

**AN ALTERNATIVE SOUL OF POLITICS:
THE RISE OF CONTEMPORARY PROGRESSIVE EVANGELICALISM**

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ABSTRACT

Brantley W. Gasaway: An Alternative Soul of Politics: The Rise of Contemporary
Progressive Evangelicalism
(Under the direction of Yaakov Ariel)

This dissertation traces the development of the contemporary progressive evangelical movement and analyzes how leaders responded to issues of race, gender, and sexuality. Beginning in the late 1960s progressive evangelicals became vigorous advocates for social justice. Perceived inequality and injustice represented the primary moral issues that compelled their social and political activism. Yet the emergence of the Christian Right and its conservative agenda in the late 1970s soon overshadowed progressive evangelicalism. Alarm over assaults on both America's ostensible Christian heritage and traditional standards of family and sexuality inspired the politicization of Christian conservatives. As the Christian Right became the most conspicuous form of evangelical political engagement, progressive evangelical leaders found themselves on the defensive. They protested that their alternative "soul of politics" represented the most faithful and comprehensive expression of Christian public engagement.

Focusing on three primary representatives—*Sojourners* and its editor Jim Wallis; *The Other Side*; and Evangelicals for Social Action under the leadership of Ron Sider—I argue that contemporary progressive evangelical leaders embraced a public theology of community that prioritized social justice. Community membership not only safeguards individual rights, they believed, but also entails responsibilities for the common good. In

abstract terms, the common good results from basic social and economic conditions that allow *all* of a community's members to prosper. Justice provides the vital framework for achieving the common good, they argued, and thus represents the highest ideal of public life.

Both racism and sexism denied the equality of minorities and women, and each injustice became a natural target of progressive evangelical activism. Leaders campaigned both for anti-discriminatory laws such as the Equal Rights Amendment and for distributive justice programs such as affirmative action. With respect to abortion, most progressive evangelical leaders concluded that unborn children deserved the same protection as other community members. Yet these pro-life advocates refused to separate their opposition to abortion from their campaigns against other injustices and threats to life. Finally, progressive evangelical leaders disagreed on the legitimacy of homosexual behavior for Christians but united in defending the full civil rights of gays and lesbians.

To Katie

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Introduction

We acknowledge that God requires love. But we have not demonstrated the love of God to those suffering social abuses. We acknowledge that God requires justice. But we have not proclaimed or demonstrated his justice to an unjust American society...We affirm that God abounds in mercy and that he forgives all who repent and turn from their sins. So we call our fellow evangelical Christians to demonstrate repentance in a Christian discipleship that confronts the social and political injustice of our nation.

— “Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern” (1973)

In his 1994 book *The Soul of Politics*, Jim Wallis described the state of his adopted town of Washington, D.C. in Dickensian terms. Borrowing the title “A Tale of Two Cities,” Wallis emphasized two realities within the city itself. Affluent white politicians fought for power while black residents of the city fought poverty. Fund-raisers and lobbyists hosted dinners of caviar and champagne as homeless people dug through trash for food. Commuters from the comfortable suburbs worked in the stately city center while low-income families lived in dilapidated apartments in surrounding neighborhoods. America’s power elites governed from imposing offices as residents of the impoverished District of Columbia lacked voting representation in Congress. “Everyone knows ‘official Washington’ with its marble, monuments, and malls,” Wallis wrote. “But the ‘other Washington’ has been off-limits to the blue-and-white tour buses and to the consciousness of the rest of America.”¹

¹ Jim Wallis, *The Soul of Politics: A practical and prophetic vision for change* (New York: New Press; New York: Orbis Press, 1994), 52.

The divisions and inequalities within Washington, D.C. appeared symptomatic of what Wallis regarded as a debilitating public disease: “broken community.” “Today the fundamental covenant that holds life together has been profoundly damaged,” he lamented. “We have little sense of community.” Wallis diagnosed this deficient sense of community from its crippling effects. Patterns of racism, sexism, disintegration of family life, economic injustice, destructive militarism, and environmental degradation all testified to a pandemic of fractured society. An appraisal of political practices offered further evidence. “Politics has been reduced to the selfish struggle for power among competing interests and groups,” Wallis declared, “instead of a process of searching for the common good.” In response, he proposed that the remedy to this crisis required the replacement of “the politics of power” with “the politics of community.” Only “the moral requirements of relationship and community,” Wallis believed, “correct our human tendencies toward individual selfishness and exploitation of our neighbors and the earth.” Because these essential moral values seemed “unrecognized” or ignored,” he envisioned a revival of “the soul of politics.”²

As the longtime editor of the progressive evangelical magazine *Sojourners*, Wallis knew that his vision conflicted with pervasive assumptions regarding religion and American politics. “For years now,” he protested, “the Religious Right has controlled the public debate on politics and morality.” As a result, most people associated evangelicalism with the conservative partisan politics of Republicans. Yet Wallis called this conventional connection a “bizarre and frightening combination of religion and politics”—an “unholy alliance of religious appeals and right-wing politics.” The

² Ibid., 40; xvii, xviii.

Christian Right emphasized “personal piety” to the exclusion of “social justice.” These conservatives championed the wealthy despite “obscene” economic disparities. They defended American imperialism and militarism. Wallis lambasted Christian conservatives for representing a “white religion,” fueling “the backlash against women’s rights,” and using “blatant caricatures and attacks on homosexuals as highly successful fund-raising techniques.” To be sure, Wallis also criticized “liberal religious leaders” for their captivity to secular culture, lack of concern for collapsing moral values, and disinterest in personal conversion. Yet he most faulted the Christian Right for obscuring the presence of “a prophetic spiritual movement for social change” that Wallis had helped to lead over the previous two decades: contemporary progressive evangelicalism.³

This spiritual movement existed before the Religious Right burst upon the national scene with Ronald Reagan’s 1980 presidential victory, and the more prophetic commitment it represents has grown ever since. It relates biblical faith to social transformation; personal conversion to the cry of the poor; theological reflection to care of the environment, core religious values to new economic priorities; the call of community to racial and gender justice; morality to foreign policy; spirituality to politics; and, at its best, transcends the categories of liberal and conservative that have captivated both religion and politics.⁴

Although he had long disputed the Christian Right’s political priorities, Wallis took up the cause with renewed vigor in the mid-1990s. Two years after his 1994 *Soul of Politics*, he authored another popular book specifically designed to “reclaim” the evangelical tradition that conservatives had “hijacked.” He published *Who Speaks for God? An Alternative to the Religious Right* in conjunction with founding a new group, Call to Renewal, dedicated to “diligently applying the values of faith to each social and religious issue.” Two other prominent progressive evangelicals, Ron Sider and Tony

³ Ibid., 33-39, *passim*.

⁴ Ibid., 39.

Campolo, joined Wallis in coordinating the group. While the Christian Right remained the most visible politically active Christians, these progressive evangelical leaders were determined to promote their movement as an alternative “soul of politics.”⁵

Contemporary Progressive Evangelicalism

This dissertation traces the development of the contemporary progressive evangelical movement and analyzes how leaders responded to issues of race, gender, and sexuality. Beginning in the late 1960s progressive evangelicals became vigorous yet marginalized advocates for social justice. Although emerging almost a decade later, the Christian Right and its conservative agenda achieved far greater influence and became the most familiar expression of evangelical political engagement. Both the progressive minority and the conservative majority promoted moral visions for American society. In doing so, both rejected the assumptions of classic political liberalism that relegates religion to the private sphere and thus keeps “the public free from contentious moral or religious beliefs that are regarded as threats to political stability.”⁶ Yet progressive and conservative evangelicals differed widely regarding the nature and priority of moral issues that shaped their public agendas. For progressive evangelicals, perceived injustice and inequality represented the primary moral issues that compelled their social and political activism. In contrast, alarm over assaults on both America’s ostensible Christian heritage and traditional standards of family and sexuality galvanized conservative

⁵ Jim Wallis, *Who Speaks for God? An Alternative to the Religious Right—A New Politics of Compassion, Community, and Civility* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1996), 19, 198.

⁶ Jason Bivins, *The Fracture of Good Order: Christian Antiliberalism and the Challenge to American Politics* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 3.

evangelicals. In constructing their distinct public agendas, both progressive and conservative evangelicals drew upon different aspects of their common heritage as they re-politicized in the final third of the twentieth century.

Many nineteenth-century evangelicals actively participated in social reform campaigns. Throughout the antebellum period, Protestants across denominational lines, particularly in the Northeast, cooperated in both evangelistic efforts and benevolent societies. While routinized revivals and missionary organizations targeted the conversion of souls, voluntary associations promoted moral reforms of personal and public vices. Evangelicals helped to fuel the great humanitarian crusades of abolitionism and temperance. They also fostered movements dedicated to expanding literacy, combating prostitution, safeguarding Sabbath observance, and extending women's rights. Even into the Gilded Age and early twentieth century, notable groups of religious conservatives embraced both revivalism and reform. Evangelical welfare groups such as the Salvation Army and the Christian Missionary Alliance worked to address not only the consequences but also the causes of social problems stemming from rapid urbanization, industrialization, and immigration. Several theological emphases contributed to these reform efforts. Inheriting a Calvinistic sense of cultural custodianship, many evangelicals believed themselves charged by God to ensure that society reflected Christian morality and mores. Among those with a Wesleyan heritage, the quest for perfectionism—both personal freedom from sin and practical love of neighbor—also inspired campaigns to sanctify society. Finally, postmillennial expectations common to Protestants produced optimism that revivals and moral reforms would inaugurate the

kingdom of God. Most evangelicals thus believed that a “Christian America” required not only the redemption of individuals but also the reformation of society.⁷

In the early twentieth century, however, an individualist social ethic began to displace evangelicals’ commitment to progressive social reforms. They came to regard the spiritual renewal and moral reform of individuals as the proper means for reforming the social order as a whole. This transformation—what several scholars of evangelicalism have labeled the “Great Reversal”—occurred in the context of divisive theological controversies. Identifying themselves as “fundamentalists,” evangelical leaders defended traditional “fundamentals” of Christianity against theologically liberal “modernists.” These modernists promoted progressive social reforms and largely embraced the Social Gospel movement. Its advocates emphasized “the sinfulness of the social order” and prioritized social transformation over individual regeneration. Fundamentalists were appalled. They accused Social Gospel proponents of heresy for trivializing or even abandoning what they championed as the foundation of Christian identity—personal conversion. In addition, religious liberals remained optimistic that progressive reforms would further the realization of God’s millennial kingdom. In contrast, fundamentalists had largely adopted a pessimistic premillennialism in which inevitable cultural decline—not progress—would precede God’s kingdom. Thus not only

⁷ Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980 [1957]); Norris Magnuson, *Salvation in the Slums: Evangelical Social Work, 1865-1920* (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, 1977; Jean Miller Schmidt, *Souls or the Social Order: the Two-Party System in American Protestantism* (New York: Carlson Publishing, 1991); Robert T. Handy, *A Christian America: Protestant Hopes and Historical Realities*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984); George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

did social reform efforts threaten to distract or even to supplant the vital work of evangelism, but they also could not stem social decay. The association of political progressivism with theological liberalism caused religious conservatives to shun both.⁸

By the late 1920s, fundamentalists “had forgotten the degree to which their predecessors” had “earlier espoused rather progressive social concerns.” Their choice to focus on souls as mainline Protestants targeted the social order contributed to the creation of a “two-party system” in American Protestantism. To be sure, conservative Christians remained troubled by social problems and the apparent secularization of American culture. Yet when fundamentalists did attempt to redress social problems, they turned almost exclusively to religious campaigns to redeem individuals through personal spiritual and moral renewal. Unable to vanquish either theological liberalism or secularizing trends in society, fundamentalists largely retreated into a separatist subculture and built institutions dedicated to conservative theology and revivals.⁹

In the mid-twentieth century, a group of fundamentalist leaders grew dissatisfied with this separatism and sought to re-engage with the broader American culture. They reclaimed for themselves the label “evangelicals” and sought to enhance the appeal of conservative Christianity by gaining intellectual respectability and cultural relevancy. Leaders used the newly formed National Association of Evangelicals, the creation of *Christianity Today* magazine, and especially the successful revivals of Billy Graham to

⁸ Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*; Schmidt, *Souls or the Social Order*; David O. Moberg, *The Great Reversal: Evangelism and Social Concern*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1977 [1972]).

⁹ Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 93. See also Joel Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: the Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press).

build a broad coalition of theologically conservative Protestants under the banner of “evangelicalism.” Yet their fundamentalist heritage and zeal for personal conversions continued to relegate social concern to a secondary status. In the 1950s and into the 1960s, evangelical leaders remained distant from direct political activity and devoted themselves primarily to religious issues and winning converts. Confidence in their individualist social ethic continued to justify the conviction that evangelism itself represented the ultimate expression of social concern. “There is no redeemed society apart from redeemed men,” wrote an editor in *Christianity Today* in 1965. “The greatest and most radical solution” to social problems and human suffering lies in “the transformation of the human heart through the grace and Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.” Suspicious of progressive reforms, religious conservatives had developed a deep affinity for social and political conservatism as well. As a result, most evangelicals responded coolly and conservatively to the rising tide of social protests and progressive campaigns in the 1960s and early 1970s.¹⁰

At the same time, however, a minority of evangelicals began to reevaluate their attitudes toward social activism. Led by Carl F. H. Henry, the widely respected editor of *Christianity Today*, diverse voices began to call upon evangelicals to heed biblical mandates concerning not only evangelism but also social justice. Several theologians and

¹⁰ “The Gospel’s Continuing Relevance: Healing the World’s Deep Hurt,” *Christianity Today*, Nov 5, 1965, 34. See also George Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Theological Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987); Dennis Hollinger, *Individualism and Social Ethics: an Evangelical Syncretism* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983); Robert Booth Fowler, *A New Engagement: Evangelical Political Thought, 1966-1976* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1982); and Richard Pierard, *The Unequal Yoke: Evangelical Christianity and Political Conservatism* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1970).

academics produced books that justified Christian social responsibility and political engagement. A number of prominent conferences on evangelism also explored questions of practical responses to human suffering and needs. Most important, two evangelical journals dedicated to progressive social action appeared. In 1965, Fred Alexander and his son John began the publication of *Freedom Now* to confront the blatant racism they perceived in evangelical circles. After several years John Alexander took primary leadership and broadened the journal's concern to all forms of injustice and suffering. The magazine changed its name to *The Other Side* in order to identify with the oppressed and marginalized. In 1971, Jim Wallis and several fellow students at Trinity Evangelical Seminary formed the People's Christian Coalition and began publishing the *Post-American*. As the name of the journal implied, the group protested what they interpreted as American imperialism in Vietnam and the complicity of American Christians in racism and economic injustice. Several years later the People's Christian Coalition changed the name of both their community and magazine to *Sojourners* and moved to inner-city Washington, D.C. to live and to minister among the poor. These two journals created a forum and network for like-minded evangelicals to explore and to promote social justice.

By 1973, then, evangelicals dedicated to addressing injustice and inequalities became a self-conscious minority within the larger evangelical movement. Several proponents decided to convene a workshop on social concern in order to unite sympathizers further and to challenge mainstream evangelicalism to re-balance commitments to both personal and social transformation. At a conference in a Chicago YMCA hotel over the Thanksgiving weekend of 1973, diverse evangelical leaders came together to draft a statement defending progressive social and political reform. The

resulting “Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern” outlined the primary convictions of the emergent movement. The document included confessions of the evangelical community’s sins of omission and commission in areas of justice such as racism, sexism, economic exploitation, and excessive nationalism. Most important, the endorsers identified social action as an evangelical imperative. “We call on our fellow evangelical Christians to demonstrate repentance in a Christian discipleship that confronts the social and political injustice of our nation,” read the declaration. As a follow-up to this initial meeting, Ron Sider led the formation of Evangelicals for Social Action, an organization that joined *The Other Side* and *Sojourners* as the most visible representatives of a new progressive evangelicalism. Above all, “The Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern” symbolized the coalescence of the progressive evangelical movement and marked what signers considered a renewal of evangelicalism’s rich tradition of social responsibility and political engagement.¹¹

By the end of the 1970s, however, a markedly different form of evangelical social responsibility and political engagement appeared and quickly overshadowed progressive evangelicalism. Led by a separate network of conservative Christian leaders such as Jerry Falwell and Tim LaHaye, the New Christian Right rose in reaction to perceived attacks on both America’s “Christian heritage” and traditional “family values.” Like progressive evangelicals, leaders of the Christian Right urged evangelicals to abandon their cynicism toward social and political activism. But these Christian conservatives built their movement not around efforts to redress injustices and inequalities but rather

¹¹ “The Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern,” in *The Chicago Declaration*, ed. Ronald J. Sider (Carol Stream, IL: Creation House, 1974).

around campaigns to reform the secularization of public culture and to combat abortion, feminism, and gay rights activism. They allied themselves with political conservatives and Republican politicians and established organizations such as Christian Voice and the Moral Majority. By the early 1980s, the apparent success and influence of the Christian Right established the popular association between evangelicalism and conservative social and political positions.¹² As a result, progressive evangelicals found themselves on the defensive and struggling to persuade skeptical audiences to embrace their alternative agenda. Nevertheless, they remained committed to promoting a political engagement grounded in the themes of community, the common good, and justice.

In this dissertation, I argue that contemporary progressive evangelicals embraced a public theology of community that prioritized social justice. At its best, they believed, community membership safeguards the inherent value, essential equality, and human rights of each individual. Such membership also entails responsibilities for the common good. In abstract terms, the common good results from basic social and economic conditions that allow *all* of the community's members, not merely a subset, to prosper. Justice provides the vital framework for achieving the common good and thus represents the highest ideal of public life. Biblical justice requires not only equality before the law, they argued, but also the fair allocation of a society's resources. Progressive evangelicals therefore endorsed the more controversial principle of distributive justice. By ensuring access to basic resources, forms of distributive justice attempt to redress gross social

¹² Among many notable studies of the Christian Right, see especially William Martin, *With God on Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America*, rev. ed. (New York: Broadway Books, 2005); and Michael Lienesch, *Redeeming America: Piety and Politics in the New Christian Right* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

inequalities that prevent equal opportunities to participate in community life. In their political praxis, progressive evangelicals have unashamedly advocated a communitarian ethic and its constraints on individuals' sovereignty in order to promote their interdependent welfare. These convictions regarding the common good and the demands of social justice distinguished the political engagement of progressive evangelicals from those advanced not only by the Christian Right but also by political and theological liberals.

Overview and Outline

This dissertation draws upon the publications and activities of the three most influential and popular representatives of contemporary progressive evangelicalism: *The Other Side*, *Sojourners*, and Evangelicals for Social Action (ESA). Several factors make these two magazines and ESA effective lenses through which to analyze the movement's development and priorities. First, each of these representatives dates to the formative period of the progressive evangelical movement. As Chapter 1 details, *The Other Side* and *Sojourners* (then named the *Post-American*) contributed to the rise of progressive evangelicalism by offering important forums and organs for early participants. ESA formed following the 1973 Thanksgiving Workshop on Evangelicals and Social Concern. Second, the leaders of *The Other Side*, *Sojourners*, and ESA played pivotal roles in organizing and promoting progressive evangelicalism. Ron Sider, who became President of ESA, coordinated the 1973 Thanksgiving Workshop; both *The Other Side*'s John Alexander and *Sojourners*' Jim Wallis served on the planning committee. In subsequent years and well into the twenty-first century, Wallis and Sider in particular served as the

most recognizable progressive evangelical leaders. In addition to the platforms respectively provided by *Sojourners* and ESA, Wallis and Sider authored books, coordinated activities, made public appearances, and garnered media attention in efforts to promote progressive evangelical concerns. Finally, these three representatives produced the most consistent and popular publications within their movement. Thus a concentrated focus on *The Other Side*, *Sojourners*, and ESA's newsletters and magazine allows one to trace the development of progressive evangelicalism and analyze how their public theology of community shaped their political agendas.

In this study, the term "evangelical" has both theological and sociological connotations. With respect to theology, evangelicals share several defining characteristics: a commitment to the primary authority of the Bible; the necessity of a personal conversion; faith in the atoning work of Jesus; and the imperative of sharing the gospel, or good news, of the Christian faith. When used in this broad theological sense, therefore, evangelical may refer to Christians as disparate as Mennonites and black Baptists, Pentecostals and Missouri Synod Lutherans, Southern Baptists and theological conservatives within mainline Protestant denominations. Yet not all Christians who hold evangelical beliefs identify themselves as "evangelicals." Thus I use the term in a more narrow sociological sense to describe those who participate in the self-designated "evangelical" movement that broke from the separatist subculture of fundamentalism in the mid-twentieth century. "Evangelicalism" thus indicates an interdenominational network of leaders, institutions, and publications comprised almost exclusively of

theologically conservative white Protestants.¹³ Both the leadership and constituency of contemporary progressive evangelicalism emerged from within these religious circles.

The term “progressive” suggests a social and political orientation dedicated to reforms of injustice and inequality. At the beginning of their activism in the 1970s, both participants and observers often described the new movement as either “young evangelicals” or “radical evangelicals.”¹⁴ By the 1980s, however, these labels largely disappeared. The movement’s leadership grew older, and radicalism had lost its symbolic if not its substantive appeal. Opponents consistently identified them as “liberals” or members of “the Left” as part of efforts to discredit their agenda. Yet progressive evangelicals chafed at such charges and rejected the “liberal” label.¹⁵ By the mid-1990s, some leaders adopted the term “progressive” to describe their movement, and the designation has gained currency among both participants and media analysts in recent years. The description captures, therefore, the heart of the public engagement promoted by *Sojourners*, *The Other Side*, ESA, and like-minded evangelicals.

Two qualifications regarding this study seem in order. First, the social and political agendas of progressive evangelicals often overlapped with mainline Protestants and Roman Catholics. As a result, by the late 1970s, both *Sojourners* and *The Other Side* drew upon ecumenical authors and attracted readers from across religious traditions.

¹³ George Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991) 1-6.

¹⁴ Fowler, *A New Engagement*, 115-139; Richard Quebedeaux, *The Young Evangelicals: Revolution in Orthodoxy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974).

¹⁵ See, for example, Ronald H. Nash, *Why the Left is Not Right: the Religious Left: Who They Are and What They Believe* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996).

“We are not merely or uniquely an evangelical magazine,” the editors of *Sojourners* admitted in 1977. “There will continue to be those who write for and read *Sojourners* who are deeply Christian but may well be non-evangelical.” Rather than focus on “evangelical purity,” both magazines willingly cooperated with all Christians in a common pursuit of social justice.¹⁶ This dissertation does not attempt to exclude non-evangelical authors in *Sojourners* or *The Other Side* from its analysis. Instead, I consider their contributions as also illustrative of progressive evangelicals’ political (but not necessarily theological) commitments.

Second, this study relies upon the perspectives of prominent progressive evangelical leaders to characterize the movement as a whole. I acknowledge the potential problems of what Christian Smith calls “the representative elite fallacy”—that is, the assumption “that the views of spokespeople represent those of their supposed constituencies.”¹⁷ Yet an analysis of the publications of “elites” within *Sojourners*, *The Other Side*, and *ESA* offers an important first step into understanding progressive evangelicalism. By noting both the common core commitments and differences of opinion among these groups, this study treats progressive evangelicalism as a complex yet coherent religious movement.

As a whole, this dissertation features a thematic rather than chronological organization. The first chapter examines the factors contributing to the rise of contemporary progressive evangelicalism. In the mid-1960s a vanguard of evangelical

¹⁶ “Editorial response,” *Sojourners*, Nov 1977, 39.

¹⁷ Christian Smith, *Christian America? What Evangelicals Really Want* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 7-9.

activists, academics, and prominent began challenging the social quietism and political conservatism that characterized conservative Christians. Two journals, *The Other Side* (originally titled *Freedom Now*) and the *Post-American*, publicized the call for evangelical social concern and focused attention on social injustices. Popular and academic books described Christian public engagement as a theological imperative. Several prominent conferences on evangelism introduced calls to social action within their proceedings. These publications and activities produced a network of leaders committed to rebutting evangelicals' skepticism or hostility to social and political activism. At a workshop in late 1973, these leaders produced "The Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern" that articulated the core commitments of the emerging progressive evangelical movement.

Chapters two through five examine the ways in which progressive evangelicals' public theology of community shaped their responses to racial inequality, feminism, abortion, and homosexuality. Chapter two addresses the ways in which racial justice inspired many early progressive evangelicals and remained a central concern of the movement. Indeed, *Sojourners* identified racism as "America's original sin." Progressive evangelicals viewed racism not only as personal acts of prejudice but also as institutionalized injustice. Unlike Christian conservatives, therefore, they supported affirmative action as a means for redressing racial inequality. Despite an unequivocal commitment to racial equality, progressive evangelicalism remained an overwhelmingly white movement. Yet *Sojourners*, *The Other Side*, and ESA repeatedly confronted their audiences with the perspectives and needs of racial minorities. Each organization

recruited black authors and published regular analyses of issues and injustices faced by racial minorities.

The progressive evangelical movement confronted sexism with the same zeal that they opposed racism. Chapter three analyzes how *Sojourners*, *The Other Side*, and ESA adopted women's equality as a cause for justice and provided vital support for the growth of "biblical feminism." While theological and political conservatives vilified the feminist movement as an attack on divinely established gender roles, progressive evangelicals defended gender egalitarianism. Joining other feminists in pursuing women's full equality in all contexts, they supported legislative efforts such as the Equal Rights Amendment, condemned patterns of economic inequality, and promoted women's religious leadership in ministries and churches. Support for most feminist goals placed progressive evangelicals at odds with Christian conservatives in both religious and political debates.

Yet the majority of progressive evangelical leaders refused to agree that support for feminism required support for abortion rights. Chapter four reviews the complex responses to abortion within the progressive evangelical movement. Finding both the biblical and scientific evident ambiguous, *The Other Side* concluded that abortion represented a matter of moral ambiguity. The editors thus refused to endorse either a pro-choice or pro-life position. In contrast, after initial ambivalence both *Sojourners* and ESA determined that abortion represented violence against unborn life. Claiming the mantle of "pro-life feminism," they framed opposition to abortion as part of a broader "consistent ethic of life." They criticized leaders of the conservative pro-life movement for their failure to oppose with equal vigor other threats to human life and dignity: e.g.

war, the death penalty, economic injustice, racism, and sexism. As abortion became the critical fault line in American political life, progressive evangelical leaders believed that neither party represented promoted a “completely pro-life” agenda. More than any other factor, their unwillingness to divorce opposition to abortion from other social justice issues contributed progressive evangelicals’ sense of themselves as politically homeless.

Chapter five examines the diverse responses of progressive evangelical leaders to homosexuality. Most found themselves at odds not only with the hostility of Christian conservatives but also with the ready approval of religious and political liberals. Leaders of the Christian Right resisted the gay rights movement and combated public acceptance of homosexuality as an acceptable “alternative lifestyle.” Progressive evangelical leaders united, however, in their insistence on the full civil rights of gays and lesbians. They also all acknowledged that homosexual orientation was neither merely a matter of choice nor commonly changed. Yet disagreement arose within the movement regarding the legitimacy of homosexual behavior for Christians. Persuaded that the Bible failed to offer clear guidelines concerning contemporary covenantal same-sex relationships, *The Other Side* concluded that Christians should not only welcome but also affirm homosexuals within the church. *Sojourners* and ESA disagreed. Believing that the Bible only sanctioned heterosexual marriages, both welcomed gays and lesbians but refused to condone same-sex practice. Thus *Sojourners* and ESA differentiated between the meanings of justice in a pluralistic public and private religious context.

Although concerned most often with practical policies rather than political philosophies, progressive evangelical leaders relied upon consistent theological principles to guide their activism. The conclusion outlines the biblical interpretations and emphases

that comprised progressive evangelicals' public theology of community and thus shaped their political engagement. While this study focuses upon issues of race, gender, and sexuality, two other concerns received prominent attention within the progressive evangelical movement: economic justice and the effects of American nationalism. This dissertation closes by briefly addressing these issues in light of progressive evangelicals' public theology of community.

Significance

This study makes important contributions to several overlapping fields within American religious studies by offering a current interpretation of contemporary progressive evangelicalism. The work fills gaps within previous scholarship and further illuminates interpretations of the nature of American evangelicalism, religion in America in the late twentieth century, and the complex relationship of religion and American politics.

Although the historiography of American evangelicalism has substantially increased and diversified over the previous decades, no scholar has comprehensively documented and analyzed the contemporary progressive evangelical movement. My research thus offers a vital addition and update within the scholarship of evangelicalism by developing a more accurate picture of the complex, contested character of evangelical identity. Richard Quebedeaux's *The Young Evangelicals: Revolution in Orthodoxy* (1974) and *The Worldly Evangelicals* (1978) reflect cursory and now descriptions of the

burgeoning movement.¹⁸ In *A New Engagement: Evangelical Political Thought, 1966-1976* (1982), Robert Booth Fowler devoted a section to “radical evangelicals” represented by *Sojourners* and *The Other Side*. As the dates of its subtitle suggest, however, the work’s contemporary relevance suffers from its conclusion prior to the rise of the Christian Right.¹⁹ The surprising success and visibility of this latter movement produced the stereotype of evangelicals as homogeneously conservative. As a result, most scholarly treatments of American evangelicalism have given little more than passing mention to progressive evangelicals. Yet the progressive movement has sustained its alternative evangelical identity, and this dissertation provides an interpretation both of the continued contests over authentic evangelical civic engagement.

This study also contributes to a more accurate understanding of the broader transformations occurring in the American religious landscape in the second half of the twentieth century. While conservative traditions have thrived, mainline Christian denominations and other progressive faiths have declined in numbers and significance. Robert Wuthnow’s *The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith Since World War II* and James Davison Hunter’s *Culture Wars: the Struggle to Define America* represent two important interpretations of the causes and results of this shift. Yet in many respects, neither work adequately accounts for the fortunes of contemporary progressive evangelicalism and its blend of conservative theology and progressive social and political agenda. Like religious African-Americans—another group whose

¹⁸ Quebedeaux, *The Young Evangelicals*; idem., *The Worldly Evangelicals*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1978).

¹⁹ Fowler, *A New Engagement*.

experiences complicate these interpretations—progressive evangelicals are clear members of neither Wuthnow’s “conservative” or “liberal” religious camps nor Hunter’s “orthodox” or “progressive” parties.²⁰ This dissertation thus challenges the dichotomies presented in these two works and forces scholars to ask continuing questions about the changes in American religious life in the late twentieth century. By studying progressive evangelicals, I demonstrate the complexity within the evangelical tradition and question the ability of scholars to analyze religious and social changes in dichotomous terms.

Finally, this dissertation contributes an important analysis of an overlooked intersection between religion and politics in America. It is notable that much of the literature in the field of politics and religion began in earnest following the academic community’s surprise at the strength of the conservative evangelical re-engagement with the political process.²¹ Indeed, studies of the Christian Right have abounded in recent decades, and scholars continue to offer theories for the movement’s growth and (thus far mistakenly) predict its demise. By offering an analysis of progressive evangelicals, this study broadens appreciation for the religious commitments that inform not only conservative but also progressive political agenda. This dissertation makes clear that Christian conservatives do not have a monopoly on the salience of religious language and symbols in the public sphere.

²⁰ Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith since World War II* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988); James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: the Struggle to Define America*, (New York: Basic Books, 1991).

²¹ See *Rediscovering the Religious Factor in American Politics*, edited by David C. Leege and Lyman A. Kellstedt (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharp, 1993).

Chapter 1: The Movement Begins: 1965 – 1973

The hotel of Chicago's Wabash Avenue YMCA may have lacked style, but it proved a suitably symbolic host for the unusual gathering inside during the Thanksgiving weekend of 1973. The original Young Men's Christian Association, founded in the 1850s by British evangelical Christians, sought to address not only the spiritual needs but also the unhealthy social conditions of the urban working-class. In 1913 organizers opened the branch on Wabash Avenue to serve the black community in response to racial discrimination at existing Chicago YMCAs. Its services included housing, job training, and other assistance to an impoverished population swelling from the "Great Migration" of southern blacks to industrialized areas. Two years later within its walls, the historian Carter G. Woodson and several colleagues founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History. The organization proposed that all Americans should study the historical contributions of African Americans for one week in February in order to promote greater awareness and improve race relationships. Lengthened later to a month-long celebration, Black History Month thus had its genesis within the Wabash Avenue YMCA. By 1973, however, the building and surrounding neighborhoods of Chicago's "Black Metropolis" had suffered from social and economic deterioration. Groups did not descend upon the YMCA's hotel for the ambience. Yet taken together, the initial purpose of the YMCA, the unique history of the Wabash Avenue branch, and the present "dingy

surroundings” and “life and sounds of the inner city” offered an appropriate backdrop to the meeting inside.²²

A collection of progressive evangelical Christians committed to social action, racial reconciliation, and relieving the economic burdens of the poor had assembled at the Wabash Avenue YMCA for the “Thanksgiving Workshop on Evangelicals and Social Concern.” These diverse evangelical leaders gathered to draft a statement that described and endorsed the imperatives of social justice and reform. Such a purpose distinguished the participants as a self-conscious minority within the contemporary evangelical movement. They rejected forms of either cultural disengagement or reflexive conservatism that had become standard within twentieth-century American evangelicalism. Instead, those present believed that conservative theology and biblical faith in fact compelled them to confront suffering, oppression, and social injustice. Nineteenth-century evangelicals who fueled abolitionism or initiated efforts similar to the YMCA inspired these Christians to renew what they considered their tradition’s rich heritage of social responsibility and political involvement. Participants discussed abuses produced by militarism and patriarchal traditions, but they especially emphasized injustices rooted in racism and unequal socioeconomic resources. The legacy of racial segregation embodied in the Wabash Avenue YMCA and marks of poverty in the historically black surrounding neighborhoods offered tangible reminders of the acuteness of such themes. Like those promoting the didactic value of black history, these

²² Sabrina L. Miller, “Black History Was Born, Nurtured Here,” *Chicago Tribune*, Feb 1, 1996; Ronald J. Sider, “Introduction: An Historic Moment for Biblical Social Concern,” in *The Chicago Declaration*, ed. Ronald J. Sider (Carol Stream, IL: Creation House, 1974), 24-25.

progressive evangelicals intended to persuade fellow conservative Christians of the urgency of social justice. The document produced at the end of the weekend workshop, “The Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern,” became the medium for these hopes.

Although Thanksgiving had just passed, “The Chicago Declaration” called American evangelicals to confess and to repent rather than to express gratitude. The signers acknowledged dissonance between God’s love and justice and their own attitudes and actions toward the poor, oppressed, and racial minorities. In addition to highlighting social and political injustice within American society, the document also criticized evangelicals’ complicity in the economic practices and militaristic nationalism that apparently compounded global suffering and violence. The declaration confessed evangelicals’ wrongful support of male domination and female passivity. The overwhelming thrust of “The Chicago Declaration” centered upon a summons to public engagement on behalf of progressive social reform. Both the tenor and vocabulary pointedly countered the narrow religious preoccupation, cultural separatism, and conservative politics characteristic of the majority of evangelicals. What then had led this group of evangelicals at this workshop in 1973 to identify social justice and progressive politics as vital to responsible Christian citizenship?

A combination of social, theological, and intellectual factors propelled the rise of contemporary progressive evangelicalism. Direct contact and deepened familiarity with underprivileged communities increased sensitivity to immediate physical (rather than only spiritual) needs. Often in concert with these experiences, association with many of the social and political movements of the preceding decade sharpened these evangelicals’

analyses of the roots of suffering and heightened disillusionment with American society. Drawing upon both secular and more liberal Christian sources, a cluster of evangelical scholars produced works that challenged the premises and effectiveness of their tradition's predominant separatism, conservatism, and individualistic approach to social problems. In addition, a small yet influential number of evangelical biblical interpreters emphasized the political implications of the gospel and scriptural concern for social justice. To the vanguard of progressive evangelicals, the convergence of these developments culminated in a primary practical concern: how could their Christian witness remain plausible if so many evangelicals ignored or even perpetuated social injustice?

Beginning in earnest in 1965, a pioneering minority of evangelical activists, academics, and recognized leaders began claiming social concern as a Christian imperative. They promoted and defended their reformist visions through journals, books, conferences, and collaborative efforts. These media and forums increasingly drew together a sympathetic and often frustrated constituency, laying the groundwork for the new progressive evangelical movement that coalesced at the 1973 Thanksgiving workshop. This chapter analyzes the antecedents to this gathering and how "The Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern" came to express the central priorities of contemporary progressive evangelicalism.

Progressive Evangelical Journals

Two magazines provided the primary forums through which progressive evangelical ideas spread and attracted early advocates of evangelical social action.

Leaders of social, political, or religious movements regularly create journals in order to disseminate ideas and forge a common sense of purpose among followers. Like the broader evangelical movement, progressive evangelicalism came together as an unofficial network of organizations and individuals loosely united by common convictions and self-definitions. Through their regular publication and growing popularity, *The Other Side* (founded as *Freedom Now* in 1965) and *The Post-American* (established in 1971) emerged as the nuclei for this growing network.

Close inspection of the origins and developments of these magazines offers the clearest picture of the rise of contemporary progressive evangelicalism. The early appearance of *The Other Side* allows one to trace the evolution of its progressive orientation and the editors' self-conscious attempts to challenge evangelical conservatism. *The Post-American's* aggressive rhetoric and analyses regarding American nationalism illustrate the influence of concurrent social and political protest movements. Both magazines attempted to define and to defend social action for popular audiences, thus exemplifying the early methods leaders chose to explain theological, theoretical, and practical features of progressive evangelicalism. Finally, *The Other Side* and *The Post-American* (renamed *Sojourners* in 1975) continued to provide visible and influential leadership for the progressive evangelical movement in the coming decades. By the late 1960s less recognizable journals such as *Right On* and *Inside* also promoted evangelical social concern.²³ Yet *The Other Side* and *The Post-American* attracted the widest readership and retained reputations as vital organs for progressive platforms. Their

²³ Richard Quebedeaux, *The Young Evangelicals: Revolution in Orthodoxy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974); idem, *The Worldly Evangelicals* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978).

stories reflect the different factors that stimulated evangelical social concern and the core convictions that united the inchoate movement.

“Freedom Now for The Other Side”

Like most fundamentalist leaders reared in the early twentieth century, Fred Alexander believed that Protestant Liberalism presented the most pressing challenge to his ministry. “The problem of the church thirty years ago was theological—proper Biblical doctrine,” he wrote in 1965. But by the mid-1960s, a different difficulty preoccupied Alexander. “The problem today is practical,” he concluded, the “proper application of Biblical doctrine to human relations, especially racial relations.” Although proud that “fundamentalists met the problem of modernism head-on,” Alexander discerned a current lack of similar resolve. “We meet the problem of race relations fearfully,” he complained.²⁴ In response, Fred Alexander and his son John began publishing *Freedom Now*, a journal focused on provoking conservative Christians to support the civil rights and integration of blacks. Although more liberal Christian leaders had already mobilized for such reform, the overwhelming majority of evangelicals remained either passive or hostile. Such conservative Christians still believed that social or political activism, including the civil rights movement, distracted and even undermined the church’s foremost task of evangelism.²⁵ The Alexanders refused to accept, however, that Christians could legitimately address spiritual privation while

²⁴ Fred Alexander, “Integration Now,” *Freedom Now*, Dec 1965, 3.

²⁵ For a brief account of white evangelical attitudes toward segregation and civil rights, see Michael Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 45-49.

ignoring physical and economic needs. Over the next several years their magazine evolved into a leading forum for conservative Christian opposition to all forms of injustice, increasing both the self-awareness and visibility of the emergent progressive evangelical movement.

Personal exposure to the plight of black Americans introduced the Alexanders to the social application of the Christian gospel. In the early 1960s Fred Alexander began pastoring a black congregation and moved into an integrated neighborhood in Cleveland, Ohio. His experiences caused him to reevaluate the standard evangelical response to socio-economic problems. "I must confess that most of my life I have isolated Christian responsibility from everything but soul winning and direct Christian activity," he reflected. "I have honestly believed that all we need to do is lead people to Christ and build them up in the faith, and everything else would automatically fall into place."²⁶ Yet Alexander discovered that evangelism and religious training neither necessarily nor even routinely improved the quality of life of his black parishioners and neighbors. Joined by his son John, Alexander started publishing a magazine in order to challenge evangelical Christians' racism, support for segregation, and apparent naiveté regarding social problems. They intended the journal's title, *Freedom Now*, to underscore that blacks needed more than religious salvation to experience immediate deliverance from social and economic problems. To be sure, John Alexander explained in the initial issue, the gospel of Jesus remained the only means to true, eternal freedom. But "the simple message of salvation" did not accelerate integration, end discrimination, improve

²⁶ Fred Alexander, "Christ is not the Answer, or Is Christ Really the Answer," *Freedom Now*, May-June 1967, 9.

educational facilities, or fight poverty. Immediate rather than eventual freedom from such pressing problems required the application of “the whole gospel” to “every phase of an individual’s life, not just the ‘religious’ phase.”²⁷ From the magazine’s outset, the Alexanders promoted their interpretation of the Christian gospel as both the answer to individual sin and a summons to active social reform.

The specter of the Social Gospel still haunted evangelicals, and thus the editors and contributors to the early issues of *Freedom Now* felt compelled to distance their message from fundamentalism’s historic adversary. “Surely the gospel of Jesus Christ is partly social,” John Alexander argued, for “being born again means being born again in the whole man, political, social, economical, personal, etc.” He believed that the application of the gospel to every aspect of life should lead one to combat racism and other social sins.²⁸ Another author interpreted the retreat from social concern by fundamentalists in the early twentieth century as an understandable response to the theological liberalism of the Social Gospel. But such a negative reaction had become outdated, he wrote, and evangelicals needed to regain a scriptural balance between their responsibilities to God and fellow humans.²⁹ In an issue devoted to “The Church and Social Concern,” Fred Alexander harshly criticized liberal Protestants for conflating individual and social salvation. Yet he insisted that this legacy of the Social Gospel did not nullify a proper biblical regard for social action. “Because some men confuse social

²⁷ John Alexander, “Our Name,” *Freedom Now*, Aug 1965, 4.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Robert G. Krueger, “Evangelical Retreat from the Social Gospel,” *Freedom Now*, Dec 1965, 7.

concern with evangelism does not make social concern evil any more than it makes evangelism evil,” he argued. “Because they have let the pendulum swing too far in one direction does not mean that we should let it swing too far in the other direction.”³⁰ In fact, several authors claimed that the lack of social concern actually hindered Christians’ witness. John Perkins, the African-American founder of Voice of Calvary Ministries in Mendenhall, Mississippi, believed that reports of racism and segregation had “tied the hands of missionaries abroad as those to whom they preach read in newspapers about our racial strife.”³¹ Disregard for people’s physical welfare even caused evangelicals to forfeit the right to be heard. “People will just not listen to us,” Fred Alexander insisted, “until they are convinced we are concerned about their bodies as well as their souls.”³² According to *Freedom Now*, anxiety about the Social Gospel had become a red herring that prevented evangelicals from rightly expressing love of others through practical social action.

Until the middle of 1968, *Freedom Now* kept a narrow focus on persuading its white audience to reexamine their own views on race. Numerous exegetical articles debunked biblical interpretations often used to support black inferiority and segregation. Modern blacks did not represent the descendents of Ham and Canaan, several authors

³⁰ [Fred Alexander], “Social Concern,” *Freedom Now*, May-Jun 1967, 3. Alexander wrote in response to the National Council of Church’s director of evangelism, Dr. Jitsuo Morikawa. He quoted Morikawa as stating that “God does not deal with each man as an individual...There can not be individual salvation. Salvation has more to do with the whole society than with the individual soul...It is for this reason that contemporary evangelism is moving away from winning souls one by one to the evangelism of the structure of society.”

³¹ John Perkins, “The Oneness of Believers,” *Freedom Now*, Dec 1965, 4.

³² Fred Alexander, “Christ is not the Answer, or Is Christ Really the Answer,” 9.

concluded, and thus the curse of servanthood in Genesis 9:24-27 did not apply to them. Likewise, other articles explained that one could not legitimately base segregationist policies upon Paul's statement in Acts 17:26 that God had made all nations and determined "the bounds of their habitation."³³ But the Alexanders believed that ignorance as much as biblical misunderstandings perpetuated discrimination. Therefore they urged readers to empathize with the struggles of blacks and to understand white Americans' complicity in creating them. The editors suggested increasing personal relationships with blacks, reading books such as *Black Like Me* by John Howard Griffin, joining the NAACP, and even subscribing to *Ebony* magazine.³⁴ John Alexander repeatedly argued that whites must accept considerable blame for the socio-economic struggles faced by blacks. "The reason Negroes have so many problems is precisely because whites have treated them so wretchedly," he wrote. "First we broke their legs, and now we criticize them for limping."³⁵ Through its first three years, *Freedom Now* centered its criticism on unbiblical beliefs and attitudes among conservative Christians that hindered a balanced concern for blacks' spiritual and physical needs.

³³ The quote from Acts 17:26 is from the King James Version, the dominant translation used by conservative Christians at that time. The Alexanders clearly considered segregationists' interpretations of these texts a threat to combat immediately, for no less than two entire issues and ten articles within the first ten issues of *Freedom Now* provided exegetical analyses of these two passages. See, for example, John Alexander, "Ham and the Curse, or the Biblical Inferiority of the Negro?" *Freedom Now*, Oct 1965; and W. B. Wallis, "The Bounds of Their Habitation," *Freedom Now*, Aug-Sept 1966.

³⁴ John Alexander, "These Things Ought Not Be So," *Freedom Now*, Oct-Nov 1966, 3; idem, "What the Christians Must Do," *Freedom Now*, Dec 1966, 6; Fred Alexander, "Understanding," *Freedom Now*, Dec 1966, 8.

³⁵ John Alexander, "The Problems of Integration in the Community," *Freedom Now*, Apr 1966, 4.

Coverage of the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. in April 1968 marked a turning point in *Freedom Now*'s focus and purpose. Two years earlier, the magazine had carried articles on King in which the Alexanders concluded that conservative Christians should support the Civil Rights movement even if King had questionable religious credentials and stood accused of Communist sympathies. Negative letters poured in, and several included spiteful comments deriding the work of "Martin Lucifer King."³⁶ Following King's murder, the editors hastily reworked the upcoming issue to include reflections upon the event. "The time for polite discussion is past," John Alexander warned. Although recognizing that "this issue will be shocking to many people" and "expect[ing] to lose some supporters," he believed that most of *Freedom Now*'s past discussions seemed trivial in light of surrounding cultural chaos and violence.³⁷ As a result, the magazine began to expand its analyses of both the scope of Christian responsibility and the roots of social problems.

Memorial articles on King signaled two critical developments in the progressive orientation of *Freedom Now*. First, the rubric and language of justice superseded that of love as foundational for Christian social concern. Bill Pannell, a black evangelist with Youth for Christ and contributing editor to the magazine, remembered that as a fundamentalist he had initially assumed that King "should not meddle in civic affairs." "I

³⁶ John Alexander, "Is Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. a Communist?" *Freedom Now*, Jun-Jul 1966; Fred Alexander, "Is Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. a Fundamentalist?" *Freedom Now*, Jun-Jul 1966. For readers' reaction to these articles, see "Letters," *Freedom Now*, Aug-Sept 1966, 6; and Fred Alexander, "Memorial," *Freedom Now*, May-Jun 1968. In the latter article, Alexander wrote "Without a doubt we lost more friends over that issue [discussing Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1966] than any other...I have no doubt that fundamentalists hated Dr. King more than they hated any other man."

