much more radical than social change”, and “the issues that concern the Mosaic tradition are much more profound than the matters we usually regard as social action” (21). For Brueggemann, the prophetic imagination is penetratingly spiritual.

Kenneth Burke

In *The Rhetoric of Religion*, Burke explains the rhetorical significance of covenant (order). He intimates, “the ideas of both guilt and redemption by vicarious sacrifice are intrinsic to the idea of a Covenant (which in turn is intrinsic to the idea of governance)” (181). Because of his emphasis on covenant, Burke’s ideas work harmoniously with prophetic rhetoric. Burke argues that sacrifice is implied in a covenant and this must be satisfied, which leads to guilt/victimhood (219). This, in turn, leads to mortification which can take various forms. He defines mortification as “‘subjection of the passions and appetites, by penance, abstinence or painful severities inflicted on the body,’ mortification as a kind of governance, an extreme form of ‘self-control,’ the deliberate, disciplinary ‘slaying’ of any motive that, for ‘doctrinal’ reasons, one thinks of as unruly. In an emphatic way, mortification is the exercising of oneself in ‘virtue’; it is a systematic way of saying no to Disorder, or obediently saying yes to Order” (190). Burke goes on to explain the significance of this principle, writing that it is

“particularly crucial to conditions of empire, which act simultaneously to awaken all sorts of odd and exacting appetites, while at the same time imposing equally odd and exacting obstacles to their fulfillment” (190). Sometimes this mortification manifests through the identification of a scapegoat. Obviously, the supreme scapegoat (for the evangelical faithful) is Jesus Christ, but some still seek secular scapegoats. Burke writes, “For it seems that even if one believes in the idea of a perfect, supernatural, superpersonal victim, by identification with whose voluntary sacrifice one can be eternally saved, there is still the goad to look for victims here on earth as well, who should be punished for their part, real or imaginary, in blocking the believer’s path to felicity, or perhaps in threatening to send him on his heavenly way too soon” (223). I will argue in a later chapter that conservative evangelicals have created such a scapegoat in gays. In *A Grammar of Motives*, Burke distinguishes between Christ as scapegoat and worldly versions, such as with Hitler and the Jews. He explains, “Here the scapegoat is the ‘essence’ of evil, the principle of the discord felt by those who are to purified by the sacrifice” (407). Moreover, “The Hitlerite Anti-Semitism as scapegoat principle clearly reveals a related process of dialectic: unification by a foe shared in common” (408). Burke critiques Hitler’s rhetoric specifically in his essay, “The Rhetoric of Hitler’s ‘Battle’”. He observes that “his cult of war is developed ‘in the name of’ humility, love, and peace. Judged on a quantitative basis, Hitler’s book certainly falls under the classification of hate. Its venom is everywhere, its charity is sparse. But the rationalized family tree for this hate situates it in ‘Aryan love’” (199). Also useful for the purpose at hand is Burke’s explanation of Hitler’s unification device (especially the first two). One is “inborn dignity” which Burke explains, “this categorical dignity is considered to be an

attribute of *all* men, if they will but avail themselves of it, by right thinking and right living” (202). The second is “projection device” which is “the ‘curative’ process that comes with the ability to hand over one’s ills to a scapegoat, thereby getting purification by dissociation....if one can hand over his infirmities to a vessel, or ‘cause,’ outside the self, one can battle an external enemy instead of battling an enemy within” (202 – 203). Burke’s conception of the scapegoat function will be especially useful when analyzing conservative evangelicals culture war rhetoric, and specifically Dobson’s war on gays.

Christian Right forefather, Francis Schaeffer, first introduced the idea that western thought and culture had become antagonistic to the Christian worldview in 1976 in his book, *How Should We Then Live?* Five years later he made his case for Christian involvement in politics in *A Christian Manifesto*. He sets up a dichotomy between Humanism and Christianity, and compels Christians to fight the evil influence of Humanism. Schaeffer declares, “If we are going to join the battle in a way that has any hope of effectiveness—with Christians truly being salt and the light in our culture and our society—then we must do battle on the entire front. We must not finally even battle on the front for freedom, and specifically not only *our* freedom. It must be on the basis of Truth” (53 - 54). There are clearly polarized sides and compromise is not an option. This approach, defending all that is right and good against a clear enemy, becomes a typical rhetorical strategy of conservative evangelicals.

Robert Ivie’s identification of themes within American warfare rhetoric is most efficacious for analyzing culture war rhetoric, and especially, Dobson’s proclamation on gay marriage. Though Dobson’s war is verbal rather than physical, the rhetoric employed is frighteningly similar to the war rhetoric of the U.S. administrations when

engaged in actual wars. Ivie maintains that warfare is characterized “as a means of last resort, a necessary evil forced upon a reluctant nation by the aggressive acts of an enemy bent upon the alienation of humankind from their liberties. As a victim of these tyrannical forces of aggression, the nation fights ‘just wars’ that are ‘in self-defense or in collective defense against armed attack’ and is thereby exonerated of responsibility for an outbreak of hostilities” (“Images” 279). Moreover, the declarers of war “generate rhetorical force by activating the national hierarchy of values which subordinates the ideal of peace to the necessity of preserving freedom. Insofar as images of savagery suggest a threat to the republic, the enemy justly can be held responsible for a breach of the peace” (281). Ivie outlines two relevant topoi of warfare rhetoric: victimage and savagery. He defines the topoi of victimage rhetoric as a “cluster of binary oppositions, or core notions from which rhetors generate the particular statements that support a claim of reluctant belligerence. Once established, the claim itself then serves as a crucial premise in the overall justification for war” (283). For the topos of savagery, “The usual strategy is to construct the image indirectly through contrasting references to the adversary’s coercive, irrational, and aggressive attempts to subjugate a freedom-loving, rational and pacific victim” (284). In describing the justification of the Vietnam War, Ivie claims that the opponent was portrayed as a “faceless enemy whose identity was reduced to the personification of certain actions” (285). This is clearly how the Dobson describes gay individuals. They are defined by their sexual behavior, and since he considers homosexuality a perversion, he has a singular conceptualization of this group of individuals. Moreover, it is important to portray oneself as merely a defender against

aggression – “While the savage has acted against order, the victim has been forced to respond in defense” (290). This leads to the importance of victimage.

Ivie grounds his theory in Kenneth Burke’s notion of victimage. Because of the mythic influence of original sin, “the promotion of social cohesion through victimage is ‘normal’ and ‘natural’” (*Permanence* 284). Burke posits: “Basically, the pattern proclaims a principle of *absolute* ‘guilt,’ matched by a principle that is designed for the corresponding absolute cancellation of such guilt. And this cancellation is contrived by *victimage*, by the choice of a sacrificial offering that is correspondingly absolute in the perfection of its fitness” (283 – 284). Victimage can lead either to perfect victims, as with Christ, or perfect enemies. Burke explains in “Definition of Man” that because man is rotten with perfection there is the “tendency to conceive of a ‘perfect’ enemy” (18).

He writes:

The principle of victimage is implicit in the nature of drama. The negative helps radically to define the elements to be victimized. And inasmuch as substitution is a prime resource of symbol systems, the conditions are set for catharsis by scapegoat (including the ‘natural’ invitation to ‘project’ upon the enemy any troublesome traits of our own that we would negate). And the unresolved problems of ‘pride’ that are intrinsic to privilege also bring the motive of hierarchy to bear here; for many kinds of guilt, resentment, and fear tend to cluster about the hierarchical psychosis, with its corresponding search for a sacrificial principle such as can become embodied in a political scapegoat. (18 – 19)

The tragic example Burke uses to illustrate this phenomenon is Hitler’s depiction of the Jew as the scapegoat of Germany. The similarity is palpable in that Dobson is creating a scapegoat in gays by representing them as the ultimate threat to evangelical families.

Ultimately, Ivie critiques the rhetoric of fear based upon victimage and instead proposes Burke’s notion of a rhetoric of identification. He writes

Rhetoric is the mode of discourse in the realm of political relations for good or ill. It can undermine or enrich democratic culture by the way it addresses the human divide, either by calling for the obliteration of a sacrificial Other in a ritual of victimization that would rid the world of an evil threat and redeem a troubled but otherwise virtuous people or alternatively, by articulating enough points of consubstantiality between adversaries to prevent them from becoming sheer enemies. In this way, rhetoric can call a frantic nation to war or speak more confidently of peace in the idiom of democracy.... (*Democracy* 122)

Ivie illustrates this through the example of America's war on terror and explains how the creation of the evil enemy has resulted in polarization and makes impossible healthy, productive relationships. Nevertheless, according to Ivie, it has become a dominant theme in American rhetoric. He writes that war has become a, "perpetual and pervasive condition of U.S. political culture, a habit of thought embedded in a manner of speaking, the cultural motif of an embattled nation. This militarized world-view extended to declaring metaphorical wars on poverty, drugs, disease and crime engaging in 'trade wars' with foreign competitors, and fighting 'culture wars' with one another" ("Savagery" 58). It is a prevailing attitude in U.S. culture and an effective rhetorical strategy. Ivie contends that war has become "the master trope of all things domestic and foreign and all issues economic and social" (60). Moreover, dissent is prohibited. With the war on terror, disagreement results in charges of treason. Likewise, dissent against the traditional evangelical position on sexuality results in charges of blasphemy. Ivie distinguishes the consequences of the two rhetorical approaches: "Just as the rhetoric of evil promotes war, the rhetoric of identification, as Kenneth Burke calls it, enacts democracy and advances a positive conception of peace among consubstantial rivals" (170). Thus, culture wars have significant consequences and thus should be critiqued from a democratic and Christian perspective.

Constitutive Rhetoric

The last theory that will be summarized is Maurice Charland's conceptualization of constitutive rhetoric, which "calls its audience into being" (134). He borrows the notion of interpellation from Althusser to explain how rhetoric constitutes subjectivity:

Interpellation occurs at the very moment one enters into a rhetorical situation, that is, as soon as an individual recognizes and acknowledges being addressed. An interpellated subject participates in the discourse that addresses him. Thus, to be interpellated is to become one of Black's personae and be a position in a discourse. In consequence, interpellation has a significance to rhetoric, for the acknowledgment of an address entails an acceptance of an imputed self-understanding which can form the basis for an appeal. Furthermore, interpellation occurs rhetorically, through the effect of the addressed discourse. Note, however, that interpellation does not occur through persuasion in the usual sense, for the very act of *addressing* is rhetorical. It is logically prior to the rhetorical *narratio*. In addition, this rhetoric of identification is ongoing, not restricted to one hailing, but usually part of a rhetoric of socialization. Thus, one must already be an interpellated subject and exist as a discursive position in order to be part of the audience of a rhetorical situation in which persuasion could occur. (138)

Evangelical rhetoric clearly interpellates subjects as it speaks to them. It presumes a particular faith commitment and calls them into being based on their membership within this group. The significance of constitutive rhetoric, according to Charland, "is that it positions the reader towards political, social, and economic action in the material world and it is in this positioning that its ideological character becomes significant" (141). Therefore, successful interpellation of audience members functions ideologically and will have material consequences. Nevertheless, not all constitutive rhetorics succeed (141). Furthermore, subjectivity is not fixed, and this makes rearticulation possible. Charland explains that contradictory subject positions "place a strain upon identification with a given subject position and render possible a subject's rearticulation. Successful new

constitutive rhetorics offer new subject positions that resolve, or at least contain, experienced contradictions. They serve to overcome or define away the recalcitrance the world presents by providing the subject with new perspectives and motives” (142). This will be relevant in understanding the current struggle over evangelical political identity and the effort by progressives to rearticulate evangelical political ideology.

This project will rely on these selected methodologies to interpret the chosen rhetorical texts. The significance of the antagonisms existing over the issues of gay marriage, alleviating suffering, and climate change is that they provide evangelical rhetors the opportunity to enact change through discourse. There is evidence of a repositioning of evangelicals on these issues, and a meaningful effort at reorientation of how they go about their political praxis. The tension between conservatives and progressives is erupting in a public dialectic with implications that expand beyond the evangelical faithful. This dissertation will apply the theories laid out in this chapter in an effort to understand this very important point in evangelical history.

Works Cited

- Burke, Kenneth. "Definition of Man." *Language as Symbolic Action*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965.
- Burke, Kenneth. *Permanence and Change*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1954.
- Burke, Kenneth. *A Grammar of Motives*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969.
- Burke, Kenneth. "The Rhetoric of Hitler's Battle." *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, 3rd ed. Berkeley: University of California Press: 1973.
- Burke, Kenneth. *A Rhetoric of Motives*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969.
- Burke, Kenneth. *The Rhetoric of Religion*. . Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970.
- Brueggemann, Walter. *The Prophetic Imagination*. 2nd ed. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001.
- Charland, Maurice. "Constitutive Rhetoric: The Case of the *Peuple Quebecois*." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 73 (1987): 133 – 150.
- Darsey, James. *The Prophetic Tradition and Radical Rhetoric in America*. New York: New York University Press, 1997.
- Ivie, Robert L. *Democracy and America's War on Terror*. Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2005.
- Ivie, Robert L. "Images of Savagery." *Communication Monographs* 47 (1980): 279 – 291.
- Ivie, Robert L. "Metaphor and the Rhetorical Invention of Cold War 'Idealists.'" *Communication Monographs* 54 (1987): 165 – 182.
- Ivie, Robert L. "Presidential Motives for War." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 60 (1974): 337 – 345.
- Ivie, Robert L. "Savagery in Democracy's Empire." *Third World Quarterly*. 26.1 (2005): 55 – 65.
- Schaeffer, Francis A. *A Christian Manifesto*. Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1981.
- Wallis, Jim. *The Call to Conversion*. New York: HarperCollins, 1981, Revised 2005.

West, Cornel. *Democracy Matters*. New York: The Penguin Press, 2004.

CHAPTER FIVE

CREATION ETHIC: STEWARDSHIP COVENANT

Compared to other political issues that have been debated for centuries, global warming is a relatively recent subject of controversy. As with many other social problems, evangelicals have been slow to respond on the matter, and the recent recognition of the urgency of climate change by some evangelicals has been met with measured reluctance. Represented within the fold of evangelicalism are many different positions including apathy, concern about the problem with a burden for action, and suspicion of the environmental movement resulting in a hesitancy to support any action. For many years, conservative evangelicals have resisted the influence of the leftist tendencies of the environmental movement and instead embraced the Republican instinct to protect business from regulations. Today, this perspective is still being articulated by evangelical leaders such as James Dobson and Sarah Palin. Predictably, progressive evangelicals take a more forward approach of protecting the environment in deference to God's creation. An even more interesting development is that some mainstream and even a few conservative evangelicals are now acknowledging the human contribution to global warming and the need to take action to slow the process. Examples include Republican presidential nominee Mike Huckabee who presented himself as more progressive on

environmental and energy policies than the rest of his party; Rick Warren (previously thought to be a more moderate voice until he made comments comparing same-sex relationships with incest) who signed the Evangelical Climate Initiative; and even Christian Right veteran Pat Robertson, who appeared in a television advertisement sponsored by Alliance for Climate Protection alongside Al Sharpton, who are now declaring global warming to be a serious problem.

This chapter will take up the issue of climate change and evaluate messages on both sides through the lens of prophetic rhetoric. Furthermore, concepts from Burke and Charland will inform the discussion as well. Ultimately, I will argue that progressive evangelicals represent a consistent prophetic voice as understood through the framework outlined in the previous chapter. Moreover, both groups attempt to interpellate evangelicals through their rhetoric. Finally, conservatives fail to provide a prophetic voice in their argument against conservation.

EVANGELICALS AND GLOBAL WARMING

Progressives

Progressive evangelicals have grown increasingly concerned and proactive regarding global warming in the last few years grounding their arguments in the concept of stewardship of God's earth. This is based on the idea that in Genesis, God calls God's people to be good caretakers of creation. While, by no means considered a progressive evangelical, forefather of contemporary evangelical political action, Francis Schaeffer, "criticized fellow Christians for neglecting God's creation" in 1968 (Higgins A1). He

also wrote a book called *Pollution and the Death of Man* in 1970 where he condemned the Church for not speaking out as it “should have done throughout history against the abuse of nature” (Sullivan 217). Although Schaeffer eventually became singularly focused on opposing abortion, progressive evangelicals continue to represent this view.

Tony Campolo cites Romans 8:19-22 to explain his burden for environmentalism:

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now. (55)

According to Campolo, this scripture is “a clear injunction that we who are imbued with the Holy Spirit should be drawn into a commitment to save the earth from degradation.

All of creation, according to these verses, is waiting for us to rescue it from its fallen condition” (55). This includes not just humankind but the entirety of creation. Rather than justifying the human use of the earth without limitation, Campolo suggests that Christians should be respectful of God’s creation and be proactive in protecting it from exploitation.

Brian McLaren describes the unrestrained use and abuse of the earth’s resources for economic pursuit as an “excrement factory” (130). He explains how this conflicts with God’s desire:

In this way, God’s beautiful ecological dream can become an ugly nightmare of pain for Creator and creation alike. If God embraces that pain and its ugliness, and responds not with unquenchable fury and irreconcilable revenge but with justice and mercy, truth and grace, then humanity has the option of responding to God’s kindness, regretting its foolish abuse and rejection of its original gifts, and returning to embrace God’s beautiful dream. This mutual embrace—God’s embracing our pain

and ugliness, and humanity embracing God's mercy and beauty—creates the possibility of a new beginning where we stop working against God. Instead of pursuing our own selfish dreams—whether they are individual, ethnic, religious, political, economic, or national—we seek for God's dream for creation to come true, and we are restored to our place in God's sacred ecosystem. (132)

According to McLaren, there is no question that it is the right thing for followers of Jesus to revere God's beautiful creation. Ravaging the earth and its beauty is a display of disrespect for the One who created it.

The Evangelical Environmental Network (EEN) came into existence in 1993 and released the “Evangelical Declaration for the Care of Creation” as a founding document. On their website, they offer the following rationale explaining why Christians should be concerned about the environment:

Biblically understood, “the environment” is actually part of God's creation, of which human beings are also a part. So why should we care for all of God's creation?

1. Christ died to reconcile all of creation to God (Col. 1:20).
2. All of creation belongs to Jesus (Col. 1:16; Ps 24:1).
3. It fulfills the Great Commandments to love God, and love what God loves. (It's hard to love a child with asthma when you're filling her lungs with pollution.)
4. Pollution hurts the poor the most, and Christians are called to care for the poor and the less powerful (Mt. 25: 37-40).

Thus, caring for all of creation provides a Christian with the deepest sense of joy and contentment since it is part of loving God. We call this “creation-care.”

They define creation-care as “caring for all of God's creation by stopping and preventing activities that are harmful (e.g. air and water pollution, species extinction,) and participating in activities that further Christ's reconciliation of all of creation to God.”

EEN received their most publicity when they ran the “What Would Jesus Drive

Campaign” starting in 2002 encouraging Christians to consider how their vehicles affected the environment and use that information as a factor in their selection of cars.

In 2006, a group of evangelicals, calling themselves the Evangelical Climate Initiative, came together to release a statement stressing the urgency of global warming and calling on other evangelicals to join with them. They make the argument that global warming is a serious threat to the environment, and that evangelicals are called to respond out of love for neighbor and God. The effects of climate change would harm the poor the most, and good stewardship is consistent with a genuine Christian faith. The signers include progressive evangelicals such as Jim Wallis and Brian McLaren. Of greater interest, however, was the inclusion of the signature of Rick Warren, mainstream evangelical preacher and author of the best-selling *The Purpose Driven Life*. This statement prompted a response by another group of evangelicals who oppose making the environment a priority. The letter, written by the Interfaith Stewardship Alliance, claims that describing global warming as catastrophic is an extreme exaggeration and that most likely, only minimal consequences will occur as a result of global warming, most of the causes of global warming are natural and not human, there is little that can be done to stop global warming, and proposed efforts would hurt the poor. Therefore, the best approach is to make preparation for the consequences instead of attempting to prevent global warming.

Christian Right

Conservative evangelicals have been mostly apathetic or opposed to the environmental movement. Jerry Falwell represented this general view most succinctly when he described evangelical attention toward global warming as “Satan’s attempt to redirect the church’s primary focus” (Higgins A1). According to the Cornwall Alliance’s website, in 2000, “a coalition of scholars and religious leaders put forward an ethical statement of belief called the *Cornwall Declaration on Environmental Stewardship*” which advanced the following arguments:

First, the document notes that “many people mistakenly view humans as principally consumer and polluters rather than producers and stewards.”

Second, *Cornwall* takes a critical look at the perception that “nature knows best,” or that “the earth, untouched by human hands is the ideal.”

Third, the declaration points out that while “some environmental concerns are well founded and serious, others are without foundation or greatly exaggerated.” This is of particular concern in developing nations, where basic issues like inadequate sanitation, widespread use of primitive fuels like wood and dung, and primitive agricultural practices go largely unaddressed while more distant and theoretical issues receive the lion’s share of funding and attention.

The *Cornwall* Declaration further sets forth an articulate and Biblically-grounded set of beliefs and aspirations in which God can be glorified through a world in which “human beings care wisely and humbly for all creatures” and “widespread economic freedom... makes sound ecological stewardship available to ever greater numbers.”