³⁷ John Alexander, "A Time to Act," *Freedom Now*, May-Jun 1968, 3.

was naïve, of course,” Pannell wrote, “both as a Negro and a Christian. I might add, as an American also.” As Pannell gradually embraced the social implication of the gospel, however, he identified a motivation even greater than love. “I began to see that the issue was not love, but justice, and that one is false to the Gospel if he dares preach one concept to the exclusion of the other.”³⁸ Fred Alexander lauded King for judging that “things like justice and freedom are more important than peace.” He also regretted the lack of concern for justice in the deaths of Medgar Evers and the black children who died in the Birmingham church bombing. King’s death became the inspiration for Alexander to pledge himself to fight on behalf of justice. “Dr. King, you have won my heart to your cause,” he announced. “I am in this war with you. I am at war with any man, white or black, who is practicing injustice.”³⁹ *Freedom Now* increasingly articulated the purpose of Christian responsibility in terms of justice actualized in society rather than love expressed in individualized action. The editors soon devoted an entire issue to “The Old Testament in Today’s Society,” appealing to the biblical bases for social justice in the Mosaic laws and prophetic scriptures. John Alexander argued that evangelicals had neglected these Old Testament teachings about poverty, racism and justice for too long. “We must make it very clear to those who say Christianity has little to say to society” that they “are in disobedience to God’s Word,” he wrote.⁴⁰ Thus the vision of social justice augmented the *Freedom Now*’s recurrent emphasis upon personal social concern.

³⁸ Bill Pannell, “Memorial to Dr. Martin Luther King,” *Freedom Now*, May-Jun 1968, 4.

³⁹ Fred Alexander, “Memorial,” 7.

⁴⁰ John Alexander, “The Old Testament in Today’s Society,” *The Other Side*, May-Jun 1970, 4.

This focus on corporate and not just personal morality reinforced the second trend that developed in the wake of King's assassination. Until that point, *Freedom Now* had concentrated almost exclusively on exposing unacceptable practices and priorities among conservative Christians. Yet the complex background and chaotic response to King's death expanded the magazine's critical focus beyond the evangelical subculture to include the larger American culture as well. The editors made explicit that the underlying sources of blacks' social problems existed not merely among Christians but rather permeated American society. "Racism killed Dr. King," Fred Alexander stated, and "racism is as American as apple pie. Killing Martin Luther King was as American as apple pie."⁴¹ *Freedom Now* began to explore the roots of social problems that flourished not only in Christian contexts but also in the apparently fertile soil of the broader American culture. More and more articles defined and applied biblical standards of justice to measure the dominant values and public policies of American society at large.

The cumulative effect of these two new priorities shaped the subsequent direction of the magazine and prompted a change in the journal's name. In 1969 the Alexanders abandoned the title *Freedom Now* for one more suggestive of a broadened focus—*The Other Side*. In contrast to prosperous and healthy white Americans, the editors explained, "the other side of America is hungry, defeated and miserable." Representatives resided in "migrant working camps, Indian reservations, inner-city ghettos," and international sites devastated by hunger, war and tyranny. Thus a more extensive purpose began to guide *The Other Side*: "to apply the whole gospel to the problems of suffering people,

⁴¹ Fred Alexander, "Memorial," 7.

just as our Lord did.”⁴² While the magazine would continue periodic analysis of racism, this diversified sensitivity to all suffering yielded expanded coverage of additional, often related social problems.

Over the next several years, *The Other Side* addressed topics that included poverty, crime, police brutality, prison reform, misplaced budget priorities, American jingoism, and even sexism. Authors regularly highlighted forms of injustice within American culture that precipitated these hardships. They summarized many of the apparent underlying causes and pressed readers to oppose them on a personal and public level. “Our racism, our materialism, our travesty of evangelism, our militarism, our nationalism, our insensitivity to the other side, are open for all to see.”⁴³ By identifying these collective forms of injustice as sinful, *The Other Side* pushed evangelicals to recognize sin not merely in the form of individual immorality, but also embodied in corrupt cultural values and institutionalized inequalities. By 1973, *The Other Side* had outlined the bases for progressive Christian public engagement. Writers demanded that Christians confront social sins in order to ameliorate social problems faced by minority and underprivileged populations.

The maturation of the Alexanders’ progressive social concern illustrates the catalytic role played by the exposure of white evangelicals to the immediate needs of minority communities. Until ministering to and living among African Americans, Fred Alexander had considered social concern a distraction from his primary evangelistic calling. Not only did his experience alter his theoretical understanding of biblical social

⁴² [Fred and John Alexander], “The Other Side,” *The Other Side*, Sept-Oct 1969, 31.

⁴³ John Alexander, “The Authority of Scripture,” *The Other Side*, Jan-Feb 1973, 45.

responsibility, but it also gradually challenged his traditional views of economics and politics. Confessing that he had always considered capitalism and states' rights as biblical, Alexander became convinced that "it was capitalism which enslaved blacks and that states' rights, supposedly so crucial to freedom, held blacks in slavery for an extra seventy-five years and still causes them to be grossly mistreated."⁴⁴ Likewise, preparation for a Thanksgiving sermon disabused him of previous patriotic sentimentality. "So what could I say to a people to whom this 'sweet land of liberty' has been the sour land of slavery and continued oppression?" he realized. "How could a white man preach thanksgiving to a people who were social outcasts and had strong in their memories incidents of lynching, castration, and rape?" "The American dream is still a dream," he concluded, "or maybe even a nightmare for blacks, Indians, Spanish Americans, and many others."⁴⁵ The magazine's growing coverage of specific social problems manifested a sympathetic understanding of the multiform difficulties faced by minorities. By heightening white evangelicals' sensitivity to injustices and sufferings typically far from their own experiences, *Freedom Now* and then *The Other Side* nourished the appeal and growth of progressive evangelicalism.

But the magazine went further than merely highlighting minority issues. It offered black leaders who participated within the self-conscious evangelical movement an important forum for addressing white audiences. Prominent black evangelicals such as John Perkins, Bill Pannell, National Black Evangelical Association president William Bentley, and the popular evangelist Tom Skinner encouraged white evangelicals to

⁴⁴ Fred Alexander, "White Pastor, Black Church," *The Other Side*, Nov-Dec 1969, 22-23.

⁴⁵ Fred Alexander, "The American Dream," *The Other Side*, Nov-Dec 1970, 29.

embrace social justice, a cause that they as minorities rarely had the luxury to overlook. In the first installment of a regular column in *The Other Side*, Pannell pressed its audience to construct a new form of public engagement that neither stood silent in the face of oppression nor sanctioned violent change. “There may be another alternative,” he hoped, “and it had better be something other than the usual evangelical cop-out that posits responsibility for change with the individual Christian working within the system.”⁴⁶ Above all, these black authors challenged readers to reexamine the dominant social, economic, and political assumptions of the white evangelical subculture. In an article entitled “The Other America,” Bentley underlined the growing economic gap in American society and criticized the government’s priorities that privileged the military budget and space exploration at the expense of education, child welfare, and adequate relief of poverty.⁴⁷ “For the whites who will read this,” Skinner wrote in another article, “I trust it will open your eyes to the fact that the gospel that you have historically preached is not relevant and has not been to the overwhelming majority of black people.” He graphically explained how blacks would reject Jesus when evangelicals implicitly “wrapped him up in the American flag” and “made him chairman of the Republican Party, head of the Pentagon, [and] founder of capitalism.”⁴⁸ *The Other Side* helped

⁴⁶ Bill Pannell, “How Blacks Must Change,” *The Other Side*, Jan-Feb 1971, 20.

⁴⁷ William Bentley, “The Other America,” *The Other Side*, Jan-Feb 1970, 30-33.

⁴⁸ Tom Skinner, “[Untitled],” *The Other Side*, Jul-Aug 1970, 34. Pannell expressed an almost identical critique in *My Friend the Enemy*, written to white evangelicals to increase their understanding of the particular challenges facing black conservative Christians. He protested the tendency “to associate Christianity with American patriotism (it’s called nationalism when we criticize its manifestation in Africa), free enterprise, and the Republican party.” (William Pannell, *My Friend, the Enemy* [Waco, TX: Word Books], 53.)

ensure that black Christians would provide pivotal contributions to the emerging network of progressive evangelicalism.

As the earliest popular journal dedicated to evangelical social concern, *Freedom Now* and its successor *The Other Side* played an integral role in publicizing and uniting the burgeoning progressive evangelical movement. A litany of theological and practical arguments provided conservative Christians with the theoretical grounds for regarding social concern as a duty rather than a diversion. The magazine pushed white evangelicals to acknowledge and confront injustice and sufferings beyond the issues that typically inflamed their hostility. Thorough Christian engagement “means being concerned about immorality in politics as well as in the movies,” Fred Alexander wrote as early as 1968. “It means being concerned about racism as well as about sex.”⁴⁹ Authors attacked sin as both a personal and social phenomenon, stressing the inadequacy of exclusively evangelistic strategies in response to injustice. Most important, the magazine brought together prominent evangelicals who shared a common desire to transform evangelical public engagement. Not by coincidence did many of those present at the 1973 Thanksgiving workshop on evangelical social concern serve before then as contributing editors, advisors, or writers for *Freedom Now* and *The Other Side*.⁵⁰ By 1973, the magazine represented a distinct, self-conscious voice for a minority of conservative Christians committed to advancing social justice.

⁴⁹ [Fred Alexander], “Politics or Christ?” *Freedom Now*, Sept-Oct 1968, 4.

⁵⁰ Those who both contributed to *The Other Side* and attended the workshop included John Alexander, David Moberg, Richard Pierard, Vernon Grounds, Bill Pannell, John Perkins, William Bentley, Art Gish, Paul Henry, Nancy Hardesty, Frank Gaebelein, Ron Potter, Boyd Reese, Jim Wallis, and Ron Sider.

Despite the increasingly progressive and even self-styled “radical” views expressed within *The Other Side*, one of the major debates raging within the United States through these years remained virtually absent from the magazine’s purview: the war in Vietnam. In 1971 John Alexander admitted that the journal had printed very little (and nothing editorially) about America’s military involvement because “the factual issues about Vietnam are very complex, and we do not feel that Christians are in a special position to decide what the facts are.” Alexander did criticize, however, the apparent motivation of President Nixon to solidify America as the world’s greatest power and increase his own prestige.⁵¹ *The Other Side*’s inceptive sympathy lay with the civil rights movement, but potential affinity for the concurrent protest against American militarism in Indochina remained muted. Instead, strident criticism of the Vietnam war inspired the development of progressive evangelicalism through the pages of another progressive evangelical periodical to arise: *The Post-American*.

“A *Post-American* Faith”

Just after the speaker called for a moment of silence to remember American troops fighting in Vietnam, faint chanting disturbed the quiet. “Stop the war! Stop the war! Stop the war!” Turning towards the noise coming from the top of the stadium, over eighty thousand people who had gathered in the Cotton Bowl saw unfurled banners proclaiming “Christ or Country” and “Cross or Flag.” The audience had come to Dallas, Texas for Explo ’72, a week-long conference of evangelistic training featuring Billy

⁵¹ See John Alexander’s editorial response to a reader’s letter, *The Other Side*, Sept-Oct 1971, 7; and idem, “A Politics of Love,” *The Other Side*, Jul-Aug 1972, 42-44.

Graham and sponsored by Campus Crusade for Christ. On this particular evening, the program had included both a Flag Day ceremony and testimonies of conversion and patriotic pride by military officers. The crowd of conservative Christians seemed stunned at first by this brazen display but quickly drowned out the chants with thundering “boos.” As policemen promptly surrounded the small band of protestors, a Campus Crusade official demanded to know who was in charge. “The Holy Spirit,” replied one of the demonstrators.⁵² Indeed, these representatives of the People’s Christian Coalition believed themselves divinely inspired to oppose evangelicals’ tacit if not enthusiastic support for American militarism. The organization’s public witness at Explo ’72 dramatized its mission to challenge “those who would equate Christianity with the American way of life or baptize American foreign policy.” As its banners attested, the People’s Christian Coalition framed allegiance to America and commitment to Christianity as exclusive loyalties.

A year earlier, the group had named a journal it founded *The Post-American* and described itself in prophetic terms. The People’s Christian Coalition sought to free the institutional American church—and establishment evangelicalism in particular—from its “cultural captivity.” Emancipation would occur in two stages. Conservative Christians needed to accept that biblical faith entailed “both personal liberation and dynamic commitment to social justice.” The People’s Christian Coalition believed that this acknowledgement would then lead the church to repudiate “a society whose values are

⁵² Peter Ediger, “Explo ’72,” *The Post-American*, Fall 1972, 13; Jim Wallis, *Revive Us Again: A Sojourner’s Story* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983), 83-85. *Time* also noted the “ruckus” caused by the People’s Christian Coalition’s “more radical approach to the Gospel.” See “The Jesus Woodstock,” *Time*, June 26, 1972, 66.

corrupt and destructive.”⁵³ Under the leadership of its editor, Jim Wallis, *The Post-American* and its successor *Sojourners* emerged as the flagship journal of progressive evangelicalism.

The transformation of Wallis’s own faith and politics guided the founding of the People’s Christian Coalition and eventually shaped the progressive evangelical movement as a whole. Born in 1948 outside of Detroit, Wallis described himself as “a son of the American dream” in the economic boom of the post-war era. As a teenager, however, he became disillusioned with both the suburban lifestyle and conservative evangelicalism of his all-white community. The plight of black Americans particularly troubled Wallis, and the apparent apathy and patronizing attitude of his Plymouth Brethren church led him to inner city Detroit to interact with black communities. There he built relationships with many African Americans—including a Plymouth Brethren leader named Bill Pannell, who soon began writing for *The Other Side*. Their stories of suffering and oppression indelibly shaped his perspectives on racism and injustice. “They showed me the other America, the America that is wrong and mean and hateful; the America that we white people accept,” Wallis later wrote. In repeated conversations, the refusal of white Christians to acknowledge the contributions of racism to black suffering in general and to the violence of Detroit’s 1967 race riot confirmed for Wallis the hypocrisy of the church. As with Fred Alexander, the relatively meager response of white evangelicals to challenges faced by black Americans played a significant role in the appeal of progressive Christian social responsibility.⁵⁴

⁵³ Jim Wallis, “Post-American Christianity,” *The Post-American*, Fall 1971, 2-3.

⁵⁴ Jim Wallis, *Revive Us Again: A Sojourner’s Story*, 45.

As Wallis studied at Michigan State University, involvement in the anti-war movement completed his alienation from conservative Christians. The evangelicals he knew made it clear that “Christian faith had nothing to do with the questions that were creating such a passion in me: racism, poverty, and war.” Abandoning the church, Wallis in turn channeled his passion into leading campus protests. He became attracted to Marxist analysis and the New Left’s critique that both oppression of the poor and political self-interest defined American public policy and the power elite. Yet toward the end of his collegiate studies, Wallis began questioning the basic assumptions of the New Left. He witnessed different expressions of exploitation and apparent assent to violence, power manipulation, and condescension toward the poor. The New Left seemed “unable to generate enough vision or resources for spiritual and political transformation,” he concluded, and thus “had an inadequate basis for both protest and affirmation.”⁵⁵

As a result, Wallis reconsidered the possibility that the Christian gospel could transform both personal and political life. Rereading the New Testament, he discovered in the Sermon on the Mount a “manifesto of Christ’s new social order.” More important, Jesus’ identification with the poor and oppressed as described in Matthew 25 served as his “conversion passage.” “To find our way back to Jesus means a pilgrimage into the world of the hungry, the homeless, the disenfranchised,” Wallis determined. “Contrary to the message I had received from the church, Jesus’ message was as political as it was personal, as economic as it was spiritual, having as much to do with public life as

⁵⁵ Ibid., 67, 73.

individual devotion.”⁵⁶ Thus Wallis integrated his youthful biblical faith and more mature cultural criticism. He interpreted the call to follow Jesus, the traditional *imitatio Christi*, as not precluding but actually prescribing progressive social action. Drawn to more sustained theological study upon graduation from Michigan State, he enrolled in Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in the fall of 1970. It would not take long, however, for Wallis’s seminary education to become secondary to his leadership of the People’s Christian Coalition.

The uproar created by the People’s Christian Coalition at Trinity foreshadowed the buzz that the group’s message would generate within the broader circles of American evangelicalism. Within weeks of his arrival, Wallis founded a handful of other seminarians who shared his disappointment with evangelicals’ apparent indifference to racism and support for the Vietnam war. The small group gathered for Bible studies and intense discussions that reconfirmed their sense that the church had lost its prophetic voice and relevance. Defining the group’s commitment to “radical discipleship,” Wallis crafted a statement that displayed an ambitious agenda for evangelical social action. “The Scriptures are clear in condemning social and economic injustice, oppression, racism, hypocrisy, environmental destruction, and the kind of chauvinistic nationalism that gives rise to aggression, imperialism, and endless war,” the declaration announced. “Biblical instruction is clear in teaching that faith divorced from social justice is a mockery.” Distribution of the statement at the seminary and its neighboring denominational college immediately caused controversy and earned the group the reputation of “radicals.” As rumors circulated of militant activism at the normally placid

⁵⁶ Ibid., 74, 76.

seminary, complaints from alumni and financial withholding from donors predictably disturbed the administration. The board of trustees even summoned Wallis to hear his testimony of personal faith in Jesus, presumably to verify his Christian identity. Nevertheless, the People's Christian Coalition (as the group christened itself) received encouragement from defenders like Trinity professor Clark Pinnock and at campuses and conferences they visited. The group's zeal and optimism swelled, for they felt themselves part of nothing less than a new reformation of the church. In the fall of 1971, the People's Christian Coalition embodied their aspirations in a magazine that they hoped would become a vehicle for a new movement of biblical Christians committed to social justice.⁵⁷

As its title suggested, *The Post-American* placed great emphasis upon attacking the injustice and unbiblical values that its authors considered embedded within American society. This criticism continually appeared in less than subtle terms. On the cover of its initial issue, Jesus sat slumped over, adorned with the accustomed crown of thorns but wrapped in an unconventional robe. The caption underneath proclaimed "...and they crucified Him," but neither Romans nor Pharisees committed this execution. Instead, an American flag covered the body of Jesus, and thus the People's Christian Coalition identified American culture as the principal adversary of authentic Christianity. "We have become disillusioned, alienated, and angered by an American system that we regard as oppressive," Wallis wrote in the lead editorial.⁵⁸ Throughout its early years, *The Post-American* carried a persistent polemic against a nation whose sinfulness its authors

⁵⁷ Ibid., 79.

⁵⁸ Jim Wallis, "Post-American Christianity," 2.

considered analogous to Babylon. “America in 1972,” fumed Wallis, “is a society blatantly manifesting violence and racism and resigned to the dictates of a corporate-military complex, a people drunkenly worshiping the idolatrous gods of American nationalism, pride, and power, a culture where values of wealth, property, and security take top priority.”⁵⁹ *The Post-American* clearly accepted the New Left’s hostility to the injustice it believed characterized American society. But unlike secular protest movements, the People’s Christian Coalition considered the reformation of American culture a subsidiary goal. Instead, the primary desire to transform radically the American church fueled the group’s articles and efforts.

The Post-American charged that Christian capitulation to the surrounding context had produced an imprisoned, silent, subservient church. “We find that the American church is in captivity to the values and life-style of our culture,” Wallis wrote. “This cultural captivity has caused the church to lose its prophetic voice by preaching and exporting a pro-American gospel and a materialistic faith which supports and sanctifies the values of American society, rather than calling them into question.”⁶⁰ The magazine especially criticized Billy Graham for leading conservative Christians in baptizing the American way of life while ignoring the social sins it harbored. “Our leading evangelist plays golf with the corporate elite, opens his pulpit to the President’s politics, presides over nation-worship ceremonies, and thinks the poor should kill their own rats,”

⁵⁹ Jim Wallis, “The Issue of 1972,” *The Post-American*, Fall, 1972, 2. For comparisons of the United States to Babylon, see Jim Wallis, “Babylon,” *The Post-American*, Summer 1972; and William Stringfellow, “The Relevance of Babylon,” *The Post-American*, Jan-Feb 1973.

⁶⁰ Jim Wallis, “Post-American Christianity,” 3.

exclaimed Wallis. Joe Roos concurred. “Graham not only fails to condemn American corporate sin with the same vigor that he condemns personal sin,” he wrote, “but he [also] frequently identifies with that American system which creates so much evil in this world.”⁶¹ Contrasting his group with establishment evangelicalism and “institutional Christianity,” Wallis identified the People’s Christian Coalition as “radical Christians [who] view the personal and social dimensions of salvation as integrally related in biblical definitions.”⁶² *The Post-American* articles defended both this interpretation and the need to withstand conformity to an unjust American society.

Numerous authors argued that Christianity offered the legitimate moral foundation for opposing cultural values and practices. John Stott, the most recognizable British evangelical leader, lent his considerable credibility to this belief. He suggested that Christians must remain theologically conservative (resisting change) but should constantly question established traditions (striving for change). “Far from resenting or resisting cultural change, we should be in the forefront of those who propose and work for it, provided of course that our critique of culture is made from a sound biblical perspective, Stott wrote. “I thank God for *The Post-American* and for its witness to this truth.”⁶³ *The Post-American* implored Christians to regard biblical faith as the fount of justice and resistance to “cultural captivity.”

⁶¹ Jim Wallis, “The Movemental Church,” *The Post-American*, Winter 1972, 2; Joe Roos, “American Civil Religion,” *The Post-American*, Spring 1972, 9.

⁶² Jim Wallis, “Post-American Christianity,” 3.

⁶³ John R. Stott, “The Conservative Radical,” *The Post-American*, Nov-Dec 1973, 5. For analogous articles, see, for example, Clark Pinnock, “The Christian Revolution,” *The Post-American*, Fall 1971; idem, “The Christian as a Revolutionary Man,” *The Post-American*, Summer 1972; Dennis Macdonald, “Christian Transcendence: Dope or Hope,”

In its first two years of publication, *The Post-American* carried articles that addressed a wide range of injustices demanding a Christian response. Several pieces supported black liberation and black power. A biblical parody by Donald Owen, Fred Alexander's black co-pastor in Ohio, typified the magazine's view of institutional racism. "The white man has always been my shepherd. I have always been in want," began "Psalm 23 of the Black Man." "He maketh me lie down on welfare and poverty. He leadeth me into the noisy, rat-infested ghetto. He despiseth my soul."⁶⁴ Sexism received condemnation as well, and authors supported women's rights on Christian grounds: "Jesus was a feminist, and a very radical one," asserted one article.⁶⁵ References to America's economic imbalance and capitalism's tendency toward exploitation abounded, and the magazine advocated support for such causes as the boycotts led by Cesar Chavez.⁶⁶ "The Christian lives in spirited response to injustice," Wallis summarized. He favorably quoted Jacques Ellul, a French sociologist, to identify the people whom Christians must defend. "The place of the Nazarene's followers is not with the oppressor but the oppressed," Ellul had written, "not with the overfed but the hungry, not with the free but the enslaved, not with the opulent but the poverty-stricken, not with the well but

The Post-American, Winter 1972; and Richard Mouw, "Political Evangelism," *The Post-American*, May-Jun 1973.

⁶⁴ Donald Oden, "Psalm 23 of the Black Man," *The Post-American*, Fall 1972, 7.

⁶⁵ "Jesus was no Chauvinist," *The Post-American*, Summer 1972, 11. See also Dick and Joyce Boldrey, "Technocracy and Women's Liberation," *The Post-American*, Summer 1972; and Beth Burbank, "Special Report [on the National Women's Political Caucus]," *The Post-American*, Mar-Apr 1973.

⁶⁶ Glen Melink, "Lettuce Boycott," *The Post-American*, Fall 1972; Annette Doornbos, "The Justice of Our Cause," *The Post-American*, Mar-Apr 1973.

with the sick, not with the successful but the defeated, not with the comfortable majority but with the miserable minorities, not with the bourgeois but with the proletariat.”⁶⁷

Particularly in the midst of the 1972 presidential election, the magazine urged readers to make social justice *the* criteria for their political engagement. “A vote for Richard Nixon,” warned Wallis, “is a vote for the spread of Americanism as a missionary religion” and would ratify a national self-righteousness defined by aggression, arrogance, and imperialism. With his commitment to stem American militarism and address economic inequality, George McGovern seemed the obvious choice to Wallis.⁶⁸ *The Post-American* forcefully argued that conservative Christians must fathom the alarming injustice fostered by American culture and convert this knowledge into action.

By the end of 1973, *The Post-American* had drawn extensive attention as the most aggressive and politicized forum for progressive evangelicalism. Like *The Other Side*, the magazine sought to convince its conservative Christian audience to free itself from participation in common injustices. But affinities with the combative protests and Marxist sympathies of the New Left produced a more provocative rhetoric and severe assessment of American culture. From its inception, *The Post-American* espoused the militant implications of “radical” and “revolutionary” Christianity in order to reverse the perceived impotence of the American church. “The Christian is to be a revolutionary person,” Clark Pinnock declared. “He is one who radically questions the received values of the culture he is in and calls for a complete change of behavior, public and private.”⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Jim Wallis, “The Movemental Church,” 3.

⁶⁸ Wallis, “The Issue of 1972,” 2-3.

⁶⁹ Clark Pinnock, “The Christian as a Revolutionary Man,” 2.

Propelling the development of the progressive evangelical movement, *The Post-American* intensified antagonism to conservative Christians' rapport with American culture that seemed to blunt concern for social justice. "If we are too dependent on our society, its values, securities and institutions," Wallis wrote late in 1973, "we will be unable to raise the prophetic voice so desperately needed in our times."⁷⁰ Sympathetic evangelical leaders supported the magazine's call to practice "radical Christian discipleship" in response to "the gospel that changes people's lives and generates an active commitment to social justice."⁷¹ *The Post-American's* contributing editors included no less than ten leaders who would attend the workshop that would issue "The Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern."⁷² The magazine, renamed *Sojourners* in 1975, and Jim Wallis became the most recognizable proponents of progressive evangelicalism.

Progressive Evangelical Books

The apparent nadir of evangelical social concern moved Carl F. H. Henry's pen to action. In 1947, Henry published *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* and addressed this "evaporation of Fundamentalist humanitarianism." "For the first protracted period in its history," he wrote, "evangelical Christianity stands divorced from the great social reform movements." Certainly conservative Christians possessed

⁷⁰ Jim Wallis, "The New Community," *The Post-American*, Sept-Oct 1973, 1.

⁷¹ "[The Post-American]," *The Post-American*, Sept-Oct 1973, 14.

⁷² These contributing editors included John Alexander, Dale Brown, Art Gish, Wes Michaelson, David Moberg, Richard Mouw, Bill Pannell, Richard Pierard, Robert Webber, and John Howard Yoder.

orthodox theology, Henry conceded, but in the mid-twentieth century liberal Protestants rightly criticized evangelicals for lacking social programs to redress misery and injustice. To many observers, wrote Henry, “Fundamentalism is the priest and Levite, by-passing suffering humanity.” He affirmed that over the previous generation his own tradition had become “increasingly inarticulate about the social reference of the Gospel.” In response, Henry mounted arguments for renewed evangelical opposition to the causes and consequences of social evil. The “uneasy conscience” that he discerned among fellow evangelicals yielded cautious optimism that they would soon again exercise social responsibility. In the coming years, Henry helped to establish Fuller Theological Seminary and served as the first editor of *Christianity Today* as part of his larger agenda to lead evangelicals away from the fundamentalist custom of cultural separatism. Yet even as the intellectual engagement of evangelicalism began to flourish, Henry’s prophetic call for social responsibility lay dormant for almost two decades.⁷³

Not until the mid-1960s did a visible number of evangelicals pilgrimage back into the realm of social concern. As both stimuli and signs of this movement, an increasing number of books appeared that amplified Themes of *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* and the early progressive evangelical journals that concurrently appeared. While articles in *The Other Side* and *The Post-American* helped to popularize progressive evangelical convictions, books offered more sustained rejoinders to evangelicals’ characteristic quietism and conservatism. The authors ranged from scholars and theologians to evangelists, activists, and even politicians. The books themselves

⁷³ Carl F. H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003 [1947]), 27, 2, 13-14, 86.

focused on one or more of three primary subjects: (1) the obligation of social concern; (2) the exploration of the political implications of evangelical faith; and (3) the analyses of how evangelicals should respond to specific issues of suffering and injustice. Collectively, these works helped to fashion and to fortify a foundation for evangelical social engagement. By 1973, the echoes of Henry's early thesis had swelled into a chorus of progressive evangelical voices.

Numerous scholars authored books that provided theoretical and theological grounds for supporting social concern and justice. Many of these works criticized the factors leading to evangelical withdrawal from social concern, assessed the scriptural basis for social responsibility, and offered guidelines for reconstructing public engagement. David Moberg, a sociology professor at first Bethel College and then Marquette University, produced two such influential works: *Inasmuch: Christian Social Responsibility in the Twentieth Century* (1965), and *The Great Reversal: Evangelism versus Social Concern* (1972). Moberg's most important contributions stemmed from his sociological awareness that systemic factors as much as individualistic choices produced suffering. "Christians should abandon simplistic moralistic interpretations," he wrote, "which always attribute people's involvement in social problems to their personal acts of sin."⁷⁴ In both *Evangelicalism and Social Responsibility* (1969) and *Revolution and the Christian Faith* (1971), Vernon Grounds, the president of Conservative Baptist Seminary, faulted evangelicalism's social indifference and ineffectiveness in light of biblical

⁷⁴ David O. Moberg, *Inasmuch: Christian Social Responsibility in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1965); and idem, *The Great Reversal: Evangelism versus Social Concern* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1972). The quote is from *Inasmuch*, 68.

condemnations of injustice. The church “is divinely obligated to maximize love by maximizing justice,” he argued, and “we can and must insist on the necessity of Christian political action.”⁷⁵ Dale Brown, a professor at Bethany Theological Seminary, stated that to accept Jesus “as the Messiah or Christ is to believe in a kingdom of justice, righteousness, and love.” In *The Christian Revolutionary* (1971), Brown urged readers to grasp “a radical apprehension of how minimally Christian the present social order is and how desperately it needs to be changed.”⁷⁶ These arguments augmented the legitimacy of social concern and the potential for active opposition to social injustice.

Additional books specifically explored political activity consistent with biblical faith. In 1970 Richard Pierard, a history professor at Indiana State University, published *The Unequal Yoke: Evangelical Christianity and Political Conservatism*. He claimed that evangelicals wrongly equated Christian values with economic and political conservatism. This “unequal yoke” resulted, Pierard argued, in the naïve support for both *laissez-faire* capitalism and particularly American nationalism.⁷⁷ Richard Mouw attempted to demonstrate that the very evangelistic task of the church, a responsibility all evangelicals endorsed, actually warranted political action. In *Political Evangelism* (1973), the Calvin College professor claimed that Jesus saves not only people but also the entire created order from the power of sin. Therefore, Mouw wrote, “the message of the

⁷⁵ Vernon Grounds, *Evangelicalism and Social Responsibility* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1969); and idem, *Revolution and the Christian Faith* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1971). The quote is from *Evangelicalism and Social Responsibility*, 28.

⁷⁶ Dale Brown, *The Christian Revolutionary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971), 124, 19.

⁷⁷ Richard V. Pierard, *The Unequal Yoke: Evangelical Christianity and Political Conservatism* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1970).

church to individuals cannot be separated effectively from a critical stance toward the general patterns of social and political life.”⁷⁸ The most widely acclaimed of these books came from John Howard Yoder, President and professor of theology at Goshen Biblical Seminary. Published in 1972, *The Politics of Jesus* forced many Christians to rethink and even abandon interpretations of Jesus and New Testament writings as apolitical. Yoder forcefully argued that Jesus resisted social injustice and state violence, creating an alternative political paradigm applicable for contemporary Christians as well.⁷⁹ The necessity of political engagement and progressive public policies appeared increasingly credible to a growing segment within the evangelical tradition.

Two other relevant volumes appeared that contained essays by evangelical scholars. In *Protest and Politics: Christianity and Contemporary Affairs* (1968), historians and political scientists described the Christian basis for progressive social action in response to “doctrinaire conservative political ideology.” “Eleven of us who are displeased with this calloused indifference on the part of so many of our fellow evangelicals to the vital political, social, and economic problems of the day have decided to speak out in protest,” the editors wrote. Notable essays urged evangelicals to take unfamiliar stands: opposition to American militarism, extension of welfare assistance, active defense of minorities’ civil rights, rejection of prayers in public schools, and

⁷⁸ Richard Mouw, *Political Evangelism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1973), 16.

⁷⁹ John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972).

tempered support for Zionism in the face of Arabs' just grievances and rights.⁸⁰ Chapters in *The Cross and the Flag* (1972) reiterated many of these arguments but also included support for evangelical feminism and environmentalism.⁸¹ Among the contributors to these two books, all had received doctorates from secular universities, many after attending evangelical undergraduate colleges. For example, Nancy Hardesty, Ozzie Edwards, Thomas Howard, and Paul Henry (Carl F. H. Henry's son) had all graduated from Wheaton College, the most prominent evangelical college. They went on to complete their respective graduate work at the University of Chicago, the University of Wisconsin, New York University, and Duke University.⁸² As greater numbers of evangelicals pursued graduate education beyond the traditional network of evangelical schools in the 1950s and 1960s, they encountered alternative theologies and political philosophies that called their conservative evangelical convictions into question.

Books produced by evangelical scholars who championed social concern and justice displayed the influence of exposure to more liberal authors and education. In the transition from evangelical backgrounds to secular academic context, many of these authors likely reached conclusions similar to Richard Mouw. Mouw had studied at

⁸⁰ Robert G. Clouse, Robert D. Linder, and Richard V. Pierard, eds., *Protest and Politics: Christianity and Contemporary Affairs* (Greenwood, SC: The Attic Press, 1968), 2.

⁸¹ Robert G. Clouse, Robert D. Linder, and Richard V. Pierard, eds., *The Cross and the Flag* (Carol Stream, IL: Creation House, 1972).

⁸² Other examples include Richard Pierard (Westmont College; California State College, B.A.; University of Iowa, Ph.D.); Robert Clouse (Ashland College; Bryan College, B.A.; University of Iowa, Ph.D.); Walfred H. Peterson (Bethel College, B.A.; University of Minnesota, Ph.D.); Donald E. Pitzer (Messiah College; Wittenberg University, B.A.; The Ohio State University, Ph.D.); George Giacumakis (Shelton College, B.A.; Brandeis University, Ph.D.). At the time of her authorship, Nancy Hardesty was still completing her Ph.D. at the University of Chicago.

Houghton College, affiliated with the Wesleyan Church, before ultimately completing his Ph.D. at the University of Chicago. “My training within the environs of ‘conservative-evangelical’ Christianity,” he wrote in the preface to *Political Evangelism*, “did not provide me with a theological framework adequate to deal with the concerns over social injustice, racism and militarism that were so much a part of the years I spent doing graduate study at secular universities.” Rejecting the “political passivity” of fundamentalism, Mouw employed insights gained from figures such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King, and Catholic social activist Daniel Berrigan to build upon his conservative religious heritage.⁸³ David Moberg also paid tribute to the influence on his thinking of more liberal Christians who had remained committed to social concern despite their ostensible heterodoxy. He recommended that readers utilize the contributions of works such as Ernest Troeltsch’s *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, Walter Rauchenbusch’s *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, and Reinhold Niebuhr’s *Moral Man and Immoral Society*.⁸⁴

Other authors demonstrated similar influence. Dale Brown too regarded Rauschenbusch and Neibuhr as vitally relevant, and in *The Christian Revolutionary* he developed his interpretation of “radical” biblical faith in conversation with Karl Barth,

⁸³ Mouw, *Political Evangelism*, 7.

⁸⁴ At the end of each chapter of *Inasmuch: Christian Social Responsibility in the Twentieth Century*, Moberg included “Recommended Reading” and study questions that included references to these authors. He anticipated that his references to liberal Protestants would upset many evangelicals. “Some readers may wonder why certain of the recommended readings come from theologically liberal sources. The main reason is simply that most work on Christian social concern has been done by the liberals,” he wrote in the preface to *Inasmuch*. “I do not endorse all the references completely,” he reassured his audience, “but they have stimulated my thinking and will give many ideas to the intelligent reader” (6).

Bonhoeffer, and Harvey Cox.⁸⁵ In *Revolution and the Christian Faith*, Vernon Grounds hoped to introduce American evangelicals to the work of Jacques Ellul, a Christian French sociologist who harshly criticized the tendency of the modern “technocratic” society to subvert Christian values and to oppress large segments of the population.”⁸⁶ While the vast majority of evangelicals either ignored or vilified such non-evangelical authors as “liberal” and thus misguided, scholars could not as readily disregard the challenges they posed to traditional evangelical conservatism. Through books and their contributions to *The Other Side* and *The Post-American*, many evangelical scholars disseminated comprehensive intellectual and theological apologies for evangelical engagement with social problems.

The editors of two popular evangelical periodicals joined academic evangelicals in promoting the necessity of evangelical social concern. Sherwood Eliot Wirt served as editor of *Decision* magazine, produced by the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. In *The Social Conscience of the Evangelical* (1968), he reviewed the example of Jesus and other biblical teachings that should compel Christians to confront injustice and suffering. Quoting James 2:17 that faith without works is dead, Wirt claimed that the apostle “makes explicit what is implicit all through the New Testament: that the Christian social conscience should be as wide as the love of God in Christ.”⁸⁷ More important, Carl Henry, then editor of *Christianity Today*, built upon his pioneering articulation of

⁸⁵ Brown, *The Christian Revolutionary*, 11, 83-98.

⁸⁶ Grounds, *Revolution and the Christian Faith*, 13.

⁸⁷ Sherwood Eliot Wirt, *The Social Conscience of the Evangelical* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 7-8.

evangelical social concern in *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*. In *Evangelicals at the Brink of Crisis* (1967), he devoted an entire chapter to arguing that divine revelation addressed more than the spiritual transformation of individuals through evangelism. “The will of God has implications also for sociology and economics and culture and social order,” he argued. “In the crisis of our times the task and duty of evangelical Christians is to proclaim to men everywhere what the God of justice and justification demands.”⁸⁸ Over the next several years these convictions only intensified, and in 1971 Henry published *A Plea for Evangelical Demonstration*. He believed that the magnitude of social crises demanded Christian moral protest of “enduring and intractable social injustices.” Thus Henry refused to regard social concern as only secondarily important. “The Biblical view declares both individual conversion and social justice to be alike indispensable,” he repeated. “Existing social structures that frustrate human freedom and public justice must be challenged.”⁸⁹ As visible spokesmen within the broad evangelical movement, Wirt and Henry added both symbolic and substantive credibility to the cause of evangelical social concern.

Throughout *A Plea for Evangelical Demonstration*, Henry defended two convictions that would increasingly distance evangelicals sympathetic to progressive causes from the conservative majority. First, establishing social justice represented a vital end itself rather than a means to facilitating Christian conversions. “The primary reason for social involvement ought not to be an indirect evangelistic ploy,” Henry

⁸⁸ Carl F. H. Henry, *Evangelicals at the Brink of Crisis: Significance of the World Congress on Evangelism* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1967), 79.

⁸⁹ Carl F. H. Henry, *A Plea for Evangelical Demonstration* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1971), 13, 107, 122.

claimed. Evangelicals should “disavow the notion that men have value in earthly history only in terms of their potential alignment with the church.” Second, evangelicals should not require theological litmus tests of potential partners in the pursuit of social justice. “In seeking justice in public affairs, the Christian is not precluded from cooperation with men of other faiths or of no faith,” explained Henry. “He ought, rather, to participate in every legitimate method of promoting justice.” Indeed, commitment to the rights of all humans as equivalent bearers of the divine image transcended religious differences. “The evangelical is free to participate with non-evangelicals in the moment of protest because his common humanity no less than his religious vision motivates him.”⁹⁰ Ron Sider, one of the conveners of the 1973 Thanksgiving conference that produced “The Chicago Declaration,” specifically cited Henry’s example and *A Plea for Evangelical Demonstration* as harbingers of the rise of progressive evangelicalism.⁹¹

Books by two African-American evangelists active in the networks of white evangelicalism suggested that privileged statuses had blinded most evangelicals to injustice and the social implications of the gospel. As he recounted in *My Friend, the Enemy* (1968), Bill Pannell at first accepted the assumptions of traditional fundamentalist separatism while one of the few blacks at Fort Wayne Bible College. The Birmingham church bombing in 1963, however, shook Pannell from his self-described complacency regarding social problems and convinced him that he could no longer remain “content merely to preach a typical evangelical Gospel.” “The time had come to reevaluate the Gospel in terms of its meaning and application for our times,” Pannell wrote. He

⁹⁰ Ibid., 112, 19.

⁹¹ Sider, “An Historic Moment for Biblical Social Concern,” 13.

explicitly challenged his white evangelical “friends” to realize how practical apathy toward suffering and injustice made them de facto “enemies.”⁹² In 1968, Pannell left the staff of Youth for Christ to join the evangelistic efforts of Tom Skinner.

Tom Skinner became the most popular black evangelist in the 1960s following his conversion from gang leadership in Harlem to evangelical Christianity. In 1970 Skinner released two books that indicted evangelical conservatism and America’s inherent injustice. Calling not merely for love but also for justice, *How Black is the Gospel?* insisted that evangelicals must articulate the gospel as relevant to politically and economically powerless people. In *Words of Revolution*, Skinner rebuked the “sin, hypocrisy and immorality in the establishment.” He declared his sympathy for revolutionary calls to overthrow an American system that produced racism, poverty, violence, and corruption. “No one is more committed than I am in seeking to bring America to its knees,” Skinner declared. “I am sick of the immorality and mythology of the ‘great American dream.’” But to succeed, this revolution must follow the model of Jesus, who both met individual’s spiritual needs and called redeemed people to fight systemic injustice in God’s name. “Wherever there is injustice,” summarized Skinner, “as a member of the family of God and a joint-heir with Jesus Christ, it is my duty to go out and fight it.”⁹³ Although a minority within the evangelical subculture, vocal black

⁹² Pannell, *My Friend, the Enemy*, 57.

⁹³ Tom Skinner, *How Black is the Gospel?* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1970); and idem, *Words of Revolution: A Call to Involvement in the REAL Revolution* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House). The quotes are from *Words of Revolution*, 149, 113. For Skinner’s description of his conversion and the development of his evangelistic career, see his autobiographical *Black and Free* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1968).

leaders grounded their social criticism in evangelical terms to persuade white evangelicals to support a progressive agenda.

As the progressive evangelical movement gained momentum through the late 1960s and early 1970s, Mark Hatfield emerged as its prototypical politician. Serving as the Republican governor of Oregon from 1960 to 1966, Hatfield enacted legislation to guarantee civil rights and housing opportunities for minorities. He also cast the lone dissenting vote among his peers in a referendum to support America's military involvement in Vietnam in 1966. Later that year, Hatfield won election to the Senate and continued to support progressive public policies. In *Not Quite So Simple* (1968) and then more explicitly in *Conflict and Conscience* (1971), the senator described how his evangelical faith translated into political expressions of social concern. "We as evangelicals must regain sensitivity to the corporateness of human life—we must become sensitive to issues of social morality as well as to issues of private morality," Hatfield wrote. "An ethic which deals solely with personal mores is singularly inadequate if it fails to deal with war, poverty, and racial antagonism." Indeed, Hatfield argued that traditional evangelical responses to the Vietnam war, inequitable distribution of wealth, and racial hostility failed to manifest God's priorities of love and justice.⁹⁴ Another politically liberal Republican, Congressman John B. Anderson of Illinois, also attested to the evangelical principles behind his progressive policies. "While I am essentially a religious conservative," Anderson explained in *Between Two Worlds: A Congressman's Choice* (1970), "I do not believe that religious conservatism must be equated with or

⁹⁴ Mark Hatfield, *Not Quite So Simple* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1968); and idem, *Conflict and Conscience* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1971). The quote is from *Conflict and Conscience*, 27.

regarded as synonymous with conservative solutions to all our political problems.”⁹⁵ To supportive observers, Hatfield and Anderson authenticated the practical possibilities of evangelical social responsibility within the political realm.

Because social concern remained dubious if not spurious within evangelical circles, the collective force of these books written between 1965 and 1973 enhanced the legitimacy and prominence of social justice as a Christian mandate. The publication by major evangelical presses of additional works such as Art Gish’s *The New Left and Christian Radicalism* (1970) and *Your God is Too White* (1970) by Columbus Salley and Ronald Behm further testified to perceptible discontent with traditional sociopolitical conservatism.⁹⁶ Books advocating social concern offered more extensive corroboration of the commentary and challenges voiced within the popular progressive evangelical journals. Many of these authors, in fact, affiliated themselves with *The Other Side* and *The Post-American* and thus helped to create a network of like-minded proponents of social justice.⁹⁷ In addition to these journals and books, evangelical conferences over this same period became other important forums for the expansion of progressive evangelicalism.

⁹⁵ John B. Anderson, *Between Two Worlds: A Congressman’s Choice* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), 146.

⁹⁶ Art Gish, *The New Left and Christian Radicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1970); Columbus Salley and Ronald Behm, *Your God is Too White* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1970).

⁹⁷ Writers, advisors, and contributing editors for *Freedom Now* and *The Other Side* included David Moberg, Richard Pierard, Vernon Grounds, Bill Pannell, Mark Hatfield, Nancy Hardesty, Paul Henry, and Art Gish. Moberg, Pannell, Pierard, Hatfield, and Gish joined Dale Brown, Richard Mouw, and John Howard Yoder as contributing editors to *The Post-American*.

Evangelism Conferences and Social Action

At a gathering of evangelical leaders in 1965, Rufus Jones envisioned an expanded agenda for evangelicalism. The director of the Conservative Baptist Home Mission Society had become dissatisfied with evangelicals' reactionary habits and meager response to the world's critical needs, and thus he sought "a positive program that would contribute to the extension of the Kingdom of God." Replying to the question "What Program and Activities Should Evangelicals Be Promoting and Implementing," Jones naturally listed evangelism as the top priority. Yet before discussing the priority of foreign missions, he proposed an unanticipated second task: social concern. "If evangelicals are to have an effective witness," Jones claimed, "they must reveal the same love and compassion that motivated our Lord in His concern for the physical, mental, and social needs of the people to whom He ministered." Poverty, racism, war, and health care represented "moral, ethical, and social problems" that Christians could not ignore. "I am not advocating a return to the social gospel," Jones reassured those in attendance, "but rather I am calling for a complete commitment and identification with Christ in His love and compassion for all humanity."⁹⁸ Speaking at this informal "Consultation on Christian Unity," Jones became one of the earliest evangelical leaders to associate the obligations of social concern and evangelistic efforts. As other noted speakers at subsequent evangelistic conferences began to issue similar summons to social responsibility, the appeal of evangelical social action gained increasingly legitimacy.