The declaration was signed by leaders such as Charles Colson, James Dobson, Richard Neuhaus, and D. James Kennedy (Cornwall). In 2005, the Interfaith Stewardship Alliance formed to advance the values represented in the declaration, but was renamed the Cornwall Alliance in 2007 (Cornwall). They describe themselves as “a coalition of

clergy, theologians, religious leaders, scientists, academics, policy experts, and others,” and maintain that they are “committed to bringing a proper and balanced biblical view of stewardship to the critical issues of environment and development.” Their letter challenging the Evangelical Climate Initiative’s statement will be taken up later in the chapter.

In 2007, conservative evangelicals assembled to compose a letter to the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) problematizing the actions of Richard Cizik, vice president of government relations for the NAE, and his embrace of a progressive stance on climate change. First they argue that there is not a consensus regarding global warming among evangelicals and therefore Cizik does not represent evangelicals in general. The letter states, “The issue that is dividing and demoralizing the NAE and its leaders is related to global warming, resulting from a relentless campaign orchestrated by a single individual in the Washington office, Richard Cizik, vice president of government relations. While many of us consider Richard to be a friend, he regularly speaks without authorization for the entire organization and puts forward his own political opinions as scientific fact.” The letter then goes on to argue that prioritizing the issue of global warming is simply functioning as a distraction away from more important issues. It declares, “we have observed that Cizik and others are using the global warming controversy to shift the emphasis away from the great moral issues of our time, notably the sanctity of human life, the integrity of marriage and the teaching of sexual abstinence and morality to our children. In their place has come a preoccupation with climate concerns that extends beyond the NAE’s mandate and its own statement of

purpose.” Not only would Cizik’s agenda ignore these more important issues, it would perpetuate immoral action throughout the world. The letter asks, “how is population control going to be achieved if not by promoting abortion, the distribution of condoms to the young, and, even by infanticide in China and elsewhere? Is this where Richard Cizik would lead us?” The letter criticizes Cizik’s identification within and representation of evangelicalism and ultimately argues that the main problem with his position on global warming is that he (and the NAE) does not have the expertise to take a position on climate change. Finally, the letter advocates the resignation of Cizik, unless he changes his position: “We implore the NAE board to ensure that Mr. Cizik faithfully represents the policies and commitments of the organization, including its defense of traditional values. If he cannot be trusted to articulate the views of American evangelicals on environmental issues, then we respectfully suggest that he be encouraged to resign his position with the NAE.” Cizik was not forced, nor willfully complied with this request. In 2008, however, he was forced into resignation because of statements made about same-sex relationships. It is interesting to note that the signers of this letter, such as James Dobson, Tony Perkins, Gary Bauer, and Paul Weyrich, are not members of the NAE.

Mainstream Evangelicals

Clearly there are two distinct positions on climate change being articulated by the left and the right of evangelicalism. This leads to the question: where is the mainstream evangelical thought on global warming? The National Association of Evangelicals

(NAE) has made three statements on the environment. In 1970, they passed a resolution stating, “Christians should remember that they were entrusted with the stewardship of all God’s earthly creation and resources”. In 1971, they passed a resolution, stating, “Recognizing both the immediacy of the danger and the cultural mandate of Genesis 1:28, the National Association of Evangelicals vigorously affirms that ecology is not merely founded upon an instinct for human survival, but expresses man’s responsibility under God to act as a faithful steward of the natural world.” Lastly, in 1990, they released a statement that says, “True Christian stewardship is recognizing and living out a commitment to the truth that ‘The Earth is the Lords and everything in it’”. These statements indicate an awareness and acknowledgment of the responsibility of Christians to care for the earth but do not take a specific position on global warming, in part, because the first two statements predated the debate on global warming. Despite Richard Cizik’s outspokenness on climate change, the NAE has refrained from endorsing any type of political action designed to curb it. This effort is intended to remain inclusive of the divergent political views of its members.

Currently, both sides of the debate cite polls they believe situate the mainstream in line with their views. A survey conducted by Ellison Research, cited by the Evangelical Climate Initiative, says that 70% of evangelicals think climate change is a serious threat to future generations and 64% want to take immediate action to curtail it (Higgins A1). On the other hand, a study by the Barna Group (a more conservative organization) states that only 33% of evangelicals think global warming is a serious problem (Higgins A1). Even more recently, a Baylor Religion Survey found that evangelicals are less likely than

other social groups to be concerned about global warming and supportive of government spending to slow it (Grossman). This leads Baylor sociologist F. Carson Mencken to conclude, “So much for the myth of the evangelical environmental movement” (Grossman). There is no doubt that evangelicals have been slower than other social groups to embrace the environmental movement, especially since it orients from the left and evangelicals are generally located on the right. However, there does seem to be indications of an ideological shift occurring, especially among younger generations. There is definitely a battle being waged for the political support of evangelicals and the issue of climate change illustrates it perfectly.

IDEOLOGICAL STRUGGLE

Stewardship

The Evangelical Climate Initiative’s statement, “Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action,” represents the signatories broadly. The statement begins by identifying the group as “American evangelical Christian leaders” attempting to interpellate a subject that is a member of several entities including citizens of the United States, followers of the Christian faith, and evangelical believers. The hope is that by affirming their belonging to these powers, they will establish an ethos with all other members within their country, religion, and faith. Most important to the present study, emphasized in the statement, is their identification as evangelical. Aside from simply calling themselves evangelical, they construct their religious authority in several ways. They fashion their prophetic stance as messengers of God by specifying that their attention, “goes to

whatever our faith *requires* us to address” (italics mine). They have no choice in communicating their message. This establishes their prophetic ethos because the authorship belongs to God. Moreover, they establish common ground with mainstream evangelicalism by upholding the “sanctity of human life” thereby interpellating their audience into their social ethic. This is significant because life has consistently been represented as a key political value for evangelicals for over three decades, and therefore, constructs unity. The primary intention of the Evangelical Climate Initiative’s statement is to broaden the moral agenda of evangelicals by convincing them of the urgency of global warming. They declare, “The need to act now is urgent.” It is a crisis that emanates in a violation of God’s covenant with God’s people. They also establish their ethos as evangelical Christians by affirming that it is through prayer and reflection that they came to this position. God spoke *to* them and is now speaking *through* them. Nevertheless, it is still legitimate to be persuaded by scientific evidence without surrendering their prophetic credentials. They offer the qualifying disclaimer as their reason for using evidence: “Because all religious/moral claims about climate change are relevant only if climate change is real and is mainly human-induced, everything hinges on the scientific data.” The crucial difference is that their arguments are grounded in God’s Truth, rather than worldly philosophy. The science simply affirms the reality of the situation leading to an application of spiritual principle. The statement reads, “Many of us have required considerable convincing before becoming persuaded that climate change is a real problem and that it ought to matter to us as Christians. But now we have seen and heard enough to offer the following moral argument related to the matter of

human-induced climate change.” It is essential that they clarify that they reluctantly came to this conclusion, so that it is clear that they were not easily swayed, in order to be perceived as genuine evangelicals. Evangelicals consider themselves as possessors of Truth and anyone effortlessly persuaded by a political movement would be perceived as suspect. Finally, they close the statement by invoking their God, which is a common evangelical way to end prayers. “In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, we urge all who read this declaration to join us in this effort.” When attempting to constitute an evangelical subject, it is crucial that the source be identified as part of their faith community in order to have sufficient credibility. If this were a statement coming from the scientific community or the environmental movement, it would not be well received by many evangelicals who trust their belief system to be truth and are therefore suspicious of information coming from other sources. This effort is not about total change of political discourse, but simply a shift in priorities. The signers of this statement are attempting to persuade evangelicals to not only acknowledge the crisis of global warming, but to assign it to a highly prioritized position on their social agenda.

The evidence used is a combination of biblical scripture and scientific testimony.

The statement summarizes the biblical arguments for creation care in the following way:

Christians must care about climate change because we love God the Creator and Jesus our Lord, through whom and for whom the creation was made. This is God’s world, and any damage that we do to God’s world is an offense against God Himself (Gen. 1; Ps. 24; Col. 1:16).

Christians must care about climate change because we are called to love our neighbors, to do unto others as we would have them do unto us, and to protect and care for the least of these as though each was Jesus Christ himself (Mt. 22:34-40; Mt. 7:12; Mt. 25:31-46).

Christians, noting the fact that most of the climate change problem is human induced, are reminded that when God made humanity he commissioned us to exercise stewardship over the earth and its creatures. Climate change is the latest evidence of our failure to exercise proper stewardship, and constitutes a critical opportunity for us to do better (Gen. 1:26-28).

Since the Bible is viewed as the only sacred text for evangelical Christians, it is imperative that any effort to persuade them, that will be influential, be grounded in biblical justification. Here, the argument being made is twofold: Christians are called upon to care for the poor, and Christians should be respectful and good stewards of God's creation. Evangelical Christians are compelled to act out of love for God and love for neighbor. This love expresses the pathos of prophecy. Committing acts that degrade the environment and consequently harm our neighbors in the poorest areas is a denial of this love that Jesus commanded. Furthermore, the call to change behavior in ways that would reduce convenience implies a level of mortification on the parts of these evangelicals. They proclaim that governments, businesses, churches, and individuals must "reduce the carbon dioxide emissions from the burning of fossil fuels that are the primary cause of human-induced climate change". This injunction intimates sacrifice of its listeners. Moreover, their prophetic logos is established by their foundation of principle in God's covenant with humans to be good stewards of the earth. Currently humans are failing to uphold that covenant and this demands change. That global warming is being contributed to by humans in ways that can be reduced, and that it will have a negative impact on the world, especially those in poorer nations, is an argument that must be supported through scientific evidence.

The statement makes the argument that there is a general consensus among scientists studying climate change that humans are the main cause. It reads,

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the world's most authoritative body of scientists and policy experts on the issue of global warming, has been studying this issue since the late 1980s. (From 1988—2002 the IPCC's assessment of the climate science was Chaired by Sir John Houghton, a devout evangelical Christian.) It has documented the steady rise in global temperatures over the last fifty years, projects that the average global temperature will continue to rise in the coming decades and attributes "most of the warming" to human activities.

The U.S. National Academy of Sciences, as well as all other G8 country scientific Academies (Great Britain, France, Germany, Japan, Canada, Italy, and Russia), has concurred with these judgments.

These reputable institutions strengthen their argument that humans have a significant role in creating and preventing global warming, which is an idea that has been met with much skepticism by conservatives. Additionally, the presence of an evangelical Christian within the scientific body strengthens their argument with the group they are attempting to constitute. With that established, the statement then goes on to argue that "even small rises in global temperatures will have such likely impacts as: sea level rise; more frequent heat waves, droughts, and extreme weather events such as torrential rains and floods; increased tropical disease in now-temperate regions; and hurricanes that are more intense. It could lead to significant reduction in agricultural output, especially in poor countries. Low-lying regions, indeed entire islands, could find themselves under water." These effects could have secondary consequences such as violence and security threats. Furthermore, it is logical that since "poor nations and poor individuals have fewer resources available to cope with major challenges and threats," they will suffer the most as a result of climate change. All of this prophetically attempts to invoke both fear of

crisis and compassion for the poor, therefore persuading evangelicals that global warming is an ensuing catastrophe that can and should be averted. The rhetorical strength of the scientific evidence and logical analysis is bolstered by the foundation of the reasoning in scripture. Without the science, however, the link between good stewardship and environmental policies could not be made.

Conservative Resistance

This statement motivated a swift response from the more conservative wing of evangelicalism. A group calling itself the Interfaith Stewardship Alliance, (later changing their name to the Cornwall Alliance,) issued “An Open Letter to the Signers of ‘Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action’ and Others Concerned About Global Warming,” where they express their opposition to “drastic steps to prevent global warming” (1). The three page letter is accompanied by a much longer document called, “A Call to Truth, Prudence, and Protection of the Poor: An Evangelical Response to Global Warming,” with which they offer their own set of evidence making the fundamental point that the effects of global warming have been seriously exaggerated by the Evangelical Climate Initiative. In the document, they claim to, “present extensive scientific evidence and argument against the extent, the significance, and perhaps the existence of the much-touted scientific consensus on catastrophic human-induced global warming” (1 – 2).¹

The conservative alliance must make some effort to identify themselves as evangelical believers in order to respond to the religiously based argument of the Evangelical Climate Initiative, and therefore call their audience into being. They do this

by responding that their position is better for the poor. The letter begins by quoting the Apostle Paul, “they only asked us to remember the poor – the very thing I was eager to do” in Galatians 2:10 (1). After attempting to establish that caring for the poor is their fundamental rationale for their environmental positions, they argue that restrictions on energy will harm the poor the most. “For the world’s two billion or more poor people, who can barely afford sufficient food, clothing, and shelter to sustain life, and who are without electricity and the refrigeration, cooking, light, heat, and air conditioning it can provide, it can mean the difference between life or death” (2). Put another way, all of these things that would be restricted by policies attempting to curtail climate change are simply things people need to do to live. This argument is easily dismissed, however, because of its inconsistency within their political platform. At no other time is care for the poor represented as a conservative political value and, therefore, the argument seems to be arbitrarily made simply in response to the Evangelical Climate Initiative’s statement. Therefore, the reality is that the economic growth that they are promoting is for themselves. To the creation care argument they respond:

The stewardship God gave to human beings over the earth—to cultivate and guard the garden (Genesis 2:15) and to fill, subdue, and rule the whole earth (Genesis 1:28)—strongly suggests that caring for human needs is compatible with caring for the earth. As theologian Wayne Grudem put it, “It does not seem likely to me that God would set up the world to work in such a way that human beings would eventually destroy the earth by doing such ordinary and morally good and necessary things as breathing, building a fire to cook or keep warm, burning fuel to travel, or using energy for a refrigerator to preserve food.” (2)

This, of course, is an oversimplification of the issue and completely disregards the fact that most of the cause of global warming would not be described as life-sustaining

activity. Accordingly, this could be interpreted as a non-response. Fundamentally, the value of creation-care is dismissed as possessing little value based on the amount of time offered to addressing it. Economic prosperity is clearly the more important priority. Nevertheless, they must establish their evangelical credentials and thus have a superficial and naïve response to the religious arguments made by the Evangelical Climate Initiative. It is, however, mostly through their use of scientific information that they attempt to validate their position.

The Interfaith Stewardship Alliance commits more time representing themselves as scholarly and scientific than as evangelical. This is likely due to the fact that the linking of a conservative political agenda and evangelicalism is assumed, whereas, the more progressive agenda, especially environmentally friendly, is not usually associated with evangelical faith. Furthermore, evangelicals are not typically perceived to be linked with science and have had a turbulent relationship with it for several decades. Therefore, they perceive the need to establish their scientific credentials in order to be received as credible. One element that works to do this is that they have a section of signatures attached to the document described as “Non-evangelicals with special expertise in climatology or related sciences, economics, environmental studies, theology, or ethics” (9). Dating back to the Scopes Trial, more theologically conservative evangelicals (fundamentalists) have been perceived as unscientific and even ignorant by many in the larger culture. Thus, in a debate grounded in science, they must work harder. This explains the accompanying document that is much longer than both statements and

supported by many citations.² Their faith is presumed, but their intellectual authority must be proven.

The conservatives justify their opposition through economic conservatism. The letter, signed by many members of the Christian Right, represents the ongoing relationship between the Republican Party and evangelicals. Many of the arguments made in the letter articulate Republican Party ideals. The letter contends, “it is far wiser to promote economic growth, partly through keeping energy inexpensive, than to fight against potential global warming and thus slow economic growth. And there is a side benefit too: wealthier societies are better able and more willing to spend to protect and improve the natural environment than poorer societies. Our policy, therefore, is better not only for humanity but also for the rest of the planet” (3). In other words, the accumulation of wealth by certain people will have trickle down effects on the less fortunate. The theory that promoting wealth at the top will benefit all by stimulating good economic effects is commonly advanced by fiscal conservatives. Here these evangelicals seem to be guarding their relationship with the political Right by justifying economic pursuit that may cause harm to the environment. Economic growth is the superior value over environmental care. This works to deny the prophetic consciousness as described by Brueggemann. He writes, “Imperial economics is designed to keep people satiated so that they do not notice. Its politics is intended to block out the cries of the denied ones. Its religion is to be an opiate so that no one discerns misery alive in the heart of God” (35). An economic philosophy that serves the privileged while

marginalizing the underprivileged is in direct conflict with the prophetic voice described by Brueggemann.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that this letter is not as extreme as some of the Christian Right's other rhetoric. While remnants of culture war can be observed in their defensive posture, the letter departs from their usual strategy of waging war on the opposition. This may be partly due to the fact that they are responding to other evangelicals and are therefore more diplomatic in their choice of words. There is also the probability that they realize that at least a third of their fellow evangelicals identify global warming as a serious problem, and they are adapting to that. Lastly, (and hopefully,) it could possibly mean that they recognize the fruitlessness of the culture war approach, (other than instilling fear among their members,) and are avoiding further controversy by carefully choosing their words. If this were the case, this would constitute evidence of an even deeper transformation among evangelicals. Regardless, it is important that it be acknowledged that this rhetorical text does not fit neatly into the culture war repertoire.

Most significantly, this letter represents the ideological struggle that is currently taking place within evangelicalism over the issue of global warming. The fact that this letter was even written as a response to the statement made by the Evangelical Climate Initiative, once again situating evangelicals in a defensive posture, indicates that conservative evangelicals see progressive positions on climate change as a threat to the relationship evangelicals have with the GOP. Otherwise, the first statement would have been casually dismissed. Particularly concerning was the inclusion of signatures by moderates such as Rick Warren, (who is also a very popular figure). The principal

struggle is over political priorities and the Christian Right is resisting efforts to make global warming a high evangelical priority. If this happens, it will strain their relationship with the political Right making them less effective on the issues they do prioritize, such as abortion and gay marriage. Furthermore, it threatens their comfortable lifestyle to depart from economic conservatism. This denies it prophetic power because they are primarily seeking self-preservation through their political position. In this case, they are seeking political and economic self-preservation (although the argument could be made that they are sacrificing the self-preservation of future generations). Darsey explains that within the prophetic ethos, “personal success is self-serving and vitiates the purity of divine motive” (32). Because there are many within evangelicalism who are now joining the movement to curtail global warming, the issue represents a challenge to the discourse of the Christian Right. Additionally, it represents a larger struggle over the political identity of evangelicals. Distaste with the culture wars, a broader conceptualization of “moral issues” beyond abortion and gay marriage, and a more progressive thinking youth leads to the trepidation that evangelicalism’s relationship with the Right is dissolving. Those who have benefitted from this are working furiously to stop it from happening. According to the Interfaith Stewardship Alliance, if climate change is occurring, the best response is to adapt, but not to attempt to “prevent or reduce whatever slight warming might really occur” (2). No consideration is given to whether believers should be participating in the degradation of God’s earth. Moreover, they claim to be motivated out of concern for the poor, but this is never mentioned as a political priority by the Christian Right except when opposing efforts to fight global warming,

which makes it suspect. As already established, the fact that this value is inconsistent within the larger Christian Right discourse makes it unconvincing. Nevertheless, the fact that moderate to conservative evangelicals, including Christian Right icon Pat Robertson, have shifted on this issue, indicates a waning of the control of the Right over evangelicals. Progressives are rearticulating evangelical political identity and it is clear that it is finally reverberating through more than just the intellectual Left. These texts indicate the complexity of evangelical subjectivity, and draw a sharp distinction between prophetic and conservative rhetoric. What they demonstrate is the fact that the evangelical political participant is not a static entity. Moreover, multiple representations of evangelical political identity can exist at the same time. While more conservative voices have dominated in the last few decades, it would seem that finally more progressive voices are resonating with evangelicals. Despite being traditionally sluggish to respond to or resistant of social change, the issue of global warming illustrates that evangelicals can, once again, participate in a more progressive social movement.

The conflict over climate change being deliberated within evangelicalism indicates that the Christian Right is not dead, as some have claimed. They still represent a certain faction of evangelicals that identify with a conservative politics and ground their rhetoric as a defense of their traditional values and conservative politics. Both the efforts by certain leaders, and the resistance to believing that climate change is going to bring certain effects unless thwarted by significant changes in human behavior, demonstrates the lingering presence of the relationship between evangelicals and the Right. At the same time, however, the momentum developing among the progressive, mainstream, and

even some conservative evangelicals, on the issue of climate change exemplifies the willingness to question that relationship with the Right and depart if needed. This may not mean a complete dissolution of evangelicals' partnership with the Republican Party, but it does imply that they will no longer be a voting bloc that can be taken for granted. It also demonstrates another issue that will draw some evangelicals to the left at the voting booth.