⁹⁸ Rufus Jones, letter to Dale Ihrie (March 25, 1965), Evangelicals for Social Action Collection (Billy Graham Center Archives), Box 1 Folder 1; idem, "What Program and Activities Should Evangelicals Be Promoting and Implementing," unpublished paper, Evangelicals for Social Action Collection, Box 1 Folder 1, 4, 8.

Commitments to social concern made scattered yet discernable appearances at the 1966 World Congress on Evangelism in Berlin. Sponsored by *Christianity Today* in conjunction with its tenth anniversary and headlined by Billy Graham, the conference drew over 1100 international delegates and observers. The gathering sought to stimulate the worldwide church to realize the urgent goal of world evangelization. For these Christians, evangelism denoted personal witnessing and individual conversions in response to spiritual need. Numerous speakers therefore unequivocally condemned liberal Protestant attempts to define salvation as social redemption. Yet even Graham himself acknowledged that “evangelism has a social responsibility” and specifically highlighted the need to end racism.⁹⁹ Paul Rees of World Vision agreed that evangelism and social concern had close ties, arguing that evangelicals needed “to feel the savage rawness of human ache and fury and despair.” In its summary report, *Christianity Today* noted that a number of participants and small group discussions broached the theme of the relation of evangelism and social action but left it undeveloped.¹⁰⁰ At a conference on evangelism, however, even this inchoate discourse regarding the appropriate place of social concern indicated a new receptiveness among some evangelicals.

⁹⁹ Billy Graham, “Why the Berlin Congress?” *Christianity Today*, Nov 11, 1963, 5. Evangelicals’ reputation for a narrow focus on personal evangelization and individual conversion caused at least one reporter to express surprise at the inclusion of even brief allusions to the social implications of the Christian gospel. Writing after the initial meeting during which both Graham and Carl F. H. Henry addressed racial strife, John Cogley noted that “these hints of ‘social’ Christianity, which would have been commonplace at most church gatherings, were exceptional at the opening session of the world congress.” (John Cogley, “World Church Parley Emphasizes Evangelism,” *The New York Times*, Oct 27, 1966).

¹⁰⁰ “Springboard for Evangelical Renewal,” *Christianity Today*, (Nov 25, 1966, 34-35.

Three years later another evangelistic conference made social concern a central rather than peripheral topic. In 1969 Minneapolis hosted almost five thousand evangelicals from ninety-three denominations at the U.S. Congress on Evangelism. Graham promised beforehand that this meeting would explicitly explore how social action related to evangelism, and many addresses fulfilled this intention. David Hubbard, president of Fuller Theological Seminary, refused to view social concern as inconsistent with orthodox evangelistic programs. “We must show,” he stated, “that it is possible to relate Christianity to the problems of the world without copping out on the Gospel.”¹⁰¹ Tom Skinner issued an impassioned appeal to confront racism, and the overwhelmingly white audience interrupted his speech with several standing ovations. Ralph Abernathy, the black civil rights leader, challenged evangelicals to solve what he considered the most pressing social evils: war, poverty, and racism. The most notable calls to social action came from Leighton Ford, Graham’s brother-in-law and fellow evangelist. “Our message has got to combine the prophets, who called for repentance and justice,” he affirmed, “with the apostles, who called for repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.”¹⁰² *Christianity Today* recognized the unprecedented nature of these explicit endorsements of social action. “Perhaps no evangelical conclave in this century has responded more positively to the call for Christians to help right the wrongs in the social order.”¹⁰³ The

¹⁰¹ David Hubbard, quoted in Edward B. Fiske, “New Liberal Mood is Found Among Fundamentalist Protestants,” *The New York Times*, Sept 14, 1969.

¹⁰² Leighton Ford, quoted in David E. Kucharsky, “Six Days in September,” *Christianity Today*, Oct 10, 1969, 43.

¹⁰³ “U.S. Congress on Evangelism: A Turning Point?” *Christianity Today*, Oct 10, 1969, 32.

presentations made it difficult for those present to ignore the pressing nature of social problems. “It’s been a wonderful meeting,” a reporter overheard a delegate tell her family during a telephone conversation. “I just learned our country is in the midst of a social revolution.”¹⁰⁴ With support from prominent leaders, increasing numbers of evangelicals interpreted social action and evangelism as not only compatible but also mutually essential.¹⁰⁵

In 1970 Intervarsity Christian Fellowship’s triennial Urbana missions convention included numerous speeches that promoted both evangelism and social action. To be sure, reiterated C. Peter Wagner, a missionary in Latin America, evangelicals must not conflate the two as many liberal Christians had mistakenly done. Yet, he said, the distinctiveness of social action did not negate its necessity. Samuel Escobar, a Peruvian theologian affiliated with International Fellowship of Evangelical Students, developed this theme in his talk entitled “Social Concern and World Evangelism.” Distorted reaction to the Social Gospel, a “middle-class captivity” of evangelical churches, and extreme separatism combined to make social action seem unnecessary and undesirable. As a result, Escobar argued, secular thinkers often had a superior understanding of the complex reality of sin. Although not employing the language of sinfulness, Marx and Marcuse “have detected the depths of injustice with far more realism and acuteness than the average preacher who should know more about it.” Escobar stated that evangelicals

¹⁰⁴ Edward B. Fiske, “Evangelicals Learn About the Social Revolution,” *The New York Times*, Sept 21, 1969.

¹⁰⁵ In *The Unequal Yoke*, Richard Pierard pointed to the stress upon evangelical social concern at the U.S. Congress on Evangelism, especially the talk by Leighton Ford, as grounds for a “glimmer of hope” (184-185).

must show in “word and deed that we are being liberated from those sins of social injustice, social prejudice, abuse and selfish individualism which have brought our society to the mess in which it is.” Thus proclaiming the gospel of Jesus included messages of both spiritual and social freedom.¹⁰⁶

The most electrifying speech at Urbana '70 came from Tom Skinner. After George J. Taylor, a seminary professor in Costa Rica, explained how North Americans often exported racism along with the gospel in their mission work, Skinner spoke to address the conference. In a talk entitled “The U.S. Racial Crisis and World Evangelism,” he began by briefly reviewing blacks’ experience in America and white evangelicals’ pronounced support for slavery and segregation. Proclaiming the gospel, he stated, entailed addressing the sins—both spiritual and social—that oppressed people. “Any gospel that does not talk about delivering to man a personal Savior who will free him from the personal bondage of sin and grant him eternal life and does not at the same time speak to the issue of enslavement, the issue of injustice, the issue of inequality,” Skinner declared, “any gospel that does not want to go where people are hungry and poverty-stricken and set them free in the name of Jesus Christ—is not the gospel.” Skinner concluded by echoing the words recorded by Luke as inaugurating Jesus’ ministry. “Proclaim liberation to the captives, preach sight to the blind, set at liberty them that are bruised, go into the world and tell men that are bound mentally, spiritually and physically, *“The liberator has come!”*” David Howard, a leader of the Latin American Mission organization, summarized well Urbana '70’s intentional focus on *both* social

¹⁰⁶ C. Peter Wagner, “What is Evangelism?” in John R. W. Stott, et al., *Christ the Liberator* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1971), 96-97; Samuel Escobar, “Social Concern and World Evangelism,” in *Christ the Liberator*, 107, 108.

concern and evangelism. “Today we dare not ignore the burning issues of race relations, economic injustice and imperialism,” he stated. “By the same token we dare not ignore God’s eternal and unchanging commands to his church to make the gospel of Jesus Christ, in all of its totality, available to all mankind.”¹⁰⁷ Each of these speakers who championed social responsibility ministered in contexts outside of the comfortable confines of white American evangelicalism. With such critical distance, the speakers underscored the urgent social implications of evangelism among international, underprivileged, or minority populations.

Coordinated efforts and conferences on evangelism had a long history among American evangelicals, but ones dedicated to political engagement signaled a turning point in evangelical social action. During the presidential election season of 1972, a small group of evangelicals became convinced that the platform of George McGovern aligned much more closely with biblical principles than the policies of President Richard Nixon. A leadership committee calling itself “Evangelicals for McGovern” banded together and included several familiar advocates of social justice: John Alexander, David Moberg, Richard Pierard, Columbus Salley, and Tom Skinner. Ron Sider, a professor at Messiah College, served as a principle organizer and secretary for the group.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ George J. Taylor, “Racial Tensions Overseas and World Evangelism,” in *Christ the Liberator*, 113-120; Tom Skinner, “The U.S. Racial Crisis and World Evangelism,” in *Christ the Liberator*, 205, 209; David M. Howard, “Student Power in World Evangelism,” in *Christ the Liberator*, 186.

¹⁰⁸ Other members who comprised the Board of Reference for Evangelicals for McGovern: Lewis Smedes (Fuller Theological Seminary); Gilbert James (Asbury Seminary); Robert Webber (Wheaton College); C. J. Dyck (Mennonite Biblical Seminary); William Harper (Gordon College); Stephen Monsma (Calvin College); Deane Kemper (Gordon-Conwell Seminary); Paul Leatherman (Mennonite Central Committee);

“Evangelicals should be concerned about social justice,” chairman Walden Howard told *Christianity Today*. “I just don’t believe social justice is a high priority with Nixon. But it’s the heart of McGovern’s motivation.” In a circular letter sent to 8,000 evangelical leaders, Walden contrasted Nixon’s track record with McGovern’s support for poverty relief, racial justice, and peace in Vietnam. The group hoped both to persuade significant numbers of conservative Christians to make social justice the primary election criterion and to present \$100,000 to McGovern’s campaign as proof of evangelical support. *Christianity Today* rightly predicted, however, that most evangelicals would follow the example of Billy Graham. Graham announced that he would vote for Nixon. He even stated that the incumbent “will probably go down in history as one of the country’s greatest presidents.”¹⁰⁹ The ability of Evangelicals for McGovern to raise only \$5,762 corresponded with presidential hopeful’s landslide defeat.

But these meager numbers did not diminish the larger momentum created by Evangelicals for McGovern. In a post-election letter to contributors, Sider wrote that the group attained its fundamental objective by underlining the biblical emphasis on justice. More and more evangelicals heard the message that “our politics must reflect a concern not just about pubs, pot, and pornographic literature, but also about racism, poverty, and the grossly unjust distribution of wealth here and abroad.”¹¹⁰ For Richard Mouw, the

Roger Dewey (editor, *Inside*); William Johnson (Bethel College); Robert Ives (Messiah College); and Anthony Campolo (Eastern Baptist College).

¹⁰⁹ Barrie Doyle, “Backing Their Man,” *Christianity Today*, Oct 27 1972, 38-39; Walden Howard, undated letter (Billy Graham Center archives), Evangelicals for Social Action Collection, Box 1 Folder 4.

¹¹⁰ Ron Sider to Stephen Charles Mott (Nov 14, 1972), Billy Graham Center Archives, Evangelicals for Social Action Collection, Box 1 Folder 4.

group helped to identify other sympathetic and progressive evangelicals, curbing his sense of isolation within the dominant political conservatism in American evangelicalism. “To see the words ‘Evangelicals for McGovern’ actually in print was an experience of sweet vindication,” he remembered.¹¹¹ At first, Jim Wallis showed no enthusiasm for what he interpreted as the meaning of Nixon’s election. “It was a dark spirit that overtook the land on November 7 and showed the moral bankruptcy of the American nation,” he wrote. “Sixty percent of the American public cast their votes of indifference or support for racism, criminality in government, a reaction stance toward social injustice, the erosion of civil rights, and the U.S. global domination.” Yet Wallis believed the outcome might awaken conservative Christians to challenge cultural values and governmental policies.¹¹² The efforts, lessons, and network of Evangelicals for McGovern served as an important precursor to another conference held in the spring of 1973.

Richard Mouw and Paul Henry, both professors at Calvin College, helped to organize the inaugural “Calvin Conference on Christianity and Politics.” Presentations and panels featured speakers such as Richard Pierard, David Moberg, John Alexander, and Jim Wallis. Presentations covered analytic, theological, and practical issues related to Christian political participation. The conference proved significant on two fronts. First, a large group of leading evangelicals gathered to discuss not evangelism but rather the nature of political engagement. As *The Post-American* noted, the conference “was

¹¹¹ Richard Mouw, “Weaving a Coherent Pattern of Discipleship,” *The Christian Century*, Aug 20-27, 1975, 729.

¹¹² Jim Wallis, “Election Reflection,” *The Post-American*, Jan-Feb 1973, 3.

the first organized effort by evangelicals to confront the questions of legitimate political involvement.”¹¹³ Second, at the Calvin conference a planning committee formed in order to prepare for another major conference explicitly devoted to social concern. Headed by Ron Sider and incorporating both established evangelical spokesmen and younger radical representatives, this leadership group included several recognizable advocates of social action and justice: Alexander, Wallis, Pierard, Moberg, Bill Pannell, Paul Henry, and Rufus Jones.¹¹⁴ Working towards a proposed meeting in Chicago just after Thanksgiving, the planning committee met several times to send out invitations and compose preliminary drafts of an endorsement of social concern. What had begun as scattered discourse at evangelistic conferences had now evolved into sustained philosophical and practical explorations of political and social action. A minority of evangelicals now regarded these themes as meriting conferences in their own right. The labors of this planning committee would help to generate the “The Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern.”

“The Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern”

In late November of 1973 over fifty evangelicals traveled to the workshop at the Wabash Avenue YMCA. The convening committee had agreed to limit invitations to

¹¹³ “Signs of a New Order,” *The Post-American*, May-Jun 1973, 12.

¹¹⁴ Three additional members served on the planning committee: Lewis Smedes, professor at Fuller Theological Seminary; Frank Gaebelin, headmaster emeritus of The Stony Brook School and former coeditor of *Christianity Today*; and Myron Augsburger, president of Eastern Mennonite University.

evangelicals with recognized sympathies for social action and justice.¹¹⁵ The leadership also hoped to gather participants diverse in denominational affiliations, geographic locales, age, race, and gender. Yet the planning committee itself included no women and only one African-American.¹¹⁶ The attention to diversity only reached so far in other ways as well. As Richard Pierard noted, the majority of those in attendance “were people from more articulate walks of life—theologians, college professors, journalists, evangelists, [and] denominational executives.”¹¹⁷ Participating “elder statesmen” included Carl F. H. Henry, Rufus Jones, Paul Rees, and Frank Gaebelein. John Alexander, Jim Wallis, and Art Gish represented younger activist voices. Bill Pannell,

¹¹⁵ Ron Sider recognized the problematic nature of defining an “evangelical,” but he utilized a characterization offered by Harold Ockenga, one of the most prominent figures in mid-twentieth century evangelicalism. “An evangelical,” Sider wrote, “is one who believes on the basis of the Bible, which is the inspired, authoritative Word of God and hence the norm for faith and practice, the basic doctrines of historic Christianity—the deity of Christ, the sinfulness of man, justification by faith alone through Christ’s death on the cross, and regeneration” (“An Historic Moment for Biblical Social Concern,” 22).

¹¹⁶ The planning committee seemed at least moderately sensitive to the lack of women. At the preceding Calvin Conference on Christianity and Politics, John Alexander had complained that under-representation of women and blacks indicated that “this conference is participating in the corrupt structures of our society” (quoted in “Signs of a New Order,” *The Post-American*, May-Jun 1973, 12). Leading up to the conference, Ron Sider informed the other leaders, “The number of women coming is abominably small (about five at the present)! No women are chairpersons!” (undated “Memo to Planning Committee” [Billy Graham Center Archives, Evangelicals for Social Action Collection, Box 1 Folder 17]). Several preliminary lists of potential participants included a greater number of blacks, women, and international evangelicals. The records do not indicate, however, whether these people received but declined an invitation to attend, or the planning committee ultimately decided to invite a smaller number. Ultimately seven women, seven black participants, and one Latin American (Samuel Escobar) attended. Dr. Ruth Bentley, wife of William and a sociologist who taught at Trinity College, replaced Clark Pinnock to serve as the only female chair of a session.

¹¹⁷ Richard Pierard, Notes for lecture given to a church group in Terre Haute, IN (Feb 15, 1974), Billy Graham Center Archives, Evangelicals for Social Action Collection Box 2 Folder 1.

William Bentley, and John Perkins stood out among black participants, and leading evangelical women included Nancy Hardesty and Sharon Gallagher. Samuel Escobar alone represented an evangelical from outside North America. As advocates for more progressive social and political policies, those present stood outside of the conservative mainstream of American evangelicalism. A post-conference survey confirmed the atypical political commitments of these evangelicals as a group. An equal number of registered Democrats and Independents each outnumbered Republicans by more than two to one, with respondents indicating that their socio-political perspectives had changed mostly from “right to left.” As their activities had demonstrated, the report summarized that this change included “(a) a more sensitive social conscience, and (b) a more socially inclusive definition of sin and salvation.”¹¹⁸ These convictions clearly manifested themselves in the rhetoric and content of the statement endorsed at the end of the workshop.

Reaching consensus on a declaration that described social action as an evangelical imperative proved neither quick nor easy. Prior to the meeting, the planning committee assembled a proposed statement for delegates to discuss and amend as necessary. As the workshop began on Friday, strong objections arose almost immediately from blacks, women, and members of the historic peace churches. Feeling underrepresented, both African-Americans and women expressed frustrations with the perceived hollowness of

¹¹⁸ James Robert Ross, undated results of Thanksgiving Workshop Questionnaire, (Billy Graham Center Archives, Evangelicals for Social Action Collection, Box 2 Folder 10). Ross, a professor at Lincoln Christian Seminary, had himself participated in the conference and endorsed “The Chicago Declaration.” Ross received twenty-four responses from the forty-seven questionnaires he distributed (a 51% rate of return). Four respondents identify themselves as Republicans, nine as Democrats, and nine as Independents.

the proposal's respective content regarding racism and sexism. Speaking for evangelical pacifists, John Howard Yoder also protested the absence of a condemnation of war. Symbolizing the pessimism and divisiveness at the end of the first day, groups that went into the city for a late night snack segregated themselves by race. The next morning, a new drafting committee—this one containing two blacks yet still no women—prepared another proposal. Throughout Saturday afternoon's lively discussion, however, an irenic mood of agreement on most points of the declaration emerged from the debates. Although points of differences remained regarding how best to rectify injustices, the group discovered increasing unity with respect to each section's descriptive analysis and call for evangelical response. After an additional session Sunday morning, participants unanimously approved what became known as "The Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern."¹¹⁹

The traditional language and references within "The Chicago Declaration" reflected an implicit attempt to persuade evangelical audiences of the legitimacy of Christian social responsibility. The statement immediately sought to establish its supporters' evangelical credentials. "As evangelical Christians committed to the Lord Jesus Christ and the full authority of the Word of God," the declaration began, "we affirm that God lays total claim upon the lives of his people." Yet the signers quickly confessed that they had not fully embraced this complete claim, thus establishing grounds for the subsequent calls for penance and amends. The declaration also acknowledged "that God requires love" and "God requires justice." The signers linked these affirmations,

¹¹⁹ For a detailed description of the meeting, see Sider, "An Historic Moment for Biblical Social Concern," 24-30.

however, with confessions that they had neither “demonstrated the love of God to those suffering social abuses” nor “proclaimed and demonstrated his justice to an unjust American society.” In this way, the document directed its potential audiences to consider anew how Christians should repent and emulate God’s virtues of love and justice in social contexts. Finally, the statement testified “that God abounds in mercy and that he forgives all who repent and turn from their sins.” But again, supporters used this fundamental Christian tenet to suggest transforming not personal but rather public, corporate sins. “We call our fellow evangelical Christians to demonstrate repentance in a Christian discipleship that confronts the social and political injustice of our nation.” Recognizing that their message might appear unconventional, signers strategically asserted its orthodoxy. “We proclaim no new gospel,” the declaration insisted, “but the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, through the power of the Holy Spirit, frees people from sin so that they might praise God through works of righteousness.” In this case, works of righteousness clearly connoted efforts to end suffering and social injustice. “The Chicago Declaration” represented both a manifesto and an apology for the emergent progressive evangelical movement.¹²⁰

In succinct fashion, the declaration described several inequalities that produced suffering and marked American society as unjust. Economic disparity received particular criticism. Contending that “the Lord calls us to defend the social and economic rights of the poor and oppressed,” supporters urged opposition to the results of America’s economic system. “We must attack the materialism of our culture and the maldistribution of the nation’s wealth and services.” In light of worldwide need and hunger, the

¹²⁰ “The Chicago Declaration,” in *The Chicago Declaration*, i, 1-2.

declaration continued, Christians should question their own standard of living and work for economic justice in global contexts. The concerns of black evangelicals at the Thanksgiving workshop also manifested themselves in strong denunciations of racism and its consequences. Signers lamented the historic support of American churches for slavery and continued attitudes and structures that perpetuated segregated communities of worship. Perhaps the most controversial passage regarded supporters' belief in evangelicals' sexist attitudes and actions. "We acknowledge that we have encouraged men to prideful domination and women to irresponsible passivity," the declaration read. "So we call upon both men and women to mutual submission and active discipleship." To evangelicals steeped in hierarchical assumptions regarding male headship, this statement would appear repugnant. According to Nancy Hardesty, Billy Graham pointed to this clause as the primary reason that he refused to sign the declaration. Although employing familiar theological language, "The Chicago Declaration" differentiated its supporters from the evangelical majority by making progressive reform central to faithful Christian discipleship.¹²¹

The criticisms of injustice harbored in American society culminated in a rejection of nationalism and its repercussions. To be sure, supporters agreed with other evangelicals who believed that they had civic obligations. "We acknowledge our Christian responsibilities of citizenship," signers affirmed. Yet responsible citizenship did not entail patriotic piety and uncritical allegiance, charges that the workshop's participants had often leveled against conservative evangelicals. Thus, the declaration

¹²¹ Ibid., 1-2; Nancy Hardesty, "Blessed the Waters That Rise and Fall to Rise Again," *EEWC Update*, Summer 2004.

proclaimed, “we must resist the temptation to make the nation and its institutions objects of near-religious loyalty.” In particular, supporters pointed to the militarism and economic imperialism produced by inordinate nationalism. “We must challenge the misplaced trust of the nation in economic and military might—a proud trust that promotes a national pathology of war and violence which victimizes our neighbors at home and abroad.” By closing with hope for the coming of the kingdom of God, the declaration underlined the conviction that primary loyalty to God’s kingdom should temper enthusiasm for the American nation-state.¹²²

Contemporary progressive evangelicalism and its leadership network coalesced at the Thanksgiving workshop and with the publication of “The Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern.” The endorsement from older, established leaders reaffirmed for many younger, more radically inclined activists that the evangelical faith remained a viable foundation for social action. Ron Sider observed, “Younger evangelicals, whose increasing dismay at the lack of social concern had been approaching despair, discovered a surprising degree of agreement” with “elder evangelical statesmen.”¹²³ This combination of well-respected leaders and youthful reformers broadened the appeal and credibility of the movement. “Major leaders of mainline evangelicalism are conscious of the apostasy in the evangelical community in failing to articulate the social and political claims of the gospel,” Paul Henry concluded. “The

¹²² “The Chicago Declaration,” 2.

¹²³ Sider, “An Historic Moment for Biblical Social Concern,” 29. Richard Mouw also spoke of a “sense of vindication” produced by the presence of “persons whose names had been household words in my childhood—Gabelein, Rees, Henry, Grounds, Ramm” (“Weaving a Coherent Pattern of Discipleship,” 729).

attack on the social indifference of evangelicalism no longer comes from just a minority of prophetic critics.”¹²⁴ Less conspicuous but no less important, the contributions of blacks and women increased sensitivity to racism and sexism, even if white males remained progressive evangelicalism’s visible and vocal spokesmen. William Bentley recognized the potential for white audiences to appreciate and even move toward the progressive social ambitions of minorities. “Although the declaration would not be adequate for a purely black constituency,” he wrote, “it has to be, in my judgment, about the strongest that has so far come from white evangelicalism.”¹²⁵ Building upon the vision and momentum of the conference, the younger advocates of progressive evangelicalism such as Sider, Jim Wallis, and John Alexander took leadership of the movement and articulated its priorities well into the twenty-first century.

Above all, “The Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern” established progressive evangelicalism as a distinct movement within American religion. The statement received significant coverage (albeit to mixed reviews) in evangelical journals. More liberal Protestants and the secular press also took favorable notice.¹²⁶ “Someday,” Roy Larsen speculated in the *Chicago Sun-Times*, “American church historians may write that the most significant church-related event of 1973 took place last week at the YMCA hotel on S. Wabash.” Indeed, Marjorie Hyer reported in *The Washington Post*, the

¹²⁴ Paul B. Henry, “Reflections,” in *The Chicago Declaration*, 137.

¹²⁵ William H. Bentley, “Reflections,” in *The Chicago Declaration*, 136.

Sider, “An Historic Moment for Biblical Social Concern,” 31-33.

conference and the declaration “could well change the face of both religion and politics in America.”¹²⁷

The relationship between religion and American politics did change thoroughly after 1973, but the dominant form that evangelical social and political action took in this period likely surprised the journalists and disappointed the conference participants. The thunderous rise of the New Christian Right and its conservative agenda in the late 1970s muffled the voices of progressive evangelicals and tempered both their optimism and success. Nevertheless, this minority movement has continued to stress themes and messages consistent with the principles summarized in “The Chicago Declaration.” The following chapters examine how the responses of progressive evangelical leaders to issues of race, gender, and sexuality placed them outside the dominant expressions of religion and politics in late twentieth-century America.

¹²⁷ Quoted in Joel Carpenter, “Compassionate Evangelicalism,” *Christianity Today*, Dec 2003, 41.

Chapter 2: Racism: “America’s Original Sin”

Ron Sider did not consider his action radical. But for a white evangelical Christian in 1967, joining the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) marked a decisive break with his tradition’s dominant social conservatism. Sider’s concern for social issues had grown while studying for his doctorate at Yale University in the 1960s. He and his wife lived in a predominantly black neighborhood, and witnessing events through the eyes of the African American couple from whom they rented proved particularly influential. “We actually sat with them the night that Martin Luther King was killed, we felt their pain,” Sider remembered. “We got to know their son, who was an angry young man open enough to talk to a white person.” Like the formative experiences of John Alexander and Jim Wallis, Sider’s relationships with African Americans and exposure to racial inequality played a pivotal role in his understanding of the Christian responsibility for progressive social action. “Most of what I know about oppression I’ve learned from black Americans,” he declared.¹²⁸

For Sider and other progressive evangelical leaders, racism represented one of the most egregious and persistent forms of injustice. This chapter traces how they repeatedly identified and condemned discrimination against racial minorities, especially African

¹²⁸ Jeff M. Jones, “Interview with Ronald J. Sider,” in Jeffrey McClain Jones, *Ronald Sider and Radical Evangelical Political Theology*, (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University and Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, 1990), 406; Kathleen Hayes, “Ron Sider: Working for Kingdom Values,” *The Other Side*, Oct 1986, 11.

Americans. Progressive evangelicals pointed to the ongoing social and economic inequalities faced by these minorities as evidence of entrenched barriers to their substantive equality. In contrast to conservative evangelicals, they interpreted racism not only as personal prejudice but also more significantly as institutionalized injustice. The conviction that systemic racism still afflicts institutional and cultural patterns of American society produced strong support among progressive evangelicals for affirmative action programs. Despite an unequivocal commitment to racial equality, however, the progressive evangelical movement targeted and predominantly attracted white Christians. Nevertheless, these supporters received regular analyses of the ways in which racial injustice continued to exclude minorities from full and dignified community participation.

Racism and the Rise of Progressive Evangelicalism

A sense of Christian responsibility to oppose racism and reverse its unjust social effects propelled the rise of contemporary progressive evangelicalism. In response to the civil rights movement, Fred and John Alexander began the publication of *Freedom Now* in 1965 in order to convince white conservative Christians to support the equality and integration of African Americans. The Alexanders came to regard blacks as equal to whites not from simply reading their Bibles but rather from hearing the messages of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X. “Our concerns were biblically based and motivated, but to be truthful, that wasn’t their origin,” remembered John Alexander. “Their origin was in what was happening in society.”¹²⁹ Throughout its early years the

¹²⁹ Mark Olson, “John Alexander: Taking Jesus Seriously,” *The Other Side*, Oct 1985, 10.

magazine carried articles that appealed to the fundamental equality of blacks and sought to debunk common perceptions of white superiority. “The heart of our racism is the belief that black is not beautiful,” John Alexander wrote, “that it is better to be white than black.” Yet, he argued, white evangelicals must recognize that blacks’ equality before God demands both respect for them as community members and self-sacrifice for their welfare. “Christ told us to love our neighbors *as ourselves*,” Alexander reminded readers.¹³⁰ Article after article insisted that white Christians must work to integrate African Americans in society and promote the equal civil rights of their black “neighbors.”¹³¹ By 1970 *The Other Side* had expanded its focus to address other social problems in addition to racism. Nevertheless, over the next several years editorials by John Alexander and the regular contributions of black authors such as Bill Pannell, William Bentley, and Tom Skinner continued to highlight the gross inequalities faced by blacks and to reiterate that white evangelicals must work for justice on their behalf.¹³²

The founders of the People’s Christian Coalition likewise identified racism as one of the most pressing forms of injustice. In the initial 1971 issue of *The Post-American*, Jim Wallis condemned what he regarded as a “society cancerous with racism,” and Glen

¹³⁰ John Alexander, “Black is Beautiful,” *The Other Side*, Sept-Oct 1969, 3.

¹³¹ For example, see John Perkins, “The Oneness of Believers,” *Freedom Now*, Dec 1965; Fred Alexander, “Do Bible Believers Believe the Bible?” *Freedom Now*, Apr 1966; and John Alexander, “What the Christians Must Do,” *Freedom Now*, Dec 1966.

¹³² For example, see William Bentley, “The Other America,” *The Other Side*, Jan-Feb 1970; John Alexander, “Racism,” *The Other Side*, Mar-Apr 1970; Bill Pannell, “School Busing: Pros & Cons,” *The Other Side*, Nov-Dec 1971; John Alexander, “Plastic Domes,” *The Other Side*, Jan-Feb 1972; and Tom Skinner, “Black Power,” *The Other Side*, Jan-Feb 1972.

Melnik identified “Black liberation” along with the Vietnam War as one of the two paramount issues Christians must face. As part of its insistence that “Christians must be active in rejecting the corrupt values of our culture,” the People’s Christian Coalition called readers to become “prophetic in our resistance and activism against the injustice of a racist society.” Unlike *Freedom Now* and its successor *The Other Side*, however, *The Post-American* in its early years never included articles explicitly devoted to defending black equality or to exploring proposals for combating racism. Its primary focus on American militarism reflected the genesis of the magazine at the apex of opposition to the Vietnam War rather than in the midst of the civil rights movement. Nevertheless, *The Post-American* consistently listed racism among the litany of injustices its writers perceived in American culture. Contributors to the magazine clearly presumed support for the full civil rights and equal opportunities of all people, regardless of race. Along with *The Other Side* in the early 1970s, *The Post-American* ensured that the emerging progressive evangelical network would make the equality of racial minorities a prominent objective within its politics of community.¹³³

The 1973 “Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern” made this intention clear. The statement first contained a clear, strong repudiation of evangelicals’ responsibility for racial inequalities and estrangement. “We deplore the historic involvement of the church in America with racism and the conspicuous responsibility of the evangelical community for perpetuating the personal attitudes and institutional

¹³³ Jim Wallis, “Post-American Christianity,” *The Post-American*, Fall 1971 2; Glen Melnik, “Awake Thou That Sleepest or Who Are you Sleeping With?” *The Post-American*, Fall 1971, 7; “What is the People’s Christian Coalition?” *The Post-American* Winter 1972, 7.

structures that have divided the body of Christ along color line,” the signers stated. The document then emphasized the financial consequences of such attitudes and actions. “Further, we have failed to condemn the exploitation of racism at home and abroad by our economic system.” For progressive evangelicals, equitable access to economic resources would become a litmus test for determining the state of racial equality. Following the publication of “The Chicago Declaration,” many progressive evangelicals specifically focused upon the lack of economic resources as the key impediment to substantive equality for racial minorities.¹³⁴

The first issue of *The Other Side* in 1974 featured several paradigmatic articles. Despite the passage of civil rights legislation, Fred and John Alexander argued that attempts at integration had failed to achieve the supreme goal: “justice and human development.” In response, the Alexanders suggested that financial redistribution from wealthy white Christians to black Christians would enable more equal opportunities for development than forced integration efforts. Two black authors reached similar conclusions. “Integration isn’t the answer,” argued John Perkins, and instead African Americans needed “an equal economic base” that allowed for “self-determination” and “human development.” Ron Potter insisted that “equal footing” was in fact a prerequisite to equitable integration and racial reconciliation. “Before reconciliation takes place there must be an equal distribution of power across the board,” he wrote. As progressive evangelicals pointed out, power proved inextricably tied to money.¹³⁵

¹³⁴ “The Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern,” in *The Chicago Declaration*, ed. Ronald J. Sider (Carol Stream, IL: Creation House, 1974), 1.

¹³⁵ Fred Alexander and John Alexander, “A Manifesto for White Christians,” *The Other Side*, Jan-Feb 1974, 51; John Perkins, “Integration or Development,” *The Other Side*, Jan-

As the 1970s progressed, the sagging American economy led progressive evangelical leaders to frame discussions of racial inequality within attacks upon economic injustice. Not since the Great Depression four decades earlier had Americans experienced such a severe recession. Budget deficits grew as the government financed both the social programs of President Lyndon Johnson's "Great Society" and America's military involvement in Vietnam. The 1973 oil embargo by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) precipitated soaring energy and gas costs. Sluggish business, dramatic increases in unemployment, and historically high inflation produced the economic quagmire of "stagflation"—rising prices and low growth.¹³⁶ This economic uncertainty reinforced progressive evangelicals' sensitivity to issues of poverty and unequal distribution of wealth. The popularity of Ron Sider's *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, the most influential book produced by progressive evangelicals, symbolized the centrality of economics within the movement's analytic categories. In many ways, these economic crises seemed more urgent than racial prejudice. An end to legalized segregation, a reduction in overt racism, and affirmative action policies had

Feb 1974, 12, 48; Ron Potter, "Black Christian Separatism," *The Other Side*, Jan-Feb 1974, 42.

¹³⁶ Between 1973 and 1983, the average annual inflation stood at 8.2%—double the rate of the previous decade—and reached as high as 13.3% in 1979. Unemployment rates, which averaged 4.7% between 1960 and 1973, rose to 7.4% between 1973 and 1986. American productivity decreased from 3% between 1947 and 1965 to 2.4% between 1965 and 1970 to a low of 1.2% between 1973 and 1979. See James T. Patterson, *Restless Giant: The United States from Watergate to Bush v. Gore* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 62-66; Stephanie A. Slocum-Schaffer, *America in the Seventies* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 67-70.

created greater economic and educational opportunities for some African Americans.¹³⁷

Yet while the black middle class expanded, many inner-city blacks without the same social opportunities remained trapped in poverty. William Julius Wilson, an influential black sociologist at the University of Chicago, suggested in *The Declining Significance of Race* that class had become a more important factor than race in determining African Americans' welfare. Economic justice and opportunity appeared a determining factor in the extent to which racial minorities achieved substantive equality.¹³⁸

While not discounting racism, progressive evangelicals stressed the significance of socioeconomic factors that perpetuated inequalities. In his 1976 *Agenda for Biblical People*, for example, Jim Wallis addressed "the division of the world" not in terms of race but along the lines of "powerful and powerless, rich and poor, strong and weak, those who benefit and those who are victimized." Within these dichotomies, he consistently acknowledged that racial minorities were overwhelmingly confined to the latter category. "Race and sex are still the basis for denying people their basic human rights," Wallis wrote, "and class and color continue to be the primary factors in determining a person's share of justice, education, health, respect, income, and society's

¹³⁷ Patterson, *Restless Giant*, 15-17; Sean Dennis Cashman, *African-Americans and the Quest for Civil Rights, 1900-1990* (New York: New York University Press, 1991), 236-241.

¹³⁸ William Julius Wilson, *The Declining Significance of Race: Blacks and Changing American Institutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978). See also Patterson, *Restless Giant*, 18-19; and James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, *Hard Road to Freedom: The Story of African America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 335-338.

goods and services.”¹³⁹ Following the earlier trend within *The Post-American* and its successor *Sojourners*, authors in *The Other Side* also subsumed most discussions of racial inequalities under broader evaluations of social and economic injustice.¹⁴⁰

Two articles from the late 1970s demonstrate how arguments regarding economics served as vehicles for expectations of racial equality. In 1978 John Perkins described in *Sojourners* the hostility shown black evangelical leaders by white conservative Christians not when they denounced racism but when they challenged economic inequalities. “As soon as I question the economic order that has made America unfairly rich and is creating massive poverty,” he wrote, “I find myself in very, very hot water.” He accused the leadership of white evangelicalism of defending a system that prevented substantive equality for African Americans by unfairly distributing wealth and perpetuating poverty. When black leaders such as Tom Skinner, Bill Pannell, and William Bentley highlighted the association between economic and racial inequalities, they had been called communists and barred from white evangelical institutions. Perkins

¹³⁹ Jim Wallis, *Agenda for Biblical People* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976) 85. For a paradigmatic example of how Wallis argued that poverty had the most debilitating effects upon racial minorities, see “Mammon’s Iron Thumb,” *Sojourners*, Feb 1978.

¹⁴⁰ James Davison Hunter conducted a statistical analysis of the content of articles within *The Other Side* from 1972 to 1978 and *The Post-American/Sojourners* from 1973 to 1979. During this period, *The Other Side* devoted about 9% (18 out of 205) of its articles primarily to analyzing inequalities faced by African Americans, while *The Post-American/Sojourners* primarily addressed blacks’ inequality in just over 1% (5 out of 416) of its articles (James Davison Hunter, “The New Class and the Young Evangelicals,” *Review of Religious Research* 22 [Dec 1980], 163). The significantly higher percentage in *The Other Side* reflects both its genesis in the civil rights movement and a greater percentage of African-American authors. Numerous articles in *The Post-American* and *Sojourners* did discuss racism in the context of other social injustices. But without being the primary focus of the article, such references to inequalities among racial minorities would not have appeared in Davison’s statistical analysis.

identified this treatment as the “institutional assassination of prophetic black leaders,” and he pleaded for white evangelicals to “stop stoning our black prophets.” In 1979 Mark Olson, an editor of *The Other Side*, cited statistics showing the ongoing economic, social, and educational inequalities faced by African Americans. Despite “the myth of black progress,” he claimed, “racism is not over.” Olson described Jimmy Carter as a “huge disappointment” for African Americans and accused the president of “establishing an economic philosophy that ignores the plight of ghetto-dwelling blacks.” The slow advance toward racial minorities’ substantive equality under the Carter administration caused Olson to anticipate that “the 1980s may see a resurgence of black activism.” Yet even Olson could not have predicted the extent to which Ronald Reagan’s tenure in the White House would make his speculation appear prescient.¹⁴¹

“Ronald Reagan is Not Their Friend”

The Republican Party’s platform in 1980 signaled how the Reagan administration would interpret racial equality. Although affirming that “no individual should be victimized by unfair discrimination because of race” or other personal characteristics, Republicans insisted that “equal opportunity should not be jeopardized by bureaucratic regulation and decisions which rely on quotas, ratios, and numerical requirements to exclude some individuals in favor of others, thereby rendering such regulations and

¹⁴¹ John Perkins, “Stoning the Prophets,” *Sojourners*, Feb 1978, 8-9; Mark Olson, “White Follies, Black Shackles,” *The Other Side*, Jun 1979, 14, 28.

decisions inherently discriminatory.”¹⁴² In other words, they repudiated affirmative action. Enforced by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and the Office of Federal Contract Compliance (OFCC), affirmative action programs grew out of the civil rights legislation of the 1960s in order to prevent discrimination and to increase opportunities for minorities. To meet affirmative action goals, many businesses and institutions gave special preferences to non-whites in order to overcome the effects of historic inequalities. By the late 1970s, however, white conservatives became increasingly frustrated by liberals’ support for compensatory treatment for past racial oppression and discrimination. Many Americans believed, in fact, that affirmative action programs represented “reverse racism” and subverted the ideal of equal opportunity by giving advantages to certain groups. In a Gallup poll of March 1977, 83% of those questioned opposed preferential treatment of minorities and women in employment and higher education. The Republicans benefited from this backlash against affirmative action.¹⁴³

Reagan’s intentions to end affirmative action reflected his opposition both to federal intervention and legal efforts to promote racial equality. He had earlier objected to the 1964 Civil Rights Act and described the subsequent Voting Rights Act of 1965 as “humiliating” for southerners, apparently disregarding the benefits to the region’s millions of disenfranchised African Americans. Not only did Reagan and his

¹⁴² Quoted in Philip A. Klinkner and Rogers M. Smith, *The Unsteady March: The Rise and Decline of Racial Equality in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 300.

¹⁴³ Philip F. Rubio, *A History of Affirmative Action, 1619-2000* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), 144-166; David W. Bishop, “The Affirmative Action Cases: *Bakke*, *Weber*, and *Fullilove*,” *The Journal of Negro History* 67 (Autumn 1982), 232-233.

conservative supporters hope to end these programs, but they also intended to cut federally financed social programs that aided the poor. Reagan's promises to end the intrusion of "big government" tied together his opposition to affirmative action, civil rights regulations, and social welfare. While these themes solidified his appeal to newly politicized conservative evangelicals as represented by Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority, progressive evangelicals found them deplorable and damaging to racial minorities.¹⁴⁴

Almost immediately following Reagan's election, progressive evangelical leaders began addressing racial equality with renewed urgency. Explicit issues of race itself had been neglected recently, Wallis conceded early in 1981, but the policies of the new administration were already undermining the precarious hopes of African Americans for equality. He therefore wanted to renew attention to "the vulnerability of black children and of all black people" who "are forced to live on the margins of a society that still refuses to grant them the most basic requirements of human dignity and justice." Wallis accused the Reagan administration of justifying the "official neglect of the poor" in "the name of sound fiscal policy," and he claimed that the disproportionate poverty of racial minorities represented the persistence of white racism. In the same issue of *Sojourners*,

¹⁴⁴ As even a sympathetic analyst has noted, "a major focus of the Reagan presidency was to curtail federal enforcement of the landmark federal civil rights laws passed during 1960s and 1970s" (Nicholas Laham, *The Reagan Presidency and the Politics of Race: In Pursuit of Colorblind Justice and Limited Government* [Westport, CT: Praeger, 1981], 1). For additional background on Ronald Reagan's reaction to the civil rights movement and how issues of race factored into the 1980 election and his presidency, see Michael Schaller, *Right Turn: American Life in the Reagan-Bush Era, 1980-1992* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 131-133; and Jeremy D. Mayer, *Running on Race: Racial Politics in Presidential Campaigns, 1960-2000* (New York: Random House, 2002), 150-172; Robert R. Detlefsen, *Civil Rights Under Reagan* (San Francisco: Institute for Contemporary Studies, 1991); and Steven A. Shull, *A Kinder, Gentler Racism? The Reagan-Bush Civil Rights Legacy* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1993).

Lucius Outlaw stated that the return of conservatives to political power gave him “concern and even fear” for “the future of black people in the United States.” Progressive evangelicals’ anxiety over prospects for racial equality quickly turned to disillusionment and disgust with the policies of the Reagan administration.¹⁴⁵

While the president justified his desire to slash programs that benefited the poor and minorities by appealing to his philosophical commitment to limited government, progressive evangelicals interpreted his political agenda as thinly disguised assaults on black equality. “Instead of protecting civil rights and eliminating the demonic effects of racism,” wrote Bill Kallio, the executive director of Evangelicals for Social Action (ESA), “our government only talks about reverse discrimination and getting rid of affirmative action.” *Sojourners* editor Danny Collum believed that the president had revealed himself “personally and officially” against the needs of blacks. “The signal [his] policies are sending to black people is that Ronald Reagan is not their friend,” Collum declared. “The small gains toward racial equality made in the last twenty years are being eaten away by an administration whose officials have made it clear that racial discrimination is a tolerable evil.” The combination of Reagan’s opposition to affirmative action and domestic spending cuts produced suspicion and hostility among

¹⁴⁵ Jim Wallis, “The Children Are Getting Hurt,” *Sojourners*, May 1981, 3; Lucius Outlaw, “Down to the Crossroads: The Future of Black People in the United States,” *Sojourners*, May 1981, 12. See also William Pannell, “Somewhat Short of the Second Coming: Reflections on black people and the Reagan Administration,” *Sojourners*, Sep 1981.

African Americans and those committed to fulfilling the promises of the civil rights movement.¹⁴⁶

For the remainder of Reagan's tenure, progressive evangelicals repeatedly denounced the apparent active and passive enforcement of racial inequalities over which the president presided. In its twentieth anniversary issue in 1985, for example, *The Other Side* carried articles by John Perkins, Bill Pannell, Coretta Scott King, and civil rights veterans Vincent and Rosemarie Harding that addressed the ongoing challenges faced by African Americans. Pannell especially lashed out at the Reagan administration and the Republican Party, calling the president's professed commitment to civil rights "baloney." "The message out of the Republican convention in Dallas last year was loud and clear: this country is better off in the hands of a few white folks with plenty of money whose businesses can provide gobs of trickle-down fun for the upper-middle class," Pannell stated.¹⁴⁷ *Sojourners* devoted its January 1986 issue to honoring the first celebration of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday as a national holiday. But while lauding the inauguration of an annual tribute to "a great prophet of God," Jim Wallis also insisted that King's vision of justice should inspire ongoing efforts to achieve racial equality. Likewise, James Cone declared that King's dream of racial equality in America must not

¹⁴⁶ Bill Kallio, "Editorial: From the Executive Director," *ESA Advocate*, Feb 1982, 2; Danny Collum, "Clear Signals," *Sojourners*, Mar 1982, 4, 6; idem., "Prophet of Hope for the Sick and Tired," *Sojourners*, Dec 1982, 4.

¹⁴⁷ Bill Pannell, "Catsup and Baloney," *The Other Side*, Oct 1985, 33. Pannell went on to criticize the disregard that the Reagan administration showed for lower-class minorities. "Below that level [of the upper-middle class], folks can eat administration baloney," he wrote. "And if one cannot read that label due to poor education or a bad diet, one can always slurp catsup. It makes a nice vegetable," Pannell joked in reference the U. S. Department of Agriculture's widely ridiculed proposal in 1981 to classify the condiment as a vegetable in school lunches.

obscure Malcolm X's message of the nightmare of racial oppression. He asserted that Reagan willingly ignored the existence of poverty and racial discrimination in his proclamations that the American dream had already been realized. Therefore Cone declared that Malcolm X offered a timely corrective to focusing solely on hopes for the "beloved community of integration" envisioned by King. "No promise of equality, no beautiful word about freedom and justice, can serve as a substitute for the bestowal of basic human rights for all people," Cone wrote.¹⁴⁸

At the end of 1987, *Sojourners* published its most sustained rebuke of racial inequality. On the cover, a white figure stood triumphantly on the back of a kneeling black silhouette next to a title blaring "White Racism: America's Original Sin." Once more, Wallis tried to direct his readers' attention to a matter that no longer seemed a "hot topic." He suggested that improvements in personal attitudes and increased opportunities for some black Americans had caused white America as a whole and even activists like himself to prioritize other concerns. Indeed, combating racism had received less attention from the progressive evangelical movement over the previous decade than protests against nuclear arms, America's militarism in Central America, and persistent poverty. Yet Wallis argued that racism endured, and he again used financial statistics as the prime evidence of intensifying inequalities faced by African Americans. "The heart of racism was and is economic, though its roots and results are also deeply cultural, psychological, sexual, even religious, and, of course, political," he wrote. "The existence of a vast black underclass, inhabiting the inner cities of our nation, is a testimony to the versatility of

¹⁴⁸ Jim Wallis, "A Great Prophet of God," *Sojourners*, Jan 1986, 4; James H. Cone, "A Dream or a Nightmare? Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X: Speaking the Truth about America," *Sojourners*, Jan 1986, 28-29.

white racism twenty years after legal segregation was officially outlawed.” Subsequent articles recounted the history of racism in America, gave examples of recent racial violence, and urged white Christians to work for equal educational, economic, and social opportunities.¹⁴⁹ The detrimental effects of the Reagan administration’s political agenda upon African Americans had provoked renewed concern among progressive evangelicals for racial equality in the United States. Reagan’s policies toward South Africa had intensified their protests against racism abroad as well.

The Battle Against Apartheid

In the late 1970s progressive evangelicals joined the growing international opposition to apartheid in South Africa. Beginning in 1948, the system of apartheid (Afrikaans for “separateness”) extended and institutionalized racial segregation that allowed the minority of white South Africans to dominate the majority nonwhite population. Countries throughout the world opposed this oppression, and in 1962 the United Nations General Assembly urged member nations to end diplomatic and economic relationships with the South African government. Within the country itself, groups such as the predominantly black African National Congress led protests that often ended in arrests and violent suppression. Following the 1977 death of Steve Biko, a black opposition leader imprisoned as a security threat, progressive evangelical publications

¹⁴⁹ Jim Wallis, “America’s Original Sin: The Legacy of White Racism,” *Sojourners*, Nov 1987, 15-16. Other articles in this issue included “We, the White People: A History of Oppression” by Calvin S. Morris; “Target: Democracy—Racial Violence in the ‘80s,” by C. T. Vivian; “At the Door of the Church: The Challenge to White and Black People of Faith,” by Catherine Meeks; and “The Promised Community: The Way Out of the Ghetto and Oblivion” by Ron Spann.

began exhorting readers to join efforts to fight apartheid. “As Americans we have a personal responsibility to end our corporate and governmental alliances with the racist South African regime,” wrote Perry Perkins in *Sojourners*. “We must muster all the energy of nonviolent struggle and end our country’s participation in a deeply oppressive system.”¹⁵⁰ *Sojourners* began profiling Christians within both South Africa and the United States working to end apartheid.¹⁵¹ *The Other Side* published articles from authors such as Muhammad Isaiiah Kenyatta, who claimed that “our unity with suffering South African humanity” required American Christians to “disrupt the political, economic, and moral alliance that exists between the United States of America and the fascist Union of South Africa.”¹⁵² As with domestic issues of racial equality, the Reagan administration’s policies heightened these protests.

In light of President Reagan’s unwillingness to distance the United States from South Africa, progressive evangelicals’ waged a consistent campaign against apartheid through the 1980s. Reagan understood the primary problem in South Africa not as racism but the threat of communism gaining a foothold in the region. The Cold War with the Soviet Union dominated his thinking, and he declared that concern for human rights in South Africa “clouds our ability to see this international danger [Soviet interests] to the Western world.” Jeane Kirkpatrick, Reagan’s appointed ambassador to the United

¹⁵⁰ Perry Perkins, “The Loss of Steve Biko,” *Sojourners*, Nov 1977, 7.

¹⁵¹ See, for example, Nicholas Wolterstorff, “Naude: Prophet to South Africa,” *Sojourners*, Mar 1980; Motlalepula Chabaku, “‘We Carry the Cross Close to Us’: a South African Woman Talks About Her Land and Faith,” *Sojourners*, Jul 1980; and Robert Robertson, “The Naidus started it: how one family’s resistance to apartheid snowballed,” *Sojourners*, Sep 1981.

¹⁵² Muhammad Isaiiah Kenyatta, “Time to Take Offense,” *The Other Side*, Nov 1981, 20.

Nations, claimed that “racist dictatorship is not as bad as Marxist dictatorship.”¹⁵³ In response, progressive evangelical leaders began publicizing the extent to which the American government and industries not only sanctioned but also empowered the repressive system of apartheid. For example, in a *Sojourners* article entitled “Greasing the Wheels of Apartheid: How the Reagan administration and the U.S. corporations bolster the South African regime,” Elizabeth Schmidt detailed the extent to which American diplomatic and economic support for the country had increased since Reagan took office. “In the face of the most racist and totalitarian government on earth today,” Jim Wallis concluded in 1986, “Ronald Reagan is trying to do as little as possible.”¹⁵⁴ For the rest of the decade, the progressive evangelical movement continued to highlight efforts to end apartheid and to urge participants to contribute to the movement. *Sojourners* in particular publicized and promoted Christian opposition to apartheid by carrying over forty relevant articles between 1986 and the end of apartheid in 1991.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ Quoted in Donald R. Culverson, *Contesting Apartheid: U.S. Activism, 1960-1987* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999), 87-88. Culverson’s book provides an excellent overview of Reagan’s defense of the South African government and the ways in which the antiapartheid movement pressured elected officials to support sanctions against South Africa.

¹⁵⁴ Elizabeth Schmidt, “Greasing the Wheels of Apartheid: How the Reagan Administration and the U. S. corporations bolster the South African regime,” *Sojourners*, Oct 1983, 10-12; Jim Wallis, “A Lesson for the Long Haul,” *Sojourners*, Oct 1986, 5. For additional examples of articles discussing American support for the South African apartheid system, see Danny Collum, “No Apologetics for Apartheid,” *Sojourners*, Oct 1982; and Jim Wallis, “Loosening Heresy’s Fetters,” *Sojourners*, Feb 1985. Often progressive evangelical publications devoted almost an issue to racism in South Africa. See, for example, the February 1985 issue of *Sojourners* and the December 1985 issue of *The Other Side*.

¹⁵⁵ For examples of these articles, see Vicki Kemper, “Anti-Apartheid Movement Broadens Struggle,” *Sojourners*, Mar 1986; Danny Collum, “Terms of Engagement,” *Sojourners*, Jan 1987; numerous articles in *Sojourners* Aug-Sep 1988 devoted to “The

For progressive evangelicals, working to end apartheid represented a logical extension of their commitment to racial equality and justice. “To treat any bearer of God’s image as sub-human is to contradict the gospel,” wrote Vernon Grounds, President of ESA. “And to permit millions of blacks to be treated as sub-human is heresy in act. It is not just heresy. It is sin.” Based upon this conclusion, Grounds reflected on the responsibilities of both himself and his audience. “Am I courageously taking my stand against any policy of my government which at bottom is ethnically discriminatory and harmful to a minority group?” he asked. “Am I praying fervently and persistently for the bloodless, non-violent triumph of equality and justice in South Africa?”¹⁵⁶ To spur its members to action, ESA carried regular updates in its publications and encouraged readers to petition the president and congressional representatives for sanctions against South Africa.¹⁵⁷

Yet even as antiapartheid efforts played a significant role in the progressive evangelical movement in the 1980s, participants knew domestic work remained. “As we are appalled by the institutionalized racism imposed in South Africa,” Sharon Temple wrote in 1988 for ESA, “let us not forget our own shamefully recent history of a similar apartheid that denied full rights of citizenship and humanity to our black neighbors—and

Church Confronts Apartheid; Jim Wallis, “Stand for Truth: From Pentecost to Soweto,” *Sojourners*, Mar 1989; and Hannes Siebert, “The Painful Liberation of South Africa: The Church Assumes Role as Mediator,” *Sojourners*, Dec 1991.

¹⁵⁶ Vernon Grounds, “Sharing South Africa’s Agony: Indifferent Spectators or Empathetic Intercessors?” *ESA Update* May 1986, 3.

¹⁵⁷ See, for example, “Issues in Christian Perspective: South Africa,” insert in *ESA Update*, May 1986; and Ronald J. Sider, “Will Sanctions End Apartheid?” *ESA Advocate*, June 1989.

which continues in many ways today.”¹⁵⁸ Notable events in the coming decade periodically sparked national conversations regarding issues of race and inspired progressive evangelicals to reiterate their calls for substantive equality and justice for all people.

The Persistent Problem

The impending 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus’s arrival in the New World encouraged progressive evangelical leaders to reemphasize that African Americans were not the only targets of white racism. In the late 1970s both *The Other Side* and *Sojourners* first gave brief attention to injustices faced by Native Americans. The American Indian Movement (AIM) organized a walk across the United States in 1977 to protest legislation that would abrogate treaties between the American government and Native American tribes. AIM’s activities successfully raised progressive evangelicals’ consciousness. The didactic articles in *The Other Side* and *Sojourners* described threats to “Indian self-preservation” and efforts to “survive the onslaught of anti-Indian legislation being proposed in the U.S. Congress.”¹⁵⁹ In the mid-1980s, *The Other Side* ran several more articles that accused the FBI of conducting a “secret war” against AIM and framing American Indian activist Leonard Peltier for the murder of FBI agents during a siege of Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in 1975. To progressive evangelicals, these events served as reminders of persecution suffered by Native

¹⁵⁸ Sharon Temple, “Apartheid in America,” *ESA Update* Jul-Aug 1988, 4.

¹⁵⁹ Phil Shenk “The Longest Walk: Marching for Indian Self-Preservation,” *Sojourners* Jul 1978, 10-12; Charlie Garriot “Captives in Their Homeland” *Sojourners* Jul 1978, 12-13. See also John Alexander, “Greed and Savages,” *The Other Side*, May 1977.

Americans that called not only for repentance but also for “restitution of stolen land” and “reparation for three hundred years of injustice.”¹⁶⁰ As 1992 approached, the opportunity to thrust Native Americans into the public eye alongside Columbus offered a promising strategy to increase awareness of their oppression.

Plans to commemorate Columbus’s “discovery” represented a fitting symbol to progressive evangelicals of how celebrations of American history often masked racial oppression. White Americans should realize, wrote Bob Hulteen in *Sojourners*, that “1992 actually marks the 500th anniversary of an invasion and the heinous consequences that resulted for America’s indigenous people.” Additional articles in *Sojourners*, *The Other Side*, and ESA’s *Advocate* all suggested that anti-Indian prejudice persisted and contributed to the contemporary social and economic inequality of Native Americans. “White America has at least one thing left to discover,” Hulteen concluded: “justice for American Indians.”¹⁶¹ Even as they focused primarily on African Americans,

¹⁶⁰ Charlie Garriott, “Land, Sin, and Repentance,” *The Other Side* Vol. 21 No. 4 (Jun 1985), 23. See also Ward Churchill, “Behind Our Backs: The Seldom-told Story of America’s Secret War Against Leonard Peltier and the Contemporary Indian Movement,” *The Other Side*, Aug 1984; “Issues in Christian Perspective: Native Americans,” insert in *ESA Update*, Sep 1986; and Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall, “The FBI Takes AIM: The FBI’s Secret War against the American Indian Movement,” *The Other Side*, Jun 1987. In 1987, many progressive evangelical leaders—including Jim Wallis, John Alexander, Ron Sider, and Vernon Grounds—endorsed a petition urging a “stand for justice” by demanding that Congress investigate the 1975 siege of the Pine Ridge Reservation. See “A Call to Action,” *The Other Side*, Jun 1987, 36-37.

¹⁶¹ Bob Hulteen, “Unsettled Scores of History,” *Sojourners* Jan 1991, 4, 6. See also Carol Hampton, “A Heritage Denied: American Indians Struggle for Racial Justice,” *Sojourners*, Jan 1991; Kathleen Hayes, “Columbus and the Great Commission: Did He Help Fulfill It?” *ESA Advocate*, Jan-Feb 1992; and Little Rock Reed, “Broken Treaties, Broken Promises,” *The Other Side*, May-Jun 1992.

progressive evangelicals defended other minorities who suffered discrimination and injustice.

Additional prominent events in the 1990s reconfirmed for progressive evangelicals their perception that racial equality, particularly for African Americans, remained far from realized. At the beginning of the decade, *Sojourners* devoted an issue to reexamining race relations since the civil rights movement. Authors agreed that efforts to achieve an integrated society had failed to produce any semblance of substantive equality. “In the critical areas of income and employment, education, housing, and health,” wrote Jim Wallis, “life for most black Americans is still separate and very unequal.” He claimed that an ostensible commitment to integration had allowed whites to assimilate blacks selectively into social structures that they still controlled. “White society has preferred integration to equality,” Wallis charged, and continued “to cover up the fundamental questions of justice and compassion.” Contributors to *Sojourners* called for the goal of social transformation to replace that of integration in order to create “a multicultural partnership of equals.”¹⁶² These calls to revive discussions and efforts to generate racial equality became even more urgent in the wake of the 1992 Los Angeles riots.

In 1991 the violent arrest of a black motorist, Rodney King, by Los Angeles police officers was caught on tape and received extensive media coverage. A year later a

¹⁶² Jim Wallis, “From Integration to Transformation,” *Sojourners*, Aug-Sep 1990, 4-5. Additional articles in this issue that examined “What’s Wong With Integration” included Anthony A. Parker, “Whose America Is It?”; Manning Marable, “The Rhetoric of Racial Harmony: Finding Substance in Culture and Ethnicity;” Eugene Rivers, “Separate and Free: The Role of the Black Church in Integration;” and Danny Duncan Collum, “An Interest in Equality: White People’s Place in the Rainbow.”

jury acquitted the officers of using excessive force, and several days of violence and vandalism ensued. Progressive evangelicals interpreted the decision as yet another sign of racial injustice. “There was no question that Rodney King was brutalized; the issue was whether it mattered,” Wallis wrote. “The verdict, in effect, told every black American that it did not.” While condemning the riots, Wallis also insisted that African Americans had just grievances against ongoing discrimination and inequalities that “demonstrate the absolute and persistent reality of racism on every level of American life.” Several authors in *Sojourners* again declared that responsibility for racial equality began with white Americans. “The white community needs to move beyond denial to the facing of racism, the naming of racism, and the commitment to do everything in its power to change racist behavior and systems of injustice,” argued Yvonne Delk, a *Sojourners* contributing editor. For Wallis, the riots once more manifested the economic and racial divisions that plagued the United States. “This violence is not only rooted in crushing poverty,” he claimed, “but also in our painful separation from one another” that reflected Americans’ “deep-seated individualism and failure to make community.” Progressive evangelicals used the Los Angeles riots to underscore again the exclusion of African Americans from authentic participation and equal opportunities in American society.¹⁶³

Three years later, another controversial trial captured the nation’s attention and provoked discussions of racial equality. In 1994, football star and actor O. J. Simpson had been charged with murder in the deaths of his former wife Nicole Brown Simpson and her friend Ronald Goldman. Simpson’s lengthy televised trial in 1995 fascinated the

¹⁶³ Jim Wallis, “Time to Listen and Act,” *Sojourners*, Jul 1992, 12; Yvonne V. Delk, “To Move Beyond Denial,” *Sojourners*, Jul 1992, 16.

public. In polls, most African Americans expressed sympathy for charges of police misconduct and Simpson's innocence, while the majority of white Americans believed the prosecution's case left little doubt of his guilt. When the predominantly black jury found Simpson not guilty, many African Americans celebrated.¹⁶⁴ Wallis responded to disbelief among whites by explaining how the experience of racism contributed to African Americans' response. "Black jubilation over the acquittal," he wrote, "reflected a belief that this case hadn't been proven beyond a reasonable doubt, that it had been tainted by police sloppiness and racial corruption, and that a black man finally had the resources to beat the system, as whites have done for years." In his column for *Prism*, the magazine of ESA, Rodney Clapp interpreted the case's appeal as a reflection of historic racial inequalities in America. "The extraordinary attention devoted to the O.J. Simpson trial can only be accounted for in terms of the passions and fears race engenders in a country with a history of such tortured racial relations," he wrote. Wallis used the Simpson case to illustrate the racial polarization in American culture that demanded "a new conversation on race" led by religious communities. He criticized the Religious Right, whose attempts to repeal affirmative action he considered "a desire to turn back in the struggle for racial justice rather than go forward." "It is absolutely clear," Wallis continued, "that continuing efforts are still vitally needed to open up opportunities for people of color." To progressive evangelicals, the legacy of racism made equality elusive.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴ Patterson, *Restless Giant*, 310-313.

¹⁶⁵ Jim Wallis, "A New Conversation on Race," *Sojourners*, Nov-Dec 1995, 10; Rodney Clapp, "One Afternoon in the Sun," *Prism* Nov-Dec 2000; Jim Wallis, *Who Speaks for*

At the close of the twentieth century, progressive evangelicals remained ambivalent about prospects for racial justice. Many signs indicated progress. During Bill Clinton's presidency, African Americans had benefited from benign public policies and a robust economy. The growth of the median income for black households exceeded that of whites, while poverty among blacks decreased dramatically.¹⁶⁶ Among their more conservative religious peers, progressive evangelicals noted several encouraging signs. At a 1996 gathering of the National Association of Evangelicals, president Don Argue publicly confessed the sin of racism and committed his group to addressing patterns of racial inequality. The conservative evangelical men's organization of Promise Keepers likewise embraced the goal of racial reconciliation as a prominent part of its agenda. Both Jim Wallis and contributors to *Prism*, ESA's magazine, expressed cautious optimism. "A deep conviction and growing passion about racial reconciliation is taking root in the very unexpected soil of the white, conservative Christian world," Wallis reported. *Prism* noted that the conspicuous participation of minorities at "Stand in the Gap," Promise Keeper's 1997 assembly in Washington, D.C., "may signal the forging of a powerful multiethnic coalition." Yet other considerations tempered this optimism.¹⁶⁷

Progressive evangelicals expected not merely advances but the achievement of racial equality. While some socioeconomic gaps had lessened, other glaring disparities

God: An Alternative to the Religious Right (New York: Delacorte Press, 1996), 118, 112, 113.

¹⁶⁶ Patterson, *Restless Giant*, 305-307.

¹⁶⁷ Jim Wallis, "Evangelicals and Race," *Sojourners* Mar-Apr 1997, 11; Andres Tapia and Rodolpho Carrasco, "The High Stakes in Promise Keepers Bid to Reconcile Races," *Prism*, Jan-Feb 1998.

endured. The poverty rate among African Americans still stood at two and a half times that of whites. The unemployment rate for blacks remained twice as high. African Americans had significantly less access to health insurance and a lower life expectancy than whites by six years.¹⁶⁸ Although heartened by the rhetoric of racial reconciliation, progressive evangelicals insisted that its actualization required racial justice. “Outside the church meeting rooms and stadium rallies where white and black Christians are hugging each other is a nation where racial polarization is on the rise,” Wallis wrote, “where the legacy of slavery and discrimination is still brutally present, and where the majority white population is signaling its tiredness with the ‘issue’ of race by voting down long-standing affirmative action policies.” The same issue of *Sojourners* carried a stinging indictment of white racism by contributing editor Eugene Rivers, an African American pastor and community leader in Boston. The ideological concept of “white identity” was created, he argued, in order to justify enslavement and oppression. The bifurcation of people into white and non-white identities empowered “the demonic ideology of white supremacy” that remained “the dominant principle governing American culture.” He challenged white Christians no longer to think of themselves as white, for accepting distinctions based upon constructed racial identity undermined the reality of the equality of *all* people. Justice for minorities required both social and ideological transformation.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁸ Patterson, *Restless Giant*, 308.

¹⁶⁹ Jim Wallis, “Evangelicals and Race,” 11; Eugene F. Rivers 3d, “Blocking the Prayers of the Church: The Idol of White Supremacy,” *Sojourners*, Mar-Apr 1997, 26-31. See also the accompanying article by Bob Hulteen, “As Long As You Think You’re White, There’s No Hope for You.”

In 1997 both *Sojourners* and ESA's *Prism* marked the thirtieth anniversary of the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. by once again reviewing African Americans' disproportionate poverty and the persistence of discrimination and racial estrangement. "The hopes and dreams that followed the 1960s civil rights and voting rights legislation have yet to be fulfilled," Wallis argued. "America is still a racially divided society, where diversity is widely perceived as a greater cause for concern than for celebration." Yvonne Delk outlined a strategy to dismantle racism that included acknowledging racism's existence and challenging organizational structures and cultural patterns that reinforce racial inequalities. In *Prism*, editorial board member Harold Dean Trulear pointed to King's vision for social transformation, not superficial integration, as vital to achieving equality for minorities. Americans must change "the quality of inter-racial interaction," he proposed, "so that the gifts of all persons in society come to form what he called 'the beloved community.'" From its inception, the progressive evangelical movement had proclaimed a consistent message that they carried into the beginning of the twenty-first century. White racism endured, and only radical social transformation would begin to dismantle the obstacles that hindered minorities' substantive equality in American society.¹⁷⁰

Diverse Authors, White Audiences

¹⁷⁰ Jim Wallis, "Why?" *Sojourners*, Mar-Apr 1998, 9; Yvonne Delk, "A Time for Action: Building a Strategy to Dismantle Racism," *Sojourners*, Mar-Apr 1998, 25; Harold Dean Trulear, "I've Been to the Edge: Martin Luther King's Vision, 30 Years Later," *Prism*, Mar-Apr 1998, 8.

Although contemporary progressive evangelical leaders have consistently championed the equality and welfare of racial minorities, white Americans overwhelmingly have formed the movement's constituency. The available self-reported statistics regarding the primary progressive evangelical magazines and organizations reveal a movement that has received support almost exclusively from whites. In 1980 *Sojourners* discovered that 95% of respondents to a questionnaire distributed to its readers identified themselves as white.¹⁷¹ Two years later, *The Other Side* reported that 98% of those who responded to its own reader survey were white.¹⁷² Membership surveys by ESA produced remarkably similar data, as 95% of members in 1984 and 96% in 1988 described themselves as white.¹⁷³ Despite emphatic commitments to civil rights and substantive equality for racial minorities, therefore, progressive evangelical leaders did not attract appreciable numbers of non-white participants. Two important factors contributed to this lack of racial diversity.

First, early progressive evangelical leaders defined their goal as the reformation of the white evangelical subculture that traced its heritage to the fundamentalist movement at the beginning of the century. Fundamentalism arose to defend traditional

¹⁷¹ Joe Roos, "Into 1980 Together," *Sojourners*, Jan 1980, 4. Roos, the publisher of *Sojourners*, reported that over 6,000 readers returned the questionnaires out of 38,000 mailed.

¹⁷² "Who You Are," *The Other Side*, Sep 1982, 7. Although only 330 readers mailed in responses, the editors considered the findings a "good picture, even if not fully representative" of the magazine's approximately 10,000 subscribers.

¹⁷³ "1984 ESA Member Survey Results," *ESA Update*, Jan-Feb 1984, 3; "Who We Are and Where We Are Headed: A Summary of the ESA Member Survey," *ESA Update*, Apr 1988, 1. In the 1984 survey, 12% (a total of 400 people) returned surveys mailed to members. The 1988 survey had a noteworthy return rate of 29%.

interpretations of Christian orthodoxy against the spread of theological liberalism within white Protestantism. In particular, fundamentalists opposed the adoption of biblical higher criticism, acceptance of Darwinian evolution, and the de-emphasis of individual salvation in the Social Gospel movement. Unable to enforce their conservative convictions in denominational and cultural debates, fundamentalists largely withdrew into subcultural enclaves in the late 1920s and 1930s. Though the vast majority of black Protestants at that time shared the theological conservatism of fundamentalists, they possessed a distinct religious and cultural identity. Throughout the nineteenth century, African Americans had developed their own religious denominations, institutions, and priorities in response to racial segregation. Focused as much on practical efforts to improve their members' welfare as on theological controversies, black churches remained institutionally and culturally separate. As a result, African American Christians remained isolated from internecine battles that rent white Protestantism into conservative and more liberal factions. They participated in neither the fundamentalists' withdrawal nor subsequent efforts by conservative white Protestants in the mid-twentieth century to gain renewed cultural legitimacy.¹⁷⁴

Beginning in the 1940s, a group of fundamentalist leaders grew dissatisfied with the separatism inherent in their movement and sought to re-engage with the broader American culture. Concerned primarily with intellectual and cultural respectability, leaders such as Billy Graham, Harold Ockenga, and Carl F. H. Henry adopted the name

¹⁷⁴ C. Eric Lincoln, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990).

“evangelicals” to describe themselves.¹⁷⁵ Although joined by a minority of African Americans, modern evangelicalism as a self-conscious religious and social movement almost exclusively comprised white denominations, institutions, and participants. Even those black Christians sympathetic to the movement expressed ambivalence about calling themselves “evangelicals.” “One reason blacks aren’t comfortable with the word is that it grows out of the fundamentalist-liberal controversy, and in the black church we’ve never had that controversy,” William Bentley, president of the National Black Evangelical Association, told *The Other Side* in 1975.¹⁷⁶ Despite sharing the characteristic theology of self-identified evangelicals, the majority of black Christians remained disconnected from the movement’s interdenominational activities and institutions. The dominant political, social, and economic conservatism among most white evangelicals only reinforced this distinction. In an effort to reform the white evangelical movement, the small progressive group that emerged in the early 1970s drew upon the religious and social networks of white evangelicals. Thus the story of contemporary progressive evangelicalism stands as part of the larger narrative of theologically conservative white Christians in the twentieth century. In spite of black Protestants’ theological and even political affinities with the movement, separate sociological histories have proven barriers to the self-conscious identification and participation of minorities with progressive evangelicalism.

¹⁷⁵George Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987).

¹⁷⁶“Growing Together: A Conversation With Seven New Black Evangelicals,” *The Other Side*, Jul-Aug 1975, 31.

Second, the ways in which progressive evangelical leaders prioritized and articulated issues of race reaffirmed that white Christians represented their primary audience. As the “Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern” symbolized, the movement’s commitment to a broad social justice agenda did not stress racism to the extent that some African Americans wished. In fact, the force of the declaration’s condemnation of racism resulted only after the insistence of the participating black minority. “Blacks especially had to press aggressively for a strong statement on the complicity of white evangelicalism in the individual manifestations and group mechanisms that originated and perpetuate racial oppression in America,” wrote Bentley. While other issues of justice preoccupied the white majority, African Americans understandably considered racism the most urgent. “We felt that while racial prejudice and discrimination are not the only social issues that plague America and her churches,” Bentley claimed, “it is the one above all others that colors all others.” Wyn Wright Potter, a black activist from Chicago, described the difference in perspective in even stronger terms. “I felt an insensitivity to the criticalness of the racial crisis,” she remembered. In her opinion, white evangelicals believed that “we have all these problems” and “racism is just one of them.” “That sickens me,” Potter vented in an interview with *The Other Side*. “Granted that other things are important, but there’s nothing like racial oppression.” To African-Americans affiliated with the early progressive evangelical movement, racial equality remained the sine qua non of social justice.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁷ William H. Bentley, “Reflections,” in *The Chicago Declaration*, 136; “Growing Together: A conversation with seven new black evangelicals,” *The Other Side*, Jul-Aug 1975, 45.

Yet the issue of racism would never dominate progressive evangelicals' attention. It continued to represent only one form of injustice that they protested. As ESA defined its scope of public policy analysis, for example, racism and minority issues represented one of eleven categories on which they pledged to report.¹⁷⁸ In *Sojourners* and *The Other Side*, explicit articles addressing racial equality became overshadowed at times by other concerns that appeared more pressing—e.g. sexism, economic justice, the influence of the Religious Right, or American militarism in the Cold War, Central America, and the Middle East. To be sure, progressive evangelicals never wavered in their commitment to equality and justice for racial minorities. Yet they remained what Ron Sider described as “stubbornly multi-issue.” “If the Bible is any clue, God seems to be very concerned both with peacemaking and with the family, both with justice and life,” wrote Sider. “Violating the integrity of persons through racism, sexism, and economic oppression all displease God.”¹⁷⁹ As a result of this commitment to a broad range of social justice issues, progressive evangelical publications carried only intermittent coverage of racial issues. Minorities who sought constant and primary analyses of racial justice likely joined alternative social and religious movements. By placing issues of race within the

¹⁷⁸ In inaugurating a new section entitled “Washington Update,” Ron Sider committed ESA to a broad range of issues. He listed them in alphabetical order in order not to appear to prioritize any particular ones: “abortion, church/state, crime and the judicial system, economic justice, environment/ecology, the family, freedom/democracy/human rights, health and medical issues, military policy, racism and minority issues, and sexism and feminist issues.” Ronald J. Sider, “Called To Be Servant Advocates,” *ESA Advocate*, Sept 1988, 1.

¹⁷⁹ Ronald J. Sider, “Why ESA is Stubbornly Multi-Issue,” *ESA Advocate*, Jan 1989), 2.

broader framework of social justice, *The Other Side*, *Sojourners*, and ESA would continue to attract an overwhelmingly white constituency.

Even when demands for racial equality did move into the spotlight, the repetitious insistence upon racism's persistence and consequences remained more fitting for white than for minority audiences. As with subsequent progressive evangelical publications, "The Chicago Declaration" assumed that its audience needed to acknowledge the existence of racial inequality. Both the specific contrition for racism within the declaration and the broader appeals for social action clearly targeted white conservative Christians, thus limiting the statement's relevance for racial minorities. African Americans needed few if any reminders of the urgent problems of racial inequality and social injustice. Bentley appreciated the significance of the statement for white evangelicalism yet acknowledged that "the declaration would not be adequate for a purely black constituency." The focus of the movement's leaders would remain upon urging the white evangelical subculture to recognize and to advance racial equality. "If the problem is *whites*, why should *whites* try to reform blacks?" concluded Fred and John Alexander in an article for *The Other Side*. "The moral is obvious: the target audience of whites should be whites." Progressive evangelical leaders never left in doubt whom they were attempting to educate. "Whites in America must admit the reality and begin to operate on the assumption that ours is a racist society," Wallis claimed. He insisted that whites had ultimate culpability for racial inequalities. "Racism has to do with the power to dominate and enforce oppression, and that power in America is in white hands," he argued. "There is no such thing as black racism. Black people in America do not have the power to enforce that prejudice." The predominant participation in the progressive

evangelical movement by white supporters reflected these efforts to inform and to inspire white audiences.¹⁸⁰

Yet progressive evangelical leaders did not let a predominantly white constituency avoid grappling with the persistence of racism. That is to say, these leaders made strategic decisions to confront their white audience with both the needs and the perspectives of minorities. The contributors to *Sojourners*, *The Other Side*, and publications of ESA displayed decidedly more racial diversity than the readership. In the early stages of the movement, the prominence given by *The Other Side* to black authors stood out within the traditionally white circles of evangelicalism. “It was in the pages of this vital organ that many of us [black evangelicals] were given the opportunity which no other magazine would even consider,” William Bentley recalled. “There can be no mistake that it was first *Freedom Now*, and then *The Other Side* which gave our viewpoints a chance at unedited expression.”¹⁸¹ Beginning in the late 1970s and continuing through the present, *Sojourners* also began to carry frequent articles by African Americans. In order to assure the representation of their perspectives, both *Sojourners* and ESA included numerous minorities on their editorial and advisory boards. In addition, progressive evangelical publications featured interviews with notable figures ranging from black theologian James Cone to South African leader Desmond Tutu and profiles of civil rights leaders, including Martin Luther King, Jr. and Fannie Lou Hamer.

¹⁸⁰ “The Chicago Declaration,” 1; Fred Alexander and John Alexander, “A Manifesto for White Christians,” 52; Jim Wallis, *The Soul of Politics: A Practical and Prophetic Vision for Change* (New York: The New Press, 1994) 91-92.

¹⁸¹ William H. Bentley, *The National Black Evangelical Association: Reflections on the Evolution of a Concept of Ministry* (Chicago: William Bentley, 1979), 104.

Thus black Christians provided readers and supporters firsthand recounts and analyses of racial discrimination and inequalities.

Through these minority messengers, progressive evangelical leaders augmented their efforts to ensure that white audiences would not remain isolated from and ignorant of racism's persistence. Numerous studies have shown that sensitivity to racism increases through respectful interracial contact and exposure to evidence of racial discrimination.¹⁸² Progressive evangelical publications offered a forum for thoughtful engagement with minorities' testaments to racial prejudice. The didactic nature of articles dealing with racial issues—particularly those by minorities themselves—reflected a clear strategy to introduce and to persuade readers of racial injustice and inequalities. A provocative recent analysis of racial attitudes among evangelicals revealed the significance of this strategy. “We were struck by how racially homogeneous the social worlds of most evangelicals are, particularly those of white respondents,” wrote Michael Emerson and Christian Smith. In *Divided By Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America*, these authors demonstrated how isolation from racial pluralism allowed evangelicals to downplay the existence and ramifications of racism. Conversely, greater interracial experiences enhanced evangelicals' recognition of racial problems.¹⁸³ Indeed, relationships with African Americans that produced increased awareness of their plight had proven influential in inspiring many progressive evangelical leaders themselves. Recurrent reports of racial inequality helped to convince the

¹⁸² Michael Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided By Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) 80-84.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 80.

movement's white participants of the imperative of fighting racism. Although over 95% of the ESA members who completed surveys in the 1980s identified as white, at least 91% of respondents still regarded racism as a problem.¹⁸⁴ Thus the commitment to substantive racial equality represented a vital goal within the public engagement of progressive evangelicalism.

The majority of white evangelicals interpreted racial issues in a markedly different way than progressive evangelicals. As with most social problems, racism appeared to mainstream evangelicals as the aggregate of magnified personal faults. In other words, social problems such as racism, poverty, or crime, resulted almost exclusively from the poor decisions and sinfulness of individuals. Evangelicals in particular viewed humans as free and independent actors, in control of and fully responsible for their decisions. This interpretation showed little appreciation, however, for the ways in which historical factors, social structures, and cultural patterns affect individuals.¹⁸⁵ In their study of evangelicals' racial attitudes, Emerson and Smith demonstrated how the individualistic ethos of most evangelicals limited their understanding of racism. The only racial problems that existed, respondents believed, were the prejudice and discrimination of individuals that produced hurtful interpersonal relationships. As the authors noted, "This perspective misses the racialized patterns that transcend and encompass individuals, and are therefore often institutional and systemic."

¹⁸⁴ "1984 ESA Member Survey Results," 3; "Who We Are and Where We Are Headed: A Summary of the ESA Member Survey," 1.

¹⁸⁵ Dennis Hollinger, *Individualism and Social Ethics: An Evangelical Syncretism* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983); Emerson and Smith, *Divided By Faith*, 76-79.

Most prominent, white evangelicals did not believe racial problems included economic inequalities—one of the dominant themes within progressive evangelical coverage of racial issues. Instead, they assumed that equal opportunity existed for all Americans, and thus any inequalities resulted from personal deficiencies. White evangelicals overwhelmingly disregarded relevant social structures that influence individuals: “unequal access to quality education, segregated neighborhoods that concentrate the already higher black poverty rate and lead to further social problems, and other forms of discrimination.” Emerson and Smith concluded that, despite their intentions, these evangelicals reinforced racial inequality by minimizing its reality and proposing inadequate solutions based upon personal rather than structural transformation.”¹⁸⁶ Progressive evangelicals represented, however, an important exception to this traditional response.

The most striking aspect of progressive evangelicals’ opposition to racism was their firm assertion of its institutionalized and structural nature. As early as 1970, John Alexander began discussing “institutional racism” and advocating changes in social and economic patterns. Signers of the “Chicago Declaration” acknowledged not only the “personal attitudes” but also the “institutional structures” that segregated Christians and fed racial injustice. As President Reagan made clear his policies would correspond with individualized interpretations of racial problems, progressive evangelicals condemned views that discounted structural support for racial inequalities. “Reagan’s approach in matters of racial justice, as in economics, is to reduce everything to isolated transactions between individuals,” wrote *Sojourners* assistant editor Danny Collum. “This is

¹⁸⁶ Emerson and Smith, *Divided By Faith*, 90, 112.

essentially an attempt to escape from history, to abdicate human responsibility for the powerful economic, political, cultural, and spiritual forces that form and feed the racist impulse in people and societies.” Jim Wallis argued that the appearance of improved personal attitudes belied the pervasive institutional nature of racism. American economic, education, and judicial systems remained biased toward the benefits of whites and thus perpetuated African Americans’ inequality. “Merely to keep personally free of the taint of racial attitudes is both illusory and inadequate,” he argued. “Just to go along with a racist social structure, to accept the economic order as it is, just to do one’s job within impersonal institutions is to participate in racism.” Unlike other white conservative Christians, therefore, progressive evangelicals believed that the primary obstacles to racial equality lay not in the personal attitudes of individual prejudice but in institutional patterns and structural injustices. They rejected strategies for improvement based upon the transformation of individuals, including spiritual regeneration, and instead supported a solution repugnant to conservative evangelicals: affirmative action.¹⁸⁷

Jim Wallis signaled progressive evangelical support for affirmative action in his response to the Supreme Court’s ruling in the landmark 1978 case of *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*. Alan Bakke, a white applicant, had sued the University of California-Davis for discrimination in denying him admission to its medical school. The program accepted minority candidates with lower scores through a separate admissions process. The Supreme Court ruled five to four that admission processes could not use quota systems—that is, numerical requirement based upon a single factor such as

¹⁸⁷ John Alexander, “Racism,” *The Other Side* Mar-Apr 1970, 33; “Chicago Declaration,” 1; Collum, “Clear Signals,” 6; Wallis, “America’s Original Sin,” 17.

race—but nevertheless could consider a candidate’s race as part of a holistic evaluation. Wallis believed that some form of affirmative action remained necessary to create substantive equality for disadvantaged racial minorities. “To legally enforce equality in a society of inequities is to perpetuate those inequities,” he wrote. “The Blind Lady of Justice has peeked through her blindfold just enough to see race and class and adjust her decisions accordingly.” Although President Reagan’s unsuccessful attempts to dismantle affirmative action programs stirred progressive evangelical opposition, their most vocal defense came during renewed objections to such policies in next decade.¹⁸⁸

Backed by many white evangelicals, conservative Republicans in the 1990s campaigned against affirmative action on the grounds that it provided *unequal* opportunities for some based upon race, gender, or other factors. Yet progressive evangelicals maintained that authentic equality represented the goal of affirmative action. Certain preferential policies do not deprive white males of opportunity, Van Temple assured readers of ESA’s newsletter, but only chip away at unfair advantages those in power have possessed. Wallis likewise emphasized the reality of these advantages. “Affirmative action has always existed in America—for white men from affluent classes, in particular,” he wrote. “It is not whether anyone should get affirmative action, but rather whether anyone other than white men should get it.” Wallis advocated continued attempts to find the best methods for recruiting and empowering the underprivileged, and he agreed with President Clinton’s endorsement of affirmative action: don’t end it, mend it. Writing in *Sojourners*, Barbara Reynolds encouraged readers to think of affirmative action not as “preferences” but as a “remedy.” “Affirmative action done correctly lifts

¹⁸⁸ Jim Wallis, “The ‘Equality’ of the Hard-Hearted,” *Sojourners*, Aug 1978, 4-5.

up, rather than tears down,” she declared. “It makes up for past wrongs, while not unjustly creating new wrongs.” For progressive evangelicals, the legitimacy of affirmative action stemmed from their understanding of distributive justice. “Can we acknowledge that God exercises impartial justice, but at the same time shows special consideration for victims of structural sin?” asked Timothy Tseng in *Prism*. “Affirmative action is an important mechanism for compensatory racial justice—perhaps the only mechanism,” he concluded. “It deserves the support of evangelicals.” Increased diversity in educational, business, and other institutional settings has encouraged progressive evangelicals’ continued promotion of affirmative action.¹⁸⁹

Conclusion

The article’s title, “Still Separate, Still Unequal,” represented a fitting description of how progressive evangelicals viewed race relations in the early twentieth century. In 2004 *Sojourners* published this piece as an examination of racial equality on the fiftieth anniversary of the Supreme Court’s ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*. Once more, author David Hilfiker wrote, promises remained unfulfilled. Despite the court’s rejection of the “separate but equal” premise that created segregation, he argued, the “structural violence” of American society kept many African Americans just as segregated and even more endangered than fifty years before. Discriminatory zoning laws, lack of affordable housing, and underfunded schools institutionalized patterns of segregation and poverty.

¹⁸⁹ Van Temple, “Affirmative Action is Good Business,” *ESA Advocate*, Dec 1991; Wallis, “Is Affirmative Action Obsolete? Or Just in Need of Repair?” *Sojourners*, Jul-Aug 1998, 12; Barbara Reynolds, “Playing the Race Card,” *Sojourners*, May-Jun 1995, 10-11; Timothy Tseng, “Affirmative Action: Scapegoat or Sacred Cow?” *Prism*, Jan-Feb 1996, 12.

"Most of us who don't suffer from the violence of our structures don't see it," Hilfiker claimed. "We live the myth of equal opportunity and don't see our opportunities for the privileges they are." But until privileged Americans recognize "the violence of the structures that keep the affluent comfortable," Hilfiker did not believe they would embrace substantive solutions such as increased anti-poverty programs, access to affordable housing, and more equitable funding of schools.¹⁹⁰

"Still Separate, Still Unequal" encapsulated the themes of progressive evangelical interpretations of racial issues over the past four decades. Racial discrimination and inequalities persisted, and only a willingness to overhaul social structures would allow minorities to participate equally and fully in their communities. Periodic events of the early twenty-first century kept racial justice an important priority of progressive evangelicals. Reports of unbalanced disenfranchisement of black voters in the 2000 presidential election and the disproportionate suffering of African Americans following Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans encouraged leaders to raise awareness of continued problems. At the end of their study of evangelicals and race, Michael Emerson and Christian Smith claimed that "with a few exceptions, evangelicals lack serious thinking" regarding "the complexity of American race relations." The authors suggested that evangelicals should bring together knowledge based upon thoughtful analyses with "Christian understanding of freedom, love, universalism, justice, unity, and community."¹⁹¹ Although uncertain of the best solutions, the progressive evangelical movement distinguished itself as an exception to individualistic interpretations of the

¹⁹⁰ David Hilfiker, "Still Separate, Still Unequal," *Sojourners*, May 2004, 7.

¹⁹¹ Emerson and Smith, *Divided By Faith*, 171, 172.

problem of race in America. A commitment to the Christian themes listed by Emerson and Smith made progressive evangelicals consistent advocates for racial equality.

Chapter 3: The Trials and Triumphs of Biblical Feminism

Few statements could have more provoked conservative Christians in 1972. “Jesus was a feminist, and a very radical one,” proclaimed the *Post-American*. “Can his followers attempt to be anything less?”¹⁹² To most evangelicals, such a claim would have seemed erroneous if not downright blasphemous. They believed that any call to support “women’s liberation” constituted the siren song of secular feminists and religious liberals intent upon wrecking God’s designated order in domestic, social, and religious life. As the *Post-American*’s article suggested, however, in the early 1970s progressive evangelicals began to view feminism more sympathetically. Sensitive to different forms of injustice, they found persuasive many feminist protests against discrimination and gender inequalities. Most important, progressive evangelical authors began to offer biblical interpretations that promoted gender egalitarianism rather than traditional hierarchical views of male leadership. By the mid-1970s, a distinct evangelical feminist movement emerged, and “biblical feminism” garnered the support of progressive evangelical leaders.¹⁹³ Yet what progressive evangelicals considered a movement for social justice, the majority of evangelicals judged a spiritual mistake and a sign of social

¹⁹² “Jesus was no Chauvinist,” *The Post-America*, Summer 1972, 11.

¹⁹³ Like participants in the movement, I use the terms “evangelical feminism” and “biblical feminism” interchangeably. In her recent history of the movement, Pamela Cochran also adopted this practice. See *Evangelical Feminism: A History* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 195 [note 2].

malady. Throughout the 1970s, conservative Christians solidified their theological hostility, and leaders of the emergent Christian Right crusaded against the feminist movement's political goals. In the face of this opposition, progressive evangelicals defended the orthodoxy of biblical feminism. In addition, they joined other feminists in challenging traditional gender roles and supporting anti-discriminatory policies such as the Equal Rights Amendment.

This chapter examines how progressive evangelicals' public theology of community led them to embrace biblical feminism and support feminist reforms. Leaders came to believe that scriptural passages suggesting women's subordination and men's unique leadership roles reflected transitory traditions rather than eternal Christian truth. By opposing gender inequality and sexism as forms of injustice, the progressive evangelical movement helped to launch and to nurture the growth of biblical feminism. Through the end of the 1970s and early 1980s, *Sojourners* and *The Other Side* offered critical defenses of the movement's theology and political sympathies. Leaders responded to growing hostility from Christian conservatives by promoting the orthodoxy of biblical feminism and legislative demands for women's equality. This pattern continued through the end of the century. Despite the success of many feminist campaigns to enhance women's relative status, progressive evangelical leaders joined other feminists in highlighting persistent economic inequalities, violence against women, and the hardships faced by women in developing nations. *Sojourners*, *The Other Side*, and *Evangelicals for Social Action* especially criticized Christian resistance to gender egalitarianism and obstacles to women's religious leadership. Their insistence upon

gender egalitarianism and critique of systemic sexism placed progressive evangelicals at odds with Christian conservatives in religious and political debates.

The Emergence of Biblical Feminism

The modern feminist movement met resistance from the evangelical subculture. Beginning in the 1960s, contemporary feminist leaders launched a campaign to identify and to protest social, political, and economic inequalities faced by women. Representatives such as Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinem, and Mary Daly particularly denounced expectations of women's submissiveness and domesticity. But, in the words of a 1969 *Christianity Today* article, conservative Christians regarded these very qualities as "timeless spiritual principles." Evangelical polemicists believed that women experienced authentic freedom only by fulfilling the roles to which God had called them. "The truly liberating option for modern mothers lies in a broadened sense of homemaking," wrote Mary Bouma in 1971. Evangelicals had long advocated biblical interpretations that emphasized a gender hierarchy. God had established a patriarchal order, they argued, in which men and women possess inherently different roles and responsibilities despite their equal intrinsic worth. Elisabeth Elliot's declaration that "equality is not really a Christian ideal" typified the initial responses of most evangelicals to feminist demands for egalitarianism.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁴ Andre S. Bustanoby, "Love, Honor, and Obey," *Christianity Today*, Jun 6, 1969, 3; Mary Bouma, "Liberated Mothers," *Christianity Today*, May 7, 1971, 4; Elisabeth Elliot, *Let Me Be a Woman: Notes on Womanhood for Valerie* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1976), 126. For historical analyses of the ways in which gender norms evolved among conservative Christian, see Sally K. Gallagher, *Evangelical Identity and Gendered Family Life* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 19-61; Betty A. DeBerg, *Ungodly Women: Gender and the First Wave of American*

Not all evangelicals rejected the feminist impulse out of hand. Despite widespread assumption of gender hierarchy, mainstream evangelical journals carried several articles that explored support for women's equality beginning in the mid-1960s. In 1966, Letha Scanzoni wrote an essay in *Eternity* that questioned the consistency of conservative Christians who allowed women to lead evangelistic activities but prohibited them from teaching a mixed Sunday school class. Two years later, the popular evangelical magazine carried another piece by Scanzoni in which she defended marriage as a "partnership" rather than hierarchical relationship. Attempting to temper the threat of these respective articles, Scanzoni included disclaimers that she was neither calling for female ordination nor rejecting "loving direction by a husband" in marriage. Nevertheless, her arguments demonstrated that some conservative Christians were wrestling with the implications of the feminist movement for their traditional notions of gender hierarchy.¹⁹⁵

In 1971 three articles in mainstream evangelical magazines questioned conventional views of gender more boldly. In *Christianity Today* Ruth Schmidt criticized the ways in which Christians replicated cultural discrimination against women. "I'm tired of being considered a second-class citizen in the Kingdom of God," she wrote. "I'm not considered that by God, of course, but by men." She lamented that "the Christian Church has not been a leader in the struggle for *full* equality for women in

Fundamentalism, 2nd ed. (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2000); and Margaret Lamberts Bendroth, *Fundamentalism and Gender: 1875 to the Present* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

¹⁹⁵ Letha Scanzoni, "Woman's Place: Silence or Service?" *Eternity*, Feb 1966, 14-16; idem, "Elevating Marriage to Partnership," *Eternity* Jul 1968, 11-14.

society, nor has it allowed women to experience freedom from society's prejudices within the Church." *Christianity Today* also published interpretations of Pauline passages by Calvin Miller that supported expanded ministry opportunities for women and mutual submission in marriage. In *Eternity*, assistant editor Nancy Hardesty authored an article entitled "Women: Second Class Citizens" in which she advocated similar forms of gender equality.¹⁹⁶ In comparison to more belligerent feminists, these proposals represented modest reforms. Yet suggestions of gender egalitarianism proved far too threatening for most evangelicals.