Works Cited

- Brueggemann, Walter. *The Prophetic Imagination*. 2nd Ed. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001.
- Campolo, Tony. *Red Letter Christians*. Ventura: Regal, 2008.
- Darsey, James. *The Prophetic Tradition and Radical Rhetoric in America*. New York: New York University Press, 1997.
- Evangelical Climate Initiative. "Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action." 27 Feb. 2009 <<http://christiansandclimate.org/learn/call-to-action/>>.
- Evangelical Environmental Network. 4 Mar. 2009 <www.creationcare.org>.
- Grossman, Cathy Lynn. "Evangelicals Less Worried about Global Climate Change." *USA Today* 18 September 2008. 12 Apr. 2009 <http://www.usatoday.com/news/religion/2008-09-18-baylor-environment_N.htm>.
- Higgins, Andrew. "Heated Debate: Split Over Global Warming Widens Among Evangelicals." *Wall Street Journal* 28 Sep. 2007: A1.
- Cornwall Alliance. 4 Mar. 2009 <<http://www.cornwallalliance.org/about/>>.
- Cornwall Alliance. "An Open Letter to the Signers of 'Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action' and Others Concerned About Global Warming." 27 Feb. 2009 <<http://www.cornwallalliance.org/docs/an-open-letter-to-the-signers-of-climate-change-an-evangelical-call-to-action-and-others-concerned-about-global-warming.pdf>>.
- Letter to L. Roy Taylor, Chairman of the Board of the National Association of Evangelicals. 1 Mar. 2007. 27 Feb. 2009 <<http://www.citizenlink.org/pdfs/NAELetterFinal.pdf>>.
- McLaren, Brian D. *Everything Must Change*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007.
- National Association of Evangelicals. 4 Mar. 2009 <www.NAE.net>.
- Sullivan, Dale L. "Francis Schaeffer's Apparent Apology in *Pollution and the Death of Man*." *Journal of Communication and Religion* 21 (1998): 200 – 229.

Wallis, Jim. "Dobson and Friends, Outside the Mainstream, Get Personal on Global Warming." 2 Mar. 2007. 27 Feb. 2009 <<http://www.beliefnet.com/blogs/godspolitics/2007/03/jim-wallis-dobson-and-friends-get.html>>

¹ This chapter will not analyze the accompanying document and the validity of its evidence due to its length. The three page letter is a more comparable text to contrast with the Evangelical Climate Initiative's statement.

² Again, I will not attempt to evaluate who has the better science since that is not my expertise nor my purpose.

CHAPTER SIX

GENESIS EXEMPLAR: MARRIAGE COVENANT

Since the establishment of the Christian Right, an assortment of leaders and organizations have exerted authority seeking to influence voters and public policy with varying levels of success. Furthermore, since the evangelical voting bloc has proven to be effectual in recent elections, politicians appealing for the evangelical vote seek the approval of certain evangelical leaders. Dr. James Dobson, psychologist, internationally syndicated radio show host, and author of many best-selling books, is one of the most influential evangelicals in the U.S. It is estimated that his radio broadcasts, which he has been hosting for over 30 years, have an audience of 8.9 million people in the U.S. and 220 million around the world (Healy). As many have observed, his effectiveness as an authority among the evangelical faithful is explicated by his unique approach. While spending the majority of his time offering practical advice on marriage and raising children and developing a large following of mainstream evangelicals, Dobson intermittently introduces a conservative political agenda. In recent years, this political engagement for Dobson has manifested most prominently in his opposition to gay civil rights and the legalization of gay marriage. Dobson frames the dialectic as a battle between the family and those seeking to destroy it, and thus engages in familiar culture war rhetoric. In this chapter, I will analyze the antigay rhetoric of Dobson articulated in

his book, *Marriage Under Fire*. First it will be important to contextualize evangelical conceptions of gender and sexuality. Next, I will explain Dobson's rhetoric as an example of Burke's notion of the scapegoat and compare it with American warfare rhetoric as described by Robert Ivie to elucidate how Dobson wages war on and dehumanizes gays through the topoi of victimage and savagery. Dobson's rhetoric will also be measured in terms of its prophetic qualities and contrasted with the rhetoric of progressive evangelicals. Culture war rhetoric has recently become an antagonistic issue within the discourse of evangelicalism. Many evangelicals express discomfort with the depiction of their political opposition as the enemy. Despite their similar theological foundations, conservatives and progressives express their positions on sexuality quite distinctly.

DR. JAMES DOBSON

Dr. James Dobson received his Ph.D. in Child Development from the University of Southern California and is a licensed counselor. He published his first book, *Dare to Discipline* in 1970, founded Focus on the Family in 1977, and has served on several government commissions (Focus). Dobson served on Ed Meese's Commission on Pornography, and "gained national name recognition when he interviewed Ted Bundy just hours before the notorious serial killer was executed" (Diamond, *Not by Politics Alone* 32). Through his radio show, books, and Focus, Dobson has risen to the top of the evangelical fold in terms of authority with believers and those seeking to court the vote of evangelicals.

Focus on the Family is a large organization that engages evangelicals in their everyday lives. According to Sara Diamond's research, Focus on the Family is a successful organism because it "combines activist training with more subtle cultural programming aimed at a potentially broader audience" (*Facing the Wrath* 73). Their strategy is different than other Christian Right organizations in that rather than explicitly representing themselves as an organization seeking to influence public policy, they portray themselves simply as an organization working to uphold the Christian values of marriage and family. Sometimes these values overflow into the political arena. This multifaceted approach is why Dobson has moved to the top rank of leadership of the Christian Right, in terms of who evangelical Christians, politicians, and the media listen to. Diamond goes on to write that "Dobson primarily plays an agenda-setting and figurehead role within the Christian Right. Politicians know that Dobson has millions of loyal listeners" (35). Therefore, they understand that one of the most effective ways to reach the evangelical voting bloc is to gain the approval of James Dobson.

The first relevant activist function Dobson played in politics was in 1992, when he had a "pivotal" role in the passage of Colorado's anti-gay rights Amendment 2 (*Facing* 72). He has also exerted his influence on the issue of abortion with the Republican Party as described in a previous chapter. GOP politicians are well aware of the power he holds over many evangelicals and therefore seek his approval and accommodate his demands. More recently, he has been the most outspoken regarding the gay marriage issue and was instrumental in pushing for the constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage. He states in his book, *Marriage Under Fire*, that the Federal Marriage Amendment that

would ban gay marriage “is the passion of my heart at this stage of my life” (79). While Dobson has also consistently been a pro-life advocate, the topics of the books he’s authored suggest, opposing gay marriage would seem to be a higher priority for him. As a lifelong advocate of the traditional family, Dobson sees himself as having a burden to defend it amidst what he perceives as its attackers.

Some have suggested that the influence of the Christian Right on the Republican Party is waning, and others have gone so far as to predict the death of the Christian Right. They especially argue that James Dobson’s influence is diminished, as evidenced by McCain’s selection as presidential nominee in 2008, despite Dobson’s pledge to not support him. Furthermore, with Dobson’s recent resignation as board chairman of Focus on the Family, many wonder if his reign is over. For example, a *Time* magazine article points out that Focus on the Family’s ministries have exceeded its revenues for two years, Dobson’s monthly newsletter’s circulation has decreased by more than half in the last ten years, purchases of Dobson’s tapes and books are down significantly, and contributions to Focus on the Family Action are down (Healy). While there is no doubt that Focus on the Family is not the organization it once was, there is evidence that Dobson is still influencing the direction of evangelical politics. As will be expanded upon later in the dissertation, Dobson was influential in passing the Defense of Marriage Act, organizations such as the National Association of Evangelicals are capitulating to his will, and prominent evangelicals, such as Rick Warren, are following in his footsteps in their antigay rhetoric. Therefore, I posit that James Dobson still has an important role within American evangelicalism today.

SEXUALITY AND GENDER ROLES

The foundation of Dobson's (and most evangelicals,) argument against homosexuality is that it violates God's created order as described in Genesis. It is written in the second chapter and 24th verse, "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife and they become one flesh" (NRSV). For many evangelicals, especially Dobson, this describes God's divine plan for marriage—that men and women were created differently for each other. Many religious scholars and cultural theorists have related positions on sexuality to gender hierarchy. There is a direct line of authority in heterosexual relationships, for most evangelicals, and therefore same-sex relationships call this into question. Clearly, the acceptance of same-sex relationships throws into chaos gender hierarchy and thus would logically be resisted by a patriarchal institution such as the evangelical church. In *The History of Sexuality* Michel Foucault observes, "All this garrulous attention which has us in a stew over sexuality, is it not motivated by one basic concern: to ensure population, to reproduce labor capacity, to perpetuate the form of social relations; in short, to constitute a sexuality that is economically useful and politically conservative?" (36 - 37). Evangelicals often attempt to explain their view of sexuality as simply a moral issue based on the order God created as explained in Genesis. But this is often an uncritical and traditional interpretation of Scripture and should be considered far more complexly. Ultimately, according to Foucault, it is power that motivates humans in their behaviors. Just like the Christian defense of patriarchy has

been questioned by progressive evangelicals, one should question further the regime of sexuality.¹ Furthermore, according to Foucault, sexuality is a modern concept. He writes

What has taken place since the seventeenth century can be interpreted in the following manner: the deployment of sexuality which first developed on the fringes of familial institutions (in the direction of conscience and pedagogy, for example) gradually became focused on the family: the alien, irreducible, and even perilous effects it held in store for the deployment of alliance (an awareness of this danger was evidenced in the criticism often directed at the indiscretion of the directors, and in the entire controversy, which occurred somewhat later, over the private or public, institutional or familial education of children) were absorbed by the family, a family that was reorganized, restricted no doubt, and in any case intensified in comparison with the functions it formerly exercised in the deployment of alliance. (110)

In other words, the way we currently understand sexuality is a relatively recent phenomenon that cannot be reduced to a simple conceptualization of right and wrong as is often represented by powerful institutions, such as the evangelical church. Foucault describes several common representations of power, two of which are clearly relevant to this discussion and, therefore, worth quoting:

The insistence of the rule. Power is essentially what dictates its law to sex. Which means first of all that sex is placed by power in a binary system: licit and illicit, permitted and forbidden. Secondly, power prescribes an 'order' for sex that operates at the same time as a form of intelligibility: sex is to be deciphered on the basis of its relation to the law. And finally, power acts by laying down the rule: power's hold on sex is maintained through language, or rather through the art of discourse that creates, from the very fact that it is articulated, a rule of law....

The cycle of prohibition. thou shalt not go near, thou shalt not touch, thou shalt not consume, thou shalt not experience pleasure, thou shalt not speak, thou shalt not show thyself; ultimately thou shalt not exist, except in darkness and secrecy.... (83 - 84)

The importance in considering Foucault's perspective on sexuality is that it calls into question the reduction of sexuality into an issue of morality. It is far more complicated to conceive of the origins of moral boundaries and the implications on regimes of power. Ultimately Foucault posits, "Sexuality is not the most intractable element in power relations, but rather one of those endowed with the greatest instrumentality: useful for the greatest number of maneuvers and capable of serving as a point of support, as a linchpin, for the most varied strategies" (103). This offers an explanation as to why conservative evangelicals are so preoccupied with homosexuality and why opposition to gay marriage has become the most prominent political concern of the Christian Right. Otherwise, one must wonder why this issue evokes such a passionate response when one could argue that divorce is the biggest threat to the family. Ann Burlein writes, "Precisely by holding up families as an ideal, 'the family' is produced as something people are, or want to have, by producing homosexuality as something you (or your children) must not be or want: something unthinkable, impossible, even monstrous" (12). When evangelicals talk about "family values" or focusing on the family, they mean the nuclear family: a married, heterosexual couple with children. This is the idealized norm and anything different is inferior and even unacceptable. Burlein argues further that "stigmatization characterizes *normative* heterosexuality; indeed, stigmatizing homosexuality is how heterosexuality is produced and enforced as a norm, as something people *want* for their children" (12). Homosexuality must be condemned in order to maintain this dominant family structure. The implications of the belief in this interpretation of God's created order are both specific gender roles and a prohibition of sexuality that does not fit this divine plan.

These inviolable gender roles ultimately lead to the conclusion that homosexual relationships are not ordained by God and are in fact sinful.

Conservative evangelical opposition to same-sex orientation is rooted in the position that men and women were created differently for one another. A popular text written to guide evangelical men is the book *Tender Warriors* by Stu Weber. In the book he argues that men and women have distinctly different roles and that living outside of those violates God's divine plan. According to the author, there are 4 pillars of manhood: king, warrior, mentor, and friend (38). Men are called to have authority in relationships with women and there are all sorts of negative societal implications when men and women act outside of this created order. Interestingly, Weber argues that, "Scripture has always indicated a woman is more suited to nurturing children than a man" (113). However, fathers are the more important parents. He writes, "As a man, I am responsible for the development of our children. God did not leave it to my wife. Neither can I. Dad is responsible" (144). Weber argues that these gender roles are the result of an inerrant interpretation of Scripture and often cites James Dobson as support.

Another text, *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood*, makes the specific link between the confusion of gender roles and homosexuality (and other kinds of social problems). John Piper laments, "Confusion over the meaning of sexual personhood today is epidemic. The consequence of this confusion is not a free and happy harmony among gender-free persons relating on the basis of abstract competencies. The consequence rather is more divorce, more homosexuality, more sexual abuse, more promiscuity, more social awkwardness, and more emotional distress and suicide that come with the loss of

God-given identity” (33). He then stipulates that, “supporting the family is primarily the responsibility of the husband. Caring for the children is primarily the responsibility of the wife” (43). Nevertheless, the authors’ conception about male and female gender roles exceeds beyond marriage and into all facets of society. Piper and Wayne Grudem argue that gender roles are so important because,

Biblical truth and clarity in this matter are important because error and confusion over sexual identity leads to: (1) marriage patterns that do not portray the relationship between Christ and the church (Ephesians 5:31-32); (2) parenting practices that do not train boys to be masculine or girls to be feminine; (3) homosexual tendencies and increasing attempts to justify homosexual alliances ...; (4) patterns of unbiblical female leadership in the church that reflect and promote the confusion over the true meaning of manhood and womanhood. (60)

The authors repeatedly connect gender roles and sexuality (82, 84). Clearly their opposition to homosexuality is inextricably linked to their desire to maintain clearly defined gender hierarchy with men at the top.

James Dobson has explicitly delineated notions of how the sexes differ, despite softening his rhetoric in recent years. In *Family Under Fire*, which was written in 1976 as a discussion between Dobson and other individuals including his father, pastors, a doctor, a teacher, a professor/chaplain, and a housewife, there is a chapter dedicated to the feminine role, one to the masculine role, and one on teaching male and female roles to children. In the discussion, Dobson clearly articulates distinctive roles for males and females, couching his positions in what Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza calls love patriarchy. Dobson states, “If husbands will do the jobs God gave them ... loving their wives as their own flesh, with all that means ... then wives will be much more comfortable in accepting their supportive roles with enthusiasm and self-esteem” (19).

But he clarifies that the husband and wife have very different roles, arguing, “equal does not mean equivalent; you can be equal in worth and have different functions and different roles” (23). Moreover, on submission he states, “It’s not that a wife becomes a child or a nonperson, never expressing an opinion or a disagreement. I want all the input my wife will give me. I want her to express her views without reservation, because I don’t have all the answers. But on those occasions when we can’t compromise or harmonize our points of view, she yields to my decision” (23). Thus, these different roles demand that there is a line of authority in the marriage with the husband at the helm. Dobson bases this position, at least in part, on Genesis.

Dobson wrote a book called *Straight Talk to Men*, first in 1984, and republished an updated version recently. In this book he addresses such issues as a man’s sexual identity and the biological differences between men and women. He writes that, “One of the greatest threats to the institution of the family today is the undermining of this role as protector and provider. This is the contribution for which men were designed, physically and emotionally” (33). Dobson posits that the destruction of the masculine role is what has destroyed inner-city black families. “It all begins with an unhealthy relationship between the sexes that undermine families and leave broken lives in its wake” (40). Of course, there is no mention of poverty or racism as possible causes. Dobson holds that it is crucial for sustaining strong families that “we must not abandon the biblical concept of masculinity and femininity” (41). He asserts that, “there should be a clear delineation between maleness and femaleness, exemplified by clothing, customs, and function” (41). Moreover, this starts with children. “Boys and girls should be taught that the sexes are

equal in worth but very different from one another. Girls should know they are girls, and boys should know they are boys” (41). Dobson affirms the view that men and women are different in every way possible using the creation story as justification. “The Bible says emphatically, ‘Male *and* female created he them’ (Genesis 1:27, KJV, emphasis added). Not one sex, but *two!*” (194). He disagrees with the perspective that gender differences are culturally created and instead argues that “males and females are original creations of God, each bearing strengths and weaknesses that counterbalance and interface with one another. It is a beautiful design that must not be disassembled” (194). He then goes on to list many ways males and females are different such as biology, emotions, and even how they derive their self-esteem. He writes, “Males and females apparently differ in the manner by which they develop self-esteem. Men draw the necessary evidence of their worthiness primarily from their jobs—from being respected in business, profession or craft. Women, however, *especially those who are homemakers*, depend primarily on the romantic relationship with their husbands for ego support” (199). While this may seem like an antiquated notion to many, Dobson believes that these differences are rooted in God’s design. Regarding male leadership, Dobson offers two “opinions” on the matter:

1. Because of the fragile nature of the male ego and a man’s enormous need to be respected, combined with female vulnerability and a woman’s need to be loved, I feel it is a mistake to tamper with the time-honored relationship of husband as loving protector and wife as recipient of that protection.
2. Because two captains sink the ship and two cooks spoil the broth, I feel that a family must have a leader whose decisions prevail in times of differing opinions. If I understand the Scriptures, that role has been assigned to the man of the house. (200)

Dobson concludes the chapter objecting to more equitable relationships and certainly ones where the man lacks leadership. “None of the modern alternatives have improved on the traditional, masculine role as prescribed in the Good Book. It was, after all, inspired by the Creator of mankind” (200). Hence, for Dobson, gender roles clearly mean gender hierarchy, and this is the only option ordained by God. Acting outside of these mandates leads to unhealthy relationships, weak egos, and ultimately destroys the family.

In the next chapter concerning the women’s liberation movement, Dobson defers to a woman to critique feminism, allowing Dobson to indirectly state patriarchal views. One of the most disturbing passages in the article, written by Kay Ebeling, published originally in *Newsweek*, is when she writes, “Women and men are not equal, we’re different. The economy might even improve if women came home, opening up jobs for unemployed men, who could then support a wife and children, the way it was, pre-feminism” (204). While this is music to Dobson’s ears, it also allows him to circuitously express much more controversial positions all the while deflecting criticism off of himself and giving a woman the responsibility for it. While his sexism is not as extreme as it could be, (likely because of gains made by feminism among even the evangelical community,) it seems that he believes that the gender roles go far beyond headship in marriage. A former colleague of 10 years charges Dobson with sexism claiming there is a glass ceiling at Focus on the Family. Gil Alexander-Moegerle writes that “Dobson consciously resisted the elevation of women to the inner circle of senior leadership during the entire decade I worked with him” (145). Moreover, when the author questioned the

Focus policy of replying to women by their husband's name, motivated by a situation where a woman was left by her husband, he was met with little understanding. "Jim attempted to explain why addressing women by their husband's name was a traditional and acceptable concept and that he was opposed to the effort by the women's movement to discredit that tradition" (149). The author concludes by observing, "In studying Dobson one realizes that his public praise of women is actually praise of a certain stereotypical woman whom Jim wants to reward for her subservience. He genuinely likes women—who know their place in his cultural view. He applauds women—who stay home and support their men. Of other women he speaks with disingenuous tolerance..." (150). Evidently, for Dobson, there are very distinctive God-given gender roles and that entails men having power over women in all facets of society. This is inextricably associated with his ardent opposition to same-sex relationships and marriage.

DOBSON AND SEXUALITY

Despite not being politically involved in his opposition of gays until 1992, Dobson has written about it for quite some time. In the book *Family Under Fire*, published in 1976, Dobson explains that on the one hand, homosexuality,

Usually grows out of extremely unhappy home situations ... where the child has been given an emotional reason to reject his appropriate sex role. Perhaps his mother showed an aversion for him as a male or the father figure was missing or the mother completely dominated him. There are many possible causes. But I think the most common cause is through massive feelings of inferiority and inadequacy which lead a youngster to hate (and thus reject) himself. (64)

Hence, being gay is a dysfunction developed during childhood, departing from God's plan for gender and sexuality. On the other hand, according to Dobson, "homosexuality is a 'contagious' disorder. It is not always a matter of faulty development. It is pretty well documented that one of the ways homosexuality can get started is for male roommates to catch each other masturbating and then to make a group experience out of it" (64 – 65). Accordingly, parents must protect their children from being indoctrinated into this lifestyle by others and thus must teach their children appropriate gender roles so that they are not confused and vulnerable to the homosexual lifestyle. Nonetheless, this contradiction illustrates the unstable argument Dobson uses to support his diagnosis.

Dobson establishes a theme in his discourse that the family, grounded in heterosexual marriage, is under attack by secular society, and must be defended at all costs. He writes in *Children at Risk*:

But what is the traditional definition of the family? It is a group of individuals who are related to one another by marriage, birth, or adoption—nothing more, nothing else. The family was divinely instituted and sanctioned in the beginning, when God created one man and one woman, brought them together, and commanded them to 'be fruitful and multiply.' This is where we begin and this is where we must stand.