Rebuttals in defense of traditional gender hierarchy overwhelmed these early attempts to identify biblical support for Christian forms of feminism. A steady stream of editorials, articles, and letters within *Eternity*, *Christianity Today*, and other evangelical circles acknowledged abuses of male authority but reaffirmed its necessity in society and the family. "In the beginning, Eve bit into forbidden fruit and fell into subjection to Adam," the editor of *Christianity Today* wrote. "Her descendents face a lesser temptation—equality with man instead of with God—but they are biting no less eagerly into their forbidden fruit." Billy Graham, the most influential evangelical leader, made clear his support of traditional feminine roles. "Wife, mother, homemaker," he told *Ladies' Home Journal*, "this is the appointed destiny of true womanhood." Popular literature and teaching on family life, such as Larry Christenson's *The Christian Family* and Bill Gothard's parenting and marital seminars, also reaffirmed men's leadership and

¹⁹⁶ Ruth A Schmidt, "Second-Class Citizenship in the Kingdom of God," *Christianity Today*, Jan 1, 1971, 13; Nancy Hardesty, "Women: Second Class Citizens," *Eternity* Jan 1971, 14-16; Calvin Miller, "St. Paul and the Liberated Woman," *Christianity Today*, Aug 6, 1971, 13-14.

women's submission in the home and culture at large.¹⁹⁷ As the feminist movement gained strength and visible success—in 1972, for example, Congress passed the Equal Rights Amendment and *Ms.* magazine debuted—the conservative majority of evangelicals increasingly asserted the incompatibility of Christian orthodoxy and feminism. Pushed away from the mainstream, emerging biblical feminists found support within progressive evangelical circles.

Unlike opposition to racism, concern for gender equality played little discernable role in the rise of the progressive evangelical movement. Only after eight years of publication did *The Other Side* address sexism, and even then its 1973 issue with the cover title of “Women” reflected ambivalence about feminist claims. The editors included articles from several women who had challenged traditional views of women in mainstream evangelical magazines. Authors such as Letha Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty highlighted biblical support for women's equality, historical precedents for women's ministry, and the ways in which Christians wrongly accepted cultural sex-role stereotypes. In separate editorials, John Alexander and his wife Judy agreed that the feminist movement rightly identified unjust inequalities and false assumptions of gender roles. But, they each maintained, the Bible *did* teach some binding form of male authority and female submission. “The Bible says that men are to be the leaders in the home and spokesmen of the church. Now I don't like that,” John Alexander admitted, “and neither does the women's movement.” He concluded, therefore, that progressive evangelicals should admit ambiguity on how to apply biblical teachings, challenge clear

¹⁹⁷ “Eve's Second Apple,” *Christianity Today*, Aug 24, 1973, 29; Billy Graham, “Jesus and the Liberated Woman,” *Ladies' Home Journal*, Dec 1970, 42. See also Gallagher, *Evangelical Identity and Gendered Family Life*, 46-49.

social discrimination against women, and follow Jesus' model of siding with the oppressed (in this case, women).¹⁹⁸

In its early years, the *Post-American* published less tentative yet still isolated support of feminist convictions. The magazine revealed its sympathy in the brief description in 1972 of Jesus as a feminist—"that is, a person who promotes the equality of women with men, who treats women primarily as human persons and willingly contravenes social customs in so acting." Another article urged readers both to reassess domestic expectations for women and to combat the economic exploitation of those who did work outside the home. In early 1973 the *Post-American* also carried a supportive report regarding the first convention of the National Women's Political Caucus.¹⁹⁹ Yet the magazine's preoccupation with the Vietnam War, economic injustice, and theological justification for social action marginalized feminist concerns. Nevertheless, both the *Post-American's* and *The Other Side's* underlying commitment to justice and equality offered fertile soil in which biblical feminism would soon flourish.

The 1973 workshop that issued the "Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern" became the catalyst for self-conscious, organized evangelical feminism. The original draft submitted by the all-male planning committee made no mention of women's issues—a fact protested by Nancy Hardesty, one of the few women invited. Although a second committee charged with preparing a more succinct statement again

¹⁹⁸ John Alexander, "Thinking Male," *The Other Side*, Jul-Aug 1973, 45. In the same issue of *The Other Side*, see Letha Scanzoni, "Mystique and Machismo;" Nancy Hardesty, "Gifts;" Kathryn Lindskoog, "Paul's Bad News for Women;" Judith Sanderson, "Jesus and Women;" and Judy Alexander, "Servanthood and Submission."

¹⁹⁹ "Jesus was no Chauvinist," 11; Dick and Joyce Boldrey, "Technocracy and Women's Liberation," *Post-American*, Summer 1972.

comprised all men, Stephen Mott asked Hardesty to compose a line on women's issues that he might include. Her suggestion formed the basis for a confession within the "Chicago Declaration" of abuses regarding male authority and female submission. "We acknowledge that we have encouraged men to prideful domination and women to irresponsible passivity," the document read. "So we call both men and women to mutual submission and active discipleship."²⁰⁰ Despite the brevity and political restraint of this affirmation, it established a precedent for more sustained attention to feminist concerns at a second conference the following year.

Meeting under the auspices of the newly organized Evangelicals for Social Action, the 1974 conference divided into six groups, or "caucuses," devoted to various forms of injustice. One caucus analyzed women's issues. That the particular concerns of women merited a distinct task force revealed the commitment among early progressive evangelical leaders to confront feminist concerns. Led by Hardesty, this task force issued recommendations that included encouraging expanded opportunities for women at evangelical institutions, opposing sexist stereotypes in Christian educational literature, endorsing the Equal Rights Amendment, and using a newly formed newsletter—*Daughters of Sarah*—to publicize Christian feminism. Most important, the group decided to organize separately and form the Evangelical Women's Caucus. With a national meeting scheduled for late 1975 and use of *Daughters of Sarah* as an organ, the

²⁰⁰ Nancy Hardesty, "Blessed the Waters That Rise and Fall Again," *EEWC Update* Jul-Aug 2004; "The Chicago Declaration," 2.

institutional emergence of biblical feminism from within progressive evangelical circles became official.²⁰¹

By the mid-1970s, support for biblical feminism became a marker of progressive evangelical identity. Leading representatives unequivocally endorsed the movement's social and theological arguments. They labeled feminism a campaign against social injustice and championed biblical interpretations in support of women's full equality. Just prior to the 1974 Evangelicals for Social Action conference, the *Post-American* published an entire issue devoted to "Evangelical Feminism." In the lead editorial, Jim Wallis confessed that he and his male peers had largely failed to translate lessons about oppression learned from protests against racism and the Vietnam War into support for women's equality. By equating "women's liberation" with other "freedom movements," Wallis thus framed support for gender equality within the larger context of justice for marginalized or oppressed people. Beginning with this issue, the magazine—soon renamed *Sojourners*—carried regular apologetic articles, theological analyses, and news items that signaled a commitment to evangelical feminism and its institutional growth. In addition to promoting *Daughters of Sarah*, *Sojourners* published an enthusiastic review of the inaugural conference of the Evangelical Women's Caucus. "I've never been with a group of Christians before where equality between men and women is simply assumed," editor Wes Michaelson favorably quoted one female participant.²⁰² Adopting the

²⁰¹ "The Action Proposals Accepted at the Second Thanksgiving Workshop, Evangelicals for Social Action, Chicago 1974" (Billy Graham Center Archives, Evangelical for Social Action Collection, Box 2 Folder 16); Cochran, *Evangelical Feminism*, 14-16.

²⁰² Jim Wallis, "Our Common Struggle," *Post-American*, Aug-Sep 1974, 3-4; Wes Michaelson, "Neither Male Nor Female: the Thanksgiving conference on biblical feminism" *Sojourners*, Jan 1976, 12.

presumption of gender egalitarianism, *Sojourners* established justice for women as a key concern among progressive evangelicals.

The Other Side also assumed unqualified women's equality as a matter of principle. Despite previous hesitance, John Alexander stated in 1976 that he had come to agree with evangelical feminists that proper biblical interpretations taught gender egalitarianism rather than hierarchy. The magazine added as associated editors leading figures within the Evangelical Women's Caucus, including Hardesty, Scanzoni, and Virginia Mollenkott. These women contributed articles that detailed sexist exploitation and defended feminist hermeneutics.²⁰³ Like Wallis, the editors of *The Other Side* discerned connections between women's inequality and other forms of injustice. "Until the biblical standard of *mutuality and partnership* is practiced in Christian homes, there is little hope for the Christian community to bring a prophetic challenge to bear on the carnal concept of dominance and submission which leads to racial, economic, and military oppression," the journal quoted Mollenkott. "Sexism, rooted in home and family, must be defeated as a foundation for lasting solutions to other forms of oppression."²⁰⁴ For progressive evangelicals, support for the feminist goal of women's equal rights flowed naturally from their reflexive resistance to perceived injustice.

²⁰³ John Alexander, "A Conversation with Virginia Mollenkott," *The Other Side*, May-Jun 1976), 24; Nancy Hardesty, "Women: the Affordable Commodity," *The Other Side*, Jan-Feb 1976.

²⁰⁴ Virginia Mollenkott, "[unattributed source]," *The Other Side* Apr 1977, 43.

Theological and Political Battles

Progressive evangelical leaders provided crucial support for biblical feminism as it faced assaults from the most theologically conservative wing of evangelicalism. Traditionalists rejected the orthodoxy of evangelical feminism as part of their defense of a strict definition of biblical inerrancy. Throughout the 1970s, intense debates swirled within evangelicalism over the issue of the Bible's inspiration. Traditionalists insisted that orthodox Christians had always regarded the Bible as "inerrant"—that is, free from *all* errors through the divine inspiration of its human authors. Other evangelicals, however, accepted the infallibility of scripture in matters of faith and practice but adopted a more limited definition of its authority. They conceded minor historical or scientific inaccuracies in biblical accounts and willingly used the methods of higher criticism in biblical exegesis. To proponents of strict inerrancy, any qualification undercut biblical authority. "The authority of Scripture is inescapably impaired if this total divine inerrancy is in any way limited or disregarded, or made relative to a view of truth contrary to the Bible's own," declared the authors of the 1978 "Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy." A straightforward reading of passages such as I Corinthians 11:3, I Corinthians 14:34-35, Ephesians 5:22-24, and I Peter 3:1 suggests unique male authority, and thus traditionalist evangelicals regarded gender hierarchy as part of the Bible's authoritative "view of truth." To reject the former, they believed, was to reject the latter. As a result, strict inerrantists turned affirmation of gender hierarchy into a litmus test for evangelical orthodoxy.²⁰⁵

²⁰⁵ "The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy," in *Evangelicals and Inerrancy: Selections from the Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, ed. Ronald Youngblood (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984), 231.

Evangelical feminists refused to conflate biblical authority and gender hierarchy. They upheld the Bible as normative but insisted that gender egalitarianism represented its true message. Beginning in earnest with the seminal work of the movement, Letha Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty's *All We're Meant to Be: A Biblical Approach to Women's Liberation*, numerous authors employed historical and cultural criticism to debunk patriarchal interpretations and recast the Christian ethos as feminist.²⁰⁶ They emphasized, for example, that Paul's command for his readers to practice mutual submission (Ephesians 5:21) precedes and thus tempers his derivative instruction regarding wifely submission (Ephesians 5:22). Likewise they argued that the restrictions placed upon women in passages such as 1 Timothy 2:11-12 and 1 Corinthians 14:34 reflected Paul's instructions to specific local and cultural situations of the first century and no longer applied in modern society. Most important, evangelical feminists stressed the egalitarian principle of Galatians 3:28—"There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." "Passages which are theological and doctrinal in content are used to interpret those where the writer is dealing with practical local cultural problems," Scanzoni and Hardesty argued. "Except Galatians 3:28, all of the references to women in the New Testament are contained in passages dealing with practical concerns about personal relationships or behavior in worship services." Evangelical feminists therefore regarded gender egalitarianism as a timeless theological

²⁰⁶ Cochran, *Evangelical Feminism*, 49.

truth—a truth that not only subverted cultural assumptions of gender hierarchy but also invalidated patriarchal biblical interpretations.²⁰⁷

While most advocates of evangelical feminism challenged traditional biblical exegeses, a few authors constructed a more provocative argument. Paul Jewett and Virginia Mollenkott suggested that misunderstandings stemmed not only from misinterpretations by *readers* but also from misconceptions of biblical *authors* themselves. Jewett served as a professor of theology at Fuller Theological Seminary, the most theologically progressive evangelical seminary. Mollenkott, a professor of English at William Paterson College, had become a prominent leader in the Evangelical Women's Caucus and associated editor of *The Other Side*. In the mid-1970s each produced books in which they argued that Pauline passages regarding women's subordination demonstrated Paul's flawed cultural conditioning and training in incorrect rabbinic traditions. In other words, some of Paul's teachings were wrong. In passages such as I Timothy 2:11-15, Jewett and Mollenkott wrote, Paul mistakenly accepted and reinforced cultural assumptions of male authority. In contrast, they asserted that Paul's egalitarian statements such as Galatians 3:28 transcended cultural limitations and therefore reflected the eternal, authoritative message of the gospel.²⁰⁸ To be sure, most evangelical feminists adopted the more conservative approach of describing Paul as misunderstood rather than misguided. Nevertheless, the arguments of Jewett and Mollenkott provided additional apologetic resources from which the biblical feminist movement could draw.

²⁰⁷ Letha Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty, *All We're Meant to Be: A Biblical Approach to Women's Liberation* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1974), 18-19.

²⁰⁸ Paul Jewett, *Man as Male and Female* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975); Virginia Mollenkott, *Women, Men, and the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1977).

Regardless of their approach, all of the leading biblical feminists claimed to embrace gender egalitarianism not in spite of but rather because of their loyalty to the Bible. “We did not become feminists and then try to fit our Christianity into feminist ideology,” stated Scanzoni. “We became feminists because we were Christians” and “were convinced that the church had strayed from a correct understanding of God’s will for women.”²⁰⁹ Likewise, author Patricia Gundry clarified that evangelical feminists challenged explanations of the Bible and not its authority. “We must not be confused by the words *inspiration* and *interpretation*,” she explained. “To claim the *inspiration* of the Scriptures is to believe that what the Bible says is true—that it is God’s written Word to us. *Interpretation* involves explaining what this Word means to us on a human level.” Gundry argued that “human error” may skew interpretations, and advocates of hierarchy “are not infallible in their interpretation of Scripture.” Thus, she concluded, biblical feminists did not abandon biblical authority when they rebutted advocates of gender hierarchy.²¹⁰ Both Jewett and Mollenkott denied accusations that they undermined the authority of the Bible by conceding Paul’s erroneous rabbinical training and human limitations. “I believe that Paul’s arguments for female subordination, which contradict much of his own behavior and certain other passages he himself wrote, were also written for our instruction,” Mollenkott claimed. They “show us a basically godly human being in process, struggling with his own socialization,” and “force us to use our heads in

²⁰⁹ Quoted in Phyllis E. Alsdurf, “Evangelical Feminists: Ministry is the Issue” *Christianity Today*, Jul 21, 1978, 47.

²¹⁰ Patricia Gundry, *Woman Be Free!* (New York: Zondervan, 1977), 38.

working our way through conflicting evidence.”²¹¹ To have credibility within evangelical circles, biblical feminists knew they must persuade audiences that they remained faithful to the presumption of biblical authority.

Defenders of strict biblical inerrancy remained unmoved. They regarded evangelical feminism as a subtle but serious theological threat. “At stake here is not the matter of women’s liberation,” wrote Harold Lindsell, editor of *Christianity Today* and author of the polemical *The Battle for the Bible*. “What is the issue for the evangelical is the fact that some of the most ardent advocates of egalitarianism in marriage over against hierarchy reach their conclusion by directly and deliberately denying that the Bible is the infallible rule of faith and practice.” For conservative evangelicals like Lindsell, biblical feminism was an oxymoron. The movement symbolized to him a growing tendency among evangelicals to discard what he regarded as the *sine qua non* of evangelical faith: belief in traditional biblical inerrancy. He bluntly accused Scanzoni, Hardesty, Mollenkott and other evangelical feminists of sliding down the slippery slope to heresy. Richard Quebedeaux likewise maligned biblical feminists by writing that they adopted “traditionally liberal methodology” with respect to biblical authority. Although he had previously written an appreciative survey of early progressive evangelicalism, by 1978 Quebedeaux viewed the movement as mimicking secular trends instead of remaining faithful to traditional orthodoxy. Evangelical feminism served as evidence, he believed, of the willingness to subordinate and to conform biblical teaching to secular goals rather than vice versa. Thus biblical feminism’s opponents sought to discredit the movement by associating it with theological liberalism. Indeed, proponent Pat Gundry complained, in

²¹¹ Mollenkott, *Women, Men, and the Bible*, 104.

evangelical circles the frequent accusation that feminists denied the inspiration of scripture served as “an all-purpose silencer.”²¹²

Yet evangelical feminist leaders remained outspoken, and progressive evangelical allies amplified their message. By publicizing and popularizing biblical support for feminist convictions, progressive evangelical journals defended the movement’s orthodoxy. They opened their pages and editorial boards to leading evangelical feminists. In the 1974 *Post-American* issue devoted to evangelical feminism, Jim Wallis summarized and commended the movement’s central biblical arguments. A subsequent article by Lucille Sider Dayton (Ron Sider’s sister) provided a detailed explanation of the “hermeneutical principles” that produced interpretations of women’s equality in church, home, and society. In a review essay, Boyd Reese also praised the “richness of the Biblical research” in Scanzoni and Hardesty’s *All We’re Meant to Be*.²¹³ A year later, the *Post-American* published a “Dialogue on Women, Hierarchy and Equality” between Donald Dayton, one of its contributing editors, and Thomas Howard, the brother of evangelical anti-feminist Elisabeth Elliot. Like his sister, Howard rejected the “modern, unbiblical dogmas of egalitarianism” and defended a hierarchical view of the universe in which women fall under male authority. Dayton argued the opposite position. Representing progressive evangelicals’ acceptance of biblical feminism, he described

²¹² Harold Lindsell, “Egalitarianism and Scriptural Infallibility,” *Christianity Today*, Mar 26, 1979, 46; Richard Quebedeaux, *The Worldly Evangelicals* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), 125; Gundry, *Woman Be Free*, 37. See also Cochran, *Evangelical Feminism*, 64-69.

²¹³ Jim Wallis, “Our Common Struggle,” *The Post-American* Aug-Sep 1974, 4; Lucille Sider Dayton, “The Feminist Movement and Scripture,” *The Post-American*, Aug-Sep 1974; Boyd Reese, “Review of Letha Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty, *All We’re Meant to Be*,” *The Post-American* Aug-Sep 1974, 26.

egalitarianism as the Bible's overriding theme and recommended works by Scanzoni, Hardesty, and Jewett for further reading.²¹⁴ Likewise, *The Other Side* featured articles by associate editors Hardesty, Mollenkott, Scanzoni that justified the biblical interpretations of evangelical feminists. "We must de-absolutize the biblical culture as we have already done for slavery and monarchy," Mollenkott claimed, and instead give interpretive precedence to the biblical ideal of equality that transcends specific cultures. *The Other Side* also endorsed books promoting evangelical feminism and offered them for purchase through its book service.²¹⁵

Both the newly named *Sojourners* and *The Other Side* incorporated the agenda of biblical feminists into their larger calls for reform within the church. They specifically confronted their constituencies with arguments that claimed to reject fallible interpretations without sacrificing biblical authority. "One does not deny the inspiration of scripture," Hardesty reassured readers in *Sojourners*, "when one either disputes a traditional interpretation of a passage or declares a passage less than relevant to one's own cultural situation."²¹⁶ Even as theologically conservative opponents attempted to

²¹⁴ Thomas Howard, "A Dialogue on Women, Hierarchy and Equality: A traditionalist view," *The Post-American*, May 1975, 15; Donald W. Dayton, "A Dialogue on Women, Hierarchy and Equality: An egalitarian view," *The Post-American*, May 1975, 8-15.

²¹⁵ John Alexander, "A Conversation with Virginia Mollenkott," 30. See also Nancy Hardesty, "And God Said, 'Let Us Make Woman in Our Image'" *The Other Side*, Oct 1977; Virginia Mollenkott, "There's a Whole New World Coming," *The Other Side*, Nov 1977; and Nancy Hardesty, "Roots: Why I strive toward 'mature manhood,'" *The Other Side*, Jun 1979).

²¹⁶ Nancy Hardesty, "Toward a Total Human Theology," *Sojourners*, May-Jun 1976, 35-36.

discredit the evangelical credentials of biblical feminists, the prominent progressive evangelical journals touted their orthodoxy.

Evangelical supporters of feminism faced not only religious but also political hostility. Beginning in the mid-1970s, leaders of the emerging Christian Right attacked the feminist movement for denigrating the “family values” of marriage, motherhood, and monogamy. Many conservatives blamed “women’s liberation” and feminist groups such as the National Organization of Women (NOW) for what they regarded as alarming increases in divorce rates, illegitimate births, and sexual freedom.²¹⁷ The Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) became the tangible target for critics’ fears of feminism. Intended by supporters as a legal guarantee of women’s equality, the ERA passed Congress in 1972 and appeared destined for success. Thirty-four of the necessary thirty-eight states ratified the amendment by 1975, well before the 1979 deadline. Evangelical feminists joined secular women’s organizations in celebrating the ERA as a step toward justice, and they passed several resolutions of support beginning with the initial meeting of the Evangelical Women’s Caucus in 1974. Yet galvanized by the leadership of Phyllis Schlafly and her STOP ERA campaign, Christian conservatives rallied to prevent final ratification. They believed that the ERA’s ostensibly innocuous language—“Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States, or any State, on account of sex”—masked feminists’ subversive agenda.

Schlafly, Jerry Falwell, and other representatives of the Religious Right regarded the ERA as a feminist ploy to annul divinely established gender distinctions. Feminists

²¹⁷ James T. Patterson, *Restless Giant: The United States from Watergate to Bush v. Gore* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 45-58.

“believe that we should use the Constitution and legislation to eliminate the eternal differences and the roles that God has ordained between men and women,” Schlafly declared. Proper gender conventions mattered not only for private practice, politically conservative Christians believed, but also for public policies. Falwell explicitly tied the feminist movement’s rejection of traditional gender roles to social disintegration. By implementing a “godless philosophy” that denied women’s “God-given roles” as mothers and housewives, he argued, “the Equal Rights Amendment strikes at the foundation of our entire social structure.” Opponents proclaimed that the ERA would abrogate prevailing laws and customs that delineated sex roles. They motivated audiences by dramatizing the consequences that would result if such distinctions became illegal or ignored: unisex bathrooms; women forced into military combat; homosexual marriages; men abandoning families with impunity; and, in Schlafly’s evocative language, loss of “the marvelous legal rights of a woman to be a full-time wife and mother in the home supported by her husband.”²¹⁸

Such claims rested upon unlikely legal developments, yet these arguments motivated Christian conservatives to oppose the “antifamily” agenda of feminists and the ERA’s “definite violation of holy Scripture.”²¹⁹ They mounted successful grassroots campaigns against the ERA’s ratification in remaining states. When Congress extended the deadline from 1979 until 1982, the Religious Right elevated their opposition to a national scope and asserted its influence in partisan politics. In 1980 the Republican

²¹⁸ Jerry Falwell, *Listen, America!* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1980), 150-152.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 152.

Party dropped its previous support of the ERA and enshrined an antifeminist social agenda in its platform. By pitting feminism and “family values” as mutually exclusive, leaders of the Christian Right stigmatized feminism as a political threat to the very fabric of Christian civilization.

In the midst of this political antagonism toward feminism, progressive evangelicals defended the legitimacy of feminist concerns in general and the ERA in particular. Their refusal to vilify feminism placed them directly at odds with the Christian Right and political conservatives. Progressive evangelicals disputed accusations from these critics that belief in gender egalitarianism abetted familial and social disorder. In 1977, for example, Sharon Gallagher, a *Sojourners* contributing editor, wrote an article in response to a *Time* magazine cover story on “the new housewife blues.” The story alleged that the feminist movement had created insecurity among wives and mothers by devaluing these traditional roles. Gallagher rejected the portrayal of feminists as “villains who make housewives feel insignificant.” The *Time* writers insinuated that the ideal “woman should return to the bedroom and kitchen” and the ideal “man should return to his historical prerogative to dominion.” Yet Gallagher regarded this “mentality of the 1950s” as more of a cause than remedy for social problems. “The breakdown of American family life which *Time* blames on the women’s movement might just as easily be blamed on what the movement is reacting to—a paucity of shared experience in the fifties-style marriage,” Gallagher wrote in *Sojourners*.²²⁰ In

²²⁰ Sharon Gallagher, “The Soul of the Total Woman,” *Sojourners*, May 1977, 31. The *Time* article to which Gallagher responded featured Marabel Morgan and her “Total Woman” philosophy. Morgan had become popular among conservative Christians for her teaching that women achieved happiness only by pampering and submitting to their husbands. See “The New Housewife Blues,” *Time*, Mar 14, 1977.

the late 1970s, *The Other Side* carried a regular column, “In the Realm of the Sexes,” by Letha Scanzoni and her husband John that often addressed practical issues of gender egalitarianism in marriages and family life. Progressive evangelicals defended the feminist emphasis on women’s full equality as more healthy for families and society at large than traditional gender hierarchy and stereotypical sex roles.

The 1980 presidential election and final efforts to support the ERA allied progressive evangelicals with other women’s rights advocates and political liberals against politically conservative Christians. As part of their support for Ronald Reagan, leaders of the Christian Right intensified their attacks on feminism and the ERA in the name of their “pro-family” agenda. Yet *Sojourners’* associate editor Joyce Hollyday regarded these claims as simplistic. “It is too easy to blame the disintegration of the family and moral values on the changing role of women while ignoring mobility, technology, materialism, alienation from authority structures, and other factors that have set the tone of the times,” she argued. Within six months of Reagan’s inauguration, Hollyday grew exasperated with the president’s stance on women’s and family issues. Reagan not only opposed the ERA but also proposed budget cuts in programs such as Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) that disproportionately benefited poor women. There exists “a calculated effort by the Reagan administration to undermine the progress of the recent past toward equality for women,” Hollyday wrote in *Sojourners*. “It is ironic and tragic that a so-called ‘pro-family’ president is doing so much to destroy the families of the poor, and placing the greatest hardship on women.”²²¹ As the 1982

²²¹ Joyce Hollyday, “Toward One Freedom,” *Sojourners*, Jul 1980, 5; idem, “Walking Through Death Valley Days,” *Sojourners*, Jun 1981, 3.

deadline for the ERA's ratification approached, progressive evangelical groups joined the appeals from groups such as NOW, the Democratic National Convention, and the AFL-CIO to overcome the opposition of political conservatives.²²² In both symbolic and substantive ways, feminist sympathies estranged progressive from conservative evangelicals.

Yet progressive evangelicals also qualified their political support of secular feminists, the avowed foes of politically conservative evangelicals. Advocates of biblical feminism openly criticized the secular feminist movement for goals and rhetoric they found objectionable. Progressive evangelicals disputed, for example, the growing insistence that women must seek power historically denied them. Writing in *Sojourners*, Virginia Mollenkott reproached the well-known feminist intellectual Susan Sontag for stating that "liberation is not just about equality...It is about *power*. Women cannot be liberated without reducing the power of men." Mollenkott accused feminists like Sontag of betraying the "ultimate goal" of women's liberation by perpetuating a society based on "machismo" rather than "mutuality." She insisted that Jesus' own renunciation of power and exploitation in the name of reciprocal servanthood should guide feminists. "It is this feminist drive toward human justice and mutuality that should properly call forth cooperation from the whole Christian community," Mollenkott argued. Joyce Hollyday also pointed out the limitations of the broader feminist movement. "There is much that we can benefit from in the secular feminist movement," she wrote in *Sojourners*. "Our

²²² Joyce Hollyday, "Just Where is the ERA?" *Sojourners*, Feb 1982; Dana Mills Powell, "Countdown for ERA: The Equal Rights Amendment Hits the Homestretch," *Sojourners*, Feb 1982.

Christian faith, however, will temper many feminist expressions of power.”²²³ In the judgment of progressive evangelicals, the stress on power by secular feminists conflicted with the biblical themes of “mutual submission” and “male-female equality” by which they defined their feminist convictions.

As we shall see, a particular form of power demanded by nearly all feminists alienated progressive evangelicals. Leading feminists increasingly asserted that women’s liberation from patriarchy required the ability to control their bodies and their sexuality. The legal right to terminate a pregnancy by abortion epitomized this power, they believed, and thus the feminist movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s pressed for abortion rights. After the Supreme Court established the legality of abortion in 1973, Christian conservatives began to wage campaigns to overturn the ruling. They regarded support for abortion as feminists’ most egregious sin. In response, secular feminists and religious liberals devoted equal energy to defending “reproductive rights.” As the debate over abortion became the critical fault line in American politics by the late 1970s, progressive evangelicals faced a dilemma: did their support for women’s equality require their endorsement of legalized abortion? As the next chapter details, the majority of progressive evangelical leaders ultimately chose to oppose abortion. Despite this key reservation, however, they refused to relinquish their feminist identity. Progressive evangelicals continued to challenge Christian conservatives’ blanket vilification of the feminist movement.

²²³ Virginia Mollenkott, “Feminism and the Kingdom,” *Sojourners*, Jun 1977, 28-30; Hollyday, “Toward One Freedom,” 5.

“Trials and Triumphs for Feminism”

By the beginning of the twenty-first century, the feminist movement had helped to narrow many aspects of women's inequality and to transform countless features of American culture. Educational and career opportunities for women dramatically expanded. By 2000, women represented over 55% of college undergraduates and nearly half of those entering business, medical, and law schools. Women increasingly entered the workforce, and many families depended upon dual incomes. Average wages for women working full-time rose from 62.5% of similarly employed men in 1979 to 81% in 2006. For younger women, the trends appeared even more encouraging: the median salaries of women aged twenty-five to thirty-four reached 88% of their male peers. Women also had gradual success in electoral politics. Between 1977 and 2007 the number of female Senators increased from two to sixteen; women in the House of Representatives rose from eighteen to eighty-seven. Feminist organizations pushed into the public and political consciousness issues such as breast cancer, maternity leave, sexual harassment, and domestic violence and rape.²²⁴ “We take for granted,” a historian of the feminist movement wrote at the close of the twentieth century, “many aspects of feminism that have become so much part of the mainstream (language, laws, labor force, and access to professional education).”²²⁵ By almost any standard, the modern feminist movement proved one of the successful social movements in American history.

²²⁴ Patterson, *Restless Giant*, 271-272; Phyllis Korkki, “A Slow Narrowing of the Pay Gap, *The New York Times*, Oct. 21, 2007; Center for American Women and Politics, “Facts and Findings,” <http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/Facts.html> (accessed Oct. 31, 2007)

²²⁵ Sara M Evans, *Tidal Wave: How Women Changed America at Century's End* (New York: The Free Press, 2003), 4-5. See also Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America* (New York: Penguin, 2000).

Despite these advances, however, feminists continually felt beleaguered in the final decades of the twentieth century. The ERA's defeat in 1982 proved symptomatic of the powerful opposition of social and political conservatives who had swept Ronald Reagan into office. Under the administrations of both Reagan and George H. W. Bush, feminists scrambled to defend programs and antidiscrimination statutes they thought secure. The popular media began to discuss "the death of feminism" and rise of a "post-feminist generation." As Susan Faludi documented in her 1991 *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*, journalists throughout the 1980s emphasized the ostensible dissatisfaction and anxieties experienced by "liberated" women who either delayed marriage and family life or struggled to balance vocational and domestic responsibilities. In the 1990s the radio talk-show host Rush Limbaugh popularized the term "femi-nazis" and helped to sustain conservatives' visceral opposition to the feminist movement and its "political correctness." While feminists celebrated gradual improvements for women, a sense of embattlement and desire to address ongoing inequalities continued to fuel their movement.²²⁶

²²⁶ Flora Davis, *Moving the Mountain: The Women's Movement in America Since 1960* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 433-512; Evans, 176-238. The quote is from Davis, *Moving the Mountain*, 458. In many respects, the feminist movement suffered from its own success. As a new generation of young women came of age in the 1980s and 1990s, they often took for granted the benefits produced by the pioneers of contemporary feminism. "Feminism is a victim of its own resounding achievements," Claudia Wallis observed in *Time* in 1989. "Its triumphs—in getting women into the workplace, in elevating their status in society and in shattering the 'feminine mystique' that defined female success only in terms of being a wife and a mother—have rendered it obsolete, at least in its original form and rhetoric." (Wallis, "Onward Women! The Superwoman is weary, the young are complacent, but feminism is not dead. And, baby, there's still a long way to go," *Time* [Dec 4, 1989]. In addition, the multitude of single-issue feminist organizations that proliferated after the ERA's failure also masked the

In the midst of these campaigns to combat sexism, progressive evangelical leaders followed the pattern that they had established by the early 1980s. *Sojourners*, *The Other Side*, and Evangelicals for Social Action joined feminist organizations in protesting the persistence of women's inequality and in highlighting their unique challenges. From the mid-1980s through the early twenty-first century progressive evangelical leaders repeatedly addressed women's economic inequality, violence against women, and the development of global feminism. In addition to these overlapping concerns with secular feminists, they also remained firm proponents of biblical feminism in addressing Christian audiences. Progressive evangelicals pushed most prominently for equal opportunities for women in ministry and the legitimacy of feminist theology.

In an editorial for *Sojourners* in 1992, Joyce Hollyday highlighted what she regarded as recent "trials and triumphs for feminism." Over the past year, she wrote, notable events had opened a door for "the nation to look at itself once more in light of gender issues": Anita Hill's charges of sexual harassment against Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas; the successful conviction of former boxing champion Mike Tyson for raping a Miss Black America contestant; Carol Moseley Braun's campaign to become the first black female Senator; Hillary Clinton's prominent role in her husband's presidential campaign; and a report that 69% of women aged eighteen to sixty-four worked outside of the home, yet women earned only 71% of men's salaries. Hollyday appreciated signs of improvement but called for continued work on behalf of women's issues. "Real progress has been made," she wrote. "But we must keep pushing the door

strength of the movement as observers misinterpreted its lack of coherence as a lack of resilience.

open—until the nation can look at itself and see a society in which women are equal and safe.” Hollyday’s editorial exemplified progressive evangelical leaders’ ongoing commitment to feminism. Numerous articles in the pages of *Sojourners*, *The Other Side*, and the publications of Evangelicals for Social Action reiterated their desire to defend the equality and safety of women in both American and foreign societies.²²⁷

Economic inequality represented one of the most glaring forms of injustice that progressive evangelicals highlighted. For example, *Sojourners* dedicated its March 1986 issue to “Women in Poverty: Left Out and Left Behind.” A series of articles moved beyond merely lamenting the persistent gap between women’s and men’s wages. Vicki Kemper examined the disproportionate number of women affected by poverty (“the feminization of poverty”) and outlined how “women’s unequal position in the labor market and women’s child care responsibilities” increased their susceptibility to impoverishment. Donna Day-Lower illustrated the emotional effects of unemployment upon women, and Joyce Hollyday appealed to the biblical call to care for widows and orphans in her criticism of American society’s treatment of marginalized women.²²⁸ A year later, Hollyday followed up with editorials in which she urged readers to support legislation guaranteeing unpaid job-protected leave for new parents and lambasted the continued lack of women in managerial and professional positions.²²⁹ When

²²⁷ Joyce Hollyday, “Trials and Triumphs for Feminism,” *Sojourners*, Jun 1992, 4-5.

²²⁸ Vicki Kemper, “Poor and Getting Poorer: Women struggle for survival,” *Sojourners*, Mar 1986; Donna Day-Lower, “Her Shattered Dream: A look at women and unemployment,” *Sojourners*, Mar 1986; Joyce Hollyday, ““You Shall Not Afflict””: A biblical perspective on women and poverty,” *Sojourners*, Mar 1986.

²²⁹ Joyce Hollyday, “Women at Work,” *Sojourners*, Apr 1987, 4; idem, “Gender Gap at Work,” *Sojourners*, May 1987, 12.

Evangelicals for Social Action introduced a regular analysis of public policy into its newsletters in 1988, “Sexism and Feminist Issues” represented one of its categories. In the following years, ESA encouraged its members to contact members of Congress to support legislation that included a Pay Equity Bill, the Family and Medical Leave Act, and a bill eliminating caps on damages awarded victims of sex discrimination.²³⁰ With the gradual improvement in women’s relative financial fortunes and the success of statutes such as the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993, however, economic inequality seemed to lose much of its urgency by the 1990s. As a result, progressive evangelicals began devoting more attention to other women’s issues that appeared more pressing.

As in other feminist circles, condemnations of violence against women became a recurrent theme among progressive evangelicals. Contributors to *Sojourners*, *The Other Side*, and ESA publications asserted the connections between women’s inequality and violence against them. Beginning in 1981, *Sojourners* brought the issue to its readers’ attention. In a lengthy article, Donna Schaper outlined the pervasiveness of sexual violence and attributed it to “a bedrock of sexism in our Western culture and life” that reflected “the unequal distribution of power on the basis of sex.” She called upon churches to lead society in redressing this imbalance of power by replacing ideals of male dominance with those of mutuality.²³¹ *Sojourners* devoted even greater coverage to the subject in its November 1984 issue. In an editorial and five articles, authors recounted

²³⁰ “Washington Update,” *ESA Advocate*, Sept 1988, 5; “Washington Update,” *ESA Advocate*, Jun 1988, 7; “Washington Update,” *ESA Advocate*, May 1992, 12.

²³¹ Donna Schaper, “Imbalance of Power,” *Sojourners*, Nov 1981, 26-29.

statistics, explored the cultural and religious roots of patriarchal violence, and shared victims' stories of anguish and hope. The editors hoped to inspire empathy and thus galvanize readers. "We can begin to see that all suffering is of one piece," Joyce Hollyday wrote, "that the suffering of victims is our suffering." Thus, she argued, "We can begin to realize that violence against women is a reality from which we cannot afford to keep our distance."²³²

At the beginning of 1990, *Sojourners* proclaimed that the "staggering" statistics of violence against women constituted an "epidemic." A rape or attempted rape occurred every three and a half minutes, and an estimated six million husbands abused their wives each year. "There is literally a war going on in this country—a war against women," the editors declared. "This war is fueled by sexism and misogyny; it is kept alive by a refusal to accept the equality and humanity of women." *Sojourners* regarded the prevalence of this violence as the legacy of historic denials of women's sacred equality and worth. "Violence against women is a direct attack on the dignity of the daughters of God, created in the image of God," the editors wrote. In response, *Sojourners* organized its annual Peace Pentecost conference in Washington, D.C. around the theme of "Breaking the Silence: A Call to End Violence Against Women."²³³ In the following years

²³² Joyce Hollyday, "Bridging the Distance," *Sojourners*, Nov 1984, 4. In this issue, see also Hollyday, "An Epidemic of Violence;" Ginny Soley, "Our Lives At Stake: The cultural roots of sexual violence;" Joan Chittister, "Divinely Ordained? The religious doctrine of female inferiority;" Liane Rozzell, "Double Jeopardy: Racism and violence against women;" Louise M. Garrison, "Where Was God? A journey of healing;" and Judy Webb, "Binding Up the Wounds: A grassroots movement is giving haven to battered women."

²³³ Joyce Hollyday, "Breaking the Silence: A call to end violence against women," *Sojourners*, Apr 1990, 6-7; "Peace Pentecost 1990," *Sojourners*, May 1990, 7; Joyce Hollyday, "Ending the War Against Women," *Sojourners*, Aug-Sep 1990, 7.

Sojourners coupled condemnations of rape and domestic abuse with stories of women's healing and recovery from physical violence.²³⁴

Both *The Other Side* and Evangelicals for Social Action also condemned sexism as the source of violence against women. Each began confronting the issue in the 1990s. In *The Other Side* Philip Brasfield interpreted the domestic violence suffered by his sister and other women as the product of "continued patriarchy so common and evident in our morally bankrupt culture."²³⁵ ESA devoted its October 1992 newsletter to women's issues and addressed violence against women at length. James Moore called on readers to "reject the attitudes and cultural practices that allow rape and other types of abuse to be tolerated in society," most prominently customs that "deny women their full and equal status as human persons." Following the proposal of the 1993 Violence Against Women Act, ESA identified the statute as one of its "top priorities" and urged readers to petition Congress to pass this "long overdue" and "bold legislation." In identifying goals for evangelical feminism at the end of the 1990s, one ESA contributor prioritized combating violence against women. "It is indeed sad," wrote Catherine Clark Kroeger, "that the most pressing item on the agenda for biblical feminists at the end of the century is precisely the same as that which headed the list at the beginning of the century:

²³⁴ See, for example, Judith Floyd, "To Greet Brothers Without Fear: The long process of healing after rape," *Sojourners*, Feb-Mar 1991; Karen Lattea, "Ending the Stigma and the Silence," *Sojourners*, Jul 1991; and Joyce Hollyday, "A Journey With Biblical Women," *Sojourners*, Nov 1994.

²³⁵ Philip Brasfield, "Stranger to Our Town," *The Other Side* Sep-Oct 1990, 21.

prevention of domestic violence and abuse.”²³⁶ Into the beginning of the twenty-first century, *The Other Side* featured additional articles that recounted the persistence of violence directed against woman and criticized the ways in which women’s internalization of their subservience contributed to physical suffering.²³⁷ The sustained focus of progressive evangelical organizations on disproportionate violence against women marked an important expression of their feminist commitment to women’s equality.

Sojourners, *The Other Side*, and ESA also repeatedly publicized and celebrated the growth of feminism in other countries, particularly developing nations. Since the inception of their movement, progressive evangelical leaders had promoted human rights worldwide. In the 1980s articles exploring the status of women in foreign societies began appearing regularly as one aspect of their support for universal justice. For example, in 1983 *The Other Side* published a piece by Mary P. Burke identifying “signs of hope for women in the third world.” In Bangladesh and other developing nations, Burke highlighted the ways in which women were “finding ways to claim their personhood” in the face of sexist patterns and social turmoil. Over the next decade *The Other Side* carried similar articles on women in areas ranging from Palestine to Latin American

²³⁶ James Moore, “Bread and Roses: Women’s Rights as Human Rights,” *ESA Advocate*, Oct 1992, 4; “Washington Update,” *ESA Advocate*, Mar 1993, 8; Katherine Clark Kroeger, “An Agenda for Biblical Feminism at the End of the Century,” *Prism*, Sep-Oct 1995, 11.

²³⁷ For example, see “Abuse and Forgiveness,” *The Other Side*, Jan-Feb 1998; Melinda Contreras-Byrd, “A Living Sacrifice?” *The Other Side*, Mar-Apr 2002; and “Violence: Personal and Political,” *The Other Side*, May-Jun 2002.

countries.²³⁸ *Sojourners* likewise published features on women's progress in countries such as South Africa, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Haiti. The feminist theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether's analysis of "feminism in the past, present, and future of Nicaragua" epitomized *Sojourners'* interest in supporting women's equality worldwide.²³⁹ In its treatment of "women's rights as human rights," ESA also outlined the injustices faced by women around the world who faced entrenched social and political injustice. James Moore favorably quoted a United Nation's document regarded women's discrimination: "The full and complete development of a country, the welfare of the world and the cause of peace require the maximum participation of women on equal terms with men in all fields."²⁴⁰ For progressive evangelicals, advances in the equality of women in the United States would ring hollow if not accompanied by the improvement of women's status worldwide.

While progressive evangelicals gave considerable attention to women's economic and social status, the effects of sexism in religious contexts predominated over other

²³⁸ Mary P. Burke, "Hope for the Future: Signs of hope for women in the third world," *The Other Side*, May 1983, 21. For additional examples, see also Lucinda Kidd, "Women on the West Bank: Backbone of the struggle," *The Other Side*, Nov-Dec 1988; Dee Dee Risher, "Bread and Tortillas: A dialogue of women," *The Other Side*, Nov-Dec 1988; Ruth Eunice Rodriguez, "Finding Our Voice," *The Other Side*, May-Jun 1993; and Renny Golden, "Sandino's Daughters Break Rank: Nicaraguan women critique the sexism of the party's leaders," *The Other Side*, Sep-Oct 1994.

²³⁹ Rosemary Radford Ruether, "The Art of Survival: Feminism in the past, present, and future of Nicaragua," *Sojourners*, Jul 1993, 18-21. See also Vicki Kemper, "'The Unique Concerns of Women,'" *Sojourners*, Oct 1985; Joyce Hollyday, "'You Have Struck the Rock': Women struggle for a free South Africa," *Sojourners*, Dec 1988; Judy Isaacson, "The Hour of the Poor, the Hour of Women: Salvadoran women speak," *Sojourners*, Jan 1993; and Rose Marie Berger, "Walking on Fire: Haitian women's stories of survival and resistance," *Sojourners*, Jul-Aug 2002.

²⁴⁰ Moore, "Bread and Roses," 2.

issues. In the latter decades of the twentieth century, no issue of women's equality appeared in progressive evangelical publications as frequently as women's roles within the church. Although mainline Protestants had endorsed women's ordination by the late 1970s, conservative evangelicals remained belligerent opponents. Organizations such as the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, Promise Keepers, and the Southern Baptist Convention explicitly attacked biblical feminists and continued to promote women's subordinated religious roles.²⁴¹ Conscious of their minority status, advocates of biblical feminism faced consistent pressure to justify their convictions. *Sojourners*, *The Other Side*, and Evangelicals for Social Action continued to promote their cause. The organizations regularly published articles that defended women's religious leadership and analyzed the unique challenges facing female pastors. In addition, *Sojourners* and *The Other Side* opened its pages to feminist theologians and called into question patriarchal imagery and language regarding God.