By contrast, if by 'family' we mean any circle of people who love each other, then the term ceases to have meaning. In that case, five homosexual men can be a 'family' until one feels unloved, and then there are four. (57 – 58)

Therefore, if the concept of the family as sanctioned by God in Genesis is tampered with, society will ultimately unravel. Moreover, by trivializing gay relationships, Dobson states how absurd he finds them. Ann Burlein asserts that "Identifying 'the Bible-based family' as the nation's *cultural* heritage enables Dobson to domesticate difference" (26). Moreover, by grounding these views in Genesis, he articulates it as God's plan. Burlein

observes, “Dobson reads these chapters as narrating the creation of binary male and female genders and therefore as inscribing heterosexuality within the order of creation” (154). The sacred blueprint for the family is based in two very different sexes and anything different is in violation of that plan. This is so crucially important for Dobson and many evangelicals to preserve that a war must be fought against those seeking to change it.

PROGRESSIVES AND SEXUALITY

It is important to note that this view on sexuality and gender is not exhaustive of all evangelicals. In fact, there is a multiplicity of perspectives on sexuality represented by progressive evangelicals. One position is the same as Dobson’s theologically, but problematizes scapegoating gays and making the opposition to gay marriage such a high priority. Progressive leaders such as Jim Wallis and Tony Campolo agree that heterosexuality is God’s created order, but question the way conservative evangelicals articulates the issue. Wallis writes,

To say gay and lesbian people are responsible for the breakdown of the heterosexual family is simply wrong. That breakdown is causing a great social crisis that affects us all, but it is hardly the fault of gays and lesbians. It has very little to do with them and honestly more to do with heterosexual dysfunction and, yes, “sin.” Gay civil and human rights must also be honored, respected, and defended for a society to be good and healthy. It is a question of both justice and compassion. To be both pro-family and pro-gay civil rights could open up some common ground that might take us forward. (331)

While clearly distinguishing himself from the rhetorical approach of the Christian Right, Wallis does not support gay marriage. He writes, “Many in the churches and the society

believe that the long-standing and deeply rooted concept of marriage as being between a man and a woman should not be changed, but same-sex couples should be granted the rights of 'civil unions.' That's still my own view" (332). Nevertheless, Wallis takes issue with the preeminence of opposing gay marriage given by the Christian Right, stating, "When conservatives seem to suggest that the future of western civilization is at stake in the battle over the legal status of same-sex couples, they seriously overstate the issue" (335). Thus, while agreeing with conservatives that gay marriage should not be legalized, Wallis objects to making it the highest priority.

Another progressive evangelical leader, Tony Campolo makes a similar argument. While asserting, "I hold to a more conservative view, believing that same-gender eroticism cannot be reconciled with Scripture," he argues that it is not a defining issue for evangelicals (55). Furthermore, he also questions the way evangelicals have framed the issue, proclaiming, "I call upon the church to stop making same-gender eroticism into some kind of supersin that somehow warrants parents throwing away their children or barring people from the church. I plead with the church to join in efforts to grant full civil rights to gay men and lesbians and to make the church into a safe place where no preacher will issue denigrating rhetoric or ignorant generalizations to hurt them" (56). Ultimately, he claims to be more concerned with the "meanness and ugly, untrue rhetoric" directed at gays from Christians than with the issue itself (70). Like Wallis, Campolo represents the same theological position on sexuality with conservative evangelicals but not the same approach, all the while professing to support civil rights.

Another position taken by some evangelicals is represented by emerging church representative, Brian McLaren, who declines to make a judgment about sexuality. He explains in a controversial statement that emerging church leaders are essentially unsure of their position on the issue:

Frankly, many of us don't know what we should think about homosexuality. We've heard all sides but no position has yet won our confidence so that we can say "it seems good to the Holy Spirit and us." Even if we are convinced that all homosexual behavior is always sinful, we still want to treat gay and lesbian people with more dignity and gentleness, and respect than our colleagues do. If we think that there may actually be a legitimate context for some homosexual relationships, we know that the biblical arguments are nuanced and multilayered, and the pastoral ramifications are staggeringly complex. We aren't sure if or where lines are to be drawn nor do we know how to enforce with fairness whatever lines are drawn. ("Brian McLaren on the Homosexual Question: Finding a Pastoral Response")

This position, of course, evoked much controversy and charges of heresy leveled against McLaren. The opposition was so extensive and vitriolic that it prompted McLaren to write a response defending the authenticity of his faith:

Please be assured that as a pastor and as someone who loves and seeks to follow the Bible, I am aware of Genesis 19, Leviticus 1:22 and 20:13, Romans 1, 1Corinthians 6:9, and related texts. Believe me, I have read them and prayerfully pondered them, and have read extensively on all the many sides of the issue. I understand that for many people, these verses end all dialogue and people like me must seem horribly stupid not to see what's there so clearly to them. I wish they could understand that some of us encounter additional levels of complexity when we try honestly and faithfully to face these texts. ("Brian McLaren on the Homosexual Question 4: McLaren's Response")

It is a familiar strategy of conservative evangelicals to cast doubt upon the legitimacy of a person's faith who reconsider traditional interpretations of scripture. Furthermore, McLaren questions, "why take these selected verses literally, and only partially so?" and

observes, “Mockery, scorn, insult, invective, name-calling and the like do appear in the Bible. It is hard to try to square them with other scriptures like Ephesians 4:29-32 or 2 Timothy 2:23 – 26 – that is another one of the kinds of complexities we face when we try to take the whole of Scripture seriously without just quoting one verse to the exclusion of others.” Ultimately, McLaren leaves the issue unanswered, but complicated by more complex considerations of Scriptural interpretation.

Finally, there are some evangelicals who promote acceptance of same-sex orientation and relationships and this position is represented by Mel White, former ghostwriter of books for evangelical leaders such as Billy Graham, Jerry Falwell, and Pat Robertson. White’s perspective is considerably influenced from the fact that he, as an evangelical Christian, struggled for decades over his own same-sex orientation and eventually concluded that his sexuality is a gift from God (*Stranger at the Gate* 260). White emphasizes the importance of opposing the current rhetorical war on gays comparing it to Hitler’s scapegoating of Jews (285). He writes,

There is a war raging against gay and lesbian people in our country right now. Our civil rights are on the line. Our freedom is at stake. The homophobic lies of the religious right are murdering the souls and threatening the civil rights of gay and lesbian Americans We must stand against those lies....

Doing justice begins by walking away from the churches and the synagogues, the preachers, priests and rabbis, who use God’s word to condemn us and into churches and fellowships where we are loved and respected as God’s children who happen to be lesbian or gay. (284)

Besides disagreeing on a theological level with other evangelicals on the issue of sexuality, White also challenges the alienation of gays from the church. “Throughout history, when religious leaders get laws passed that impose their morality on the public, it

has been disastrous to the church and a crippling blow to the spread of the Gospel. Once you've called me an outcast, I can't hear your good news even if it could change my life. Once I have associated the Gospel with hatred, persecution, and deprivation, how can I be open to its truths again?" (301). While, this is a much less common evangelical interpretation, it is an important perspective and represents a striking contrast with Dobson. Nevertheless, Dobson's conception of sexuality and intense opposition to gay marriage is the dominant view of evangelicals and thus deserves to be critiqued.

MARRIAGE UNDER FIRE

Political Priorities

In his book, *Marriage Under Fire*, Dobson declares, "There is no issue today that is more significant to our culture than the defense of the family. Not even the war on terror eclipses it" (85). Characteristic of prophetic rhetoric, Dobson presents the issue as a crisis resulting calling for judgment. This issue is so dire, that he frames it as a "battle" that must be won by Christians or it will ultimately lead to the destruction of society. He immediately sets up two opposing camps: homosexual activists and Christian families. Darsey observes, "in a world where political and religious leaders fail to offer clear direction, where the compromise of purity is innocuously presented as a process that leaves the greater part of principle intact, prophetic rhetoric posits a clear dramatic opposition of protagonist and antagonist. It clarifies moral identities and structures desire for denouement" (75). Not only does the adversary want to force their lifestyle on others, they want to legalize all kinds of perversity. Already one can see the formation of the

perfect enemy. Dobson describes the day that Massachusetts began issuing marriage licenses to gays as “the worst day for the institution of marriage in the history of the world,” and claims that “marriage is, indeed, under fire in nations around the world” (42). He frames the battle as one that “threatens the very existence of our society. This struggle is not being fought with guns and bombs, but with ideas, with creative uses of the law, and with methods of intimidation. It is a battle for the very soul of the nation” (31). This is both a spiritual and cultural battle that is as critical as a violent one. Dobson goes on to outline the destruction that gay marriage will bring if legalized:

1. The legalization of homosexual marriage will quickly destroy the traditional family.
2. Children will suffer most.
3. Public schools in every state will embrace homosexuality.
4. Adoption laws will be instantly obsolete.
5. Foster-care programs will be impacted dramatically.
6. The health care system will stagger and perhaps collapse.
7. Social Security will be severely stressed.
8. Religious freedom will almost certainly be jeopardized.
9. Other nations are watching our march toward homosexual marriage and will follow our lead.
10. The gospel of Jesus Christ will be severely curtailed.
11. The culture war will be over, and the world may soon become “as it was in the days of Noah” (Matthew 24:37). (47 – 63)

From the destruction of the family and economic collapse to religious persecution, this threat could devastate this culture as much as a real war could. Dobson’s fantasy that the legalization of gay marriage will result in the apocalypse has only one solution, and that is to wage war on this threat in order to stop it. The belligerence of the Christian Right is justified because there is an impending threat to their value system. Ivie observes, in “Presidential Motives for War,” that “belligerency, then, is the unpleasant means to a more permanent peace which will insure the security of those principles that form the

essence of America's motive structure" (344). Moreover, when declaring war, it is essential in justifying it, that the declarer portray the opponent as the antithesis to their value system, in other words, a perfect enemy. The adversary must be portrayed as seeking to destroy everything that the declarer holds dear. Ivie writes, "This strategy to dichotomize and polarize ideologies is extended further as agents, both individuals and nations, are substantiated by the ends they choose for guiding principles and the means they employ to realize those ends" ("Presidential" 342). In Dobson's rhetorical world, his side values families, while the other side wants to destroy them. Prophetic rhetoric always addresses an impending (or existing) crisis. Progressive evangelicals differ with Dobson in their conception of what constitutes a crisis and, therefore, what should be of the highest priority for the evangelical faithful.

Dobson clearly believes that God has called him to speak truth in this crucial time. He declares, "God has called us to stay in the field till the end of the day, and I for one, will do that as long as I have breath in my body" (87). Furthermore, this is not Dobson's agenda, but God's. He proclaims, "We must go on our knees in concerted prayer, knowing that the God of Joshua and Hezekiah still hears and answers the petitions of His people. Ultimately, the battle belongs to Him and we are only His soldiers. *He* will defend the family, His great gift to mankind" (92). In these ways, he conforms to the form of prophetic rhetoric by describing himself as a messenger of God who has been called to speak the truth to the people. Dobson also constitutes his audience as God's people stating, "This apocalyptic and pessimistic view of the institution of the family and its future will sound alarmist to many, but I think it will prove accurate unless—*unless*—

God's people awaken and begin an even greater vigil of prayer for our nation" (63).

Dobson demonstrates one of the major functions of the prophet, identified by Brueggemann, by energizing God's people.

A significant differentiation between the rhetorical approaches of conservatives and progressives is represented by conflicting priorities. According to Brueggemann, part of a prophetic ministry is to demonstrate compassion for those on the margins (88). Progressive evangelicals consistently make their highest concern compassion for the poor. Jimmy Carter calls this "the world's greatest challenge" (178). He maintains, "It is clear that proper treatment of the poor should be an extremely high priority among those who shape American policies. In fact, this criterion may be the most amenable to exact measurement, so that direct comparisons can be made among those who profess to espouse the basic moral values of our nation" (179). By this, he means that there are more references to serving the poor in the Bible than any other social concern. Almost every other progressive evangelical confirms this position on the exigency of serving the poor and relieving their suffering. Tony Campolo is even more confrontational in holding his people accountable, beginning a speech to a national convention of Christian leaders by saying, "30,000 children died last night from complications related to hunger, and most of you don't give a s—t. What's worse, you care more that I cursed at a Christian meeting than that those kids died" (Patel). Here, the struggle is not over theological issues regarding the definition of marriage, but over what evangelicals should be most concerned with and what constitutes the most urgency.

While Dobson's rhetoric conforms to prophetic rhetoric in some sense, there are ways that he contradicts it as well. It is important to note the economic reasons that constitute at least part of his opposition to gay marriage, which is represented in reasons six and seven in the list. His reasoning that the health care system and social security will collapse would seemingly be explained by the fact that more individuals will have access to benefits because of their spouses. This is a clearly economic rationale for opposing the right to marry. Also, he writes, "With marriage as we know it gone, everyone would enjoy all the legal benefits of marriage (custody rights, tax-free inheritance, joint ownership of property; health care and spousal citizenship, etc.) without limiting the number of partners or their gender" (50). Any time a group gains rights, power must be shared, and therefore those in power often oppose the expansion of rights. More rights for more people has economic implications in that wealth must be shared, and therefore the dominant culture loses some of its monetary hold on the rest of the culture. Thus, Dobson's argumentation would seem to confirm Foucault's notion that conceptualizations of sexuality are rooted in economics and power. Moreover, it is clear that Dobson sets up the kinds of potential effects that cannot be left without a response. How could a devoted Christian allow their religious freedom to be taken away and their family destroyed? Dobson's apocalyptic rhetoric establishes the issue as one of dire importance that will have devastating impact on the entire world.

Scapegoat

Dobson's rhetoric explicitly functions as an example of scapegoat as described by Burke. His position is based upon his employment of God's covenant of marriage found in Genesis. Dobson interprets this to mean that the only relationships that uphold this order are patriarchal heterosexual marriages. According to Burke, implicit within the idea of covenant is sin, which leads to the need for sacrifice and therefore victimage. This can be related to Foucault's notion of power relations within sexuality, which argues that power dictates law to sex. Because the covenant of marriage has been severely broken in this culture, it is a natural reaction to seek a scapegoat. For Dobson, this takes the form of homosexuals. He describes them as the essence of evil, and attempts to assemble and mobilize God's people through their unification of a common enemy. Burke explains, "if one can hand over his infirmities to a vessel, or 'cause,' outside the self, one can battle an external enemy instead of battling an enemy within" ("Rhetoric" 203). This materializes as a waging of war on gays.

Dobson utilizes both topoi that Ivie identifies in his article, "Images of Savagery in American Justification for War". He establishes both his and the Christian community's victimage and depicts the enemies as savages. He makes it clear that Christians are on the defense and analogizes the current situation to actual war. He writes:

Just as the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 by the empire of Japan served to energize and mobilize the armed forces of the United States, it would appear that the vicious assault on marriage and the church in recent months has begun to reinvigorate people of faith. I see indications that the church is marshaling its forces and preparing to meet the challenge. Evil

has a way of overreaching, and that appears to have happened regarding the blatant and lawless assault on marriage and biblical morality. (23)

The reference to Pearl Harbor, one of the only attacks on U.S. soil, arouses emotions of self-defense and outrage at the unprovoked assault. Dobson makes it clear that Christians have no choice but to defend themselves against the attacks of homosexual activists. He contends, “considering the level of aggression coming from today’s homosexual activist community, our back is to the wall. Homosexual activists are determined to ignore existing laws that protect the institution of marriage and to co-opt the family for their own purposes” (66). This agenda comes from nothing else except to seize power at the expense of everyone else. He compares the gay rights movement to the Nazis writing, “Like Adolf Hitler, who overran his European neighbors, those who favor homosexual marriage are determined to make it legal, regardless of the democratic processes that stand in their way” (41). Nothing could be more disparaging to an individual or group than to be compared to one of the most morally depraved individuals to ever exist. By depicting gay rights activists as a forceful, evil enemy imposing their will on peace-loving Christians, Dobson justifies his hostile rhetoric. In the same way that Ivie describes war rhetoric, Dobson articulates the Christian community’s opposition to the gay rights agenda as a last resort and therefore alleviates them of any charges of intolerance or sanctimony.

Victimage

Dobson utilizes the topos of victimage by describing himself, Christians, and families as victims of the homosexual agenda that wants to destroy them. He describes

Christians as, “for the most part, peace-loving people who do not like angry confrontation and bitter debate. Our philosophical opponents understand this, which explains why they often react with in-your-face rhetoric and behavior. The purpose is to intimidate those who oppose their agenda” (66). Christians are gentle and kind in the way they live their lives and would never express hostility without good reason. Moreover, the gay rights activists resort to name-calling if anyone disagrees with them, contends Dobson. “One of their most effective tactics is to depict Christians – and others who uphold traditional values – as ‘hateful,’ calling us ‘bigots’ and the dreaded (and nonsensical) ‘homophobe’” (66 – 67). Of course this name-calling goes only one way, and illustrates the verbal attacks of the enemy that cannot be ignored. Not only do the gay rights activists victimize Christians, but the media engage in this as well. Dobson claims that “Christian bashing has become routine in the secular media. Why? Because the personal attacks on us are part of a liberal strategy to silence the opposition” (69). He goes so far as to say that, “if there is hate existent in this debate over homosexuality, it appears to be coming from the other side” and that “the folks who accuse Christians of being hate-filled and intolerant” are engaging in “a game of intimidation and threats” (70 – 71). Dobson has flipped the coin of intolerance to describe the tactics of the opposition. While the charge of intolerance used to be directed at religious extremists, it has now been appropriated by the Christian Right to defend its expression of faith. Being the victim of verbal attacks is the cost for standing up for what’s right. Dobson argues, “It is not pleasant to be called ‘the religious right,’ ‘the far right,’ ‘religious extremists,’ and ‘fundamentalist right-wing crazies.’ None of us likes that. But being ridiculed and

marginalized is the price we must pay to defend what we believe” (87). Essentially, what Dobson is describing is religious persecution, and he would like his readers to believe that it is going on in this country today. According to Dobson, Christians have no choice but to respond to the attacks on their beliefs and their families. The media is also trying to indoctrinate their children into believing that the gay lifestyle is desirable. The book asserts, “We have already seen that the media’s positive portrayal of homosexuality has enticed many young people into this behavior. Should government sanction ‘gay marriage,’ many more will be drawn into this destructive lifestyle” (105). If Christians are intolerant, judgmental, or seemingly lacking in love with the way they address gays, they are redeemed through their victimage, because they are merely trying to protect their families. They are simply defending themselves against a hostile enemy and protecting their children from being brainwashed by the media.

Not only are outspoken Christians in general victimized, but Dobson, himself, claims to have been personally victimized. He gives the example of a question asked by Katie Couric on the *Today Show* as evidence for this contention:

Katie Couric of NBC’s *Today Show* asked a guest one morning if he thought the leaders of Focus on the Family, the Christian Coalition, and the Family Research Council were indirectly responsible for [Matthew] Shepard’s murder because of the venom we espoused. This was an outrageous suggestion that, frankly, I resented. There is no evidence that the killers had ever heard of me, read any of my books, or visited our campus. In twenty-seven years I have never said anything hateful about homosexuals on our broadcast, and I do not condone violence or disrespect for anyone. Yet, in asking the question, sweet little Katie planted the notion that Christians are somehow responsible for the hatred that allegedly stalks our land. (68).

Dobson's shallow understanding of the question demonstrates his reluctance to consider the repercussions of antigay rhetoric. It is not that his statements directly led to the murder, but that the rhetoric contributes to an atmosphere that disparages gay individuals, giving them less value, and possibly making them a target for disturbed individuals. Also, note Dobson's use of the word "allegedly," not even acknowledging that victimization of gays exists, even as he speaks of the murder of one of them. Dobson is the victim in this situation. He goes on to give more specific examples of his victimage, such as being called "the Godzilla of the Right" (70). Also, during the public debate over a Colorado initiative forbidding "local governments from classifying homosexuals as a protected class of people in regards to employment and housing", he claims that "our buildings were spray-painted with bigoted slogans. We received death threats and telephone bomb warnings. Bloody animal parts were brought to the front of the headquarters building, and a mock funeral found its way onto our property. Vicious lies were told about us and publicized widely in the press" (70 – 71). Dobson implies that these outlandish acts are typical of anyone supporting gay rights. This is what will have to be suffered by those defending their heterosexual values. By positioning himself and conservative Christians as the victims, he attempts to prove that Christians are merely defending themselves in this war. He creates a dichotomy that materializes as a battle between good and evil.

Dobson's prophetic voice is compromised because his rhetoric is very much focused on what's good for himself and other Christians, while prophetic rhetoric is characterized by a loss of self. According to Darsey, part of the prophetic ethos is an

“effacement of the self” (32). Moreover, “personal success is self-serving and vitiates the purity of divine motive” (32). This would apply especially to Dobson’s economic rationale for opposing gay marriage. Jim Wallis cautions against these types of social movements, warning, “the religiosity of movements that merely advance the economic and political interests of their own constituencies is far more suspect. Religion has been used in the self-defense of slaveholders, dictators, conquering warriors, captains of industry, security police, and the rules of both church and state” (*Who Speaks for God?* 8). This is, of course, not to say that a prophet cannot speak for a group that he/she belongs to. But, the motive should not be self-serving. In fact, the prophet may be asking the people to give up worldly comforts rather than protecting them. The conflicting styles of self-oriented versus other-oriented politics will continue to be a common theme represented within the dialectic of evangelicalism.

Another way that progressive rhetoric differs is in the treatment of enemies. Dobson clearly identifies gay rights advocates as the enemy of traditional families. Progressives discourage rhetoric that identifies others as enemies. Wallis, instead, encourages prayer: “With continuing prayer, our fear subsides, our anger and hurt is gradually healed, and we begin to understand the others’ fears, angers, and hurts. It is exceedingly difficult to hate people while we are praying for them. Prayer undermines hostility and enables us to identify with another person” (*The Call to Conversion* 104). Because prophetic rhetoric induces compassion for the other, it is difficult to frame them as the enemy. Brian McLaren also expresses this mentality problematizing war rhetoric. He writes, “Wars play out a framing story of *us versus them* that seeks to take precedence

over the deeper and higher framing story of God's global family table, where *us* and *them* are equally invited, equally wanted, in the biggest 'us' of all" (*Everything* 126). They reject polarizing extremes and instead opt for a more unifying approach as God's people.

Savagery

A second topos identified by Ivie that Dobson employs in his book is the topos of savagery. In justifying a war, it is essential to alleviate compassion and therefore guilt one might feel, by depicting the enemy as savages, as "a foe who is totally uncivilized and therefore perfectly evil" (Ivie, "Metaphor" 178). Ivie writes, "Americans traditionally have exonerated themselves of any guilt for war, hot or cold, by decivilizing the image of their adversaries" ("Metaphor" 178). Dobson describes the enemy's ultimate goal as to "destroy traditional marriage" and claims that "they will not stop until they achieve it" (50). He uses slippery slope reasoning to describe what will happen if they get their way, claiming that the legalization of gay marriage will eventually lead to polygamy and other alternative forms of marriage. He writes:

Why will gay marriage set the table for polygamy? Because there is no place to stop once that Rubicon has been crossed. Historically, the definition of marriage has rested on a foundation of tradition, legal precedent, theology, and the overwhelming support of the people. After the introduction of marriage between homosexuals, however, it will be supported by nothing more substantial than the opinion of a single judge or by a black-robed panel of justices. After they have reached their dubious decisions, the family will consist of little more than someone's interpretation of 'rights.' Given that unstable legal climate, it is certain that some self-possessed judge, somewhere, will soon rule that three men or three women can marry. Or five men and two women. Or four and four. Who will be able to deny them that right? The guarantee is implied, we will be told, by the Constitution. Those who disagree will continue to be seen as hatemongers and bigots. (Indeed those charges are already

being leveled against Christians who espouse biblical values!) How about group marriage? Or marriage between daddies and little girls? How about marriage between a man and his donkey? (49)

In other words, gay marriage is the gateway drug to complete perversion. This is a very common practice of the Christian Right, to justify their position by associating it with incest, pedophilia and bestiality. He is essentially implying that being gay is the moral equivalent of these things. And certainly, most reasonable adults would consider incest, pedophilia, and bestiality as morally reprehensible. Therefore, guilt by association leads to the conclusion that gays are moral savages as well. In the bounds of a moral culture, it is conceivable that citizens would differentiate between two adults deciding to commit their lives together, and a father marrying his young daughter or a person marrying an animal. For Dobson, these actions are in the same category. In order to construct support for his contention, he associates same-sex committed relationships with what most would consider morally depraved actions.

Dobson also depicts gays as savages by arguing that they have neither the desire nor ability to be in a committed, monogamous relationship. He writes, “This is the real deal: Most gays and lesbians do not want to marry each other” (50). He goes on to claim, “The homosexual agenda is not marriage for gays. It is marriage for no one. And despite what you read or see in the media, it is definitely not monogamous” (53).

Furthermore, gays are lascivious according to Dobson, “rarely monogamous, often having as many as three hundred or more partners in a lifetime – some studies say it is typically more than one thousand” (54). He disregards the complexities of gay sexuality in a culture that condemns it, and ignores the reality that there are gay individuals that are

in committed, monogamous relationships, thus making it impossible for any identification to occur.

In addition to his generalized assumptions about gay lifestyles and desires, Dobson worries that the moral savagery will go beyond the individuals participating in it. He expresses the fear that this “perversion” will be taught in public schools as “the moral equivalent of traditional marriage between a man and a woman,” despite the fact that the activities they engage in are deviant (56). Moreover, according to Dobson, “By declaring that sodomy is a constitutionally protected ‘right,’ the highest court in the land declared, in effect, the considerations of morality and decency were irrelevant” (41). This, of course, is based on the assumption that courts should legislate morality, beyond protecting people from the actions of others. Does this mean that pre-marital sex should be banned? Of course, he does not answer this question, but it is a logical next step to his reasoning process. Nevertheless, I would presume that he would not go this far, despite the fact that most evangelical Christians believe sex outside of marriage is sinful. It is significant that members of the Christian Right focus on this one particular “sin”, as if it is somehow worse than anything else they consider sinful. It is the worst of the worst, which is simply savagery. Gays have no self-control, the activities they engage in are indecent, and they are working to destroy the institution of the family. Dobson constructs the adversary as irrational, lacking basic relationship skills. They are reduced to their actions (actually just one action), and no longer possess a human face. They must be defeated at any cost.

Illustrating the similarities of Dobson's rhetoric and American war rhetoric, illustrates the ways Dobson dehumanizes gay individuals in order to justify his belligerence. The declarer of the war is portrayed as the victim and therefore without moral responsibility because of the savage attacks of the opposition. There is only one moral perspective in the situation. In the words that Ivie used to describe the justification of the Vietnam War, the enemies are portrayed as a "faceless enemy whose identity [is] reduced to the personification of certain actions" ("Images" 285). It is crucial in understanding this, that Dobson never really addresses the possibility of two committed, monogamous gay individuals, who want to commit their lives to one another in a legally binding, socially significant and possibly religious way. They are never given a human face, much less a voice. They are an "it". His only show of "compassion" for gays is for his desire to help them change. He writes:

At the risk of being misunderstood, let me acknowledge that there is a great reservoir of hatred in the world, and some of it unfortunately gets directed toward homosexuals. It is wrong and hurtful, but it does happen. Every human being is precious to God and is entitled to acceptance and respect. Each of us has a right to be treated with the dignity that comes from being created in the image of God. I have no desire to add to the suffering that homosexuals are already experiencing. In fact, it has been my intention to help relieve suffering by clarifying its causes and pointing to a way out.

Living as a homosexual is not as happy-go-lucky as is frequently portrayed in the entertainment media. This lifestyle is a prison that leaves many individuals feeling hopeless and abandoned by God, family, and society; many of these individuals desperately want to be free of their same-sex attractions and the struggles that come with it. (72 – 73)

Dobson is attempting to portray his approach as one of compassion for gay individuals, however, he ultimately places the blame for their struggle upon them. He charges "believers" to "show compassion and love to those who would be our enemies" (73). But

still, he depicts them as his enemy and his concern for them, centers on his contention that “homosexuality is preventable and treatable” (74). It is easy to justify one’s disparaging words by claiming it is directed at behavior and not the person, commonly known as “hating the sin, but loving the sinner.” But, of course, if one’s sexuality is at the core of oneself, it is difficult to separate orientation and identity. In the same regard Burke observes how Hitler positioned his anti-Semitic rhetoric as emanating in love, Dobson’s love is conditional. The “inborn dignity” is offered only if one will “avail themselves of it, by right thinking and right living” (Burke 202). The conference sponsored by Focus on the Family is even called “Love Won Out”, but its purpose is to distribute information on “addressing, understanding, and preventing homosexuality” (74). In *Marriage Under Fire*, there is a portion that instructs the reader as to how to answer questions people ask about gay marriage. To the question, “Shouldn’t any two people who love each other be committed to one another”, the suggested response that is given is that they can be committed without it being marriage (97). To the question, “Why don’t gays have the same legal right to marry that heterosexuals do,” the recommended answer maintains that they do have the right to marry someone of the opposite sex, but there are restrictions to marriage such as, “You cannot marry if you’re already married; you cannot marry a close relative; an adult cannot marry a child; you cannot marry your pet; and you cannot marry someone of the same sex” (100 – 101). Once again, rather than considering the possibility of two consenting adults, they compare gay relationships to pedophilia and bestiality. The blame for any suffering experienced by gays is placed fully on them, and at no point is cultural

intolerance considered as a possibility for the reason they experience this suffering, nor is lack of compassion from Christians. This is a very conventional approach in American war rhetoric. Ivie writes, “Men, instead must be held accountable and must be punished for their weaknesses. It is thought that perseverance only encourages the enemy to pursue his evil practices, that evil practices perpetuate themselves and gain momentum if they are endured, if they are not stopped by force” (“Presidential” 345). The moral failure of being gay is used to justify their lack of credibility. Essentially they are given no respectable voice to respond in the evangelical Christian community (in fact, anyone who questions this theological position is usually discredited as being a genuine evangelical). They are reduced to sinners who need to repent, and who have no concept of morality and decency. It’s hard to wage a war on someone with whom identification has occurred. This is why depicting gay individuals as a faceless mass of evil doers is so crucial and effective in justifying such hostile rhetoric.

As has been discussed, progressives differ on their moral judgment regarding same-sex orientation. They are, however, consistent in that they object to the way gay individuals are degraded by social conservatives like Dobson. A truly prophetic Christian, according to Brueggemann, demonstrates compassion toward marginalized groups like gays. Wallis laments the depiction of enemies as faceless: “Necessary to the preparation for war is the dehumanization of our enemies. They become sinister and disgusting. Our enemy’s way of life is depicted as inhuman” (*The Call to Conversion* 104 - 105). This mentality denies them the dignity they deserve as fellow humans. The prophetic voice always opposes oppression. Tony Campolo explains:

I believe that if Jesus were in our shoes, he would reach out to love his homosexual brothers and sisters and demand that they be treated justly, that we end the discrimination that has too often made homosexuals into second-class citizens and denied them their constitutional rights. If Jesus were in our shoes, he would work to create an atmosphere in society wherein homosexuals could be open about who they are without fear of oppression and persecution. If Jesus were in our shoes, those with a homosexual orientation would be treated with dignity and respect. (*Adventures* 200)

While many progressives do not support the legalization of gay marriage, they at least support anti-discrimination laws and many support civil unions. Just as important, they emphasize the necessity of treating all people with the love and the respect they deserve as human beings. As an evangelical gay man, Mel White offers a compelling counternarrative to Dobson, clarifying, “Gay and lesbian people do not want or need ‘special rights.’ We are for not against ‘family values.’ We have no ‘agenda’ that threatens the spiritual or moral standards of this nation. We just want the right to love and to be loved without fear, ridicule, or discrimination” (262). Regardless of where progressive evangelicals position themselves on the morality of same-sex relationships, they generally attempt to display a moderate level of respect toward gay individuals, and at the very least, refrain from waging a war on them. Furthermore, they rebuke their fellow believers for their dehumanizing rhetoric.

James Dobson’s rhetoric represents a significant portion of the evangelical population. While he borrows some prophetic strategies, tensions exist that conflict with the prophetic tradition, which is why his rhetoric is limited in terms of prophetic ideals. Darsey explains,

What the contemporary right has in common with the prophetic tradition is the impulse to order. The rigid, formal characteristics of prophetic

discourse create sense out of confusion. They offer clarity and provide direction. Although they emphasize the negative side of this equation, that those on the right should be so obsessed with plots suggests the same impulse. But there is a considerable difference between an order that derives from compassion, is optimistic, and provides direction for the future and one that derives from fear, is faithless, and retreats into the mythical past. The former may be criticized for its utopian excesses, but the latter is the provenance of fascism. The former emphasizes freedom, the latter discipline. The former emphasizes opportunity, the latter impending foreclosure. (205)

In Dobson's rhetoric, the culture war orientation eclipses the prophetic tendencies. The battle over gay marriage is still very intense and the implications of waging war on a group of people are considerable. The struggle within the discourse of evangelicalism is not necessarily over gay marriage, but the words used to articulate political positions. Furthermore, placing gay marriage at the top of the evangelical agenda, instead of issues such as poverty and AIDS is another manifestation of the conflict related to this subject. As it will become evident, the sites of contestation cannot always be reduced to two sides of an issue. This struggle is far more complicated than that. Nevertheless, the willingness of some to confront their fellow evangelicals with their faith as they interpret it provides hope that there is the possibility for change.

Works Cited

- Alexander-Moegerle, Gil. *James Dobson's War On America*. Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1997.
- Brueggemann, Walter. *The Prophetic Imagination*. 2nd Ed. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001.
- Burke, Kenneth. "The Rhetoric of Hitler's Battle." *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, 3rd ed. Berkeley: University of California Press: 1973.
- Burlein, Ann. *Lift High the Cross*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2002.
- Campolo, Tony. *Speaking My Mind*. Nashville: W. Publishing Group, 2004.
- Carter, Jimmy. *Our Endangered Values: Americas Moral Crisis*. New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2005.
- Darsey, James. *The Prophetic Tradition and Radical Rhetoric in America*. New York: New York University Press, 1997.
- Diamond, Sara. *Facing the Wrath: Confronting the Right in Dangerous Times*. Monroe: Common Courage Press, 1996.
- Diamond, Sara. *Not by Politics Alone: The Enduring Influence of the Christian Right*. New York: The Guilford Press, 1998.
- Dobson, James, and Gary L. Bauer. *Children at Risk*. Dallas, Word Publishing, 1990.
- Dobson, James. *Family Under Fire*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1976.
- Dobson, James. *Marriage Under Fire*. Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah, 2004.
- Dobson, James. *Straight Talk to Men*. Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah, 1984, 1991.
- Focus on the Family. 25 Feb. 2009
<http://www.focusonthefamily.com/about_us/profiles/dr_james_dobson.aspx>.
- Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality Volume I: An Introduction*. Trans, Robert Hurley. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.
- Grudem, Wayne, and John Piper, ed. *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*. Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1991.

- Healy, Rita. "Is Dobson's Political Clout Fading?" *Time* 24 Jan. 2008. 11 Mar. 2009 <http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1706650,00.html>.
- Ivie, Robert L. "Images of Savagery." *Communication Monographs* 47 (1980): 279 – 291.
- Ivie, Robert L. "Metaphor and the Rhetorical Invention of Cold War 'Idealists.'" *Communication Monographs* 54 (1987): 165 – 182.
- Ivie, Robert L. "Presidential Motives for War." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 60 (1974): 337 – 345.
- Martin, William. *With God on Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America*. New York: Broadway Books, 1997.
- McLaren, Brian. "Brian McLaren on the Homosexual Question: Finding a Pastoral Response." *Leadership Journal*. 23 Jan. 2006. 23 Feb. 2009 <http://blog.christianitytoday.com/outofur/archives/2006/01/brian_mclaren_o.html>.
- McLaren, Brian. "Brian McLaren on the Homosexual Question 4: McLaren's Response." 30 Jan. 2006. 23 Feb. 2009 <http://blog.christianitytoday.com/outofur/archives/2006/01/brian_mclaren_o_3.html>.
- McLaren, Brian D. *Everything Must Change*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007.
- McLaren, Brian D., and Tony Campolo. *Adventures in Missing the Point*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003.
- Patel, Eboo. "Embracing Evangelicals." 15 Nov. 2007. 12 Mar. 2009 <http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/eboo_patel/2007/11/embracing_evangelicals.html>.
- Piper, John. "A Vision of Biblical Complementarity: Manhood and Womanhood Defined According to the Bible." *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*. Grudem, Wayne, and John Piper, ed. Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1991.
- Piper, John, and Wayne Grudem. "An Overview of Central Concerns: Questions and Answers." *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*. Grudem, Wayne, and John Piper, ed.

- Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1991.
- Piper, John, and Wayne Grudem. "Charity, Clarity, and Hope: The Controversy and the Cause of Christ." *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*. Grudem, Wayne, and John Piper, ed. Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1991.
- Wallis, Jim. *The Call to Conversion*. New York: HarperCollins, 1981, Revised 2005.
- Wallis, Jim. *God's Politics*. New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005.
- Wallis, Jim. *Who Speaks for God?* New York: Delacorte Press, 1996.
- Weber, Stu. *Tender Warriors: God's Intention For A Man*. Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah, 1993.
- White, Mel. *Stranger at the Gate*. New York: Penguin Books,

¹ Please understand that I am not arguing that all who interpret the Bible to promote heteronormativity are doing so out of their desire to maintain patriarchy. I recognize that there are egalitarian Christians who have a more conservative interpretation of sexuality. I am merely suggesting that human motives underlying biblical interpretation is far more complicated than the conception of biblical inerrancy.

CHAPTER SEVEN

COMPASSION INJUNCTION: LOVE COVENANT

Through the centuries, compassion for the suffering of the underprivileged has manifested in various cultural groups. At times, it has been emphasized as a high priority for Christian believers, while at other times, hardly acknowledged. Usually, charity is touted as an important value for followers of the faith, combined with evangelism, while less action is directed toward alleviating the root causes. Most recently, there has been a revival of evangelical concern for the poor, resounding particularly with young evangelicals. This compassion is represented by the effort to relieve the suffering caused by poverty and/or disease. Among these evangelicals, service may be focused on local communities, the world, or both. The rhetoric motivated by this compassion for others manifests differently than culture war rhetoric. I will argue in this chapter that this rhetoric can be generally interpreted as prophetic rhetoric. Obviously, many political ideologies make prophetic claims, but prophetic rhetoric is characterized by certain essentials: the claim to be speaking for God, confrontation of the dominant culture/power, being reform-minded, motivation by a crisis or crises, and being countercultural. Progressive evangelical, Brian McLaren consistently represents all of these elements in his book *Everything Must Change* which seeks to reorient evangelicals in their mission as representatives and proponents of the Christian faith. He grieves the political direction that evangelicalism has taken in the U.S. and attempts to reprioritize compassion and

service to those who are suffering because of poverty and/or disease (along with care for the earth). In this chapter, I will outline the history of evangelicals and compassion, summarize the relevant written work of McLaren, apply the methodological perspectives of James Darsey and Walter Brueggemann to part seven of the McLaren text, *Everything Must Change*, and finally, contrast this style with conservative rhetoric. Ultimately, I will argue that this selection of text provides a striking contrast to the culture war rhetoric of Christian Right representatives such as James Dobson. The conflict between conservatives and progressives related to this issue is regarding the extent of the role of government and the level of priority it should be made. No evangelical, however, will make the argument that Christians are not called to serve the less fortunate, because it is emphasized extensively throughout the Bible.

EVANGELICALS AND COMPASSION

Throughout the nation's history, compassion for those who are suffering has been prioritized at different levels and suggestions about solutions for sources of alleviating that suffering have fluctuated between private charity, church, and government. As discussed in an earlier chapter, the Social Gospel movement "was a force from roughly 1880 to the start of the Great Depression in 1929" (Noll 304). A new consciousness arose among many that elevated concerns about the struggles of those around them. Walter Rauschenbusch authored *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, *Prayers of the Social Awakening*, *Christianizing the Social Order*, and *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, in which he "combined a prophetic ideal of justice with a commitment to building the kingdom of God through the power of Christ" (Noll 306). This mentality was represented by William Jennings Bryan who promoted better treatment of workers, particularly farmers (Noll 300 – 301). Tony Campolo observes that Bryan, in addition

to Charles Finney who was an abolitionist, was one of the earliest progressive evangelicals. Bryan “was committed to protecting common citizens from such unscrupulous corporate giants, and promoted the needed anti-trust legislation that reined in destructive monopolies of the business world. It was Bryan’s call for government controls on industry that generated enough public support to bring an end to factories and mines utilizing child labor to maximize profits” (16 – 17). While this movement had its populist incantations, it was mostly associated with a liberal theology, which ultimately contributed to its demise.

Two factors promoted the decline of the Social Gospel among evangelicals: fundamentalism and premillennialism. Fundamentalism resisted the influence of liberal theology while premillennialism advanced the notion that since the world was likely in the end times, saving souls was more important. Even before those two theological influences were mainstream among evangelicals, Dwight L. Moody represented the belief that it was imperative to focus on evangelism rather than serving people because the former was more important to a person’s eternal life. This mentality, along with the fundamentalist opposition to liberal theology led to the Great Reversal (86). It was feared that the Social Gospel movement focused on social service to the point of deemphasizing personal salvation. “When fundamentalists began using their heavy artillery against liberal theology, the Social Gospel was among the prime targets. In the barrage against the Social Gospel it was perhaps inevitable that the vestiges of their own progressive social attitudes would also become casualties” (Marsden 91). For decades after this, while continuing to have ministries for the poor in their churches, evangelicals prioritized evangelism over service.

Another important factor to consider that influenced evangelical compassion for the poor is the fusion of American values and Christianity creating a unique understanding of the faith.

Along with the ideals of individualism and capitalism, it is believed that charity should be privately funded (in the hands of churches) rather than publicly funded (by government). Nathan Hatch argues that because of the democratic tendencies in this country, Christianity became dominated by populist forces. This is significant because evangelicals were less likely to support larger social programs that addressed the needs of the poor believing that this was the role of church. Hatch observes, “In the aftermath of the Second Great Awakening, many Americans divorced religious leadership from social position, completing a separation that had been building for a century. They ascribed authority to preachers ill qualified to stand for public office” (226). According to Hatch, this explains the success of recent evangelical leaders, such as Billy Graham, Robert Schuller, Jerry Falwell, and Pat Robertson (211). Moreover, because of evangelicalism’s populist resonance, followers were more distrustful of voices coming from within the university. This, of course, was represented and reinforced by fundamentalism. While, not necessarily having a strong influence on the dominant culture, this mentality strongly continued to represent evangelicals for many years eventually culminating in the resonance and success of the Christian Right.