Advocates of biblical feminism demanded no less for women in religious contexts than they insisted upon in secular affairs. Women should have the same opportunities as men, they believed, to lead and to participate unconditionally in churches and ministries. Progressive evangelicals repeatedly affirmed all forms of ministry as a prerogative for everyone, and they regarded conservative Christian dogma restricting women's religious leadership as sexist discrimination. "The ordination of women has been seen primarily as a justice issue," Barbara Hargrove summarized in a 1987 *Sojourners* review of women's struggle for religious equality. She maintained that women "had every right to exercise

²⁴¹ Gallagher, *Evangelical Identity and Gendered Family Life*, 56-57; Cochran, *Evangelical Feminism*, 160-161.

all levels of leadership in the churches.” Likewise, ESA board member Gretchen Gaebelein Hull rejected claims that Christians could legitimately discriminate within their own institutions. “Just as there is not scriptural support for treating women inequitably in society,” Hull concluded at the end of an extensive biblical defense of women in ministry, “so there is no biblical basis for treating women as second-class members of the church.” Progressive evangelicals often resorted to analogies in these arguments. *Sojourners* author Kari Jo Verhulst compared protests to the Christian Reformed Church’s 1994 decision to deny women’s ordination with “the struggles against slavery, abuse, war, and apartheid, which all were once sanctioned by the church.” By barring women from ordained ministry, she asserted, “the church has declared that women are not equal to men.” A year later, Hull echoed this charge in ESA’s *Prism* magazine. “In many ways, we as a church have treated women as we once treated people of color,” she argued. “While affirming gender equality theoretically, the church has continued to limit the roles and self-determination of women.”²⁴² By equating sexism with racism, progressive evangelicals claimed that attempts to deny women their right to religious leadership represented an acute injustice that conservative Christians would regret.

Progressive evangelical leaders also supported female religious leadership by devoting periodic coverage to personal stories and practical analyses of women in ministry. *The Other Side* initiated this trend in July 1979 with a cover article entitled “Women in Pulpits: how are they faring?” That same month *Sojourners* highlighted the

²⁴² Barbara Hargrove, “A Place in the Church: The challenge of ordained Protestant women,” *Sojourners*, Jul 1987, 14; Gretchen Gaebelein Hull, “New Creations: Women and men equal servants of Christ,” *ESA Advocate*, Dec 1990, 15; Kari J. Verhulst, “Are Women Redeemed?” *Sojourners*, Sep-Oct 1994, 11; and Gretchen Gaebelein, “Human, Rights, Civil Rights, Discrimination and the Church,” *Prism*, Sep-Oct 1995, 15.

importance of women's narratives through a positive book review of *Our Struggle to Serve: The Stories of 15 Evangelical Women*. Several years later ESA focused attention on the barriers to women's ministry by publishing a dialogue in which women discussed how they were exercising their gifts within churches. In the mid-1980s *Sojourners* seemed particularly eager to advance women's equality within the church by publicizing their experiences. In 1986 Roberta Hestenes, a leading evangelical feminist, wrote an article in *Christianity Today* that praised the Christian feminist journal *Daughters of Sarah* and *The Other Side* for "calling the church to seek new directions in their attitudes toward women." Disappointed by the omission of *Sojourners*, Jim Wallis sought Hestenes' advice and endorsement. "Is there any reason why you didn't mention us?" he wrote to her privately. "My concern here is not for publicity," Wallis claimed, "but whether you have any concerns or feelings about *Sojourners* that I'm not aware of." He invited Hestenes to submit an article to the magazine, and she did in fact contribute a piece a year later to a thematic issue on female religious leadership. Entitled "Making a New Way: Women in the church tell their stories," an extensive series of articles offered first-person accounts of ordained female pastors. Continuing this pattern in 1988, *Sojourners* celebrated the election of Barbara Clementine Harris as the first female bishop in the Episcopal Church and published an interview with Nancy Hastings Sehested, a female Southern Baptist pastor fighting her denomination's increasing resistance to the ordination of women.²⁴³

²⁴³ Lareta Halteman Finger, "Women in Pulpits," *The Other Side* Vol. 15 No. 7 (Jul 1979), 14-27; D. Powell, "Review of *Our Struggle To Serve: The Stories of 15 Evangelical Women*," *Sojourners*, Jul 1979); "To Know Herself Well," *ESA Update*, Aug 1983; Jim Wallis to Roberta Hestenes, *Sojourners Papers*, (Wheaton College Special Collections, Wheaton, IL); "Making a New Way: Women in the church tell their stories,"

Printing women's firsthand struggles for equality in ministry gained even greater significance in the mid-1990s when *Daughters of Sarah* ceased publication. Since its inception in 1974, *Daughters of Sarah* had served as the primary journal for Christian feminism. Both *The Other Side* and *Sojourners* lamented its discontinuation and renewed their commitments to giving women voices. *The Other Side* inaugurated a new forum in each issue, "At the Well," in order to feature "daughters of God conversing together" on topics regularly related to women in ministry.²⁴⁴ *Sojourners* likewise continued to highlight women's experiences. First-person accounts ranged from an interview with a female seminary professor studying women in the church to a cover article on Yvonne Delk, the first black woman ordained in the United Church of Christ.²⁴⁵ At the beginning of the twenty-first century, ESA increased the frequency of its own coverage. Its *Prism* magazine carried a forum in 2000 exploring how to advance gender egalitarianism within churches and society. Several years later, *Prism* introduced a regular column, "In Like Manner...the Women," by Elizabeth Rios. "Rather than join the theological debate on women in ministry, this column will tell the stories of women who themselves have put

Sojourners, Jul 1987; Vicki Kemper, "Much Ado About Women," *Sojourners*, Dec 1988; Nan Arrington Peete, "A First for the Episcopal Church," *Sojourners*, Dec 1988; Vicki Kemper, "Nancy Hastings Sehested: a woman pastor in the Baptist church," *Sojourners*, Feb 1988; Nancy Hastings Sehested, "'By What Authority Do I Preach'," *Sojourners*, Feb 1988.

²⁴⁴ For example, see "Sitting Down Together," *The Other Side*, May-Jun 1998; "Scripture's Heroines," *The Other Side*, Nov-Dec 1999; "The Wisdom of Sarah's Daughters," *The Other Side*, Sep-Oct 2001; and "Women and Leadership," *The Other Side*, Sep-Oct 2002.

²⁴⁵ Julie Polter and Anne Wayne, "From the Inside Out: A conversation with Miriam Therese Winter on imagination, women in the church, and finding God between the lines," *Sojourners*, Jul-Aug 1997; Rose Marie Berger, "The World as God Intends," *Sojourners*, May-Jun 1999.

the debate on the shelf and have gone on to ‘just do it,’” Rios wrote in her inaugural feature. “It will also identify and tell stories about the issues that trouble women in ministry.”²⁴⁶ Perhaps progressive evangelical leaders had remembered Mark Twain’s purported response to the question of whether or not he believed in infant baptism. “Believe in it?” he replied. “Hell, I’ve seen it!” In the pages of progressive evangelical publications, readers saw for themselves women in ministry. These firsthand accounts served as a strategic means for both defending and encouraging women’s religious leadership.

Sojourners did not limit its support for women in Christian ministry to Protestant contexts. In light of its sizable Catholic readership, the magazine regularly featured Roman Catholic feminists.²⁴⁷ In 1985, the journal carried a cover article featuring a dialogue among five Catholic women regarding “new roles and new leadership [that] appear to be emerging among religious women.” One of these participants, the Benedictine nun Joan Chittister, became a contributing editor of *Sojourners*, and the magazine published several articles by her that challenged patriarchal features of the Catholic Church. “It is inevitable,” Chittister wrote in 1987, “that one day [the church] will also confess and repent of the sin of sexism.” Both *Sojourners* and *The Other Side* also published interviews with Chittister—“a model for Christian feminism” according to

²⁴⁶ “Your Daughters Will Prophesy: Which way evangelical Egalitarianism—a *Prism* forum,” *Prism*, Jul-Aug 2000; Elizabeth D. Rios, “Beyond Labels, Toward Calling,” *Prism*, Mar-Apr 2005), 12. See also “Leading Ladies: *Prism* meets seven dynamic women of the cloth,” *Prism*, Mar-Apr 2006).

²⁴⁷ In 1980, for example, 21% of respondents to a survey identified themselves as Catholic. Joe Roos, “Into 1980 Together,” *Sojourners*, Jan 1980, 4.

The Other Side—in which she provided lengthy arguments for women’s ordination.²⁴⁸ In the 1990s and early twenty-first century, *Sojourners* continued to label women’s exclusion from the Catholic priesthood an injustice. Joe Nangle, a Franciscan priest on the magazine’s staff, described “the church’s exclusionary policies toward women” as “a system of apartheid within its own ranks.” In response to Pope John Paul’s 1994 letter re-affirming the ban on women’s ordination, Nangle expressed disillusionment and even imagined the possibility of “a schism in the American Catholic Church, wherein sincere and devout women claim a call to ordination.” In 2002, *Sojourners* again carried an article by Chittister that challenged readers to work within the Church to open all ministries to women.²⁴⁹ By employing Catholic authors, *Sojourners* encouraged a “faithful dissent” among its Catholic constituency in order to promote its vision for equality in religious leadership.

The Other Side and *Sojourners* promoted not only women’s practical ministry but also their pursuit of feminist theology. Both magazines carried articles and supportive reviews of books that challenged patriarchal symbols, traditions, and practices within Christianity. As early as 1977, Nancy Hardesty argued in *The Other Side* that “to use masculine language exclusively [for God] is to violate the central message of Scripture and theology.” In the early 1980s, *The Other Side* published articles by Virginia

²⁴⁸ “Gifted With Hope: Five religious women talk about their changing roles,” *Sojourners*, Apr 1985; Joan Chittister, “Yesterday’s Dangerous Vision: Christian feminism in the Catholic Church,” *Sojourners*, Jul 1987, 21; idem, “A Full Picture of God,” *Sojourners*, Jul 1987; “Joan Chittister: a model for Christian feminism,” *The Other Side*, Apr 1986.

²⁴⁹ Joe Nangle, “‘New Grace’ in the Church,” *Sojourners*, May 1991, 7; idem, “Pastoring Those Excluded by the Pope,” *Sojourners*, Aug 1994, 35; Joan Chittister, “A Dangerous Discipleship,” *Sojourners*, Jan-Feb 2002.

Mollenkott that pointed to feminine images of God and linked the issue to women's religious and social roles. "It's important to reclaim the biblical images of God as female," she wrote, "so that we won't continue to unjustly cut off women from full participation in spiritual and public leadership."²⁵⁰ *Sojourners* began commending the insights of pioneering feminist theologians such as Mollenkott, Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, and Rosemary Radford Ruether.²⁵¹ In subsequent articles, news reports, and book reviews, both journals highlighted women's efforts to reinterpret what they regarded as male-centered theological traditions.²⁵²

Yet these progressive evangelical publications remained committed to *biblical* feminist theology. In other words, while they acknowledged feminist theologians who privileged women's experience and even promoted a feminine divine, *The Other Side* and *Sojourners* prioritized "the traditional categories of Christian orthodoxy"—i.e. biblical authority and church tradition. In the late 1980s, *The Other Side* carried two cover

²⁵⁰ Nancy Hardesty, "And God Said, 'Let Us Make Woman in Our Image'," *The Other*, Oct 1977, 62; Virginia Mollenkott, "Unlimiting God," *The Other Side*, Nov 1983, 11. See also Virginia Mollenkott, "The Bible and Linguistic Change: A feminist perspective," *The Other Side*, Jun 1981.

²⁵¹ Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, "Remembering Her: Biblical feminism in the household of God," *Sojourners*, Oct 1983; Lindsay McLaughlin, "A Spark of the Divine: Toward a more wholistic image of God," *Sojourners*, Nov 1983; Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Of One Humanity: A feminist theologian discusses issues confronting women, men, and the church," *Sojourners*, Jan 1984.

²⁵² For example, see Joyce Hollyday, "Voices Out of the Silence: Recovering the biblical witness of women," *Sojourners*, Jun 1986; John Lindscheid, "Review of *Sophia: The Future of Feminist Spirituality*," *The Other Side*, Oct 1987; Elouse Renich Fraser, "The Church's Language About God," *The Other Side*, Dec 1987; Mauren Conlan, "Women Crossing Worlds: Women-church conference fuels worldwide movement," *Sojourners*, Dec 1987; Ana Mairia Tepedino, "Martha's Passion: A model for theological liberation," *The Other Side*, Jul-Aug 1988; and Madonna Kolbenschlag, "The Feminine Face of Creation: Breaking through myths of power and spirituality," *Sojourners*, May 1991.

articles that discussed a range of feminist theologies, including those that had rejected Christianity as irredeemably patriarchal and turned to forms of goddess worship or pantheism. In response, the authors proposed theological principles by which they sought to remain equally faithful to both Christian orthodoxy and feminist ideals. Karen and Leif Torjesen argued that in repudiating the “conceptual imaging of God as male,” an “orthodox feminist theology” must avoid committing the equivalent error of imaging God as female. Therefore they argued for the development of an “inclusive orthodoxy” based upon both the self-revelation in scripture of “the God who encompasses male and female” and the divinity of Christ that is “gender-inclusive.” In a lengthy 1988 article Reta Halteman Finger, the editor of *Daughters of Sarah*, also critiqued feminist theology from the perspective of Christian feminism. She promoted “guidelines for an evangelical feminist hermeneutic” that acknowledged “the whole of Scripture as authoritative” but also the need to confront “patriarchal texts and sexist assumptions” within the Christian tradition. Although supportive of feminist theological initiatives, *Sojourners* likewise asserted its self-identity as distinctly biblical. In a 1994 article on diverse forms of feminist theology, associate editor Julie Polter clarified that “*Sojourners* has maintained a feminist position that is deeply rooted in the central authority of scripture.”²⁵³ *Sojourners* and *The Other Side* proved willing to push the boundaries of feminist theology, but only within the limits of biblical authority and the Christian tradition.

²⁵³ Karen and Leif Torjesen, “Inclusive Orthodoxy: Recovering a Suppressed Tradition,” *The Other Side*, Dec 1986, 14, 15, 18; Reta Halteman Finger, “Your Daughters Shall Prophesy: A Christian feminist critiques feminist theology,” *The Other Side*, Oct 1988, 34; Julie Polter, “When Body Meets Soul: Feminist theology seeks unity in diversity,” *Sojourners*, Sep-Oct 1994, 24.

Unlike the leading progressive evangelical journals, ESA's publications rarely addressed feminist theology beyond biblical arguments for women's unconditional equality. Nevertheless, Ron Sider also admitted the legitimacy of its explorations. God is no more male than female, he told an interviewer in 1989, and thus "it seems right to me that you have to talk about Father and Mother" in reference to God. Yet he confessed that this practice as well as other "aspects of radical Christian feminism" made him uncomfortable. In one exception Sider integrated feminine imagery into a letter to God outlining his Christmas hopes for increased justice around the world. "Dear Heavenly Father," he began—but then he immediately added, "Well, yes, and dearly Heavenly Mother, too, although that doesn't feel quite so natural." As a rule, however, ESA ignored feminist theology and avoided the possibility of making its staunchly evangelical constituency similarly uncomfortable. Its explorations of biblical feminism remained focused on more practical discussions of women's equality in churches and ministries.²⁵⁴

The consistent attention to women's equality in both the church and society demonstrated progressive evangelicals' resolute commitment to women's equality. They challenged the continuing claims of Christian conservatives that feminism undermined "family values." "A 'pro-family' vision that does not include a vigorous affirmation of women's equality is not biblical and ultimately will fail," Ron Sider wrote in 1992.²⁵⁵ *Sojourners* addressed evangelical support for gender hierarchy more directly in a 1998

²⁵⁴ Jeff M. Jones, "Interview with Ronald J. Sider," in Jeffrey McClain Jones, *Ronald Sider and Radical Evangelical Political Theology*, (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University and Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, 1990), 436; Ronald J. Sider, "All I Want for Christmas," *ESA Advocate*, Dec 1989, 1.

²⁵⁵ Ron Sider, "Valuing the Family," *ESA Advocate*, Dec 1992, 12.

cover article. In response to the Promise Keeper's movement, evangelical feminist scholar Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen acknowledged that "the Bible itself speaks ambiguously" on gender roles—but it also "speaks ambiguously about slavery, an institution whose demise contemporary Christians never question on biblical grounds." She argued that "a vision of Christian justice and community" led Christians to abandon the once-tolerated institution of slavery. Likewise "Christian feminists" believe "the Bible point[s] beyond the patriarchy tolerated," van Leeuwen wrote, to "a vision of mutuality between brothers and sisters in Christ in marriage, church, and society."²⁵⁶ Progressive evangelicals' support for women's full equality in the domestic, religious, and public spheres continued to distinguish their social and political activism.

The Quests for Equality and Liberation

The feminism advocated by progressive evangelical leaders fit well within the broader feminist movement. Since its inception in the mid-1960s, the modern feminist movement comprised two distinct themes: equality and liberation. Drawing upon the discourse of classic political liberalism, the long tradition of liberal feminism inspired activists to fight for women's comprehensive equality. The philosophy of political liberalism emphasizes the sovereignty of the individual, natural rights, and the protection of civil liberties. Appealing to this tradition, liberal feminists strove to ensure women's equal rights and opportunities. They believed that the primary barriers to such equality stemmed from prejudice, discriminatory customs, and legal restraints. Therefore their

²⁵⁶ Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, "Promise Keepers: Proof-text poker," *Sojourners*, Jan-Feb 1998.

efforts to achieve justice for women focused primarily on lobbying to secure their full civil rights. In 1966 the founders of NOW reflected this agenda in pledging “to take action to bring women into full participation in the mainstream of American society now, assuming all the privileges and responsibilities thereof in truly equal partnership with men.”²⁵⁷ Thus liberal feminism promoted the ideal of egalitarianism between the sexes and aimed to reform social, economic, and political institutions. As anti-discriminatory legislation, the ERA embodied the goals of liberal feminism.²⁵⁸

The feminism championed by progressive evangelicals unequivocally reflected the liberal feminist ideal of equality between the sexes. Evangelical feminist convictions depended upon interpretations of scripture that emphasized not only the equal worth of women and men before God but also their equal abilities and responsibilities in all spheres. Progressive evangelicals thus joined liberal feminists in demanding women’s full, equal opportunities. Leaders condemned forms of gender inequality and discrimination as injustice. They campaigned for equal access and benefits within economic matters and educational settings. In the political realm, progressive evangelical leaders supported public policies such as the ERA and the Women’s Educational Equity Act that prohibited discrimination based on sex. In religious contexts, they defended the abilities and the rights of women to exercise leadership in all church activities, including as ordained ministers. Like liberal feminists, then, advocates of biblical feminism started with the premise of women’s unqualified equality with men in order to argue that both

²⁵⁷ Quoted in Evans, *Tidal Wave*, 24.

²⁵⁸ Rosemarie Tong, *Feminist Thought: A Comprehensive Introduction* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1989), 1-38.

sexes should enjoy the same rights and treatment in social, political, and religious institutions. To the extent that other feminists promoted goals compatible with this philosophy, progressive evangelicals supported the broader feminist movement against its conservative critics.

Yet in addition to equality, the feminist movement also embraced the theme of liberation from the repressive confines of traditional sex roles. Whereas liberal feminists primarily blamed a lack of rights and opportunities for women's inequality, more radical feminists denounced male power within patriarchal systems as the root of women's oppression. They believed such oppression occurred as much in women's private lives as in their public activities. In particular, these feminists campaigned for freedom from cultural and social institutions that they believed allowed men to control women's bodies and female sexuality. As examples of the ways in which men subjugated women, radical feminists highlighted not only domestic violence and rape but also the ostensibly oppressive expectations of motherhood and men's sexual fulfillment. "We are exploited as sex objects, breeders, domestic servants, and cheap labor," protested Redstockings, a radical feminist group. "We are considered inferior beings, whose only purpose is to enhance men's lives." Supporters promoted consciousness-raising groups in which women shared personal experiences of oppression and connected them to larger patterns of social and political patriarchy. "The personal *is* the political" became the mantra of women's liberation. The most provocative proponents called for the abolition of marriage and traditional families and promoted lesbianism as the preferred form of female sexuality. To be sure, many leaders of the broader feminist movement expressed discomfort with these more extreme proposals. Yet by the early 1970s, the lines had

blurred within the feminist movement between liberal feminism's goal of equality and radical feminists' demands for liberation from patriarchy.²⁵⁹

Progressive evangelicals joined other feminists in many campaigns to liberate women from unjust patriarchal structures and restrictive gender roles. They agreed that sexism—like racism—represented an institutionalized injustice and not merely individual acts of discrimination. In a *Sojourners* feature on feminism, for example, Ginny Earnest endorsed the radical feminist conviction that “the problem with the platform of liberal feminism is that it is not critical enough of our society” and “does not begin with a critique of patriarchy.” Thus progressive evangelicals condemned sexist attitudes regarding women's inferiority that contributed to patterns of violence against them. Leaders denounced economic patterns that trapped women in low-paying jobs and devalued domestic and childrearing labor. In addition, both *Sojourners* and *The Other Side* carried articles that promoted egalitarian rather than hierarchical marriages and discussed the “oppressive burden of sex-role stereotyping.” Joyce Hollyday called for “work on the political level” that included “restructuring institutions and living patterns” to enable men and women to share vocational and family responsibilities.²⁶⁰ Progressive evangelicals' support for both the theme of equality and the theme of liberation confirmed their place within the broad feminist movement.

²⁵⁹ Evans, *Tidal Wave*, 26-32; Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975*

²⁶⁰ Ginny Earnest, “On a Firm Foundation: Building on the History and Achievements of Feminism,” *Sojourners*, Oct 1988, 30; Kathy McGinnis, “Lifting the Yoke,” *The Other Side*, Dec 1980; Jeannie and Bill Wylie-Kellermann, “More Than a Coin Toss,” *Sojourners*, Jan-Feb 1998; Hollyday, “Toward One Freedom,” 5. See also Letha Scanzoni, “Mystique and Machismo,” *The Other Side*, Aug 1973; Wallis, “Our Common Struggle;” and Mollenkott, “Feminism and the Kingdom.”

Conclusion

Well into the twenty-first century, progressive evangelicals considered campaigns for women's equality far from realized. "All around the world today," Ron Sider wrote in 2006, "men inflict widespread injustice and violence on women." In a paper presented to the Evangelical Theological Society and extracted in ESA's magazine, Sider recounted sobering statistics of inequalities in education and economics, physical and sexual abuse, and sex trafficking and prostitution. "This behavior stands in blatant defiance of the biblical teaching that every person, both male and female, is made in the very image of God," he wrote, and thus "violate[s] the dignity and equality of women." As advocates of biblical feminism, *Sojourners* and *The Other Side* joined ESA in publishing articles that described both persistent injustice and ongoing efforts to empower women in society and the church. Sympathy for feminist concerns—particularly what one ESA author described as "the quest for gender equality in the church"—continued to distinguish the progressive evangelical movement in the early twentieth century.²⁶¹

²⁶¹ Ron Sider, "Injustice Against Women," *Prism*, Jan-Feb 2007, 40; Laura Colter, "Using the 'F' Word: The pursuit of gender equality in the Church," *Prism*, May-Jun 2004. For additional articles concerning feminist issue, see, for example, Pat McDonnell Twail, "Who Is That Veiled Woman?" *Sojourners*, May-Jun 2001; "Violence: Personal and Political," *The Other Side*, May-Jun 2002; Rose Marie Berger, "Walking on Fire: Haitian women's stories of survival and resistance," *Sojourners*, Jul-Aug 2002; Marylou Fusco, "Breaking the Chains," *The Other Side*, May-June 2003; Sylvia Ann Hewlett, "Why Policy Matters," *The Other Side*, May-Jun 2004; "No Place for Abuse: Domestic Violence in the Church," *Prism*, May-Jun 2004; Rose Marie Berger, "Women Building Peace: Worldwide, women seek to reclaim their countries from violence," *Sojourners*, Nov 2004; Michaela Bruzzese, "A 'Holy Alliance,'" *Sojourners*, Feb 2005; and Elizabeth Palmberg, "Teach a Woman to Fish...And Everyone Eats: Why women are key to fighting global poverty," *Sojourners*, Jun 2005.

The demands of equality and justice at the heart of progressive evangelicals' politics of community drove leaders to combat sexism with the same fervor they contested racism. Despite identifying as feminists, however, they never unreservedly endorsed the broader feminist movement. Most feminists concluded that women could not achieve true equality and liberation from patriarchal patterns without access to legalized abortion. They believed that only abortion rights guaranteed the freedom to control their bodies and decisions regarding motherhood. "For feminists," historian Flora Davis observed, "abortion was the biological bedrock on which their demands were based."²⁶² But the majority of progressive evangelical leaders disputed this claim and thus challenged those who made support for abortion a shibboleth of authentic feminism. Their anomalous attempts to affirm feminism but oppose abortion created unique challenges in America's political landscape.

²⁶² Davis, *Moving the Mountain*, 458.

Chapter 4: The Agony of Abortion

Joyce Hollyday vocalized the frustration of many progressive evangelical feminists. “Unfortunately, the secular feminist movement has used abortion as a test of commitment to women’s equality,” the associate editor of *Sojourners* lamented in 1981. “Access to abortion is considered part of ‘reproductive rights.’”²⁶³ Although most leaders of the progressive evangelical movement disputed these premises, they faced a daunting task. Both defenders and detractors regarded the feminist movement as the guardian of abortion rights. In 1973, the Supreme Court had ruled in *Roe v. Wade* that women had a constitutionally protected right to abortion in the first six months of pregnancy. Feminist organizations that had fueled abortion rights activism celebrated the decision as a key victory for women’s rights and freedom. Support for legalized abortion became a hallmark of feminist identity. In response, Christian conservatives considered this support the most damning of feminism’s many transgressions. Efforts to reverse *Roe v. Wade* quickened the politicization of the Christian Right in the late 1970s and became the movement’s principal political goal. Thus not only feminist leaders but also their conservative opponents assumed the inextricable link between feminism and abortion. To the majority of progressive evangelicals, however, this assumption appeared too facile.

²⁶³ Hollyday, “Walking Through Death Valley Days,” *Sojourners*, Jun 1981, 4.

This chapter examines how the responses of progressive evangelical leaders to abortion placed them at odds with both pro-choice feminists and Christian conservatives. In the 1970s several factors combined to produce an initial ambivalence within the progressive evangelical movement regarding abortion: dedication to women's equal rights, ambivalence regarding fetal life, and disdain for the perceived inconsistency and anti-feminist agenda of the conservative pro-life movement. Yet by the early 1980s *Sojourners* and Evangelicals for Social Action (ESA) took a stand against abortion. Both organizations ultimately interpreted abortion primarily as an issue of violence against "unborn life" that trumped debates about women's choices. They believed, therefore, that feminism and a "pro-life" position were not only compatible but even connected campaigns against injustice. *The Other Side* remained conflicted. Its editors viewed abortion as "a question of moral ambiguity" and refused to offer a generalized condemnation or endorsement of the practice. Nevertheless, *The Other Side* joined *Sojourners* and ESA in rebutting feminists who claimed that support for women's equality and liberation required unrestricted access to abortion.

Yet progressive evangelical leaders also distanced themselves from the conservative pro-life movement. Both *Sojourners* and ESA framed abortion opposition within a broader "consistent ethic of life" that also included opposition to war, the death penalty, economic injustice, and other affronts to human dignity such as racism and sexism. Christians must defend "the sanctity of life," they insisted, not only in the womb but wherever threats occurred. As a result, *Sojourners* and ESA criticized Christian conservatives for seeming to ignore additional—and often more immediate—injustices that endangered or dehumanized individuals. *The Other Side*, while neither supporting

nor opposing abortion, joined *Sojourners* and ESA in highlighting this apparent inconsistency. As a whole, the progressive evangelical movement united in advocating expanded programs that would decrease the number of abortions. Leaders urged increased efforts to prevent unplanned pregnancies and to offer women resources and alternatives that would decrease abortion's appeal. Yet in the late 1980s and 1990s, differences emerged regarding anti-abortion legislation. ESA endorsed restrictions and even efforts to make abortion illegal. Hesitant about the effects of such measures, *Sojourners* instead focused on the less ambitious goal of reducing abortions. The magazine encouraged dialogue and pragmatic cooperation between pro-life and pro-choice proponents around the common goal of making abortion rare. By the early 1990s *The Other Side* abandoned direct attention to abortion altogether. In the midst of polarized abortion debates, its goal to present balanced coverage of the abortion debate proved too difficult to sustain.

In the final decades of the twentieth century, the seemingly dichotomous options of pro-life and pro-choice became the primary fault line in American partisan politics. Yet in the estimation of *Sojourners* and ESA, neither Republicans nor Democrats offered a "completely pro-life" agenda. Their support for feminism and efforts to expand the meaning of "pro-life" left progressive evangelical opponents of abortion politically homeless.

Ambivalence and Opposition among Progressive Evangelicals

From its early development the contemporary feminist movement embraced "reproductive freedom" as one of its primary goals. At the second annual conference of

NOW in 1967, members passed a Bill of Rights that identified abortion as a “civil right of every female person” and called for the repeal of anti-abortion laws. Some conservative participants opposed this action and formed an alternative feminist organization, the Women’s Equity Action League. By 1972, however, its members too favored abortion rights. As president of NOW, Betty Friedan helped found the National Association for the Repeal of Abortion Laws (NARAL) in 1969 and declared that the women’s movement must endorse women’s reproductive autonomy. Radical feminist groups such as the Chicago Women’s Liberation Union often operated underground abortion clinics and engaged in civil protests against abortion restrictions. As *Roe v. Wade* reached the Supreme Court, NOW filed an amicus brief. Not only did unwanted pregnancies endanger the mother’s health and welfare, the document argued, but also anti-abortion laws effectively enslaved women by forcing them to bear children. In the years preceding *Roe v. Wade*, support for legalized abortion transcended differences within the secular feminist movement and became one of its foremost goals.²⁶⁴

Following the Supreme Court’s decision, feminist support for abortion solidified. In a widely reported case, the Ohio chapter of NOW expelled Pat Goltz, founder of Feminists for Life, for denouncing abortion as incompatible with feminism.²⁶⁵ As feminists focused attention on issues of women’s health, they championed abortion as a

²⁶⁴ Kathleen C. Berkeley, *The Women’s Liberation Movement in America* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999); 33-35; Sara M. Evans, *Tidal Wave: How Women Changed America at Century’s End* (New York: The Free Press, 2003), 46-47; N. E. H. Hull and Peter Charles Hoffer, *Roe v. Wade: The Abortion Rights Controversy in American History* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2001), 97, 149.

²⁶⁵ Cindy Osborne, “Pat Goltz, Catherine Callaghan and the Founding of Feminist for Life,” in *Prolife Feminism Yesterday and Today*, ed. by Mary Krane Derr, Linda Narango-Huebl and Rachel MacNair (New York: Sulzburger & Graham, 1995), 151-158.

pivotal medical prerogative. “One of our most fundamental rights as women is the right to choose whether and when to have children,” stated the popular handbook *Our Bodies, Ourselves: A Book By and For Women*. Because “birth control methods are just not effective enough for us to be able always to avoid unwanted pregnancy,” the authors wrote, “a second indispensable tool for taking control of our fertility is *abortion*.”²⁶⁶ To many observers, the proceedings of the 1977 National Women’s Conference in Houston exemplified the feminist movement’s dedication to abortion rights. President Jimmy Carter had commissioned the massive, highly publicized event to identify goals for women. Despite objections from social conservatives present, a convincing majority of delegates adopted a Plan of Action that prescribed access to legal abortions and government funding for those unable to afford them.²⁶⁷ Abortion rights activists themselves trumpeted the integral role feminists had played in their success. “Once the National Organization for Women and Women’s Liberation groups joined the abortion movement, we were ready to shake the country,” wrote Lawrence Lader, co-founder of NARAL. “It was the surge and fervor of neofeminism that paved the way for the abortion movement.”²⁶⁸ Committed to defending *Roe v. Wade*, secular feminists adopted the language of “reproductive rights” and “pro-choice” in order to frame legal access to abortion as essential to women’s freedom and equality.

²⁶⁶ The Boston Women’s Health Book Collective, *Our Bodies, Ourselves: A Book by and for Women*, revised and expanded (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1976), 216.

²⁶⁷ “What Next for U.S. Women,” *Time* Dec 5, 1977; Evans, *Tidal Wave*, 139-142.

²⁶⁸ Lawrence Lader, *Abortion II: Making the Revolution* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), xi, 40.

Where feminists saw a woman's right to choose, Christian conservatives saw an unborn child's right to life. By the late 1970s, nearly all evangelicals became aggressively "pro-life." Yet this opposition to abortion evolved only gradually. Both prior to 1973 and immediately after *Roe v. Wade*, the primary religious opposition to abortion came from Roman Catholics. Few evangelical leaders publicly condemned or even commented on the Court's action; Jerry Falwell, for example, did not preach against abortion until 1978. Harold O. J. Brown, an associate editor of *Christianity Today*, later suggested that both historic unwillingness to concur with Catholics and reluctance to participate in political activism contributed to evangelicals' slow response. But as leaders such as Brown and Billy Graham pushed the issue, more and more conservative Christians in the late 1970s began to view abortion as a unique evil requiring mobilized opposition. The most well-known factor in motivating large numbers of evangelicals to this end came from a joint effort of Francis Schaeffer, an influential evangelical theologian and speaker, and C. Everett Koop, the future Surgeon General under Ronald Reagan. Schaeffer and Koop collaborated on a project to popularize animosity toward abortion. They produced a film and a book, both entitled *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?*, that connected abortion to "the erosion of the sanctity of human life" and compared it to practices such as infanticide and euthanasia. By attributing authentic life to unborn children, *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?* inspired audiences to join the "pro-life" movement. The works gained wide exposure and proved critical in galvanizing evangelicals' political efforts to reverse *Roe v. Wade*.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁹ William Martin, *With God on Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America*, rev. ed. (New York: Broadway Books, 2005), 193-194; Hull and Hoffer, *Roe v. Wade*, 185-188.

Yet this hostility to abortion reflected anxiety about more than just fetal life. The opposition of Christian conservatives also stemmed from concern for traditional gender roles. They interpreted feminists' abortion advocacy as part of their larger antagonism to traditional families and motherhood itself. Even prior to *Roe v. Wade*, Phyllis Schlafly vilified "women's liberationists" who endorsed both the ERA and abortion. Feminists "hate men, marriage, and children," she wrote in 1972. "They look upon husbands as exploiters, children as an evil to be avoided (by abortion if necessary), and the family as an institution which keeps women in 'second-class citizenship' or 'slavery.'" In her 1977 attack upon feminism, *The Power of the Positive Woman*, Schlafly painted the ERA as a strategy to guarantee "the major antifamily objective of the women's liberation movement," namely "abortion-on demand." She quoted "leading constitutional authorities" to demonstrate that "there is no doubt of the fact that the ERA would give every woman a constitutional right to have an abortion at will."²⁷⁰

Like the ERA, then, abortion represented to Christian conservatives the feminist movement's rejection of God's ordained maternal role for women. "Simply stated, the man is to be the provider, and the woman is to be the childbearer," wrote Beverly LaHaye, who founded Concerned Women for America in 1979. "Motherhood is the highest form of femininity," she argued, but "radical feminists" spurned their maternal

²⁷⁰ Phyllis Schlafly, *The Phyllis Schlafly Report*, November 1972, excerpted in Berkeley, *The Women's Liberation Movement in America*, 174; idem, *The Power of the Positive Woman* (New Rochelle, NY: Arlington House, 1977), 88. Jerry Falwell likewise regarded the ERA and abortion as coupled threats to gender hierarchy, he cited a NOW-ERA fundraising letter by Betty Friedan as evidence. "I am convinced that if we lose this struggle [for the ERA]," he cited Friedan as claiming, "we will have little hope in our lifetime of saving our right to abortion" (*Listen America!*, 153).

calling by defending abortion as a legitimate option.²⁷¹ The pro-life movement comprised conservatives who viewed motherhood as women's most important role, while pro-choice advocates regarded motherhood as only one option for women. "While on the surface it is the embryo's fate that seems to be at stake, the abortion debate is actually about the meanings of *women's* lives," concluded a study in the early 1980s.²⁷² Interrelated outrage at feminism and abortion politicized conservative evangelicals and inspired their "pro-life" agenda.

Like socially conservative Christians, progressive evangelicals revealed little initial consternation at the Supreme Court's ruling in *Roe v. Wade*. In fact, a few leaders initially accepted abortion as a legitimate option. Although Ron Sider later became the most outspoken progressive evangelical critic of abortion, in the early 1970s he found no persuasive reasons for challenging it. "I was not opposed to abortion at this time," he remembered. "I argued in class, but I never put it in print, that since the Bible does not say the fetus is a person we cannot assume that abortion is wrong."²⁷³ Several prominent evangelical feminists agreed. As part her proposal on women's rights for the 1973 Thanksgiving Workshop on Evangelicals and Social Concern, Nancy Hardesty

²⁷¹ Beverly LaHaye, *I am a Woman By God's Design* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1980), 27, 29. LaHaye stated that she founded Concerned Women for America in response to Betty Friedan's claim that her views represented the majority of American women... to demonstrate that "the majority of women out there don't agree with Betty Friedan and the ERA."

²⁷² Kristin Luker, *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 194.

²⁷³ Jeff M. Jones, "Interview with Ronald J. Sider," in Jeffrey McClain Jones, *Ronald Sider and Radical Evangelical Political Theology*, (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University and Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, 1990), 407.

suggested, “Abortion may be a viable alternative for ending a problematic pregnancy.” She considered a woman’s “right of control over her own body” to outweigh the “increasing value” of fetal life that gained equal worth only at live birth. To be sure, Hardesty believed abortion represented a radical decision that women should not take without considering all options. Nevertheless, she wrote, “Those who feel that abortion is the right decision should be allowed to obtain one legally, economically, and under conditions optimal for maintenance of the woman’s well-being.”²⁷⁴ In 1974 Hardesty and Letha Scanzoni published this view in their widely read *All We’re Meant to Be: A Biblical Approach to Women’s Liberation*. They recognized the deep disagreements between Christians on the issue. But, they claimed, Christian morality did not preclude abortion in cases such as unplanned pregnancies or children that would have Down syndrome.²⁷⁵

In general, however, most progressive evangelical leaders initially avoided taking a public stance on abortion. Both *Sojourners* and *The Other Side* had developed explicit commitments not only to women’s equality but also to a fundamental respect for life. As a result, the leadership of each journal appeared confounded by the competing appeals to women’s rights and to the sanctity of unborn children. Through the end of the 1970s, *Sojourners* and *The Other Side* remained noncommittal. While other feminists and

²⁷⁴ Nancy Hardesty to Ron Sider, Aug 29, 1973, Evangelicals for Social Action papers, Box 1 Folder 11 (Billy Graham Center for the Study of Evangelism, Wheaton College, Wheaton, IL).

²⁷⁵ Scanzoni and Hardesty, *All We’re Meant to Be: A Biblical Approach to Women’s Liberation* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1974), 143-144.

Christian conservatives hardened their opposing positions in acrimonious debates, the leading progressive evangelical journals stood on the sidelines until 1980.

Readers of each magazine pressed the editors to define their positions. The first two cautious pieces on abortion within *Sojourners* elicited dissatisfied responses. In 1976, *Sojourners* correspondent Charles Fager authored a short article entitled “Abortion Impasse: A Way Out.” While acknowledging the rival values at stake—a woman’s choice versus fetal life—he refused to concede they necessarily conflicted. To bridge the polarizing positions, Fager proposed not only the “legal recognition of fetal humanity” but also protecting that humanity through some alternative to criminalizing abortion. Robert Case, executive director of the anti-abortion Christian Action Council, found Fager’s mediating proposal inadequate. *Sojourners* published a letter from Case questioning why the journal was failing to speak prophetically against abortion as it did against the war in Vietnam.²⁷⁶ Despite intensifying debates in the broader culture, *Sojourners* did not address abortion again until 1979. Updating Fager’s proposal, a brief report noted that two meetings of abortion adversaries had explored middle ground. Yet the position of the editors themselves remained unclear, and the next month *Sojourners* again printed a disgruntled reaction. A reader criticized the magazine’s lack of consistency in espousing nonviolence yet ignoring the “anti-life activity” of abortion on demand. The editors offered the feeble protest that they had twice printed reports on Fager’s proposal. Clearly the question of abortion’s legitimacy was confusing the staff of

²⁷⁶ Charles Fager, “Abortion Impasse: A Way Out,” *Sojourners*, Dec 1976, 8-10; Robert Case, letter to editor, *Sojourners*, Jan 1977, 34.

Sojourners, and the journal did not address the subject again for another year and a half.²⁷⁷

The Other Side's own ambivalence mirrored *Sojourner*'s confusion. While *Sojourners* carried only cursory coverage, *The Other Side* avoided the subject of abortion altogether in the 1970s. In both March and April 1980, the magazine published letters that implored the editors to confront abortion. "The staff of *The Other Side* has been struggling for some time with the myriad facets of the abortion question," confessed Mark Olson, one of the editors. "We're seeking to find a responsible Christian approach that will cut through the emotional appeals and unquestioned assumptions that are so often thrown about by all sides."²⁷⁸ He pledged that *The Other Side* would soon address the issue. In the midst of the 1980 presidential campaigns, abortion was quickly becoming one of the most divisive issues in partisan politics and cultural debates. In its 1980 platform the Republican Party not only repudiated its previous support for the ERA but also opposed abortion unambiguously for the first time. In contrast, the Democrats affirmed their support of "reproductive freedom as a fundamental human right" and adopted a plank in support of Medicaid funding for abortions.²⁷⁹ Progressive evangelical leaders risked their credibility by postponing responses to such a controversial subject.

The Other Side ended its evasiveness in June 1980, but its stance remained equivocal. Finding merit in both positions, the staff of *The Other Side* chose neither to

²⁷⁷ Jim Stentzel, "A Way Out of the Abortion Impasses," *Sojourners*, Apr 1979, 8; letter to the editor, *Sojourners*, May 1979, 39.

²⁷⁸ "Editor's Response," *The Other Side*, Apr 1980, 47.

²⁷⁹ Andrew E. Busch, *Reagan's Victory: The Presidential Election of 1980 and the Rise of the Right* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2005), 81-82, 89.

condone nor to condemn abortion. “Given their assumptions, both sides are responding sensibly and morally,” explained co-editor John Alexander. “Which seems to me to be the most important thing to understand in the whole debate: both positions can be held in integrity and decency.” Alexander believed that a lack of evidence made impossible any determination of whether a “fetus is or is not human.” Likewise, he insisted that “the biblical evidence is sparse” and “none of it is conclusive either way.” His co-editor Mark Olson concurred, arguing that the ambiguity of Scripture precluded evangelicals’ normal reliance upon biblical certainty. Thus rather than advocating either opposition or support for abortion, *The Other Side* promoted an alternative goal. “We do not expect this issue of *The Other Side* to make much contribution to conclusions about the morality of abortion,” Alexander acknowledged. “We hope that what contributions we make will be to the tone of the debate. We hope to increase respect between the camps and lower the decibel level of the argument.” The editors rejected the developing tendency among evangelicals to make one’s stance on abortion a litmus test of religious and political orthodoxy. Instead, they urged reconciliation between “dogmatic, self-assured factions” by admitting ambiguity, listening compassionately, and rethinking inflexible premises.²⁸⁰

Since he considered the question of abortion’s morality irresolvable, Alexander suggested two practical responses. In a challenge to those who made opposition to abortion their political priority, he encouraged readers to address first unmistakable social problems such as poverty, starvation, and warfare. “When millions of those who are undeniably human are suffering, our main effort should be for them.” Yet Alexander did

²⁸⁰ John Alexander, “No Easy Answers,” *The Other Side*, Jun 1980, *passim*; Mark Olson, “Back to the Bible,” *The Other Side*, Jun 1980), *passim* ; idem, “Editorial” *The Other Side* Vol. 16 No. 6 (Jun 1980), 5-6.

not expect abortion's moral ambiguity to immobilize progressive evangelicals' reaction to the issue. He believed that efforts to improve birth control education, alternatives to unwanted pregnancies, access to decent jobs, and social services for the poor would dramatically lessen the desirability of the choice for abortion. Alexander thus refused to isolate the act of abortion from inequalities, social problems, and cultural attitudes that often prompted the decision. "We should also be working for a different society," he proclaimed. "Even if abortion is murder, it is only a symptom of a much deeper disorder" of an American society that believes "life is cheap, especially the life of the poor and weak." *The Other Side* did not let debates regarding abortion distract from its emphasis upon comprehensive social justice. Instead, the magazine framed its progressive social vision as a strategic means for both decreasing human suffering *and* reducing the number of abortions.²⁸¹

Olson rightly predicted that *The Other Side's* awaited issue on abortion would upset many readers. The editors waited several months to publish reactions, and the majority expressed disappointment or indignation. "No issue we've ever published has generated more mail than June's issue on abortion," Olson noted in October. "Most of the mail has been negative, much of it *very* negative." Nevertheless, *The Other Side* reaffirmed a commitment to publishing what it regarded as the leading of God's Spirit even if its positions proved unpopular and did not fit into predictable categories. This resolve was tested as critical letters continued to arrive and impacted *The Other Side's* subscription base. "A significant number of readers have now cancelled because of our issue on abortion," wrote Olson at the end of 1980. In particular, many letters accused

²⁸¹ Alexander, "No Easy Answers," *passim*.

The Other Side of promoting a “wishy-washy” or even “pro-abortion” position. These charges annoyed Olson, who insisted that the magazine had neither remained neutral nor endorsed abortion. “We took a firm position, calling abortion a question of moral ambiguity, requiring serious, honest, cautious struggle,” he countered. “That is not the lack of a position. We wish that were more widely understood.”²⁸² A substantial number of readers disagreed. By refusing the dichotomous options of “pro-life” or “pro-choice,” *The Other Side* frustrated the part of its constituency who wanted more clarity if not explicit opposition to abortion. Readers looking for progressive evangelical support for a pro-life position turned instead to *Sojourners* and ESA.