Conservative Evangelicals

While the Christian Right is most notable for its articulation of conservative cultural values, fiscal conservatism is a significant piece of its political agenda. This has manifested as a lack of support for social programs and apathy toward global suffering for many years. Capitalism is embraced as God’s economic plan. Michael Lienesch writes that, “Within the New Christian Right, free enterprise is seen as an ethical system as well as an economic one. Ardent advocates of American capitalism, the authors wax eloquent on its moral meaning” (99). This

includes early Christian Right leaders such as Jesse Helms, Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, and the Christian Coalition. Often times, support of any kind of social program is reacted to suspiciously and accused of having socialist motivations. Lienesch observes, “In Christian capitalist theory, distributive equality is synonymous with socialism. Contrasting capitalism to socialism, its champions collapse all differences into a single distinction: capitalism produces; socialism distributes” (120). Thus, Christian political conservatives have been very reluctant to embrace government policies that aid the poor insisting that this is the responsibility of the church and should be done in such a way that advances the gospel at the same time. For example, while acknowledging the responsibility of Christians to respond to world hunger, Jerry Falwell specifies that this should only be done in partnership with evangelism, writing, “feeding the masses without giving them the Gospel will not change them.... We must do both and we must do it now” (208). This illustrates the conditional grounds upon which service is based – it is not simply to relieve the misery of the poor, but to change them. Accordingly, if service should not be absent evangelism, this excludes any type of government service because of the separation of church and state. Furthermore, government social programs are nothing more than socialism, which is both ineffective and dangerous. Concern for the poor is not a political priority for the Christian Right. This is evidenced by the Christian Coalition’s “2009 Legislative Agenda”:

Preventing Passage of the “Freedom of Choice Act”

Oppose liberal judicial nominees

Protect the Defense of Marriage Act

Oppose any Re-introduction of the “Fairness Doctrine”

Oppose Expansion of Human Embryonic Stem Cell Research

Defend the 2001 Tax Cuts

Oppose Nationalization of Health Care

Protecting Religious Programming

Prevent Discrimination on the Internet by Passing “Net Neutrality”

Ending religious discrimination against Christians in the military

Not one element of their agenda concerns alleviating poverty. They have, in fact, resisted adding this and other more progressive issues to their list of political ideals. Rev. Joel Hunter had been selected to be president of the group in 2006, but resigned the post before taking office because of this very issue (Wallis 96). He stated, “I wanted to expand the issues from only moral ones—such as opposing abortion and redefining marriage—to include compassion issues such as poverty, justice, and creation care,” but the Christian Coalition leadership opposed this (Wallis 96). It is clear that the Christian Coalition does not consider opposing poverty a worthy political goal.

Progressive Evangelicals

Concern for the poor has always been the highest priority for progressive evangelicals and many argue that their effort to urge a reorientation in the political values of mainstream evangelicalism is finally coming to fruition. Jim Wallis, in his most recent book, *The Great Awakening*, articulates two cultural shifts that are influencing the way evangelicals approach politics. First, “evangelicals are deserting the Religious Right in droves, especially among a new generation of pastors and young people. The evangelical social agenda is now much broader and deeper, engaging issues such as poverty and economic justice, global warming, HIV/AIDS, sex trafficking, genocide in Darfur, and the ethics of the war in Iraq” (5). Second, “the left—including Democrats—is starting to get it. Progressive politics is remembering its own religious

history and recovering the language of faith. Democrats are learning to connect issues with values, engaging with the faith community, and running more candidates who have been emboldened to come out of the closet as believers” (5). Thus, according to Wallis, evangelical political identification is finally beginning to both transcend political party and resonate within both parties. The nation has moved into what he calls a “post-Religious Right era”, which simply means that “its ‘era,’ the peak of its influence, and its monopoly over faith and politics are now gone” (6). This was exemplified in the 2008 presidential election where the candidate from the Democratic Party was more comfortable expressing his personal faith than the Republican candidate. Wallis argues that many of the values held by Christian conservative are more complex and should be understood in terms of their economic components. The “family values” theme that conservatives recite should be considered in light of poverty’s effect. For example:

Although divorce is the greatest disrupter to marriage and children today, it is often an unspoken issue in the heated cultural debates over family values. Divorce rates seem to be declining for college-educated couples with higher incomes, but are much higher for lower-income families. What does that tell us about the importance of security and stability for successful family life? When will we understand that goals such as universal health care, affordable housing, and living-wage incomes are pro-marriage and family programs? (228 – 229)

In other words, the social policies promoted by conservatives are not conducive to the values they claim to represent. Another example is the moral issue of abortion. Wallis argues that the abortion rate would decrease with more compassionate fiscal policies, noting that the abortion rate increased under George W. Bush “likely with the decreasing status of low-income women and families” (193). This perspective has become a new way of approaching the abortion issue for many evangelicals, changing the focus from outlawing abortion rights to reducing the number of abortions. Wallis calls his fellow evangelicals into account when he proclaims, “When Jesus

tells us that he will regard the way we treat the hungry, the homeless, the immigrant, the poor family, the sick, or the prisoner, as if we were treating him that way, it likely means he wouldn't think ignoring them is good domestic policy" (300). This mentality finally seems to be making progress among, particularly younger evangelicals, but even the mainstream of evangelicalism resulting in a more pronounced commitment for alleviation of poverty and AIDS.

This is the mindset that lead to the formation of Red letter Christians. Theologically the two groups are very similar, but according to Campolo, "What differentiates Red Letter Christians from other Christians is our passionate commitment to social justice" (23). Campolo articulates the different ways the two groups approach politics and advocates one over the other. He differentiates between authority and power, borrowing the notion from Max Weber, "*power* entails the ability to coerce or to impose your will on others. Conversely, *authority* is having the legitimate right in the eyes of others to expect that proposals will be embraced and followed" (37 – 38). Authority is what Christians should be seeking, rather than power. According to Campolo, "Authority is earned through sacrifice" (39). He explains:

I contend that Christians will only have authority if they first serve the needs of others in sacrificial ways, especially the poor and oppressed. When those who hold power witness how Christians live out love—meeting the needs of others and binding up the wounds of those who have been left hurting on society's waysides—Christians will earn the authority to speak. When Christians sacrificially give of their time and resources to run soup kitchens for the hungry and provide shelters for the homeless, they gain the right to be heard. When they tutor poor children and care for those with AIDS, they expand their mandate to call for change. But before they speak, Christians must demonstrate God's love through sacrificial ministries. Sacrifice gives them the ability to be taken seriously by those who seem to be in control of the political machines. (40)

Furthermore, like Wallis, Campolo argues that opposing abortion should be economic. There would be fewer abortions if Medicaid covered contraception and if government provided health coverage for pregnant women (121). He calls for prophetic political candidates that reject self-

centered politics. “As we face the political challenges of our times, we need visionaries as our candidates. We ought to look for men and women who dare to point Americans away from our self-centered, consumeristic values so that we might be a light on a hill, modeling something of God’s Kingdom here on earth” (203). Campolo continues, “The Hebrew prophets were visionaries in that same spirit, men who envisioned the world as God wanted it to be—a world of peace and well-being” (203). Prophets challenge the comfort and excess of the people in order to provide well-being to the rest of the world. This conviction is echoed by Brian McLaren.

BRIAN McLAREN

According to his website, McLaren participated in founding Cedar Ridge Community Church in 1982 and later served as its pastor until 2006. He has authored several books and is a sought after lecturer. McLaren has written a series of fictional discussions about the Christian faith, which he describes as “creative non-fiction”. The first book in the series, *A New Kind of Christian*, is the novel for which he is best known. The story is framed as a discussion between two characters through which McLaren introduces a postmodern perspective to Christianity. For these emerging church thinkers, the issue is not that there is no truth, but simply questions whether what has been traditionally represented as truth is correct. The next book in the series is *The Story We Find Ourselves in*, which deals with the subjects of evolution (and whether it’s compatible with Christianity) and how faith should inform a Christian’s perspective on the environment. Finally, the third book in the series is *The Last Word and the Word after That*, which takes up the theological issue of the existence of hell and questions whether the traditional Christian conception of hell is consistent with the gospel of Jesus. The intention is not just to call into question the existence of hell, but to influence the way we understand God, as a loving

God, not a relentless punisher. These novels all seek to challenge conventional evangelical conceptions of theological issues. The ultimate goal is to provoke the faithful to think more complexly about notions of truth and understanding.

A different type of book is *a Generous Orthodoxy*, which is essentially McLaren's statement of faith. As the title implies, McLaren takes the general position that there is truth, but we may not know exactly what it is, thus the selection of the seemingly oxymoronic title. McLaren argues that the Jesus created in American Christianity is inconsistent with the Jesus of the Bible. Jesus was, in fact, a revolutionary and would not be accepted by most American Christians today (97). It is important to consider, according to McLaren, the meaning of savior. In the United States, Christians, particularly evangelicals, purport to base their faith on Jesus being their savior. McLaren contends that this is based on a limited understanding of the term. Rather than Jesus simply being a personal savior, this conception should extend to Jesus being the savior of the whole world (109). The word "save" means more than just giving eternal life. It includes rescuing, healing, and getting people out of trouble, such as sickness, war, oppression, and/or poverty (101). Therefore, spreading the gospel encompasses more than just getting personal faith conversions, but also saving people from their life-threatening circumstances. Believers should be missional which means, "To be and make disciples of Jesus Christ in authentic community for the good of the whole world" (117). This, however, consists of much more than making disciples. McLaren explains:

Missional Christian faith asserts that Jesus did *not* come to make some people saved and others condemned. Jesus did *not* come to help some people be right while leaving everyone else to be wrong. Jesus did *not* come to create another exclusive religion—Judaism having been exclusive based on genetics, and Christianity being exclusive based on belief (which can be a tougher requirement than genetics!).

Missional faith asserts that Jesus came to preach the good news of the kingdom of God to everyone, especially the poor. He came to seek and save the

lost. He came on behalf of the sick. He came to save the world. His gospel, and therefore the Christian message, is good news for the whole world (120).

McLaren laments the exclusivity that has come to represent American Christianity. Furthermore, he suggests that the reality of this expression of the faith is founded in understanding Jesus as one's personal savior, but not as Lord (94 – 95). American Christians have welcomed the notion of personal salvation in their lives, but have failed to change their lives to look like Jesus.

While *a Generous Orthodoxy* is a personal statement of faith, McLaren's book, *Everything Must change* is the social culmination of this faith. Generally, he seeks to confront the premillennialist approach of mainstream evangelicalism that has largely ignored the suffering that exists in the world. The problem is that, "by postponing the essence of salvation to the afterlife, and by assuming that God plans to destroy the earth, the conventional view leads us to assume that the world will get worse and worse, and that this deterioration is in fact God's will or plan.... To put it bluntly, in terms of humanity and this earth, the conventional view too easily creates—unintentionally, of course—a kind of religious death-wish" (81 -82). This perspective sees destruction and suffering in the world as an inevitability that is part of God's plan. Instead, McLaren argues, Christians should be focused on bettering this world. He writes, "Part of what it means to be 'a new kind of Christian' is to discover or rediscover what the essential message of Jesus is about.... Jesus' message is not actually about escaping this troubled world for heaven's blissful shores, as is popularly assumed, but instead is about God's will being done on this troubled earth as it is in heaven." (4). In other words, the gospel should be addressing the urgency of personal suffering rather than postponing salvation until the afterlife. Tragically, however, Christians are participating in the system that is causing this suffering for many. McLaren calls this the "suicide machine", which, "co-opts the main mechanisms of our civilization—our economic, political, and military systems—and reprograms

them to destroy those they should serve” (5). Unlike traditional evangelicals, he critiques the fact that merely participating in an unjust system implicates everyone with guilt. This suicide machine has resulted in global crises: the prosperity crisis, (“environmental breakdown caused by our unsustainable global economy”); the equity crisis, (gap between the rich and poor); the security crisis, (danger of cataclysmic war); and the spirituality crisis, (failure of the world’s religions) (5). Because the machinery of society has become destructive in so many ways, the only solution is to overturn it. McLaren posits, “There is much to dismantle, much to overturn, much to rebuild, much to imagine and create, and there are many seeds to be sown and grown” (7). His worldview differs from conservative evangelicalism in several ways. Both McLaren and premillennialists perceive society as destroying itself through sin, but focus on different types of sin (for example environmental destruction versus sexual deviance). Premillennialists believe that this is unavoidable to bring back the conditions that will prompt Jesus’ return. McLaren maintains that we can change this path and that this destruction of the earth and the people in it is far from God’s plan. He explains the problem:

The society machine becomes suicidal when humanity trades God’s original creative narrative for a selfish and destructive framing story of its own. Driven by this alien story, some seek profit that will make others poor. They seek security that will make others insecure. They seek equity for themselves but are insensitive to the plight of others. Their pleasure inflicts pain on others. Their gain means loss for others. They seek and use power and freedom in ways that will injure, dehumanize, reduce, or oppress others. (129)

This type of world cannot be what God intended, especially with “His people” participating in the cause of so much suffering. The evangelical *modus operandi* should instead be defined by personal sacrifice. He describes what this should look like:

While most of us won’t be called to sacrifice our physical lives (but many may), having faith *in* Jesus and sharing the faith *of* Jesus will lead all of us to make what an early disciple called “a living sacrifice.” We will give up the life we could have lived, the life we would have lived—pursuing pleasure, leisure, treasure,

security, whatever. And instead, we will live a life dedicated to replacing the suicide machine with a sacred ecosystem, a beautiful community, an insurgency of healing and peace, a creative global family, an unterror movement of faith, hope, and love. (277)

This is a radical contrast to the way evangelicals have expressed their worldview in the United States and thus would be a revolutionary change. McLaren describes this as a “revolution of hope” (267). The first change that needs to be made is attitudinal. He suggests, “the revolution we need starts in us—in our minds, our hearts—as an act of faith, a transfer of trust from the dominant system to a new way of seeing, believing, and living” (271). Next, the believer must adopt change on many levels: personal, communal, public, and global. Consistent with Brueggemann’s description of the prophetic consciousness, McLaren describes a transformation that extends far beyond social change.

Everything Must Change

Revolution vs. Self-Preservation

For the purpose of having a reasonable length of text to analyze, I have limited my criticism to part seven of McLaren’s book, which comprises approximately 40 pages. It is important, however, to acknowledge that the entirety of the book could be used to illustrate my argument, and in some cases even better examples outside of this portion of text could be found. Nevertheless, it is necessary to limit the scope of this segment and, therefore, this selection of text is made. Overall, however, part seven best exemplifies the elements of prophetic discourse. The first point that must be established is that the McLaren selection fulfills the basic premise of prophetic rhetoric. Darsey specifies that prophetic rhetoric, like the prophets in the Old Testament, promotes radical reform and seeks to overturn the dominant culture. Brueggemann also argues that it is countercultural and revolutionary, asserting, “The dominant consciousness

must be radically criticized and the dominant community must be finally dismantled. The purpose of an alternative community with an alternative consciousness is for the sake of that criticism and dismantling” (81). This is the central function of a prophetic ministry. He continues, “But more than dismantling, the purpose of the alternative community is to enable a new human beginning to be made” (101). The concept of dismantling means that the changes promoted are radical enough to recreate that which is being critiqued. Thus, an evangelicalism that is mainstream and status quo is not a prophetic representation of the Christian faith, particularly one that is part of an oppressive system. Whereas a voice within evangelicalism, like McLaren’s, which challenges the dominant culture in such an extreme way, by introducing a new way, more consistently represents the prophetic tradition. First, he describes Jesus as “the Rebel Jesus” (227). Calling Jesus a rebel should not be reduced to the intent to make Christianity sound cool, but to represent the reality that the life of Jesus confronted the cultural, political, and religious norms of his day. This is not a new interpretation, but to actually display this level of confrontation is unusual for contemporary evangelicals. Like the rebel Jesus, McLaren challenges extreme capitalist ideology and asks, “What are we free for?”:

What are markets to be free from? What are they freed for? For what purpose? Are markets freed from government regulation so that the rich can achieve luxurious levels of wealth, leaving the poor to starve or barely survive in degradation and indignity? Are markets free so that inequity can reach its apogee, providing liberty and justice for a very few? Are markets free so that those who plunder the environment can do so without accountability, or so that those who exploit the labor of the poor can do so without impunity? Is there no equity system that seeks to redress these injustices? Are the powerful free for the purpose of pursuing prosperity and security without equity? (231)

Essentially McLaren appropriates a Leftist economic position to critique the capitalist reality of the rich exploitation of the poor. In a culture that embraces capitalism, especially among evangelicals, this is a radical approach. It provides a stark contrast to the Christian Right’s

ordination of the free market. His questions demonstrate the absurdity of connecting the teachings of Jesus and a maximization of profit that comes at the expense of others. He makes the point that seeking to increase the wealth of some, while others are left to barely survive, is antithetical to the way Jesus lived and what he taught. McLaren continues his Leftist line of questioning considering:

*What's wrong with a growing gap between rich and poor? Isn't it a good thing that rich people are being rewarded for their hard work? People who ask such questions often haven't seen what I've seen: huge factories where people—mostly women, and often, mostly young girls—work harder than any CEO has ever worked, running sewing machines for eighteen hours a day, seven days a week, earning pennies an hour. They are glad for these jobs because they are much better than having no work and no income at all. But their labor enriches, not them, but already-rich people in New York, Los Angeles, Paris, London, or Hong Kong. This kind of inequity can only lead in one direction: *revolution*. (234 – 235)*

He takes the drastic step of calling for revolution to overturn the economic injustice and inequality that capitalism has created. While most American evangelicals benefit from the oppressive system, McLaren calls them to accountability through his version of the Christian faith. It is important to clarify that, according to McLaren, churches alone cannot solve this problem that is at its core systemic, and this injustice that exists contributes to both the wealth of the rich and the poverty of the poor (237). Furthermore, this inequity must be exposed, confronted, and resolved (241). Unlike the mainstream and conservative evangelicals who have either ignored or justified the disparity between the rich and poor, all the while being beneficiaries of it, McLaren contrasts this reality to the message of Jesus who confronted the same kind of economic injustice.

Contemporary conservative evangelicals, on the other hand, are resistant to change, which they often see as a threat to their way of life, prompting them to respond defensively.

Much of the explanation of the Christian Coalition's legislative agenda is structured as a defense of their values and lives. For example:

We support the nomination of judges that will uphold the Constitution as it was originally written by our Founding Fathers – not seek to re-write it to their own ideological ends, or make law from the bench....

It seems that everywhere you look, the traditional definition of marriage is under attack as liberals seek to radically redefine an institution that has existed for thousands of years. In recent years it has come under attack by left-wing judges who have sought to redefine marriage by judicial decree....

Christian Coalition of America will fight to ensure that evangelical military chaplains and other personnel are not discriminated against as they have been during the past number of decades.... The Air Force and Navy had surrendered to atheist activists and left-wing Members of Congress in adopting these ill-advised regulations.

Like Dobson, these Christian citizens are simply trying to preserve their way of life against a social force that is seeking to destroy it. Traditional values are under attack and they are left with no choice but to fight back. Here, their approach to politics is defensive. McLaren is advocating a revolution, while conservatives are protecting their way of life.

Prophetic Logos: God vs. GOP

McLaren's writing represents his voice and the ensuing movement as messengers of God, what Darsey describes as the prophetic logos. According to Darsey, a prophet reasserts God's covenant (truth) with God's people. McLaren insists, "It is clear that Jesus' framing story of the kingdom of God calls for this kind of revolution of values and hope" (255). This is not just McLaren's passion but, in his view, the mandate of the message of Jesus as found within the pages of the Bible. As Darsey observes, this type of rhetoric is enthymematic in that it confronts a culture with its own values. McLaren is holding Christian believers responsible by contending that a consistent interpretation of the Bible that they look to for guidance requires them to uphold

this ideal. Evangelicals hold up the Bible as the only sacred text, and McLaren is using this to contrast with their current values and lives. Specifically, he is concerned with compassion for the poor, but he broadens the extent to which this concern should be applied. Traditionally this has been understood among evangelicals as a calling for churches to serve the poor in some way, but McLaren represents this position to mean social justice that cannot be achieved without systemic reform. He calls them into account writing, “More and more Christians and churches, thankfully, are also showing a concern to show *kindness* or *compassion*—helping the victims of injustice through mission trips, giving to social needs, and so on. But the number of individuals and churches focused on *doing justice* remains disproportionately low” (247). In other words, to get at the root of the problem and affect enduring relief, changes will need to be made on a fundamental level. The current approach, according to McLaren, is asking little of believers and only minimally assuaging suffering. Christians have strayed far from Jesus’ message and God’s covenant by failing to alleviate the affliction that exists in this world and becoming complacent with superficial solutions that only address effects and not causes. McLaren is rearticulating God’s desire to bring healing and restoration in spiritual and physical ways. Darsey explains that, “it is precisely because the prophet engages his society over its most central and fundamental values that he is radical” (20). Nevertheless, it is not the prophet’s suggestion, but God’s command.

The Christian Right may claim to be speaking for God, but represented within their political ideology is a foundation based on fiscal conservatism, rather than spiritual revelation. Using capitalist principles as a large part of the economic aspect of their political agenda contradicts their prophetic voice. According to Darsey, “The prophets were called by God as a corrective to this failure of perception, this intoxication with the world. The prophets were, in

part, seers; for the most part, they were uninfected by and renounced worldly comfort, and they commanded the people to use their senses, long fallen into desuetude” (19). Many have long questioned the slate of political goals advanced by the Christian Coalition, and its remarkable similarity to the Republican Party’s platform. Much of their agenda is facilitated by conservative principles. For example, in opposing nationalization of health care, (which progressives argue is a critical element of compassion for the poor,) they explain, “We believe doctors should have the flexibility to practice medicine according to the needs of their patients, not government mandates. We don’t believe government has a track record of success Americans can trust to run a quality health care system. The solution to our health care problems lies with more patient and consumer control, not more government control.” This conservative philosophy of less government fails to consider the moral implications of ignoring the suffering of fellow citizens. The connection cannot be made between this economic theory and faith-based compassion for others, (universal health care would hurt more people than help,) because it has no logical integrity with the rest of their discourse. This is not to say they do not express compassion through their religious ministries, but this is not represented by the economic political policies advanced by their movement. Therefore, any appeals relating the two should be dismissed, and the argument should be seen for what it is: an appeal to fiscal conservatism. Utilizing worldly theory to justify positions is not immoral, but it is also not prophetic, again differentiating the conservative economic approach from the progressive. The struggle can be understood as a tension between faith and partisanship.

Pathos of Prophecy: Compassion vs. Capitalism

McLaren also represents what Darsey calls a pathos of prophecy in that he illuminates a crisis and expresses judgment about the failure of the community of believers to maintain the terms of the covenant. Even the book title, *Everything Must Change*, connotes an urgency about the message being advanced. There is an incomparable exigency that compels the rhetoric into being. Millions of people all over the world lack basic needs (food, clean water, medicine, etc.,) and are currently living in misery or dying because of this. McLaren identifies the collective sin of Christians as their apathy to this fundamental injustice (244). Darsey explains that, “The prophet, by his calling, becomes the vessel of Yahweh’s pathos, a symbol of divine compassion, and a vehicle for the reconciliation of humanity to God” (26). McLaren laments the fact that, “six million children under the age of five starve each year—an annual unacknowledged holocaust” (233). This is a tragedy that grieves God, especially when it could be so easily prevented. Darsey posits that, “The prophet demands that the people give up their worldly comforts and follow him into the purity of the wilderness” (Darsey 27). McLaren summons sacrifice, “we will call the rich to generosity, as Jesus frequently did. We will call the comfortable to turn from their own endless enrichment and to instead invest their energies for the good of their poorer neighbors. In today’s world, this would often involve using their entrepreneurial skills to create good jobs, since unemployment is at the core of so many of the sufferings of the poor, including substance abuse, violence, and disease” (246). It is a moral failure for followers of Jesus to be living in excess amounts of wealth while others are suffering and dying due to such easily resolved issues such as food, water, and medicine. The crises that McLaren describes are both physical and spiritual. The physical crisis is the suffering of the people around the world. The spiritual crisis is the fact that God’s people allow this to occur,

especially while living with so much prosperity. The result is an expression of deserving judgment on the people for existing apathetically while others are in misery. The people contribute to the pain of others by their persistent pursuit of wealth. This is violating God's command to love one's neighbor. A prophet's message is not easy for the people to hear and accept but it must be expressed, and the sin of the people must be exposed. This can be further explained as functioning as mortification as described by Kenneth Burke. As explained earlier, Burke posits that guilt is intrinsic to the idea of covenant and therefore requires some sort of victimage. In this case, McLaren seeks to identify the sin of the people and call for repentance manifesting as sacrifice. He observes, "I think about the United States, growing ever more conservative because it has so much to conserve, spending larger and larger percentages—obscene and irrational percentages—of its unbalanced budget on an elusive abstraction called *security* (which is elusive and abstract as *growth*)" (248 – 249). This is particularly tragic given the suffering that exists in the world. McLaren asks his fellow believers, "*What kind of world will we who are comparatively rich and powerful bequeath to our children and grandchildren if we do not redirect our energies from accumulation, and self-protection toward compassion, service, and equity? And what kind of world will we bequeath to future generations if equity becomes our sacred passion and personal ambition?*" (254). He calls on them to sacrifice their personal comforts and ambitions for a greater purpose.

On issues of economic justice, Christian Right rhetoric can rarely be characterized as compassionate. For example, one of James Dobson's reasons for opposing gay marriage is because of the strain on the health care and social security systems (58 – 59). He writes, "This could be the straw that breaks the back of the insurance industry in Western nations, as millions of new dependents become eligible for coverage. Every HIV-positive patient needs only to find

a partner to receive the same coverage as offered to an employee” (58). The implication is that it would be better for the sick person to go without health care, than for the insurance industry to be strained. While, as it was explained, Dobson in some ways represents prophetic elements in his argumentation against gay marriage, the use of economic rationale is inconsistent with the prophetic tradition. Brueggemann describes the antithesis of this attitude, “Jesus in his solidarity with the marginal ones is *moved to compassion*. Compassion constitutes a radical form of criticism, for it announces that the hurt is to be taken seriously, that the hurt is not to be accepted as normal and natural but is an abnormal and unacceptable condition for humanness” (88). This lack of genuine compassion for the needs of the people is the reason David Kuo gave as his reason for leaving the Bush administration, and consequently, Republican Party politics. While they would certainly maintain that they are motivated by compassion in their concern for the unborn, their economic positions do not reflect a compassion for the needy.

Prophetic Ethos: Self vs. Other

Lastly, McLaren possesses a prophetic ethos in that he is a servant of God. Darsey explains that, “As the messenger of God’s judgment, the prophet presents himself not as hero, but as God’s servant. The role is one of submission to God’s call” (28). The prophet’s credibility comes not from his expertise nor his motivation from his personal agenda, but directly from serving God. Furthermore, “The role of the prophet is not a role one seeks; it is a role with which one is burdened” (28). This eliminates the opportunist who uses the Bible to buttress their personal or their group’s personal best interests at the expense of others. McLaren clarifies, “My writing and your reading of this book, in a sense, can be seen as our joint attempt to encourage this struggle, to educate and to persuade and to foment, so that the prophetic social justice

movement that is trying to be born can be born. If we follow the educational and persuasive strategy of Jesus, one of our first and most important activities will be to ask a new kind of question, because the right questions cause people to think rather than react” (253). He describes himself as a visionary being used by God to participate in the inception of a movement, particularly a new age of evangelical Christian faith. McLaren presents movement as explicitly ordained by God and this is what provides its justification. This is not a movement seeking self-preservation and/or maintaining its economic dominance, but one that will lead to personal and group sacrifices (think higher taxes) in order to promote God’s radical agenda. McLaren continues, “It is clear that Jesus’ framing story of the kingdom of God calls for this kind of revolution of values and hope. It is not clear how many believers in Jesus today will open their hearts to this revolution” (255). Most often, in fact, the prophetic message is rejected by the dominant culture. Nevertheless, the prophet is compelled to communicate the message – to speak truth to power. The prophet confidently expresses this message as one given by God and therefore as God’s will. Whether or not the majority of believers endorses and eventually follows the message is irrelevant. What matters is that God proclaims God’s truth through God’s chosen vessels. McLaren positions himself as the submissive servant with a critical message to deliver to God’s people. Moreover, this rhetorical style materializes as a representation for those who are marginalized by economic oppression.

The Christian’s Right’s rhetorical approach on economic issues differs significantly with this in that they appear to be mostly interested in self-preservation rather than other-oriented. While many conservative evangelicals may present their way of life as being under attack, they can certainly not be considered a marginalized group, based on their economic status and political influence. As has already been established, Dobson uses economic reasons to oppose

gay marriage. Also, the Christian Coalition's agenda is abounding with issues that are self-serving. Some examples are their opposition to the re-introduction of the "Fairness Doctrine" because, "it would effectively end conservative talk-radio and put Christian television programming at risk"; defending the 2001 tax cuts; protecting religious programming because, "without a 'Multicast/Equal Access' law, the cable and satellite companies would probably not add new Christian channels and the influence of current Christian channels will be diluted"; and passing "Net Neutrality" to "ensure that cable and phone companies don't discriminate against groups like Christian Coalition of America". Again, there is nothing inherently immoral with representing self-interests in the political arena, as many organizations do. However, this approach differentiates them with the progressives in that it contradicts a prophetic ethos. Moreover, this type of rhetoric is consistent with their defensive posture that situates them in a culture war with forces that are trying to destroy them. The struggle can be understood as the tension between a self-oriented politics and an other-oriented agenda. Progressives are motivated to take up the economic needs of the marginalized, while conservatives defend their own community.

During the last few centuries, evangelicals have expressed a concern about the suffering of others with varying levels of urgency. There has always been some level of moral obligation to serve people's needs, but rarely in a way that attempted radical reform. Evangelicals have mostly been, in fact, suspicious of a leftist theological and/or political agenda. Brian McLaren represents the possibility for future evangelicals to reject premillennialist and fundamentalist worldviews that focus entirely on saving people from eternal hell while ignoring their hell on earth. He calls for them to make sacrifices to share some of what they have with those who have nothing. What he is asking is radical, extreme, countercultural, and likely to be rejected by many

in this culture who have grown attached to their comforts and luxuries. McLaren provides an extreme contrast to the culture war rhetoric of the Christian Right. His rhetorical style is consistent with a prophetic tradition represented in the Bible and culminating in the teachings of Jesus, who told the rich man to “sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor” (Luke 18:22). This would naturally be a very difficult scripture to apply in a culture marked with exceptional wealth. It is much simpler to adopt political positions that do not disrupt people’s lives, ones that maintain the status quo that. It is much easier to speak out against those trying to disrupt the system, trying to change things as creators of chaos and communists. Nevertheless, the prophetic tradition rejects the values of the dominant culture. Jesus rejected the cultural norms of his day. Most recently, Brian McLaren follows in their footsteps by attempting to throw the economic order of evangelicals into disorder and rebuild something more like what he believes Jesus advanced. He is not often well received by the traditionalists, as Moses was not, and Jesus was not. But he would proclaim that he speaks God’s truth whether people want to hear it or not.

Works Cited

- Brueggemann, Walter. *The Prophetic Imagination*. 2nd Ed. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001.
- Campolo, Tony. *Red Letter Christians*. Ventura: Regal, 2008.
- Christian Coalition. "2009 Legislative Agenda: Christian Coalition's Agenda for the 111th Congress." 13 Mar. 2009 <http://www.cc.org/2009_legislative_agenda>.
- Darsey, James. *The Prophetic Tradition and Radical Rhetoric in America*. New York: New York University Press, 1997.
- Dobson, James. *Marriage Under Fire*. Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah, 2004.
- Falwell, Jerry, ed. *The Fundamentalist Phenomenon*. Garden City: Doubleday-Galilee, 1981.
- Hatch, Nathan O. *The Democratization of American Christianity*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989.
- Lienesch, Michael. *Redeeming America: Piety & Politics in the New Christian Right*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993.
- Marsden, George M. *Fundamentalism and American Culture*. 2nd edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- McLaren, Brian D. *a Generous Orthodoxy*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004.
- McLaren, Brian D. *A New Kind of Christian*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001.
- McLaren, Brian D. *Everything Must Change*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007.
- McLaren, Brian D. *The Last Word and the Word After That*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005.
- McLaren, Brian D. *The Story We Find Ourselves in*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003.
- Noll, Mark A. *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992.
- Wallis, Jim. *The Great Awakening*. New York: HarperOne, 2008.

CHAPTER EIGHT

AWAKENING: IDEOLOGICAL TRANSFORMATION

“My good points are instilled by you and are your gifts. My bad points are my faults and your judgements on them. Let them take heart from the one and regret the other.... You never abandon what you have begun. Make perfect my imperfections.” (181)

Saint Augustine, Confessions

In the pages of this dissertation, a history of the political participation of evangelicals in the United States has been summarized and contrasting rhetorical texts have been analyzed. The question remains, where is evangelical political discourse headed in the future and what rhetorical styles will typify that social engagement? I will argue in this concluding chapter that while evangelicalism continues to be a dominant discourse in the United States, there is a transformation taking place in the way evangelicals are culturally engaged and the rhetoric that accompanies that action. This is evidenced most significantly in the younger generation of evangelicals, but as has been established, change has even been observed among even some conservatives. This chapter will consider the presidential election of 2008, which saw a fascinating contribution from evangelicals, the state of certain political priorities of evangelicals, and the implications of this study. Ultimately, I predict that this transformation of evangelical

political identity will manifest in a reappropriation of what it means to be evangelical demonstrated most profoundly through their rhetorical style. Culture war rhetoric, while still exhibiting an influence, is less effective with a younger audience, who find themselves more responsive to a progressive expression of evangelical faith.

ELECTION 2008

The 2008 presidential election demonstrated the continued politically participatory zeal possessed by evangelicals; however, it also indicated a more diversified expression of that zeal. First, it must be noted that the perceived failure of the Bush administration will likely have lasting effects on how evangelicals relate to politicians. While running for the office of presidency, Bush unequivocally identified himself as an evangelical Christian, and they embraced him in the election booth. In 2004, Bush received 79% of the evangelical vote and their turnout was especially high in the swing state of Ohio (Cooperman and Edsall). Nevertheless, the perceived arrogance and above reproach mentality of the Bush administration combined with an unpopular war and struggling economy has led to the overwhelming majority of the American public's unfavorable judgment of his administration. This judgment has extended into the evangelical community. Pew Forum of Religious and Public Life found that only 47% of evangelicals approve of President Bush, compared to 75% in 2001 (Pulliam). At the very least, the Bush presidency, with dismal approval ratings, has been disappointing for evangelicals. When Rudy Giuliani, a socially liberal candidate, appeared poised to win the Republican nomination for presidency, some wondered if the influence of

evangelicals within the party was over. This idea would be strongly refuted by several events.

The early success of Mike Huckabee's campaign proved that social conservatives were still influential with a victory in the Iowa primary. Nevertheless, his candidacy was met with little to no enthusiasm by Christian Right leaders due to his less than conservative fiscal principles and positions on the immigration. The charismatic former governor of Arkansas won 240 delegates and had a more successful campaign than Mitt Romney despite being out-financed. Many social conservative voters viewed Huckabee as the best choice for them until it became clear that John McCain would inevitably become the Republican nominee. Huckabee's success illustrates the continued potency of evangelicals at the polls despite the lack of support he received from their leaders. Furthermore, he represents a more complex and therefore controversial evangelical who is not lock in step with the Christian Right on issues beyond abortion and gay marriage. Despite not winning the Republican nomination, the political participation of evangelicals would continue to be meaningful because of both candidates' courtship, and the surprise selection of one of their own as a Vice Presidential nominee.

While not being known as an outspoken representative of the Christian Right, John McCain's voting record on key issues such as abortion was impeccably conservative. Nevertheless, he had a lot of work to do to inspire them. The first successful effort to do this was his participation at the forum moderated by Rick Warren where he clearly said the right things to gain the support of conservative evangelicals (Hornick). His performance was generally viewed as one of the most successful moments of the campaign. He clarified that he had firm convictions on abortion, and

appointing conservative justices would be a high priority for his presidency. Furthermore, he also confirmed his support of maintaining the definition of marriage as one man and one woman. For many evangelicals, these two issues are at the top of the hierarchy of their political agenda and, therefore, McCain secured their vote at this moment. McCain's next move in selecting Sarah Palin as his vice presidential nominee would result in energizing conservative evangelicals. Palin, not only held the right positions on abortion and gay marriage, but she also represented a more traditional Christian Right candidate overall compared to Mike Huckabee. Her selection and her speech making savvy generated the most excitement that the McCain campaign experienced. Even after serious questions about her credibility and unsuccessful media interviews, Palin remained well-liked by Christian conservatives. Nonetheless, among evangelical women, her popularity differed significantly by age. One survey found that only 46 percent of white evangelical women under age 30 rated Palin favorably, while 65 percent of white evangelical women over 30 rated her favorably (PBS). This is just one indicator of the age disparity that exists within evangelism. Whether she ultimately helped or harmed the McCain ticket is still a question that has not been answered.

Another noteworthy component of the 2008 presidential election is the effort Barack Obama actually made at courting the evangelical vote, a group that had been written off by Democrats for years. Obama is unique for a contemporary Democratic candidate in that he comfortably speaks of his faith and uses religious language more familiar to evangelicals than of that used by his Republican opponent. He speaks easily about his conversion experience. In his book, *The Audacity of Hope*, Obama discusses the day that he was baptized as an adult. He writes, "kneeling beneath that cross on the

South Side of Chicago, I felt God's spirit beckoning me. I submitted myself to His will, and dedicated myself to discovering His truth" (208). This transformative moment is a crucial element of evangelicalism and, therefore, Obama identifies with an aspect of their faith in a way than even many Republicans do not. Moreover, he acknowledges the role that faith may play in one's political participation and critiques the Left's dismissal of religion:

More fundamentally, the discomfort of some progressives with any hint of religiosity has often inhibited us from effectively addressing issues in moral terms. Some of the problem is rhetorical: Scrub language of all religious content and we forfeit the imagery and terminology through which millions of Americans understand both their personal morality and social justice. Imagine Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address without reference to "the judgments of the Lord," or King's "I Have a Dream" speech without reference to "all of God's children." Their summoning of a higher truth helped inspire what had seemed impossible and move the nation to embrace a common destiny. Of course organized religion doesn't have a monopoly on virtue, and one need not be religious to make moral claims or appeal to a common good. But we should not avoid making such claims or appeals—or abandon any reference to our rich religious traditions—in order to avoid giving offense. (214)

By affirming his faith and its role in his political discourse, Obama engages a rhetoric of identification with evangelicals. He attempts to create a common ground of faith and faith-based politics to assemble a collective will. Obama participated in the forum at Saddleback Church, albeit less successfully than McCain (Hornick). While he did not ultimately procure a large increase in the evangelical vote, the fact that he spent the time that he did working for their vote is important. In the end, Obama received 24% of the white evangelical vote, which was only a 3% increase over John Kerry (Goodstein). However, he increased his support among white evangelicals ages 18 to 29 to 32% (Kerry received only 16%) and ages 30 to 44 to 23% (Kerry received just 12%) (*New York Times*). Like with the perception of Sarah Palin, there is clearly a generational

divide evidenced in the exit polls. Obama's selection of Rick Warren for the inaugural invocation prayer demonstrates his intention to continue seeking the favor of evangelicals after the election. Furthermore, his larger message of post-partisanship and unity exhibits this strategy to create a new identification as citizens of the United States, based on potential, not history. This generational cultural shift will encompass at least some evangelicals, and could potentially contribute to the redefinition of evangelical political discourse.

POLITICAL PRIORITIES

In addition to the events of the 2008 presidential election, the shifting and broadening of the political priorities of evangelicalism is a major consideration that should be discussed as well. There is a general attempt of progressive evangelicals to refocus the political agenda of evangelicalism in a way that reflects the more compassionate orientation of their faith instead of the negative disposition assumed by the issues of abortion and gay marriage. This was the purpose of the document entitled "An Evangelical Manifesto" released in 2008, which included individuals such as Rich Mouw (Fuller Theological Seminary) and David Neff (*Christianity Today*) on its steering committee, and the charter signatures of well-known evangelicals such as Leith Anderson (NAE president), Max Lucado (author), Mark Noll, and Jim Wallis. It argues that one of the defining features of their faith is that, "*the Evangelical message, 'good news' by definition is overwhelmingly positive, and always positive before it is negative.... First and foremost we Evangelicals are for Someone and for something rather than against anyone or anything*" (8). The primary purpose of the declaration, which includes many

mainstream evangelicals, seems to be to detach the association of evangelical with Christian Right. It affirms political participation but seeks to reorient the motive. It reads, “we believe that being disciples of Jesus means serving him as Lord in every sphere of our lives, secular as well as spiritual, public as well as private, in deeds as well as words, and in every moment of our days on earth, always reaching out as he did to those who are lost as well as to the poor, the sick, the hungry, the oppressed, the socially despised, and being faith stewards of creation and our fellow-creatures” (6). This sentiment is reflected in the effort to relieve suffering, most specifically poverty and AIDS, and the effort to curtail global warming. The effects of this approach can even be seen in the AIDS relief policies of the recent administration, but resonates most powerfully with the younger generation. Michael Gerson writes that, “since leaving government, I’ve asked young evangelicals on campuses from Wheaton to Harvard who they view as their model of Christian activism. Their answer is nearly unanimous: Bono.” He is one of the founders of the ONE campaign that seeks to relieve poverty and disease throughout the world. According to their website, “ONE is nonpartisan and works with activists from the left, right and center to mobilize public opinion in support of effective, proven initiatives that are delivering results”. This could be understood as a politics that is other-oriented, instead of one that is self-serving. Even Rick Warren “has earned accolades from many Democrats (including Obama) as a new breed of evangelical interested in poverty reduction and climate change” (Kim). While, still not as highly prioritized as other issues, the relief of suffering in the world is being advanced and embraced by many evangelical leaders.