In November 1980 *Sojourners* finally clarified its own position. Jim Wallis conceded in the lead editorial that a statement on abortion was overdue. Although *Sojourners* had never supported abortion, he wrote, the community had neither clearly nor publicly challenged it either. As they analyzed the issue in light of their primary concerns, the staff members of *Sojourners* interpreted abortion as inconsistent with their core ideals. “Our deepest convictions about poverty, racism, violence, and the equality of men and women are finally rooted in a radical concern for life—its absolute value and the need to protect it,” Wallis explained. “It was only a matter of time before the spiritual logic of these other commitments would lead us to a ‘pro-life’ response to abortion as well.” Wallis insisted that *Sojourners* opposed abortion as part of its antecedent commitment to justice. He claimed that legal abortion allowed American society to abort children of the poor, especially those of minorities, instead of creating just social

²⁸² “Editor’s Response,” Mark Olson, *The Other Side*, Oct 1980, 5; idem, *The Other Side*, Dec 1980, 46.

conditions for their welfare. “The truth is that many poor women do not regard abortion as a real solution but as a brutal substitute for social justice and even as a white society’s way of controlling the population of racial minorities.”²⁸³ Both regular *Sojourners* contributors and other politically liberal leaders—including Jesse Jackson, who at that time openly opposed abortion—contributed short statements further defending the convergence of the feminist, social justice, peace, and pro-life movements.²⁸⁴

Defending opposition to abortion as consistent with these other traditionally liberal movements represented *Sojourners*’ key initiative. Authors consciously rejected the ways in which both conservatives and liberals had framed the abortion debate. “Both Jerry Falwell and Gloria Steinem agree that to oppose abortion means to oppose equal rights for women,” complained Wallis. “Both the Left and the Right have linked abortion and women’s rights together and made support for abortion a crucial test of support for women’s liberation.” Yet the magazine placed itself in the excluded middle. *Sojourners* challenged claims by liberals that pro-life feminism was an oxymoron. “In this issue of *Sojourners* are committed feminists who radically dispute that twisted logic and see abortion as yet another form of violence against women.” As an illustration, Cathy Stentzel, a longtime member of the *Sojourners* community, wrote an editorial testifying to her own conversion to a pro-life position. She initially supported *Roe v. Wade* as an integral part of the feminist agenda. Yet, Stentzel explained, she gradually came to

²⁸³ Jim Wallis, “Coming Together on the Sanctity of Life,” *Sojourners*, Nov 1980, 3-4.

²⁸⁴ Jesse Jackson, “The Willpower to Uphold Life,” *Sojourners*, Nov 1980, 23. For an analysis of Jackson’s opposition to abortion in the 1970s and his subsequent embrace of abortion rights during his presidential campaigns in the 1980s, see Colman McCarthy, “Jackson’s Reversal on Abortion,” *The Washington Post*, May 21, 1988.

differentiate between women's equal rights (which she still championed) and abortion (which she now opposed).²⁸⁵

While chiding political liberals for equating feminism and abortion, Wallis saved his harshest criticism for conservatives. He declared that abortion opponents misguidedly linked their mission with social and political conservatism and thus discredited their cause. He even blamed Christian conservatives for *Sojourners'* own evasiveness. The anti-abortion movement's "attitudes toward women and the poor, combined with its positive support for militarism and capital punishment, have been deeply offensive to us and have helped keep us away from the issue of abortion," Wallis stated. He frankly accused leaders of the Christian Right of duplicity. The "energy and passion against abortion has been used to support a broad ideological agenda which incorporates political goals that have nothing to do with abortion and, in fact, are often directly contrary to the principles on which a genuinely pro-life position is based," Wallis asserted. "In other words, the issue of abortion is being manipulated to serve other ends," specifically a "pro-military and pro-business agenda." Wallis thus implied that a "genuinely pro-life" position entailed not merely disapproval of abortion but also opposition to sexism, militarism, the death penalty, and unjust economic conditions. He called on readers to counter the pro-life movement's conservatism and to defuse its appeal. "The unholy alliance between the anti-abortion movement and the right wing must be directly challenged by those who seriously and consistently espouse a pro-life commitment," Wallis exhorted. "The energy of the pro-life movement must be removed from the

²⁸⁵ Wallis, "Coming Together on the Sanctity of Life," 3; Cathy Stentzel, "A Quiet Conversation," *Sojourners*, Nov 1980, 4-6.

ideological agenda of the New Right.”²⁸⁶ In published letters, the overwhelming majority of *Sojourners* readers responded positively to the journal’s attempt to divorce opposition to abortion from political conservatism.²⁸⁷

Like both *The Other Side* and *Sojourners*, Evangelicals for Social Action rejected the ways in which abortion had become politicized by 1980. In that year, ESA printed a tract entitled “Can My Vote Be Biblical?” to guide evangelicals in the upcoming elections. The organization joined *The Other Side* and *Sojourners* in refusing to isolate abortion from other issues of social justice. “Political activity must reflect a biblical balance that is concerned with both poverty and abortion-on-demand, both peacemaking in a nuclear age and the family,” the document read. At that time, however, ESA itself had yet to explicate fully its own stance on abortion. In fact, the Summer 1980 *ESA Update* recommended that “those wrestling with the issue of abortion” read *The Other Side*’s recent treatment of abortion as morally ambiguous. Nevertheless, ESA revealed an inchoate pro-life perspective. Listing “Every Human Life is Sacred” as one of its “basic biblical principles,” ESA argued that “biblical people cannot remain silent” when “the value of each individual human life” is demeaned by practices such as racism, sexism, and “abortion-on-demand.” By including the unborn among those requiring defense, ESA implied its pro-life identity. In 1981, ESA’s board of directors committed the organization to “articulate a consistent pro-life stance” in opposition not only to abortion but also to poverty, discrimination, and the nuclear arms race. Like *Sojourners*,

²⁸⁶ Wallis, “Coming Together on the Sanctity of Life,” 3-4.

²⁸⁷ “Postmark,” *Sojourners*, Jan 1981.

ESA too came to regard abortion as incompatible with their commitment to justice and the “sacredness of human life.”²⁸⁸

After several years of passing references to abortion opposition, the leadership of ESA explained its position in 1984. In his editorial “From Ambivalence to Action,” president Bill Kallio recounted a story that echoed Wallis’s own editorial four years earlier in *Sojourners*. Kallio confessed that he had “not always taken a clear stand on the issue of abortion,” and he suspected that “there are many ESA members who are not sure of their position.” He too blamed “the ideological captivity of the pro-life movement” and its affiliation with conservative politics for frustrating his search for consistency. Nevertheless, Kallio had come to believe that abortion represented an injustice that progressive evangelicals must oppose. He reiterated a refusal to separate the issue of abortion from other justice concerns. “Our culture needs to hear a strong Christian voice that cares for the poor and speaks for peace, for human rights, for the family and for the unborn,” he wrote. “I often wonder what would happen in our society if a new coalition were to emerge that effectively linked an end to abortion with compassionate, active and well-defined concern for other peace and justice issues?” In addition to Kallio’s editorial, ESA published several supporting articles: an interview with pro-life doctors; a commentary describing “abortion as a social justice issue” that discriminated against the poor and exploited women; and a profile of a pro-life organization. To be sure, ESA did not embrace unconditional opposition to abortion. A list of resources included three pro-choice works as “alternative positions,” and a survey of ESA members revealed that 87%

²⁸⁸ “Resources: Can My Vote Be Biblical?” *ESA Update*, Mar-Apr 1980, 4-5; “Can My Vote Be Biblical?” [reprint of 1980 tract], *ESA Update*, Sep-Oct 1984, 4; Ron Sider, “A Letter from ESA’s President,” *ESA Update*, Aug 1981, 5.

believed abortion could be justified under rare circumstances. Nevertheless, ESA joined *Sojourners* in leading the progressive evangelical movement to promote a “consistent prolife agenda” that linked opposition to abortion with other politically progressive policies.²⁸⁹

By the early 1980s, then, progressive evangelical leaders had placed themselves outside of the prevailing political struggle over abortion. Militant parties in the debate almost exclusively defined abortion in terms of a binary choice: a commitment to women’s rights, advocated by abortion supporters, versus a commitment to the sanctity of life, advocated by abortion opponents. Yet the progressive evangelical movement refused this dichotomy. Most leaders insisted upon women’s full equality while denying that this necessitated “reproductive rights.” “What must be heard is a clear voice in support of the Equal Rights Amendment,” Joyce Hollyday editorialized, “but in opposition” to “rights many of us would rather not have: abortion.” Despite their predominant objections to abortion, progressive evangelicals refused to affiliate themselves with the conservative pro-life movement since they disdained its anti-feminism and alliance with political conservatism.

As a result, *Sojourners* and ESA chose to adopt the “pro-life” banner but to adapt its connotation. The defense of the sanctity of life carried moral and political obligations, they argued, well beyond the womb. “We attempt to take a consistent pro-life stance that

²⁸⁹ Bill Kallio, “From Ambivalence to Action,” *ESA Update*, Jul-Aug 1984, 5; “An Interview with Dr. Thomas and Susan Hilgers,” *ESA Update*, Jul-Aug 1984, 4-6; “Norman and Peggy Bendroth, “Speak Out: Abortion as a Social Justice Issue,” *ESA Update*, Jul-Aug 1984); “Justice in Action,” *ESA Update*, Jul-Aug 1984, 7; “Resources on Abortion,” *ESA Update*, Jul-Aug 1984; “1984 ESA Member Survey Results,” *ESA Update*, Jan-Feb 1984, 4; “Here We Stand: A Reaffirmation of ESA’s Commitments,” *ESA Update*, Sep-Oct 1984, 2.

regards all lives as precious and seeks to defend life everywhere and anywhere it is threatened, whether by weapons of war, abortion clinics, electric chairs, or the specter of poverty,” wrote the editors *Sojourners*. Even as *The Other Side* maintained its official uncertainty, *Sojourners* and ESA led participants in the progressive evangelical movement to develop a new type of “pro-life” campaign. The majority of progressive evangelical leaders thus embarked upon an idiosyncratic mission. While remaining staunch defenders of other feminist priorities, they challenged conservative abortion opponents to broaden their agenda to include other peace and justice issues. Their hopes to unite Christians behind a “consistent pro-life agenda” quickly met the realities of political estrangements.²⁹⁰

The Development of “Completely Pro-Life” Agendas

“Of all the issues that concern Americans,” *Sojourners* associate editor Joyce Hollyday wrote in 1989, “none appears to divide us more bitterly than abortion.” In the final decades of the twentieth century, progressive evangelical leaders felt particularly marginalized in abortion debates. They considered the irreconcilable positions of both the pro-choice and pro-life movements inadequate. Pro-choice advocates rightly campaigned for women’s equality but wrongly framed abortion as a referendum on women’s rights. Pro-life proponents justly defended the sanctity of unborn life but failed to extend this defense to other assaults on human dignity. Therefore progressive evangelical leaders attempted to develop mediating alternatives that built upon their initial responses to abortion in the early 1980s.

²⁹⁰ “Abortion: The Political Dilemma,” *Sojourners*, Oct 1984, 4.

The primary progressive evangelical organizations developed different agendas. *Sojourners* emerged from a period of uncertainty to articulate a “consistent pro-life ethic” that regarded abortion as one of numerous threats to the sanctity of life that Christians must oppose. With respect to ending abortion, they focused on redressing inequalities and injustices—particularly those faced by poor women—that motivated choices to abort pregnancies. Ambivalent about legal restrictions, *Sojourners* instead championed a pragmatic pro-life strategy in which pro-life and pro-choice advocates worked together to make abortion rare. In contrast, *The Other Side* retained its refusal to offer official opposition or support for abortion. The magazine carried occasional articles that cautiously reflected both sides of the debate. While this toleration for competing interpretations aligned more closely with a pro-choice preference, after 1990 *The Other Side* avoided the controversial subject of abortion altogether. Among progressive evangelicals, ESA developed the most aggressive pro-life position and supported legislative restrictions on abortion. Yet they joined *Sojourners* in calling for expanded abortion alternatives and promoting a “completely pro-life agenda” in opposition to all injustices that threatened and devalued human lives.

Sojourners and Pro-Life Pragmatism

Sojourners may have sought to chart a new course by their distinct opposition to abortion, but they initially lacked a compass. Following its 1980 vow to defend “the sanctity of life,” the magazine failed to address the contentious issue again for four years. Jim Wallis had declared that “those who seriously and consistently espouse a pro-life commitment” must uncouple “the energy of the pro-life movement” from political

conservatism. Yet *Sojourners*' curious silence demonstrated that translating such rhetoric into practice proved problematic. A 1981 *Time* cover article on abortion—what it identified as “the most emotional issue of politics and morality that faces the nation today”—described the obstacles faced by progressive evangelicals. “To a large extent, the antiabortion movement has recently come under the aegis of the New Right” that incorporated “evangelical Christian groups like the Moral Majority,” wrote Walter Isaacson. “Conservative pro-life groups have formed a loose-knit alliance with organizations opposed to school busing, the Equal Rights Amendment, sex education in public schools, the ban on public school prayers, tough gun laws and foreign aid to leftist regimes.” Emboldened by Ronald Reagan’s own pro-life rhetoric and courting of their votes, the Christian Right fueled anti-abortion efforts in the early 1980s through proposed legislation and publicity campaigns.²⁹¹ In contrast, *Sojourners* appeared paralyzed and unable to find its own anti-abortion strategy. By 1984, discontent readers were pushing the magazine to follow up on its pro-life declaration. Since 1980, one complained, “no serious attention has been given to the Christian’s responsibility to proclaim the rights of the unborn.” He expressed concern that “for *Sojourners*, pro-life has become an ‘aborted’ issue.”²⁹²

Sojourners' response at the end of 1984 captured the frustration and hesitancy that contributed to its lengthy silence and henceforth shaped its coverage. In an October editorial, the editors acknowledged that the role of abortion in the 1984 elections had

²⁹¹ Walter Isaacson, “The Battle Over Abortion,” *Time*, Apr 6, 1981. See also Martin, *With God on Our Side*, 226-227; Patterson, *Restless Giant*, 187.

²⁹² Gary F. Daught, letter to the editor, *Sojourners*, Aug 1984, 41.

created “a political and moral dilemma” to which they found “no easy answers or clear choices, only difficult questions.” To be sure, they noted, *Sojourners* remained firmly pro-life. “We hold the conviction that abortion is morally wrong,” the editors wrote, and viewed it as “a great social evil that must be abolished.” As an electoral issue, however, abortion remained “especially difficult” on two accounts. Not only did conservatives’ monopoly of the pro-life movement prove frustrating, but also the staff of *Sojourners* remained uncertain of the best legislative approach to abortion. “We find the anti-abortion legislation currently offered,” the editors explained, “to be quite offensive in its obvious biases against women and the poor.” They declared that “an alternative is desperately needed,” and thus the editors called on other politically progressive pro-life advocates to join *Sojourners* in exploring the best strategies for opposing abortion.²⁹³ Following this invitation, *Sojourners* advanced this dialogue by increasing its own attention to abortion throughout the rest of the 1980s. In the process, its anti-abortion stand coalesced around three main themes.

First, authors in *Sojourners* reiterated that their opposition to abortion stemmed from their interpretation and prioritization of justice. They consistently wrote that justice required conditions that allowed human life not only to emerge healthy from the womb but also to flourish in all post-natal circumstances. In a 1985 article—*Sojourners*’ first detailed analysis of abortion since 1980—Phyllis Taylor shared her experience of working as a nurse for Planned Parenthood and assisting in abortions. She gradually concluded, however, that her “participation in abortion was wrong.” “It was the destruction of human life,” Taylor wrote, and thus incompatible with justice and

²⁹³ “Abortion: The Political Dilemma,” 4.

nonviolence. Yet she also argued that a commitment to justice includes more than opposition to abortion. Pro-life advocates must likewise address other forms of injustice—e.g. substandard sex education, pre-natal care, day care centers, and support for mothers releasing children for adoption—that contribute to women’s choices to abort pregnancies.²⁹⁴ A year later, Ginny Earnest Soley echoed this conclusion. She argued that a truly just society entailed economic viability, women’s unconditional equality, improved health coverage, and support for women with undesired pregnancies. In light of the overwhelming barriers to these conditions, she claimed, “it is easy to see why people say that the simplest and easiest solution to an unplanned pregnancy is the solution of abortion.” Yet to Soley, accepting this alternative indicated assent to the inevitability of injustice. “Abortion is not a mean of bringing about justice,” she wrote, but rather an indication that society refuses “to make any effort to bring about justice for women” or “to put forth any effort to guarantee a good life for children.”²⁹⁵ Thus *Sojourners* framed opposition to abortion as a necessary but not sufficient part of comprehensive social justice.

In turn, the magazine regularly denounced the conservative pro-life movement for its seeming inconsistency in narrowly focusing on abortion and ignoring (or even exacerbating) other injustices that harmed life. Just as he had done in 1980, Jim Wallis pilloried the “absurd linkages” made by the Christian Right between abortion and what he regarded as the unjust “economic and military goals that form the heart of the real

²⁹⁴ Liane Rozzell, “An Affirmation of Life: A nurse wrestles with the questions of abortion and justice,” *Sojourners*, Jun 1985, 34-37.

²⁹⁵ Ginny Earnest Soley, “To Preserve and Protect Life: A Christian feminist perspective on abortion,” *Sojourners*, Oct 1986, 34-37.

conservative political agenda.” They expressed “legitimate evangelical concern” for “the lives of unborn children,” he wrote in 1986, but simultaneously championed the “values of American capitalism, materialism, imperialism, and military superiority.”²⁹⁶ In 1988 associate editor Vicki Kemper criticized Operation Rescue, the provocative anti-abortion group led by Randall Terry, for its aggressive demonstrations and preoccupation with a constitutional amendment against abortion. She insisted that abortion opponents should also “see working for economic justice for women, better health care and social programs for the poor, and increased sex education and contraceptive availability as legitimate and necessary ways to oppose abortion.”²⁹⁷ At the end of the 1980s, associate editor Joyce Hollyday again claimed that *Sojourners* advocated the most consistent pro-life ideology. She reminded readers that the journal’s commitment to uphold “the sacredness of all life” included both the defense of “unborn life” and “life threatened by nuclear weapons, on death row, and suffering under poverty and racism.”²⁹⁸ As *Sojourners* solidified its pro-life stance, it attempted to justify and to distinguish its position as most committed to the broad demands of justice.

Ambivalence regarding legislation against abortion marked a second motif within *Sojourners’* articles. The magazine refused to join conservative pro-life advocates in

²⁹⁶ Jim Wallis, “A Wolf in Sheep Clothing: The political right invades the evangelical fold,” *Sojourners*, May 1986, 22. See also Jim Wallis, “The Court Prophets,” *Sojourners*, Sep 1984.

²⁹⁷ Vicki Kemper, “Abortion and the Front Lines,” *Sojourners*, Nov 1988, 5-6. See also idem, “Closed for the Day: Pro-life activists protest at abortion clinics,” *Sojourners*, Jul 1988, 8-9. For an overview of Operation Rescue, see Martin, *With God on Our Side*, 320-325.

²⁹⁸ Joyce Hollyday, “No Easy Answers,” *Sojourners*, Nov 1989, 14.

efforts to circumvent or overturn *Roe v. Wade* through amending the Constitution, passing state laws restricting abortions, or supporting conservative Supreme Court nominees.²⁹⁹ Instead, *Sojourners* ran articles that considered the complex ramifications of outlawing abortions. The editors highlighted, for example, Phyllis Taylor's struggle to decide whether her personal opposition to abortion should be absolute, or whether in "extraordinary circumstances" such as fatal genetic diseases or rape abortion could represent "a more loving" option. Taylor also remained "reluctant to make it illegal to have an abortion" since she believed that some women would still seek abortions and have no other options than perilous practices and "butchers." Despite criticizing the strategies of Operation Rescue in 1988, Vicki Kemper reaffirmed *Sojourners'* "lack of clarity about specific legal remedies for abortion." At the end of the decade, the Supreme Court's decision in *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services* moved *Sojourners* to address the issue at length. The Court's ruling undermined many abortion rights seemingly guaranteed by *Roe v. Wade* by upholding a state law that restricted forms of public funding for abortion. Rather than celebrating with the conservative pro-life movement, *Sojourners* professed to find compelling arguments for both the merit and detriment of the decision. In November 1989 the editors published a series of articles under the title "Abortion and the Law: How do we choose life?" that featured contributors who shared opposition to abortion but differed on whether or not to legislate

²⁹⁹ For examples of such efforts by abortion opponents, see *The Abortion Controversy: A documentary history*, edited by Eva R. Rubin (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994), 233-272.

against it.³⁰⁰ By remaining ambivalent, *Sojourners* further distinguished its pro-life commitment by questioning the legislative means favored by conservatives and instead emphasizing the expansion of just public policies and social conditions.

Finally, *Sojourners* ensured that explicit endorsements of feminism remained a theme within its critique of abortion. Authors repeatedly countered the popular perception that feminist identity required support for abortion rights. Phyllis Taylor acknowledged that her changed stance on abortion upset many of her pro-choice friends. Yet, she asserted, “I can be a feminist and still feel negatively about abortion.” In her 1986 article, Ginny Earnest Soley developed *Sojourners*’ most thorough analysis of what it identified as “a Christian feminist perspective on abortion.” Any discussion of the issue must account for the reality of women’s oppression in a patriarchal culture, Soley maintained, and thus tackle the issue of how “to bring forth justice for women and their children.” She criticized “liberal feminists,” however, for answering such a question in “a moral vacuum.” Soley responded that Christian feminists should challenge two assumptions: first, that “the individual’s self-interest is, in fact, the highest value;” and second, that “a woman’s rights” necessarily conflict with “a child’s right to life.” Abortion actually increased women’s suffering, she argued, through psychological, spiritual, and even physical damage. Ultimately, Soley rejected feminists’ claim that abortion offered the only solution to women’s inequitable responsibility for children. Instead, she proposed, Christians should witness to the more just solution that men, women, and the community at large accept equal responsibility for children’s welfare. In

³⁰⁰ Rozzell, “An Affirmation of Life,” 36; Kemper, “Abortion and the Front Lines,” 5-6; “Abortion and the Law: How do we choose life?” *Sojourners*, Nov 1989.

1989 Joyce Hollyday prefaced *Sojourners'* forum on abortion legislation with a statement of the magazine's dual commitment to women's equality and the sanctity of life. She described this position as a "feminist pro-life" stance that interpreted abortion as violence "not only to unborn children but to women, who are also its victims."³⁰¹ Thus *Sojourners* sustained its attempt to mediate between the rights of women and the unborn.

As *Sojourners* increased its coverage of abortion in the 1990s, these three established themes continued to shape the magazine's particular pro-life perspective. Editors and authors championed their "consistent ethic of life," remained ambivalent regarding anti-abortion legislation, and defended the compatibility of feminism and opposition to abortion. In 1992, for example, contributing editor Shelley Douglass described abortion as "almost always a moral wrong" for reasons she considered "feminist in nature as well as profoundly spiritual." Yet her "mixed feelings about making any laws about abortion" made Douglass uncomfortable with polarized arguments "either enshrining it as an inalienable right or forbidding it under any circumstances."³⁰² Jim Wallis offered a similar explanation to popular audiences in his 1994 monograph *The Soul of Politics*. *Sojourners* "anguished over the question of how to editorialize about abortion," he wrote, for they endorsed both women's equality and the sanctity of life—two values that had become "the antagonistic poles of our public discourse." Wallis denied the premise that "absolute support for unrestricted abortion on demand" represented "a litmus test for authentic feminism." Yet he also believed that a

³⁰¹ Rozzell, "An Affirmation of Life," 36; Soley, "To Preserve and Protect Life," 35-37; Hollyday, "Abortion and the Law," 14.

³⁰² Shelley Douglass, "The Abortion Battle: Silencing the Middle," *Sojourners*, Jul 1992, 5.

lack of resources or support forced many women to make “painful and lonely decisions about abortion.” Instead of “backing women into desperate corners” by criminalizing abortion, Wallis argued that defending those faced with traumatic decisions also represented a choice “on behalf of life.”³⁰³ While he often criticized the conservative pro-life movement for its inconsistency in failing to combat other injustices, Wallis charged political liberals with the opposite offense. They had rightly supported “the battles for racial, economic, and gender justice,” he wrote in 1997, yet had failed to recognize the defense of fetal life as a comparable, just cause. “The Left made a fundamental mistake in seeing a woman’s right to choose as the only moral issue at stake in the abortion dilemma.”³⁰⁴ Building upon these three commitments, by the mid-1990s *Sojourners* developed a more focused strategy for opposing abortion.

Uncomfortable with making abortion illegal, *Sojourners* began to champion the alternative goal of making it less desired and thus less common. This strategy combined a pragmatic regard for abortion’s legality, an idealistic belief that better alternatives would decrease abortion’s appeal, and a respect for the complex choices facing women with unwanted pregnancies. While President Clinton had pledged to make abortion “safe, legal and rare,” *Sojourners* reversed these priorities and promoted the unrealized latter characteristic. A 1995 cover article, “Women and Children First: Developing a common agenda to make abortion rare,” exemplified the magazine’s attempt to articulate practical steps to bring together “the rights and dignity of women with the sanctity of all

³⁰³ Jim Wallis, *The Soul of Politics: A Practical and Prophetic Vision for Change* (New York: The New Press, 1994), 109-110.

³⁰⁴ Idem, “Common Ground Politics,” *Sojourners*, Jan-Feb 1997, 8.

life.” Although associate editor Julie Polter believed that neither a single approach nor public policy alone would make abortions rare, she analyzed how to address factors that led women to have abortions. A variety of programs ranging from mentoring to abstinence and contraceptive education would help reduce unintended pregnancies among teenagers and low-income families. Once faced with an unplanned pregnancy, women needed access to both emotional and financial resources. Polter posed a question for both pro-life and pro-choice advocates: “Is everything being done (by myself or my church or community) to provide a place where a pregnant woman will be respected, supported, and given the resources she needs?” Social attitudes and public policies should make adoption a respected and feasible choice. Finally, women who refused abortion and wished to raise their children needed additional assistance to meet subsequent costs. Polter denounced a proposed Republican welfare reform plan that included “child exclusion” provisions that would deny benefits to needy children under certain circumstances. This plan “will serve to punish families and encourage, even coerce, abortions among women in poverty,” she argued. For *Sojourners*, making abortion rare represented a principled and pragmatic pro-life strategy.³⁰⁵

Even when endorsing focused anti-abortion legislation, *Sojourners* regarded legal restrictions as only a piece of the puzzle in the reduction of abortions. Polter expressed “outrage” over President Bill Clinton’s 1996 veto of a bill that would have outlawed “partial birth abortions.” Yet, she noted, the ban still would have failed to make abortion rare since the procedure accounted for less than 0.4% of abortions performed. Instead of

³⁰⁵ Julie Polter, “Women and Children First: Developing a common agenda to make abortion rare,” *Sojourners*, May-Jun 1995, 16-18.

urging laws prohibiting more common practices, Polter argued that the “key groundwork to move away from abortion in the United States” must continue on “several non-legislative fronts.” While accepting “the careful framing of legislative restrictions on abortion,” she pointed to “pregnancy prevention and abortion alternatives” as the most critical means for “creating a society where no one thinks that abortion is the only choice.” Jim Wallis repeated this assertion a year later when the Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act again passed Congress. He agreed that the “controversial” and “particularly abhorrent abortion procedure” should be illegal. (Wallis also rightly predicted that President Clinton would again veto the bill.) He accepted, therefore, some “restrictions to discourage but not totally outlaw abortion.” Nevertheless, he again emphasized preventive efforts—“combating teenage pregnancy, reforming adoption laws, providing needed alternatives to women”—as the decisive means “to reduce the tragic 1.5 million abortions per year.” By proclaiming that the rarity of abortion represented a primary pro-life objective, *Sojourners* sought to transform controversies over legislation to conversations about diminishing abortion rates.³⁰⁶

Furthering such conversations between pro-life and pro-choice advocates became *Sojourners*’ predominant focus in the 1990s. The magazine condemned the rhetorical hostility of extremists on each side that prevented respectful dialogue and possible consensus. “Rarely do we talk *with* those on that other side to try and find out why they think as they do, or where we might share a common concern,” wrote Shelley Douglass in 1992. “Is it possible for us to come together in search of common ground, in search of

³⁰⁶ Julie Polter, “Outrage Over the Abortion Veto,” *Sojourners*, Jul-Aug 1996, 9-10; Jim Wallis, “Unexpected Allies,” *Sojourners*, Jul-Aug 1997, 8.

reconciliation, and to seek out a truth that is big enough for all of us?” *Sojourners* believed so, and in 1993 the magazine committed itself “to encouraging open dialogue between the pro-life and the pro-choice sides of the issue who are concerned about the welfare of unborn children, as well as women and families.”³⁰⁷ To this end, *Sojourners* publicized the participation of pro-life activists in the Common Ground Network for Life and Choice. In the midst of conversations sponsored by this network, reported Frederica Mathewes-Green, abortion opponents offered each other “insights that help us move toward a society where abortion no longer looks like a grim necessity.” In 1999 *Sojourners* offered a model of such dialogue by publishing excerpts from a conversation between the pro-life Mathewes-Green and pro-choice author Naomi Wolf.³⁰⁸ Ultimately, *Sojourners* hoped that these conversations would unite those who differed on abortion legislation around the shared goal of reducing the number of abortions. “If pro-life people know that one abortion is too many and many pro-choice people at least agree that there surely shouldn’t be as many abortions as there are,” asked Julie Polter, “shouldn’t we do what we can in the scope of that common territory?”³⁰⁹ In lieu of making abortion illegal, *Sojourners* sought to develop pragmatic means to approximate pro-life ends.

³⁰⁷ Douglass, “The Abortion Battle,” 4-5; “Sojourners Fact Sheet” [1993 *Sojourners* Papers, (Wheaton College Special Collections, Wheaton, IL). See also Marie Dennis, “Murder in the Name of Life,” *Sojourners*, Jul 1993.

³⁰⁸ Frederica Mathewes-Green, “Pro-Life, Pro-Choice: Can We Talk?” *Sojourners*, Dec 1994-Jan 1995, 13; Naomi Wolf and Frederica Mathewes-Green, “Getting to Disagreement: Finding Common Ground,” *Sojourners*, Jan-Feb 1999. See also Jim Rice, “Seeking Common Ground on Abortion,” *Sojourners*, Jul 1994; Julie Polter, “Finding Another Way: Together, abortion adversaries seek real solutions,” *Sojourners*, Sep-Oct 1996; and idem, “A Civil Discourse: Seeking common ground on abortion clinic activism,” *Sojourners*, May-Jun 1999.

³⁰⁹ Polter, “Women and Children First.”

The Other Side: *From Ambivalence to Silence*

While *Sojourners* was refining its pro-life perspective, *The Other Side* maintained professed neutrality. After its controversial issue in 1980, the magazine waited two years until addressing abortion again. *The Other Side* published two articles in 1982 that continued its treatment of abortion as morally ambiguous. In a satirical criticism of conservative abortion opponents, Kay Lindskoog imagined that the pro-life group “F.E.T.A.L. (Fathers Entitled to Avoid Labor-pains)” had discovered “a clear and simple answer to the problem of unwanted children”: requiring men to assume responsibility for them. Under their plan, abortion would be outlawed, but after childbirth women would be freed from responsibilities while men “would be legally obligated” to foster children. (An accompanying cartoon depicted Jerry Falwell beside a bassinet.) In practice, Lindskoog wrote, the right to life often meant the “right to life with an ignorant teenage mother who is incompetent, incontinent, insolvent, inconsistent, and/or indecent.” The earnest note on the author described Lindskoog as “proabortion only in an agony of frustration” and “antiabortion as soon as people start taking care of people.” Several months later, Chuck Fager criticized the apparent inconsistency of the conservative pro-life movement more directly. “Pro-lifers weep for aborted fetuses yet are ready—even anxious—to blow up millions” of indisputably human beings “in order to ‘stop communism,’” he wrote. To be sure, Fager favored a pro-life position and urged advocates to develop partnerships with the peace movement based upon common respect for life (or potential life). But he criticized the methods of “the mainstream antiabortion

constituency” and praised the alternative group Prolifers for Survival for its “persuasionist” rather “prohibitionist” approach. They refused to “coerce people into giving up abortion” through legislation but rather attempted “to convert them away from resorting to it.” Together these articles demonstrated *The Other Side*’s willingness to consider both reluctant acceptance and qualified criticism of abortion. They also reflected the magazine’s ongoing refusal to isolate abortion from other issues of justice.³¹⁰

Published responses from readers showed the persistent tension created by *The Other Side*’s ambivalence. Several letters expressed sympathy for the “consistent ethic of life” that would come to characterize *Sojourners*. Juli Loesch, the head of Prolifers for Survival endorsed by Chuck Fager, appreciated a recent article condemning capital punishment that reminded her of “the similarities between the death penalty and abortion.” Both practices dehumanized and devalued their victims, she argued, and thus Christians should reflect God’s love by protecting both “the fetus and the felon.” Juanita Wright Potter agreed with Kay Lindskoog’s criticism of the conservative pro-life movement. She believed that abortion opponents “who are so concerned about the ‘civil rights’ of the unborn would be heard with greater credibility if they could get as indignant about the lack of simple human needs.” Yet other readers rejected the association of abortion with other injustices. In particular, they pushed *The Other Side* to defend legalized abortion as part of its feminist commitment to oppose injustice against women. “Whether or not women are allowed to obtain legal and safe abortions is not an issue of

³¹⁰ Kay Lindskoog, “Our Foundlings’ Fathers: Let Paternity Flourish,” *The Other Side*, Jun 1982, 38-39; Charles Fager, “Building Bridges Between Peace and Life,” *The Other Side*, Sep 1982, 34-35.

peace or murder or the sacredness of human life,” one woman wrote. “It is purely an issue of the radical oppression of women.” Another woman described attempts by Christians to make abortion illegal as “one more manifestation of the church’s sexist, antiwoman bias.” Begging *The Other Side* to retain its “prochoice stance on abortion,” she claimed to have cancelled her subscription to *Sojourners* “after its editors waffled on the issue.” Although the editors protested this characterization of *The Other Side*’s position, their continued insistence regarding abortion’s ambiguity in effect did align them more closely with pro-choice than with pro-life advocates.³¹¹ In practice, this message of moral ambiguity failed to inspire an impassioned search for resolution. Articles regarding abortion again disappeared from *The Other Side* for another four years.

At the end of 1986, internal disagreement regarding a new antiabortion initiative prompted opposing articles by editors Mark Olson and Kathleen Hayes. Led by fellow progressive evangelicals such as Ron Sider, a political action committee called JustLife formed in order to support political candidates who championed a “consistent prolife ethic.” JustLife defined consistency as commensurate opposition to abortion, nuclear arms, and poverty. Olson opposed the creation of JustLife. Among other reservations, he most objected to “JustLife’s strong and unequivocal stand on abortion” and its endorsement of antiabortion legislation. Olson remained proud of *The Other Side*’s 1980 issue on abortion, for he continued to believe that God had neither “given us a clear yes or no on abortion” nor “told us what to do in every difficult situation.” In contrast, Hayes had joined JustLife’s board of directors and supported its potential “to present society

³¹¹ Juli Loesch, letter to editor, *The Other Side*, Dec 1982, 2; Juanita Wright Potter, letter to editor, *The Other Side*, Dec 1982, 2; Karen Sayer, letter to editor, *The Other Side*, Dec 1982, 2; Ginny Hager, letter to editor, *The Other Side*, Sep 1983, 2.

with a biblical vision for both life and justice.” She expressed gratitude for the group’s stand against abortion and argued that “mounting scientific evidence” suggests “that the fetus is alive—and genetically fully human—from the moment of conception.” Hayes proclaimed that JustLife desired not only antiabortion legislation but also “viable alternatives for women facing the many difficulties of an unexpected pregnancy.” The editors asked readers to return to a brief questionnaire regarding JustLife. Two months later, they reported that eighty-eight percent of respondents objected to JustLife’s advocacy of a legal ban on abortion. Published letters to the editors reflected more balance between pro-choice and pro-life positions, however, as members of JustLife wrote in its defense.³¹² Although *The Other Side* opened its pages to debating the merits of JustLife, the editors’ conflicted views contributed to another prolonged silence on abortion itself. The journal avoided the subject in the late 1980s even as controversial pro-life groups such as Operation Rescue intensified abortion debates in broader circles.

When *The Other Side* did address abortion again in early 1990, a tacit preference for pro-choice arguments emerged. An article by Nancy Rockwell claimed that a crucial question—“what does a good woman do?”—lay at “the heart of the abortion controversy.” In her analysis of the biblical tradition, she concluded, “a clear and consistent declaration of free choice for women” emerged. Good women were praised not for fertility but rather for wise choices in the face of difficult circumstances. Rockwell insisted that women themselves, not the state, should have power to decide the morality of abortion in the contexts of their particular situations. “If the good women of

³¹² Mark Olson, “A Cause for Sadness,” *The Other Side*, Oct 1986, 34, 36; Kathleen Hayes, “A Cause for Hope,” *The Other Side*, Oct 1986, 35, 37. Letters to the editor, *The Other Side*, Dec 1986), 4-6; idem., Jan-Feb 1987, 4-5.

the Bible were those who found a way out of their situations as victims,” she wrote, “then that challenge and that permission are available within the traditions of faith for women today.” Thus Rockwell’s article represented an anomalous attempt to offer biblical justification for a pro-choice position. Immediately following this piece, *The Other Side* published an alternative stance in an interview with Kay Cole James, a former director of public affairs for the National Right to Life Committee. As an African-American, James believed that abortion represented a “civil rights issue” that had “devastating psychological effects on the black community.” “Isn’t it strange that poor black women have to fight for every right there is except the right to abort their unborn children?” she asked. Yet within this profile of a pro-life advocate, *The Other Side* posed questions that revealed a pro-choice bias. These questions ranged from traditional challenges—“But shouldn’t those women have a right to choose?” and “How can pro-life values be placed on the heads of everyone else in our pluralistic society?”—to more combative ones—“But given the grim realities of racist America, what kind of lives can unwanted, unaffordable babies hope to live?” Combined with the preceding article, the interview implied that the magazine had come to regard pro-choice sentiments more compelling.³¹³

The Other Side’s next issue appeared to confirm this shift. The magazine again published an explicitly pro-choice article. To be sure, Donna Schaper criticized the individualistic focus and sexual permissiveness among many of her fellow abortion rights advocates. But she identified support for “right-to-life” people as “much too dangerous,” for they would “make needed birth control even harder to get” and “force the creation of

³¹³ Nancy Rockwell, “Scripture and Morality: How good women make wise choices,” *The Other Side*, Mar-Apr 1990, 24-27; Niki Amarantides, “Fighting For Survival: An interview with Kay Coles James,” *The Other Side*, Mar-Apr 1990, 29-30.

more life that will starve for books and square meals.”³¹⁴ Unlike the previous issue, any potential counterbalancing pro-life perspective was absent. Just as telling, this cluster of articles in 1990 failed to include, as previous coverage had, any editorial statements regarding abortion’s ambiguity. The pro-life editor Kathleen Hayes, who had joined JustLife’s board and defended its opposition to abortion in a 1986 article, no longer worked for *The Other Side*. She left her position in 1988 in order to become director of publications for the unambiguously pro-life Evangelicals for Social Action. Whether her defection signaled or produced a muted approval of abortion, *The Other Side*’s own constituency recognized the change. Contributing editor Jim Forest could no longer tolerate the magazine’s recent imbalanced coverage. He acknowledged that *The Other Side* had occasionally printed pro-life articles. “But these exceptions only underline for me the magazine’s usual acceptance of abortion,” he wrote to the editors. Despite the “foibles” of the pro-life movement, Forest remained committed to advancing a “consistent pro-life” ethic. He therefore ended his affiliation as a contributing editor. “I am not comfortable having my name on the masthead when the magazine is one of those voices in U.S. church life dehumanizing the unborn and making it easier for them to become targets of violence.”³¹⁵ While *The Other Side* did not explicitly endorse abortion rights as its new editorial position, the preponderance of pro-choice coverage replaced the magazine’s earlier balance.

Whether Forest’s rebuke or other concerns gave the editors pause, *The Other Side* effectively ended its coverage of abortion after 1990. The proverbial fence that divided

³¹⁴ Donna Schaper, “Those Abortion Battles,” *The Other Side*, May-Jun 1990, 50.

³¹⁵ Jim Forest, letter to editor, *The Other Side*, Mar-Apr 1991, 4.

pro-life and pro-choice proponents proved too difficult a place on which to remain seated. Rather than joining either side, however, *The Other Side* retreated from abortion debates by no longer running articles focused on the controversial issue. On the one hand, this silence appeared to reflect an attempt to remain faithful to *The Other Side*'s original commitment to editorial neutrality. On the other hand, silence seemed a curious choice for a magazine dedicated to helping Christians discern the meaning of "justice rooted in discipleship"—*The Other Side*'s subtitle. As the next chapter details, the editors showed courage by continuing to defend the minority position among progressive evangelicals that committed homosexual unions represented a fully legitimate form of Christian sexuality. When it came to abortion, however, *The Other Side* chose the path of least resistance. Balanced coverage and arguments regarding abortion's moral ambiguity would continue to offend *both* pro-choice and pro-life advocates. Silence stirred few critics. Whether the choice reflected anxiety or confusion, *The Other Side* no longer confronted readers with competing interpretations of abortion. As a result, by the early 1990s few voices within the movement challenged the opposition to abortion that became predominant in progressive evangelical circles. The persistent pro-life efforts of Ron Sider and ESA contributed to this development.

The Pro-Life Politics of Evangelicals for Social Action

Beginning in the mid-1980s ESA became the most assertive pro-life proponents within progressive evangelical circles. They joined *Sojourners* in claiming that opposition to abortion represented only one front on which Christians must defend "the sacredness of human life." In the newsletter following its analysis of abortion in 1984,

ESA published a “reaffirmation” of its commitments that described a broad range of political activities required by a “consistent pro-life agenda”: oppose abortion practices that “destroy millions of lives each year;” resist governments that violate human rights, deny freedoms, and oppress the poor; object to militarism and the increase in nuclear weapons that threaten “to annihilate millions of human beings made in God’s image;” support environmental preservation; encourage “all strategies and agencies that strengthen the family;” challenge economic exploitation and injustice; and end institutionalized racism and discrimination based upon sex, age, or physical ability.³¹⁶ Like *Sojourners*, ESA’s interpretation of “consistency” in pro-life positions distinguished its anti-abortion ideology from more conservative abortion opponents. As a result, ESA advocated means beyond legislative restrictions in its anti-abortion efforts. For example, a 1985 cover article encouraged members to join the pro-life Christian Action Council in its boycott of a company that was producing a drug, similar to the later RU 486, that could induce abortions. Months later, ESA lauded Prolifers for Survival—featured in *The Other Side* several years earlier—for creating “nonviolent alternatives to abortion and nuclear arms.” The article described their “goals and programs” as “parallel,” for Prolifers for Survival supported abortion alternatives like pregnancy aid centers and appealed to “hearts and minds” rather than legal constraints.³¹⁷ By 1986, ESA’s leaders were ready to spearhead an ambitious attempt to translate its broad pro-life agenda into practical political activity.

³¹⁶ “Here We Stand: A Reaffirmation of ESA’s Commitments,” *ESA Update*, Sep-Oct 1984, 2.

³¹⁷ “Prolife Groups Organize Upjohn Boycott,” *ESA Update*, Aug 1985, 1; “‘That All May Live in Peace’,” *ESA Update*, Feb 1986, 1.

The political action committee JustLife brought together likeminded Protestants and Catholics to support Congressional candidates who upheld a “consistent pro-life ethic.” The organization defined consistency by three criteria: opposing abortion, working for justice for the poor, and seeking nuclear arms reduction. JustLife drew from ecumenical circles and had a separate board of directors from ESA. Yet the “sister” organizations shared staff and office space, and in 1987 Ron Sider became executive director of both ESA and JustLife. By working through a registered political action committee, ESA’s leadership could campaign on behalf of endorsed candidates without jeopardizing ESA’s own tax-exempt status. “JustLife’s unique contribution is to introduce [the consistent pro-life] agenda into electoral politics,” Jack Smalligan, the former executive director of JustLife, wrote in ESA’s newsletter. From 1986 through 1992, JustLife supported targeted campaigns and published broad election study guides. These booklets contained articles examining “a consistent life ethic” and relevant voting records for Congressional candidates. In its abortion opposition, JustLife adopted an aggressive strategy. While encouraging the expansion of abortion alternatives and support for underprivileged mothers and children, JustLife also embraced legislative efforts—including a constitutional amendment—that would prohibit abortion except in exceptional cases of danger to the mother, rape, and incest. To be sure, ESA clarified that it had not endorsed this “more specific stance” on abortion. “JustLife supports government efforts to limit the availability of abortion,” wrote the editor of ESA’s newsletter in 1988, “while ESA has no official position on abortion legislation.”³¹⁸

³¹⁸ Jack Smalligan, “JustLife: A Christian PAC,” *ESA Update*, Nov-Dec 1987, 3; Editor’s Preface to Corwin Smidt, “Where Do Evangelicals Really Stand on Abortion and a Nuclear Freeze?” *ESA Update*, May 1988, 1. See also Beth Spring, “A New Political

Nevertheless, the close ties between the organizations indicated that ESA had a significantly greater sympathy for legislative restrictions than *Sojourners*. Sider's own support for public policies restricting abortion confirmed this implicit approval.