The issue of global warming has received similar attention, but because it is a newer debate and its most drastic effects are still to come, it is easier to understate its importance. While research indicates that evangelicals are less concerned about climate change and therefore less supportive of government intervention than the general population, an increasing amount of discourse connects evangelical faith and environmentalism. As was demonstrated in an earlier chapter, climate change is the ideal illustration of the ideological struggle occurring within evangelicalism today. While progressives are joining with the environmental movement to articulate an urgent concern regarding stewardship of the earth and how that will impact human life, especially the poor, conservatives are attempting to protect their relationship with the Right. The resistance to emphasizing the issue of global warming is grounded in the notion that the consequences are exaggerated, and the only solution offered is fiscal conservatism: stimulate economic growth and therefore be more able to adapt. Regardless of motive, resisting the prioritization of the issue of climate change is a high priority for some evangelicals. They may claim that they simply do not want it to overshadow more important issues like abortion and gay marriage, but the effort they have expended at refuting and, at times, even censoring green evangelicals demonstrates a deeper purpose.

The issue of abortion is still maintained as a political priority for evangelicals – obviously of the highest importance for the more conservative. Evangelicals, as a group, are generally homogenous in their perception of abortion as a moral tragedy. Even young evangelicals oppose abortion rights in similar numbers as their older counterparts (PBS). “An Evangelical Manifesto” declares, “we cannot back away from our biblically rooted

commitment to the sanctity of every human life, including those unborn” (13). On the solution to abortion, however, there is some multiplicity. While the Christian Right has focused singularly on overturning Roe Versus Wade, progressives suggest more compassionate economic policies would reduce the number of abortions. Many evangelicals vow to never support a pro-choice candidate, some do reluctantly based on the premise that there are many moral issues, and others argue that progressive economic policies would do more to reduce abortions than appointing conservative justices. Brian McLaren actually gives the reason of “sacredness of human life” as one of the reasons for voting for Obama. He writes, “if we really care about seeing fewer pregnancies ending in abortion, a greater concern for ‘the least of these’ – demonstrated through better health care, more vigorous job creation, better education, and other needed initiatives for people in poverty – could bring us greater results than a strategy of criminalization. And Senator Obama is the stronger candidate in these areas.” The rejection of the simplification of being “pro-life” that McLaren represents calls into question one of the major associations between evangelicals and the Republican Party. Opposing abortion was one of the founding reasons underlying the inception of the Christian Right. If this relationship is weakened, along with a broadening of moral issues, it could possibly redefine the way evangelicals relate to the political parties in the U.S. This is also facilitated by some on the Left’s recognition of the moral complexities involved with abortion. One of the reasons many pro-life evangelicals were able to support Obama, despite his firm pro-choice position, is his willingness to acknowledge the need to “refocus at least some of our energies on reducing the number of unwanted pregnancies [and therefore abortions,] through education (including about abstinence), contraception, adoption, or any other

strategies that have broad support and have been proven to work” (222). The abortion issue is no different than any other issue for Obama in that he is attempting to bring opposing sides together to find solutions. At least some evangelicals seem to have found this rhetorical strategy compelling.

The last issue to be discussed is one that evangelicals have made and are continuing to make a high priority: opposing the legalization of same-sex marriage. Despite a survey that finds that younger evangelicals are far more supportive of gay marriage or civil unions than older evangelicals (PBS), the vast majority of evangelicals oppose the legalization of same-sex marriage and are, in fact, mobilized as voters by the issue. As was established in an earlier chapter, opposing gay marriage is rooted in traditional notions of gender. Foucault allows us to understand that moral codes are far more complex than simple notions of right and wrong, and are often grounded in the maintenance of power, in this case, patriarchy and heteronormativity. While some have called for a softening of the rhetoric surrounding the debate, language that is perceived as too ambiguous is met with serious consequences, as was the case of Richard Cizik, who was forced into resignation from his position with the National Association of Evangelicals because of comments that were controversial, despite his position against gay marriage. Specifically, he said, “I would willingly say I believe in civil unions. I don’t officially support redefining marriage from its traditional definition, I don’t think” (James). This statement was denounced and Cizik’s controversial career at the NAE came to an end. As Foucault explains, power is represented through prohibition, “thou shalt not speak”, and this moment explicitly illustrates this principle. The debate over Proposition 8 (which Cizik supported) forced many within evangelicalism to take a side

in this debate, such as Rick Warren. Though Warren has never endorsed same-sex relationships, he has been relatively quiet regarding same-sex marriage until he came out supporting Proposition 8. He claims that he simply took a public position after many in his California church inquired about how they should vote on the proposed amendment, and thus he made a statement on the church's website. Warren instructed his parishioners that, "if you believe what the Bible says about marriage, you need to support Proposition 8" (Darman). It was, however, his interview with Steven Waldman, editor-in-chief of BeliefNet, which generated so much controversy after Obama selected him for the inaugural prayer of invocation. The objection of his selection was not over Warren's position on gay marriage, but the fact that he used offensive language justifying his position. He asserted, "I'm opposed to redefinition of a 5000 year definition of marriage. I'm opposed to having a brother and sister being together and calling that marriage. I'm opposed to an older guy marrying a child and calling that marriage. I'm opposed to one guy having multiple wives and calling that marriage." Here, Warren invokes the familiar Christian Right strategy of comparing same-sex relationships to behaviors such as incest and pedophilia. By doing this he implies that being gay is the moral equivalent. Like Dobson, Warren represents gay couples as savages. He even confirms this when his answer is followed up by the question, "Do you think those are equivalent to gays getting married?":

Oh, I do. For 5000 years, marriage has been defined by every single culture and every single religion – this is not a Christian issue. Buddhist, Muslims, Jews – historically, marriage is a man and a woman. And the reason I supported Proposition 8 is really a free speech issue. Because first the court overrode the will of the people, but second there were all kinds of threats that if that did not pass then any pastor could be considered doing hate speech if he shared his views that he didn't think

homosexuality was the most natural way for relationships, and that would be hate speech.

Thus, Christians would be victimized by the gay agenda, and he implies that the consequences of gay marriage would be harmful to evangelicalism. Warren uncharacteristically invokes culture war rhetoric consistent with Dobson's contention that the legalization of gay marriage would bring about a restriction of Christian rights and ultimately the destruction of the social fabric. While he does not blame gays for the destruction of the family, Warren, like Dobson, positions gays who want to have the right to marry, as the enemy of Christians. These would not be surprising words coming from a Christian Right leader, but they are coming from the more moderate Warren, who many had praised for his willingness to depart from the Right on occasion and exhibit a more progressive evangelical praxis on issues such as poverty and global warming. This is a disappointment to many who thought he was a new kind of evangelical leader – one that rejected the culture war mentality and focused more on ministering to the needs of those who are suffering in this world. Nevertheless, I would argue that this does not entirely negate the progress that Rick Warren represents. He is a mainstream and popular evangelical leader who has focused the majority of his ministry in a positive way. This moment, however, represents the pervasiveness of traditional notions of sexuality and gender within evangelicalism. Again, it is one thing to have a position on the legalization of gay marriage, but it is entirely different to wage war on a group of people by portraying them as moral savages and enemies. Nevertheless, the evidence is quite convincing that the younger generation of evangelicals is departing with their parents and grandparents on the perception of the gay community. The Barna Group finds that while 57% of older born-again Christians consider the political efforts of homosexuals to be a

serious problem, only 33% of younger (born after 1965) ones consider it a problem. This will certainly point to a new direction for the political behavior of evangelicals.

CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT THE FUTURE

In summary, this dissertation has outlined the history of evangelical political engagement in the United States, analyzed different rhetorical styles, and considered the implications of ideological conflicts that currently exist within evangelism. Based on this examination, certain conclusions regarding the rhetoric of evangelicals and what that entails for the future can thoughtfully be made. First, there are several serious implications of war rhetoric that should be considered, especially of concern when directed at one group of people, as Dobson does. The first is that it dehumanizes gays, denying them the respect they deserve as human beings. This has both secular and religious consequences. Dobson was mentioned in the article, “Culture War Casualties,” published in *Christianity Today* in 1995, which was critical of the culture war rhetoric expressed by some evangelical Christians. In the article, the author John Woodbridge (professor of church history at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) problematizes this type of rhetoric and maintains that it is dangerous because, “Culture-war rhetoric can be self-fulfilling prophecy, exacerbating the very conflicts it seeks merely to describe. Repeated recourse to the language of war makes it harder to love our enemies – and it is already hard to do so – because it inflames angry feelings” (22). Furthermore, it contradicts the most prominent and powerful message of Jesus, to love others. Woodbridge concludes by stating, “If we follow Christ’s example of compassion ... we will love rather than hate our enemies, pray for them rather than seek to destroy them”

(26). James Dobson takes offense to this article and lashes out at Woodbridge in the article, “Why I Use Fighting Words,” soon after published in the same magazine. He justifies his war rhetoric by listing several hymns that make use of the war metaphor, such as “Onward Christian Soldiers,” and then giving several biblical references to war (27). He goes on to justify his rhetoric by conflating spiritual and cultural war, citing one of his books, and by listing several extreme examples that evangelical Christians would likely find offensive (28 – 29). He goes so far as to condemn the magazine for even publishing Woodbridge’s article. He writes, “Indeed, I don’t understand CHRISTIANITY TODAY’s decision to devote a cover story to so trivial an issue while kids are dying from sexually transmitted diseases and our entire value system is disintegrating before our eyes” (29 – 30).

Another implication of culture war rhetoric is the reality that words have power, and the sentiment may manifest itself through violence against gay individuals. It is not that these individuals who commit acts of violence are necessarily directly influenced by Dobson and his cohorts, but merely that antigay rhetoric contributes to an atmosphere in which gay individuals possess less value than others and are an easy target for deranged people. John Woodbridge points out in his “response to James Dobson”:

For more than two decades, I have studied the history of religious intolerance. My studies focused on the fate of the French Huguenots, a Calvinist minority, in Roman Catholic France from the 1550s through the French Revolution. The sixteenth century witnessed a series of brutal civil wars spawned by religious political hatred. Before and during these civil wars, waves of inflammatory pamphlets swept through both religious communities. Probably some of their authors never anticipated the intense hatred their rhetoric stirred; yet they created provocative contexts for later heinous acts of violence perpetrated by the various sides. (32)

Undeniably, many violent acts have been committed in the name of Christianity.

Therefore, it is irresponsible to think that waging a rhetorical war on a group of people will have no material consequences. Woodbridge posits, “rhetoric can fracture social unity and incite unstable elements to turn any ‘warfare over ideas’ into armed attacks on people. Words can prompt action” (31). This is a very dangerous possibility for gay individuals in this country, particularly considering how widely debated and emotionally evocative the gay marriage issue is currently.

Regardless of whether the consequences are material, emotional, or spiritual, warfare rhetoric denies one of the most undisputed messages of Christ. When asked what the greatest commandment was in the Law, Jesus replied, “Love the Lord God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and Prophets hang on these two commandments” (Matthew 22:39). Waging war on people is simply not consistent with this commandment. Who are our neighbors other than our fellow citizens? Saint Augustine wrote, “it is manifest that every man is to be thought of as a neighbor, for evil must be committed toward no one” (26). Therefore, regardless of a person’s faith, sexuality, or any other cultural trait, evangelicals are commanded to love them.

On a related level, as Ivie observes, creating a perfect enemy and/or scapegoat, makes impossible a rhetoric of identification as described by Burke. In *A Rhetoric of Motives*, Burke writes, “Here is perhaps the simplest case of persuasion. You persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, *identifying* your ways with his” (55). Because we desire unity, but are

divided, humans seek consubstantiality with others through rhetoric. This is arguably more productive and less likely to create division than rhetoric based upon fear. Ivie proposes, “The better alternative is a democratic rhetoric of identification that deploys reason to build bridges between otherwise warring communities both at home and abroad” (*Democracy* 91). The Christian Right’s polarizing and alienating rhetoric makes impossible a worthwhile exchange between evangelicals and others, creating a dichotomy and preventing a constructive dialogue. As Ivie illustrates, like the justification of the war on terror, a war on gays has definitive consequences. Once one can no longer identify with their adversary, then they become enemies and little is accomplished. Only when individuals show a certain level of respect for their opposition can rhetoric be healthy and democratic. Until the Christian Right at least respects the humanity (being created in God’s image) of gays, little can be accomplished in their dialogue. Moreover, it is important that other evangelicals critique this type of rhetoric from a Christian perspective so that it is clear that gays are loved by God, and people are not forced to choose between their sexuality and their faith.

Second, understanding prophetic rhetoric as a genre informs the interpretation of evangelical rhetoric and allows distinctions between progressives and conservatives to be made. Both groups appropriate elements of the prophetic tradition as outlined by Darsey and Brueggemann. Conservatives and progressives claim to be speaking for God. Both ground, (at least some of,) their arguments on God’s covenants (marriage and stewardship) with God’s people. Both groups express God’s judgment, of sexual sin, the sin of destroying God’s earth, or the sin of ignoring suffering (or even contributing to an oppressive system as McLaren argues). Conservatives have experienced success

energizing their people, and progressives have demonstrated more of the critical element of prophetic consciousness. It has been shown that progressives, nevertheless, represent more consistency within the prophetic genre. Their rhetoric is more often countercultural and manifests as a mortification of themselves rather than others. More tensions exist within the rhetoric of conservatives such as self-serving economic policies, association with the Republican Party, lack of compassion for the poor, and scapegoating of gays. It is partly through this prophetic voice that both groups attempt to interpellate evangelicals by speaking on God's behalf, invoking covenant, and expressing judgment.

This leads to a third implication regarding constitutive rhetoric. Conservatives and progressives attempt to call their audiences into being. Because, as Charland explains, constitutive rhetoric positions readers toward social action, and this subject position is not fixed, this is an important consideration for this current struggle over evangelical political identity. Rearticulation is possible and so is, therefore, a transformed subject and transformed ideology. Charland explains, "because the constitutive nature of rhetoric establishes the boundary of a subject's motives and experience, a truly ideological rhetoric must rework or transform subjects" (148). Progressives are attempting to rearticulate evangelical political discourse by identifying contradictions between the principles of evangelical faith and war rhetoric, and between God's covenant of stewardship and irresponsible environmental policies. Moreover, they are attempting to refocus energies on the poor. Based on the research and analysis presented in this dissertation, it would seem that they are succeeding at this attempt. These emergent evangelicals refuse to accept that a reverent interpretation of the Bible must translate into a fundamentalist theology and social praxis. Rather, they are

embracing biblical narrative, but reconsidering truth as it demands a specific social ethic. This shifting of evangelical consciousness translates into the beginning of a new evangelical political identity. This materializes as one that is less attached to the Republican Party, more energized by compassion issues, less divisive, and more hopeful. The rhetoric of leaders such as Jerry Falwell and James Dobson represents the past of evangelicalism. There is clearly discomfort with the culture wars, which is a manifestation of the implicit contradiction between waging war on people and loving them. “An Evangelical Manifesto” proclaims, “we are especially troubled by the fact that a generation of culture warring, reinforced by understandable reactions to religious extremism around the world, is creating *a powerful backlash against all religion in public life among many educated people*” (17). There is a concerted effort to reappropriate the term evangelical at least in terms of the way the larger culture understands it. This may seem to be contradicted by Rick Warren’s most recent comments about same-sex marriage, but this was an exceptional case, even for Warren. It is true that traditional notions of gender and sexuality are still deeply ingrained within evangelicalism, but there seems to be a growing aversion to the extremism of culture war rhetoric. Furthermore, the evidence is clear that the younger generation of evangelicalism is far less likely to identify with the Right than their elders. The Pew study found that identification with the Republican Party by younger evangelicals (18 – 29) decreased from 55% in 2001 to 40% in 2007 (Pulliam). They are more likely to question traditional applications of their faith. According to the research of the Barna Group summarized in the book *Unchristian* :

Four out of five young churchgoers say that Christianity is antihomosexual; half describe it as judgmental, too involved in politics, hypocritical, and confusing; one-third believe their faith is old-fashioned and out of touch with reality; and one-quarter of young Christians believe

it is boring and insensitive to others. These are significant proportions of young people in Christian churches who raise objections to the motivation, attitude, and image of modern Christianity. (Kinnaman and Lyons 33 - 34)

Additionally, one-third of young born-again Christians say that other Christians make them embarrassed to be a Christian (Kinnaman and Lyons 35). In fact, Amy Sullivan theorizes that the reason Focus on the Family has experienced financial troubles “has been its failure to effectively appeal to the next generation of Christians. The original James Dobson supporters are not being replaced by younger families.... Today’s young Christians ... know Dobson best as a divisive, controversial political figure. And they haven’t been lining up behind him.” This will inevitably result in a more complex consideration of political issues and a broader slate of political priorities. Most importantly, they are emerging forth, maintaining the fundamentals and passion of their faith, but questioning what that should mean. Furthermore, even some of the more conservative stalwarts of the Christian Right, such as Pat Robertson on the environment, are shifting their political views to be more responsive to these issues. Popular evangelical leaders are coming together with rock stars and Democrats to promote awareness and relief of disease and poverty. This is why Obama’s message of unity was able to reverberate among some evangelicals. While it cannot yet be described as a revolution, the changes are significant enough to feel encouraged that this faith can be a force for good in the world. The rearticulation of evangelical political discourse that is transpiring, especially among the young, demonstrates what rhetoric can accomplish as an agent of change and reform.

Works Cited

- “An Evangelical Manifesto.” 7 May 2008. 28 Feb. 2009
<http://www.anevangelicalmanifesto.com/docs/Evangelical_Manifesto.pdf>.
- Barna Group, Ltd / OmniPoll. 2007. 14 Mar. 2009
< http://www.unchristian.com/downloads/uc_politicalchart.pdf>.
- Charland, Maurice. “Constitutive Rhetoric: The Case of the *Peuple Quebecois*.” *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 73 (1987): 133 – 150.
- Cooperman, Alan, and Thomas B. Edsall. “Evangelicals Say They Led Charge For the GOP.” *Washington Post* 8 Nov. 2004: A1.
- Darman, Jonathan. “An Inexact Analogy.” *Newsweek* 12 Jan. 2009. 12 Apr. 2009
<<http://www.newsweek.com/id/177790>>.
- Dobson, James. “Why I Use ‘Fighting Words.’” *Christianity Today* 19 Jun. 1995: 27 – 30.
- Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality Volume I: An Introduction*. Trans, Robert Hurley. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.
- Gerson, Michael. “A New Social Gospel.” *Newsweek* 13 Nov. 2006: 40 – 43.
- Goodstein, Laurie. “Obama Made Gains Among Younger Evangelical Voters, Data Show.” *The New York Times* 6 Nov. 2008. 28 Feb. 2009
<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/07/us/politics/07religion.html?_r=1>.
- Hornick, Ed. “Obama, McCain talk issues at pastor’s forum.” 17 Aug. 2008. 10 Apr. 2009 < <http://edition.cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/08/16/warren.forum/>>.
- James, Susan Donaldson. “New Evangelists Buck the Christian Right.” 19 December 2008. ABCNews.com 25 Dec. 2008. 28 Feb. 2009
<http://www.sojo.net/index.cfm?action=media.display_article&mode=S&NewsID=7377>.
- Kim, Richard. “Good God, Bad God.” *The Nation* 12 Jan. 2009: 4 – 6.
- Kinnaman, David, and Gabe Lyons. *unchristian*. Grand Rapids: BakerBooks, 2007.
- McLaren, Brian D. “Why I’m voting for Barack Obama ... and I hope you will too. Reason 5: The Sacredness of Life.” 28 Feb. 2009
<<http://www.brianmclaren.net/archives/blog/why-im-voting-for-barak-obama-and-i-hope-you-will-too-reason-5.html>>.

- The New York Times*. "Shifts Among the Religions." 7 Nov. 2008. 28 Feb. 2009 <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/07/us/politics/07religion.html?_r=1>.
- Obama, Barack. *The Audacity of Hope*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 2006.
- ONE. 17 Jan. 2009 <<http://www.one.org/about/>>.
- PBS. "Poll: White Evangelicals Under 30 Less Supportive of McCain Than Older Evangelicals." 10 Oct. 2008. 17 Oct. 2008 <<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/week1204/survey.html>>.
- Pulliam, Sarah. "Evangelical Moderates." *Christianity Today* Nov. 2008: 16 – 17.
- Saint Augustine. *Confessions*. Trans. Henry Chadwick. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991.
- Saint Augustine. *On Christian Doctrine*. Trans., D.W. Robertson, Jr. U.S.A: The Liberal Arts Press, Inc., 1958.
- Sullivan, Amy. "And Then There Was One." 27 Feb. 2009. 14 Mar. 2009 <<http://swampland.blogs.time.com/2009/02/27/and-then-there-was-one/>>.
- Warren, Rick. Interview with Steven Waldman. beliefnet. 10 Jan. 2009 <<http://www.beliefnet.com/News/2008/12/Rick-Warren-Transcript.aspx?p=7#gaymarriage>>.
- Woodbridge, John D. "Culture War Casualties." *Christianity Today* 6 Mar. 1995: 20 - 26.
- Woodbridge, John D. "Why Words Matter: A response to James Dobson." *Christianity Today* 19 Jun. 1995: 31 – 32.