In conjunction with JustLife's efforts, Sider authored a book offering the most extended description of ESA's "consistent pro-life agenda." Published in 1987, *Completely Pro-Life: Building a Consistent Stance* began with an analysis of abortion. Sider built a biblical and scientific case that Christians "must act on the assumption" that the "developing fetus is truly a human being" created in God's image. Abortion is "murder," he argued, and should be illegal except in exceptional cases "when the physical life of the mother is threatened." Sider recommended that abortion opponents attempt to reshape public policy in two ways. First, pro-life advocates should work to end most, if not all, abortions "through constitutional amendments and legislation which focus on the personhood or humanity of the unborn child." Sider hoped that a future Supreme Court would reverse *Roe v. Wade* or a Human Life Amendment might garner sufficient support. Yet these prospects appeared unlikely, and thus he defended other legislative restrictions such as curtailed funding for abortions through federal programs and health insurance plans. While this first strategy echoed conservative abortion opponents, Sider also insisted that "the integrity of the pro-life movement" depended upon a second approach: "vigorously supporting changes in public policy that give women and families additional meaningful alternatives." Such policies would enhance

Group Will Oppose Abortion, Poverty, and Nuclear Arms;" idem, "With the Religious Right in Disarray, Two Groups Consider New Opportunities," *Christianity Today*, Jul 10, 1987); and Mary E. Bendyna, "JustLife Action," in *Risky Business? PAC decisionmaking in Congressional Elections*, edited by Robert Biersack, Paul S. Herrnson, and Clyde Wilcox (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1994), 195-201.

family planning education; provide resources for women carrying children to term; offer services for disabled children; mandate paternal responsibilities; fund crisis pregnancy centers and adoption agencies; and develop programs to help poor people so that “they no longer feel like they have to choose between desperate poverty and abortion.” Sider acknowledged the cost of such efforts, but he challenged abortion opponents “to work as hard for pro-life programs designed to guarantee quality of life to the already living as we work for policies that will ensure life itself to the not yet born.”³¹⁹

As its title suggested, however, *Completely Pro-Life* focused neither exclusively nor even primarily on abortion. In subsequent sections, Sider argued that economic injustice, family disintegration, and nuclear weapons also represented pressing threats to the “fullness of life in every area.” He criticized the debilitating effects that poverty, barriers to dignified employment, and perpetual lack of resources had upon people’s lives. Economic justice required reforms, Sider believed, that would “empower the poor, discourage extremes of wealth and poverty, [and] move in the direction of equality of economic opportunity.” He also argued that “biblical faith” described the family as “a divine gift essential for abundant living.” He therefore decried the ways in which “relativistic moral values,” “extreme feminism,” “male authoritarianism,” and the collapse of “traditional communities” undermined stable, nurturing families. Sider defined “extreme feminists” as those who rejected heterosexuality and motherhood as forms of patriarchal oppression and thus viewed “the traditional family” as an “enemy.” Yet, he insisted, “biblical feminism” strengthens rather weakens families. Affirming men

³¹⁹ Ronald J. Sider, *Completely Pro-Life: Building a consistent stance* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 49, 56, 69, 70.

and women as authentic equals, biblical feminism encourages fathers and mothers to value the “responsibilities and delights” of family life more than “economic status, professional career or short-term self-fulfillment.” Finally, Sider called for a reversal in the nuclear arms race that could lead to “the ultimate abortion”—a major nuclear war that murdered millions of people. In addition, money spent on nuclear weapons diverted funds from helping those in need and thus “robs the poor of life.” In the concluding chapter, Sider also reviewed the toll on the “fullness of human life” of tobacco, alcoholism, environmental destruction, and racism. By insisting that “a biblically informed pro-life agenda” comprised this array of issues, Sider challenged conservative abortion opponents to broaden their priorities.³²⁰

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, ESA’s recurring attention to abortion reflected Sider’s emphasis on both legislative restrictions and the development of viable alternatives. A new feature in ESA’s newsletter tracked legislative developments and instructed its members how to support pro-life policies by contacting elected officials. For example, in 1988 ESA urged readers to “write immediately to your senators and representatives” to “request that they support the Hyde amendment,” an annual rider on appropriation bills that prevented federal funding of abortions. A year later, the newsletter reported that more than two-thirds of women who had abortions indicated that their “inability to afford the baby” influenced their decision. “Parents should not have to choose between aborting a child and raising him or her in poverty,” ESA insisted. Editors celebrated the extension of the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) benefits program as “a real prolife victory” but continued to encourage the development of other

³²⁰ Ibid., 189, 103, 107, 117, 119, 122, 156, 157.

policies that would diminish the effect of financial needs upon abortion decisions. In 1990, ESA encouraged members to petition Congress to retain its ban on the use of foreign aid to fund abortions. ESA's response to the Supreme Court's 1989 *Webster* decision epitomized its broad anti-abortion strategy. The group unequivocally endorsed states' legislative ability to restrict abortions, and it objected to bills introduced in the early 1990s—particularly the Freedom of Choice Act—intended to nullify such limitations. At the same time, ESA advocated additional legislation to support “genuine alternatives” such as a model set of bills developed by JustLife Education Fund. “We support the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*,” ESA wrote in 1992, “but with a strong commitment to the simultaneous funding of support services for women and their children during and after pregnancy as well as private and public development of alternatives to abortion.” While hoping to make nearly all abortions illegal, ESA remained committed to addressing the factors that led women to terminate pregnancies.³²¹

Throughout its coverage of abortion issues, ESA rarely addressed cultural assumptions regarding the tension between the feminist commitment to women's equality and an opposition to abortion. In contrast, *Sojourners* repeatedly included affirmations of its faithfulness to feminism within discussions of its pro-life position. In fact, *Sojourners*' sensitivity to its feminist constituency even contributed to their refusal to join ESA in the work of JustLife. “Sojourners has decided not to have someone on the board of JustLife,” Ron Sider told an interviewer in 1989, “not because they are really opposed

³²¹ “Washington Update,” *ESA Advocate*, Sep 1988, 2; idem, *ESA Advocate*, Nov 1989, 4; idem, *ESA Advocate*, May 1990, 4; idem, *ESA Advocate*, Jun 1990, 5; “ESA Legislative Priorities for 1992,” *ESA Advocate*, Mar 1992, 5; “Washington Update,” *ESA Advocate*, May 1992); idem, *ESA Advocate*, Sep 1992, 6.

to it, but because they are afraid it would give the wrong impression to some feminists.” In the mid-1980s ESA had not published as extensively on feminist issues and thus felt less hesitancy about potentially offending feminists. Nevertheless, the leadership of ESA clearly regarded feminism and abortion opposition as compatible. In *Completely Pro-Life*, Sider described the movement for women’s equality as furthering a pro-life agenda and endorsed the Equal Rights Amendment as a beneficial legal reform. Yet, like feminism’s conservative critics, he believed that the pro-choice movement could use the ERA to defend abortion rights. He therefore proposed “a rider to the amendment that clearly prevents this.” ESA’s newsletter also showed concurrent support for pro-life and feminist positions. In inaugurating its public policy analysis in 1988, ESA included a category regarding abortion opposition and a category addressing sexism and feminist concerns.³²²

In the early 1990s ESA addressed the issue more directly. Benjamin Davis, former director of ESA’s Washington office, authored a 1991 article entitled “Protecting Everyone’s Rights: One Man’s Struggle with Feminism and Abortion.” Davis confessed that guilt over his own and society’s patriarchal past initially made him an uncritical advocate of the women’s movement. Yet a dilemma arose for pro-life men when feminists insisted on abortion rights. “How could a man who had finally been sensitized to women’s issues oppose a woman’s right to decide about a personal issue such as abortion?” he asked. Yet Davis eventually concluded that in the process of exalting women’s rights, feminists “had forgotten the third actor in this life-and-death drama, the

³²² Jones, “Interview with Ron Sider,” 428; Sider, *Completely Pro-Life*, 151; Washington Watch,” *ESA Advocate*, Sep 1988, 1.

unborn child.” The solution, he claimed, required Christians to champion “the human rights of *all*”—“women as well as men” and “the unborn as well as the born.” Several years later, Frederica Mathewes Green shared “confessions of a pro-life feminist” with ESA members. Despite her unequivocal support of women’s equal rights, she too had come to reject abortion. “No matter how difficult a pregnancy made a woman’s life,” she wrote in ESA’s new magazine, “dismembering her child was a violent and unjust solution.” While lacking the frequency and force of *Sojourners*’ articles, these analyses defended ESA’s interpretation of pro-life feminism.³²³

Throughout Bill Clinton’s tenure in the White House, ESA criticized both the pro-choice President and his conservative pro-life Republican opponents. Fearing the increased likelihood of success for the Freedom of Choice Act after Clinton’s election, ESA reaffirmed opposition to the bill as one of its legislative priorities. When this act appeared unlikely to succeed, ESA warned at the end of 1993 the debate on national healthcare had become “the current arena for the abortion battle.” ESA inaccurately predicted that in 1994 Congress would pass some form of universal health care plan that may contain, as advocated by First Lady Hillary Clinton, funding for “pregnancy-related services...including abortion.” The editors called on members to oppose any plan that included “unrestricted funding for abortion.” ESA saved its most harsh analysis of President Clinton’s policies in response to his perceived hypocrisy. Keith Pavlischek noted that, in spite of Clinton’s open support for abortion rights, some pro-life evangelicals voted for him based upon his pledge to make abortions “safe, legal and

³²³ Benjamin Davis, “Protecting Everyone’s Rights: One man’s struggle with feminism and abortion,” *ESA Advocate*, Jun 1991, 14-15; Frederica Mathewes-Green, “Not Quite a Perfect Fit: Confessions of a Pro-Life Feminist,” *Prism*, Sep-Oct 1994, 10.

rare.” (Pavlishek generously described most evangelicals as “skeptical” of Clinton’s intention.) Yet Clinton immediately restored federal funding for abortion counseling, refused to support reauthorization of the Hyde Amendment, and insisted that abortion be covered in his proposed healthcare plans. While the pro-choice movement celebrated, Pavlishek noted, pro-lifers waited in vain to hear an explanation of how these policies would make abortion “rare.” He concluded that Clinton’s practical actions warranted “prophetic denunciation” and “outrage,” for his administration had proved itself not merely pro-choice but rather “pro-abortion.” “Consistently pro-life Christians” must view Clinton’s claims about reducing abortion, Pavlishek wrote, “as empty political rhetoric at best and a cynical attempt to win support and favor from evangelicals at worst.”³²⁴

Even as they lobbied against policies favoring abortion rights, ESA remained dissatisfied with conservative pro-life advocates. After Republicans regained a majority in Congress in the 1994 mid-term elections, Ron Sider hoped that the 104th Congress would reflect a more consistent pro-life ethic. He expressed gratitude that the Republicans favored “greater restrictions on abortion.” Nevertheless, Sider also charged that “some Republicans have a strange idea of what it means to be ‘pro-life.’” Can consistent pro-life proponents favor, he asked, less stringent gun control, relaxed regulations on tobacco, elimination of the social “safety net,” and vast reduction in non-military foreign aid? He encouraged “evangelical voters” to write congressional

³²⁴ “ESA Legislative Priorities for 1993,” *ESA Advocate*, Mar 1993, 5; “From the Capitol: Abortion and Health Care,” *Prism*, Nov 1993, 32; Keith J. Pavlishek, “Public Policy Rhetoric: President Clinton, abortion funding, and making abortion rare,” *Prism*, Feb 1994, 14-17.

representatives and “remind them that being pro-life means not only protecting the unborn from abortion, but also guarding children from assault rifles, handguns, and seductive tobacco ads.” As the new Congress began to tackle welfare reform, Sider wrote an open letter to the U.S. House of Representatives that ESA published in its magazine. Once again, he reiterated his opposition to “policies that would have the effect of increasing the numbers of abortions.” This included not only governmental funding for abortion championed by pro-choice advocates but also “indirect incentives which encourage abortion.” In particular, Sider criticized the “Personal Responsibility” bill under consideration for offering these incentives since it would limit the duration of welfare benefits. The act’s enactment, he wrote, “will lead many women facing pregnancy, especially the young and poor, to the desperate choice of denying life to their children.” In a 1996 editorial in *Christianity Today*, Sider appealed directly to conservative evangelical abortion opponents. “It is unbiblical for pro-life Christians,” he argued, “to overlook the sanctity of life of those who die unnecessarily because of tobacco, war, pollution, or starvation.” Sider and ESA exemplified the progressive evangelical commitment to a pro-life ethic beyond abortion opposition.³²⁵

Pro-life Feminism

Did the pro-life stance of the majority of progressive evangelical leaders tarnish their feminist credentials? Both abortion rights advocates and most feminists believed so.

³²⁵ Ronald J. Sider, “Hopes (and Fears) for the 104th Congress,” *Prism*, Jan 1995, 38; idem, “An Open Letter to the U.S. House of Representatives,” *Prism*, Feb 1995, 28; idem, “Our Selective Rage: A pro-life ethic means more than being anti-abortion,” *Christianity Today*, Aug 12, 1996, 14.

In the midst of heated abortion debates, pro-choice leaders time and again insisted that women would remain exploited, inferior citizens without access to legal abortions. “We have to remind people that abortion is the guarantor of a woman’s full right to choose and her right to participate fully in the social and political life of society,” Kate Michelman, executive director of the National Abortion Rights Action League, stated in 1988.³²⁶ Likewise from the late 1960s into the twenty-first century, NOW, the most visible feminist organization, regularly presumed the connection between feminist identity and support for abortion. “Feminists must commit to protecting reproductive rights,” NOW president Kim Gandy declared in 2004. She argued for the necessity of legislation such as the still unapproved Freedom of Choice Act in order “to protect women’s lives, health, liberty and privacy.”³²⁷ Even some readers of *Sojourners* agreed and criticized the magazine for taking an anti-feminist stance. “As a woman and feminist committed to peace and justice, I find myself stirred to incredible rage over the issue of abortion,” one reader wrote in response to *Sojourners*’ 1989 forum on abortion legislation. She told of her anger “when anti-choice people masquerade as feminists,” for “a feminist doesn’t believe in a philosophy that holds that women aren’t capable of making the best decision about their lives.” “The right to abortion,” the reader concluded, “is a basic human right.”³²⁸ All feminists unequivocally agreed that women deserve basic human rights.

³²⁶ Quoted in Tamar Lewin, “Legal Abortion Under Fierce Attack 15 Years After *Roe v. Wade* Ruling,” *New York*, May 10, 1988.

³²⁷ Kim Gandy, “On the Anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*, Feminists Must Commit to Protecting Reproductive Rights,” NOW press release, Jan 22, 2004, available at <http://www.now.org/lists/news-releases/msg00055.html> (accessed Jan 3, 2008)

³²⁸ Mayone Lorenz, letter to the editor, *Sojourners*, Jan 1990, 8-9.

Whether or not abortion belonged in this category revealed differences within feminist thought.³²⁹

Most progressive evangelicals leaders believed that women neither had the right nor needed the means—specifically through abortion rights—to free themselves from family responsibilities and motherhood. They rejected the more radical feminist accusations that motherhood and childcare formed an oppressive patriarchal system. Indeed, progressive evangelicals agreed with Christian conservatives that families and parental responsibilities were divinely ordained institutions.³³⁰ To be sure, they joined feminist protests against the disproportionate and cumbersome expectations often placed upon women for childcare. But what women needed was not liberation from these responsibilities, progressive evangelical leaders argued, but rather the equitable support of fathers and the access to emotional and economic resources. Thus they disputed feminist claims that abortion offered a legitimate solution to the unjust burdens of childcare. Instead, progressive evangelicals proposed public policies to assist women *and* men in meeting their shared parental responsibilities. They respected women’s freedom to choose whether and when to bear children by encouraging family planning education and accessible birth control to prevent unwanted pregnancies. After conception, however, the majority of progressive evangelical leaders believed that any discussion of a woman’s “right” or “choice” not to give birth proved belated.

³²⁹ Evans, *Tidal Wave*, 24.

³³⁰ For a sustained progressive evangelical analysis of families and parenting, see Ron Sider, *Completely Pro-Life*, 107-151.

Pro-life progressive evangelicals included unborn children within their politics of community. Protection of the more fundamental right to life overrode feminist demands for equality and liberation. “As Christians and feminists, we care deeply about the quality of life for women, especially poor women,” wrote Bill Weld-Wallis in *Sojourners*. “But with the question of abortion, in the end, we feel that we must advocate for the person whose very existence, not just their quality of life, is at stake.” If one agreed that pro-choice advocacy was not a prerequisite for feminist identity—as both progressive evangelicals and a minority of self-identified pro-life feminists repeatedly insisted—then their support for women’s equality and other forms of liberation confirmed their place within the broad feminist movement.³³¹

Politically Homeless

More than any other conviction, progressive evangelicals’ “consistent pro-life agenda” placed them on the margins of partisan politics from the 1980s into the twenty-first century. In 1980, the Republican Party formalized its support for a constitutional ban on abortion as part of its platform, while the Democratic Party committed itself to opposing the reversal or restriction of abortion rights. As opposition to abortion became increasingly central to conservative evangelicals, they flocked to the support of Republicans. In turn, the endorsement of abortion rights by Democrats drew the loyalty of feminists and pro-choice advocates. “Every two and four years abortion has been *the* determining issue for millions of American voters, on *both* sides of the issue, when they enter the voting booth,” Vicki Kemper observed in a 1988 *Sojourners* editorial. The most

³³¹ Bill Weld-Wallis, “Abortion: The Political Dilemma,” *Sojourners*, Oct 1984, 4.

militant members of the pro-life movement turned support for pro-life Republicans into a holy cause. “To vote for Bill Clinton is to sin against God,” proclaimed Randall Terry, the founder of Operation Rescue, in 1992. Four years later, Christian Right leaders such as James Dobson of Focus on the Family and Ralph Reed of the Christian Coalition threatened Republicans that attempts to weaken the party’s forceful anti-abortion plank would cost them the votes of evangelicals. Unlike most conservative pro-life advocates, however, progressive evangelicals defined “pro-life” broadly and typically refused to let a candidate’s position on abortion dictate their electoral decisions. Jim Wallis articulated the frustration of the progressive evangelical movement by criticizing Republicans’ neglect of “other places where human life is now most threatened” and Democrats’ insensitivity to the “moral tragedy of abortion.” Believing that neither political party offered a thorough pro-life platform, progressive evangelicals consistently felt politically homeless.³³²

As early as 1984, pro-life progressive evangelicals challenged other abortion opponents to avoid what Ron Sider called “one issue politics.” Addressing the evangelical mainstream in *Christianity Today*, Sider recognized that “some judge political candidates almost exclusively by their stand on abortion.” He pleaded against this “unbiblical” imbalance, however, for he asserted that a “consistent pro-life” agenda included not only opposition to abortion but also attention to justice for the poor, world hunger, and nuclear proliferation. Writing in *Sojourners* that same year, Bill Weld-Wallis expressed the dilemma that pro-life progressive evangelicals faced. “Pro-lifers

³³² Kemper, “Abortion and the Front Lines,” 5; Martin, *With God on Our Side*, 325, 357-359; Wallis, “Coming Together on the Sanctity of Life,” 3; idem, “Lift Every Voice,” *Sojourners*, Jul-Aug 1996, 7.

don't like us because we push them to embrace a consistent pro-life ethic," he observed. "Our friends in the peace and justice movement don't like us because we make them uncomfortable with our anti-abortion talk." Weld-Wallis described the resultant political marginalization. In the presidential race, he wrote, "neither candidate comes close" to being "genuinely pro-life." The pro-choice Walter Mondale offered an end to military action in Central America and nuclear arms reduction but also "a continuation of the slaughter of innocents." Ronald Reagan symbolically opposed abortion, Weld-Wallis wrote, but supported a "reprehensible" social agenda and a "war on the poor and the Third World." He concluded that to vote for either party would "seriously compromise some aspect of our pro-life stance." Nevertheless, Weld-Wallis urged readers to seek divine counsel and forgiveness for a world that entailed such agonizing choices. While a pro-choice perspective disturbed pro-life progressive evangelicals, opposition to abortion did not guarantee their support.³³³

In the late 1980s, many progressive evangelical leaders further distinguished themselves from the conservative pro-life movement by gravitating toward Democrats. Most evangelical anti-abortion forces wove themselves into the fabric of Republican politics. They warned that votes for Democrats—even if they opposed abortion—would

³³³ Ronald J. Sider, "Let's Get the Church Off the Soapbox," *Christianity Today*, Mar 16, 1984, 54; Weld-Wallis, "Abortion: The political dilemma," 4. As early as 1980, ESA encouraged evangelicals to eschew single-issue voting. In its guide entitled "Can My Vote Be Biblical?," ESA recognized the unlikelihood of any political candidate embodying all of the biblical principles that they believed should guide Christians in public affairs. Therefore they encouraged readers to identify candidates "concerned about the whole range" of principles. "'Christian politics' that focus exclusively on a few select issues to the neglect of other matters emphasized by the scriptures are misguided," the guide stated, "because finally they are not sufficiently biblical." See "Can My Vote Be Biblical."

damage the pro-life cause, for these Democrats might obstruct the judicial appointments of President Reagan.³³⁴ But pro-life progressive evangelicals found overwhelmingly more Democrats than Republicans who agreed with their interrelated stands on life, peace, and justice. Indeed, all but one the sixty-eight candidates endorsed by JustLife in 1986 and 1988 were Democrats. In the 1986 Senate race in Nevada, for example, the Republican incumbent James Santini received the support of the anti-abortion Pro-Family Coalition. Yet Santini opposed both a nuclear freeze and increased funding for anti-poverty programs, and thus JustLife backed the successful challenge of Harry Reid, a pro-life Democrat.³³⁵ Even a pro-choice Democrat could seem the most preferable candidate. In 1988 Jim Wallis called the presidential campaign of Jesse Jackson “the closest by far to the biblical priorities.” He lauded Jackson for prioritizing the poor, supporting peaceful negotiations over military action, reversing the arms race, and denouncing apartheid in South Africa. Yet Jackson had abandoned a pro-life stance—one that *Sojourners* had printed in 1980—and adopted support for abortion rights. While the shift appeased the Democratic mainstream, Wallis condemned it as “a painful inconsistency on this sanctity of life question.” Yet Republicans appeared equally if not more inconsistent to Wallis. They proclaimed opposition to abortion but showed insensitivity to poverty, economic injustice, and military violence. Nevertheless, Wallis

³³⁴ Phil Gailey, “Abortion Knits Religious Right Into G.O.P. Fabric,” *New York Times*, Jun 19, 1986.

³³⁵ Smalligan, “JustLife: A Christian PAC;” Terry Mattingly, “Too Conservative? Too Liberal? No, it’s JustLife,” *St. Petersburg Times* Oct. 31, 1992; Bendyna, “JustLife Action,” 199.

and other *Sojourners* editors recognized that George Bush's ability to attract evangelicals through his anti-abortion stance played a pivotal role in his election.³³⁶

As the partisan divide over abortion intensified in the early 1990s, pro-life progressive evangelicals continued to feel ostracized. Writing in ESA's newsletter, Benjamin Davis refused to identify with either "the Republican Party with its pro-life stance (and its often less-than-enlightened attitudes about social justice and women's issues)" or "the Democratic Party or women's movement (and its often less-than-enlightened attitude toward the rights of the unborn)." He expressed thanks for groups like ESA, JustLife, and Feminists for Life that allowed him to "work so justice can truly roll down." In 1992, both political parties rebuffed progressive evangelical attempts to promote a "consistent ethic of life." Leaders of JustLife were denied the opportunity to testify before the Republican National Convention in favor of military cuts and increased social programs for the poor and marginalized. Likewise, the Democratic National Convention refused their request to testify against the party's pro-choice position. In fact, the Democratic leadership prevented William Casey, the pro-life Democratic governor of Pennsylvania, from even speaking at its national convention. Because "the Democrats put so much pressure on their pro-life candidates," JustLife director Dave Medema stated, his organization found fewer candidates to endorse. A year later, JustLife folded as a national organization. "In the polarized world of abortion politics," one analyst noted, "there was not a sufficiently sizable constituency for a PAC that endorsed a consistent ethic of life." Just before the 1992 presidential election, both Sider

³³⁶ Jim Wallis, "Signs of the Times: Issues, values, and the Rainbow Campaign in Election '88," *Sojourners*, Nov 1988, 15-21; Danny Duncan Collum, "An Opening for Populism," *Sojourners*, Feb 1989, 22-23.

and Wallis expressed disillusionment with the inadequate options that each party offered. “Human life does not stop being precious at birth,” Sider wrote. “It is a tragedy that we do not have presidential candidates linking opposition to abortion to other issues” within “a consistent life ethic.” Wallis felt similar anguish. “Christians committed to peace and justice feel very marginalized,” he wrote. “Most of our discussions center around the old arguments of the ‘lesser of two evils’ and the temptation to withdraw altogether.”³³⁷

While many progressive evangelical leaders remained engaged in efforts to promote their broad pro-life position, little changed during the presidency of Bill Clinton. Democratic support for Clinton’s pro-choice initiatives displeased them, but the persistently narrow pro-life definition of Republicans proved similarly disappointing. In preparation for the 2000 presidential election, both Sider and Wallis sounded familiar themes. “The perennial problem is that neither the Democratic nor the Republican presidential candidate perfectly fits” with “a prolife and pro-poor, pro-family and pro-racial justice agenda,” Sider claimed. He wished that he “could cut and paste” from the respective platforms of George W. Bush and Al Gore. Sider preferred Bush’s statements on abortion but favored Gore’s promises on gun control, restrictions on capital punishment, military spending, and economic programs. “Where does that leave me?” Sider asked. “Still undecided” and “determined to vote for the person I sense will do less damage.” Wallis encouraged *Sojourners* readers to ask, “How does the religious principle of the sacredness of human life challenge both candidates on, for example,

³³⁷ Davis, “Protecting Everyone’s Rights,” 15; Mattingly, “Too Conservative? Too Liberal? No, it’s JustLife;” Bendyna, “JustLife Action,” 200; Jim Wallis, “Can Politics Be Moral?: A way through this season of discontent,” *Sojourners*, Nov 1992), 11; Ronald J. Sider, “The Key Issues: Some Concluding Reflections,” *ESA Advocate*, May 1992, 16.

abortion, capital punishment, military spending, missile defense, or gun control?” Believing that both Bush and Gore failed to meet this standard, he too wrestled with the implications. “Is voting for candidates who are far from perfect a ‘lesser of evils’ compromise,” Wallis questioned, “or an ethical decision to seek incremental change?”³³⁸ While the answer remained unclear, pro-life progressive evangelicals’ broad position created complex choices and compromised electoral decisions. The incongruities they perceived among both Republicans and Democrats strongly contributed to their disillusionment with partisan politics.

Conclusion

Pro-life progressive evangelicals remained frustrated in the early years of the twenty-first century. Both ESA and *Sojourners* repeated protests against the narrow connotation of “pro-life” and the political polarization created by abortion. The organizations continued to highlight initiatives that linked the defense of unborn life with protection against other threats to human life and dignity. Their electoral decisions remained complicated. “When you’re Christian, progressive, and ‘pro-life,’” a 2004 *Sojourners* cover article noted, “voting your conscience is easier said than done.” In that same issue, Jim Wallis called it a “tragedy” that “in America today one can’t vote for a consistent ethic of life.” He specifically urged Democrats to abandon their “rigid, ideological” pro-choice stance that cost them the votes of those who otherwise appreciated their policies on “issues of justice and peace.” Wallis also reiterated

³³⁸ Ron Sider, “A Tough Call,” *Prism*, Sep-Oct 2000, 24; Jim Wallis, “Should Joe Lieberman Keep his Faith to Himself?” *Sojourners*, Nov-Dec 2000), 20-21.

Sojourners' earlier proposals to bring pro-choice and pro-life advocates together around the common goal of "reducing the abortion rate." In preparing for the 2004 presidential election, Ron Sider maintained a refusal to base his vote on a candidate's position on abortion. He considered the incumbent Republican George W. Bush "much better on the sanctity of human life" but the Democratic challenger John Kerry "better on economic and racial justice, the environment, and American's international role." Without a clear determinative issue, Sider wrote, "I find this year's decision especially wrenching."³³⁹

Just before the 2004 election, *Sojourners* initiated a well-publicized campaign—"God is Not a Republican...or a Democrat"—to discourage Christians from voting for Republicans based solely upon their opposition to abortion and same-sex marriage. Endorsers encouraged Christians to measure the policies of candidates "against a complete range of Christian ethics and values" that included not only "a consistent ethic of human life" but also care for human dignity, strong families, racial reconciliation, peace, and gender equality. By describing both the defense of human life and support for "gender equity" as Christian ideals, progressive evangelicals remained committed to harmonizing their "completely pro-life" and feminist convictions.³⁴⁰ Balancing and prioritizing these issues regularly placed progressive evangelicals on the margins of both the broader evangelical movement and partisan political debates. But abortion did not

³³⁹ Heidi Schlumpf, "No Place to Stand," *Sojourners*, Jun 2004,, 12-16; Jim Wallis, "Pro-Life Democrats?" *Sojourners*, Jun 2004, 5; Ron Sider, "Bush vs. Kerry: Does God Have a Preference?" *Prism*, Sep-Oct 2004, 36. See also Amy Durkee, "United for Life: Powerfully reconciling *all* opponents of the death culture to create a seamless garment of protection and peace for one and all," *Prism*, Mar-Apr 2003; and Amy Sullivan, "Abortion: A way forward," *Sojourners*, Apr 2006.

³⁴⁰ "God is Not a Republican...Or a Democrat." Available at <http://go.sojo.net/campaign/takebackourfaith> (accessed Jan. 31, 2008).

represent the only issue that marginalized progressive evangelicals. As the “God is Not a Republican...or a Democrat” campaign suggested, progressive evangelical leaders also objected to the politicization of gay and lesbian issues. Their responses to homosexuality served as well to distinguish them from both Christian conservatives and other religious and political liberals.

Chapter 5: A Civil Right but Religious Wrong?

Like abortion, the issue of homosexuality initially appeared perplexing to many progressive evangelical leaders. Gays and lesbians clearly represented a marginalized group, and thus their public theology of community led progressive evangelicals to support their full civil rights. Yet deciding whether or not homosexual behavior represented a legitimate option for Christians proved less clear. As biblical feminists had done, some scholars began offer new interpretations of passages that evangelicals had traditionally understood as prohibiting all same-sex activity. As with scriptural suggestions of patriarchy, they argued, such condemnations represented only culture bound traditions rather than timeless truths. Without clear biblical guidance, advocates claimed, evidence of the intransigence of homosexual orientation and the experiences of Christians in same-sex covenantal relationships compelled the church both to welcome and to affirm gays and lesbians. Ultimately, the primary organizations of the progressive evangelical movement reached different conclusions. While *The Other Side* found these arguments persuasive, both *Sojourners* and Evangelicals for Social Action (ESA) continued to believe that the Bible did not condone homosexual behavior. This chapter traces each organization's response to homosexuality in both the public and private religious sphere.

Gay Liberation

Beginning in the late 1960s, gays and lesbians pushed with new vigor to defend the legitimacy of homosexuality and to end legal and social discrimination against them. The movement gained both momentum and notoriety after a police raid on the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in New York's Greenwich Village, sparked well-publicized riots in 1969. Within four years, the number of organizations dedicated to securing gay rights grew from roughly fifty to over eight hundred. Such activism produced tangible results. In 1975, for example, the Civil Service Commission withdrew its ban on hiring homosexuals. By 1980, almost half of states with laws against sodomy repealed them. Gays and lesbians won not only more civil rights but also further mainstream acceptance. In 1973 the American Psychiatric Association overturned its classification of homosexuality as a mental disorder and repudiated therapies intended to "cure" gays and lesbians. In places beyond the historic hubs of New York and San Francisco, gay subcultures more and more operated openly and proudly. Media outlets portrayed homosexuality less derisively, and gay characters and themes began to appear throughout popular culture. The gay liberation movement instilled pride in its members and facilitated more favorable public attitudes toward homosexuals. As in the contemporary feminist movement, gays and lesbians employed the language of rights and equality to justify their cause.³⁴¹

³⁴¹ Philip Jenkins, *Decade of Nightmares: The End of the Sixties and the Making of Eighties America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 31-32; John D'Emilio, "Cycles of Change, Questions of Strategy: The Gay and Lesbian Movement After Fifty Years," in *The Politics of Gay Rights*, edited by Craig A. Rimmerman, Kenneth D. Wald, and Clyde Wilcox (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 31-53.

Gay activists shared with feminists not only a common goal of equal rights but also explicit ambitions to overturn traditional gender roles and stereotypes. As a result, their two campaigns often overlapped, and lesbians became a vocal minority within the women's movement. Although early feminist leaders such as Betty Friedan worried that open support for lesbians would divide and discredit their movement, the majority of feminists came to interpret the choice of sexuality as another fundamental right for women. In 1971 NOW passed a resolution that acknowledged "the oppression of lesbians as a legitimate concern of feminism" and subsequently established a National Task Force on Sexuality and Lesbianism to address discrimination against lesbians. As with abortion, the 1977 National Women's Conference in Houston proved symbolic and shaped public perception. Speaking in support of a controversial plank on sexual preference, Friedan testified to her change of heart. "As someone who has grown up in Middle America and has loved men—perhaps too well—I've had trouble with this issue," she told the audience. "But we must help women who are lesbians in their civil rights." Like endorsement of abortion, the resolution upset the minority of conservative delegates but nevertheless passed overwhelmingly. "Thank you, sisters!" shouted a lesbian contingent as pink and yellow balloons with the message "WE ARE EVERYWHERE" were released. While related only indirectly, the gay rights movement and feminism became co-belligerents in the drive to transform conservative gender ideals and to end discrimination based on sex and sexual orientation.³⁴²

³⁴² Winifred D. Wandersee, *On the Move: American Women in the 1970s* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1988), 64-69; "What Next for US Women," *Time*, Dec 5, 1977.

Among the social protest movements that emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s, none appeared as threatening to Christian conservatives as gay liberation. Evangelicals had long regarded sexual sins as scandalous, but homosexuality seemed especially egregious. Unlike illicit heterosexual activity outside of marriage, they believed, homosexual intimacy included the additional stigma of perverting the “natural” attraction between men and women. Homosexuality, not adultery or other heterosexual sins, acquired the epithet of “abomination.” In response to the gay rights movement, therefore, conservative Christians underscored biblical arguments condemning homosexuality and increasingly reacted against “gay militancy.”³⁴³ They also took up public campaigns to deny the validity of homosexual as a morally acceptable lifestyle. In 1977, for example, evangelical celebrity and Florida Citrus spokeswoman Anita Bryant led a conspicuous crusade to repeal an ordinance in Dade County, Florida that prohibited discrimination based on sexual preference. A year later, Tim LaHaye, a prominent leader in the emerging Christian Right, wrote *What Everyone Should Know About Homosexuality*. “The homosexual community, by militance [sic] and secret political maneuvering, is designing a program to increase the tidal wave of homosexuality that will drown our children in a polluted sea of sexual perversion,” he warned, “and will eventually destroy America as it did Rome, Greece, Pompeii, and Sodom.”³⁴⁴

³⁴³ William Martin, *With God on Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America*, rev. ed. (New York: Broadway Books, 2005), 100-101; Didi Herman, *The Antigay Agenda: Orthodox Vision and the Christian Right* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 25-59.

³⁴⁴ Tim LaHaye, *What Everyone Should Know About Homosexuality* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1978), 179.

Conservative evangelicals regarded public toleration of homosexuality as prime evidence of America's moral decay.

To leaders of the Christian Right, the concurrent evolution of gay liberation and women's liberation did not appear coincidental. Both movements appeared to scorn the gender conventions hallowed by conservatives. Phyllis Schlafly charged that the feminist movement's quest to challenge patriarchal systems and maternal assumptions produced predictable partiality for lesbianism. "If man is targeted as the enemy, and the ultimate goal of women's liberation is independence from men and the avoidance of pregnancy and its consequences," she claimed, "then lesbianism is logically the highest form in the ritual of women's liberation." The potential for homosexuals to capitalize on the ERA to appeal for further civil rights played a prominent role in Schlafly's arguments against the amendment. Conservatives were horrified by the show of support for lesbians at the 1977 National Women's Conference in Houston. "The lesbians flooded into that conference and attached themselves to the feminist movement, and never again were the feminists able to shake the lesbians from their agenda," recalled Beverly LaHaye, Tim LaHaye's wife and founder of Concerned Women for America. Jerry Falwell blamed feminists for initiating the cynicism toward traditional gender roles that presaged gay activism. "We would not be having the present moral crisis regarding the homosexual movement if men and women accepted their proper roles as designated by God," he wrote in 1980. Like Schlafly, Falwell virtually equated feminism and lesbianism. "The feminist movement is unisexual" and desires "to eliminate the God-given differences that exist between the sexes; that is why they are prohomosexual and lesbian," he declared.

“In fact, it is shocking how many feminists are lesbians.”³⁴⁵ By the early 1980s, conservative Christian leaders stressed the threat of gay activism as much as the danger of feminism in their summons to political mobilization. Their “pro-family” agenda defended traditional gender mores against the alternative definitions of family life and sexuality promoted by feminists and gay activists.

The progressive evangelical movement’s early response to homosexuality mirrored its initial ambivalence toward abortion in the 1970s. As socially conservative Christians resisted the growing activism of gay rights advocates, progressive evangelicals hesitated. As with abortion, the male leadership of *Sojourners*, *The Other Side*, and Evangelicals for Social Action remained silent while apparently wrestling with the issue. Like their more liberal sisters, however, early evangelical feminists grappled with the place of lesbianism in their struggle against patriarchal traditions. In 1974 Nancy Hardesty and Letha Scanzoni cautiously broached the subject in their popular defense of biblical feminism, *All We’re Meant to Be: A Biblical Approach to Women’s Liberation*. In a section devoted to the “Sexual Needs” of “The Single Woman,” the authors commended celibacy, cautiously approved of masturbation, and considered the possibility of lesbianism. They claimed that biblical writers never addressed “homosexual orientation” but rather only homosexual activity. As a result, Hardesty and Scanzoni implied that scriptural admonitions against such acts applied only to heterosexuals but not those with homosexual orientations. At the first national meeting of the Evangelical Women’s Caucus in 1975, Hardesty and Virginia Mollenkott led a

³⁴⁵ Phyllis Schlafly, *The Power of the Positive Woman*, 12; Martin, *With God on Our Side*, 164-165; Jerry Falwell, *Listen, America!*, 183, 185.

session on “Woman to Woman Relationships” at which participants discussed without resolution the issue of lesbianism.³⁴⁶ Prominent biblical feminists such as Hardesty, Scanzoni, and Mollenkott expressed doubt that the Bible clearly denounced homosexuality. Their views laid the groundwork for conflict not only within evangelical feminism but also within the larger progressive evangelical movement in which they participated.

From Ambivalence to Affirmation

As with abortion, readers prodded the leading progressive evangelical journals to address the controversial issue. In April 1977, *The Other Side* published a letter from an anonymous reader. The author expressed appreciation for a recent issue on torture but went on to describe his own torment that resulted from being a gay Christian. “I have never read in an evangelical magazine any account of the kinds of psychological and sometimes physical suffering experienced by thousands of evangelical homosexuals,” the reader asserted. *The Other Side*’s editors printed the letter without comment. Four months later, they allowed other readers to respond. The August 1977 issue carried four letters that reflected diversity of opinion among *The Other Side*’s constituency. Two responses expressed compassion for the author while reminding him that God “*can* heal homosexuality.” In contrast, Ralph Blair, the director of the pro-homosexual organization Evangelicals Concerned, assured the author that “many brothers and sisters” shared his experiences and believed “a gay Christian life *is* viable.” Finally, Scanzoni

³⁴⁶ Scanzoni and Hardesty, *All We’re Meant to Be*, 152-157; Cochran, *Evangelical Feminism*, 200 (n. 31), 92.

and Mollenkott, who served as associate editors for *The Other Side*, insisted that some Christians did care about homosexuals and reported that they were completing a book that would help to reconcile homosexual and heterosexual Christians. The editors themselves printed only a short statement acknowledging the controversy. “A debate is brewing over the proper Christian response to homosexuality,” they wrote. “Two groups claiming to be evangelicals are taking radically different stands.” Unready to define their own view, the editors resorted to publishing contact information for both Evangelicals Concerned and Liberation in Jesus Christ, an ex-gay ministry.³⁴⁷

This ambivalence and presentation of both types of reactions upset *The Other Side*’s conservative readers. All three letters that the magazine printed in response rejected homosexuality as legitimate for Christians and criticized the editors’ equivocation. “The Staff of *The Other Side* is in something of a turmoil over the question of whether or not homosexual activities can ever be an option for biblical people,” editor Mark Olson replied. “Christians whom we respect are taking positions on different sides of the question.”³⁴⁸ These respected Christians would have included Scanzoni, Mollenkott, and Hardesty—all associate editors of *The Other Side*. Their endorsement of homosexuality likely balanced the traditional aversion to homosexuals among evangelicals as the magazine staff’s debated the issue. In 1978, in fact, Mollenkott and

³⁴⁷ “Letter from ‘Accepted/Excepted One’” *The Other Side* Apr 1977, 6; Joan Tyler, letter to the editor, *The Other Side*, Aug 1977, 4; Representatives of Asbury Theological Seminary, letter to the editor, *The Other Side*, Aug 1977, 4; Ralph Blair, letter to the editor, *The Other Side*, Aug 1977, 4; Letha Scanzoni and Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, letter to the editor, *The Other Side* Aug 1977, 3; Editors, “Sidelines,” *The Other Side*, Aug 1977, 37-38.

³⁴⁸ Mark Olson, [editor’s note], *The Other Side* Dec 1977, 3.

Scanzoni published the pioneering evangelical defense of homosexuality. In *Is the Homosexual My Neighbor?*, the authors offered alternative interpretations of biblical passages traditionally understood to condemn homosexuality. Mollenkott and Scanzoni argued that the writers were not addressing monogamous homosexual relationships and were unaware of homosexual orientation. Scientific and sociological evidence also demonstrated, they contended, that some people have an involuntary, irreversible homosexual orientation that they considered analogous to left-handedness. Thus Mollenkott and Scanzoni asserted that Christians should sanction same-sex relationships.³⁴⁹ When *The Other Side* finally published its awaited issue on homosexuality in June 1978, the influence of these arguments became clear.

As a whole, *The Other Side* adopted a welcoming attitude toward gay and lesbian Christians. In his introduction to the issue, Olson acknowledged that the staff still had small disagreements. “We all firmly adhere to the authority of Scripture. And, as a result, we all firmly believe that most homosexual behavior is contrary to God’s standards,” he wrote. “Our differences concern the legitimacy—or illegitimacy—of permanent, faithful homosexual relationships for people who feel they have no other viable sexual alternative.” Olson indicated that each article or column reflected the opinion of its author rather than “an official position of *The Other Side*.” Yet only a few authors voiced reservations, and even their articles adopted moderate tones. Co-editor John Alexander cautiously disapproved of homosexual acts but admitted the issue’s

³⁴⁹ Letha Scanzoni and Virginia Mollenkott. *Is the Homosexual My Neighbor?* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978). For an analysis of Mollenkott and Scanzoni’s arguments and critical responses to their work, see Cochran, *Evangelical Feminism*, 77-91.

ambiguity. “In the end, I think the evidence is against all genital homosexual practice,” he wrote, “but I find the arguments just cloudy enough that I think sensible Christians can come down at somewhat different places.” The majority of the issue served, however, to support Christian homosexuality. Olson wrote a column recounting evangelicals’ spiteful treatment of gay and lesbian Christians and urging instead their acceptance. Most prominent, the journal carried six testimonies of Christian homosexuals and an extended interview with Ralph Blair, director of the group Evangelicals Concerned that supported gay and lesbian Christians. The thrust of these affirming pieces largely overshadowed the few expressions of tolerant opposition. Although not espousing “official” affirmation of gays and lesbians, *The Other Side* had clearly identified itself as a sympathetic and welcoming forum for homosexual Christians.³⁵⁰

The magazine’s stance drew mixed reaction and ultimately undermined *The Other Side*’s standing and even credibility in many evangelical circles. At first, the majority of printed letters to the editors expressed appreciation for what one reader called “the most Christian, most human, most compassionate thing I have ever read on the subject of homosexuality.” Another writer commended the magazine for “the unabashed and sincere empathy you display toward our gay sisters and brothers in Christ.” Olson acknowledged this encouragement. “We’ve received an amazing number of letters in response to our June issue,” he wrote in September. “The responses have been overwhelmingly supportive.” Still, several readers expressed disappointment and even outrage with what they regarded as blatant biblical unfaithfulness. When the editors

³⁵⁰ Mark Olson, “About This Issue,” *The Other Side* Jun 1978, 4; John Alexander, “Homosexuality: It’s Not That Clear,” *The Other Side* Jun 1978, 8.

printed letters again in December's issue, letters from critics, including associate editor and evangelical statesman Frank Gaebelein, equaled the number from admirers. A welcoming attitude toward gay and lesbian Christians began to cost *The Other Side* supporters. Even the magazine's founders, John Alexander's parents, ended their association. Circulation leveled off after previous growth throughout the 1970s. "Hate mail, focused on the magazine's commitment to gay and lesbian Christians, was so plentiful that it had to be stored in cardboard boxes," *The Other Side*'s editors wrote in a retrospective piece. Just as important, *The Other Side*'s reputation suffered among conservative Christians. "Never again would the magazine be considered as 'evangelical' by many in the evangelical establishment," editors remembered.³⁵¹

Despite appreciation from part of its constituency, the outcry from frustrated readers appeared to make *The Other Side* hesitant. Over the next five years, the editors did not address homosexuality directly and thus largely avoided potential controversies. Nevertheless, the magazine's cursory attention to gay and lesbian issues continued to reveal sympathy. In 1980, for example, *The Other Side* published statements by diverse Christian leaders regarding their goals and priorities for the coming decade. The editors solicited the views of Letha Scanzoni and Ralph Blair, well-known advocates for gay and lesbian Christians. Both wrote that they expected to continue their work for justice and acceptance for homosexuals that Blair described as a "ministry of agapic liberation." In the early 1980s, *The Other Side* periodically published information about conferences or

³⁵¹ Stever Tollefson, letter to editor, *The Other Side* Sep 1978, 64; Richard Quebedeaux, letter to editor, *The Other Side* Sep 1978, 64; Mark Olson, [editor's note], *The Other Side* Sep 1978, 64; "Years of Expanding Vision: 1975-1979 – Dancing With Wolves," *The Other Side* May-Jun 1995, 47.

initiatives by groups such as Evangelicals Concerned that offered “fellowship, support, and encouragement to gay and lesbian Christians.” In 1982, editor Mark Olson also favorably reviewed Brian McNaught’s *A Disturbed Peace: Selected Writings of an Irish Catholic Homosexual*.³⁵² While these references remained brief, they continued to signify an openness to homosexuality at distinct odds with the vast majority of evangelicals.³⁵³ As *The Other Side*’s staff became fully convinced of homosexuality’s legitimacy, they inaugurated a zealous campaign to persuade Christian conservatives not only to welcome but also to affirm gay and lesbian Christians.

Throughout 1984 *The Other Side* mounted a sustained defense of homosexuality. Upon the request of the editors, Letha Scanzoni authored a two-part series on gay and lesbian Christians. In the January cover article, Scanzoni drew upon social scientific research to argue that some people possess an involuntary homosexual orientation. Like a heterosexual orientation, she wrote, this orientation is “deeply ingrained and resistant to change.” Based upon that “careful scriptural, theological, historical, and scientific study,” Scanzoni noted, many Christians were abandoning calls for gays and lesbians to overcome their homosexual desires. To be sure, she allowed, sexual *behavior* “may in

³⁵² “Priorities for the Eighties,” *The Other Side*, (Jan 1980, 21-23; “Sidelines,” *The Other Side*, May 1982; Mark Olson, “Review of *A Disturbed Peace: Selected Writings of an Irish Catholic Homosexual*,” *The Other Side* Jul 1982, 30.

³⁵³ In the early and mid-1980s, surveys consistently revealed the overwhelming opposition to homosexuality among conservative Protestants. In a 1983 study almost 90% of evangelicals regarded homosexual acts as “immoral behavior.” A 1985 survey among Southern Baptists revealed that 98% of responded rejected homosexuality as a viable Christian lifestyle. A third study found conservative Protestants the least likely religious group both to affirm the civil rights of homosexuals and to accept homosexual acts as morally acceptable. See Scott Thumma, “Negotiating a Religious Identity: The Case of the Gay Evangelical,” *Sociological Analysis* 52 (Winter 1991), 338.

some instances be changed.” But Scanzoni recounted failures among both participants and even leaders of ex-gay ministries in altering their homosexual *orientation*. She hoped that readers would thus “relate with greater understanding and respect to those Christian brothers and sisters who differ from themselves only in the direction of their sexual feelings.” Scanzoni intended her second article to further this empathetic respect. Why do Christians have “such harsh reactions” and “such gut-level revulsion” to homosexuality, she asked, and in turn find it difficult to “treat homosexuals like human beings?” Scanzoni proposed that misconceptions about homosexual orientation, “depersonalization” of gays and lesbians, and a lack of compassion produced a prejudice analogous to racism. In both articles, she used testimonies of gay and lesbian Christians as primary evidence for the need to affirm their sexuality. “We can no longer pretend homosexuality doesn’t exist,” Scanzoni asserted, for “we are meeting homosexual Christians in our churches” and “at denominational gatherings.” Thus Scanzoni urged readers to eschew bigotry by fully accepting gay and lesbian Christians.³⁵⁴

The editors of *The Other Side* also argued that biblical evidence did not preclude affirmation of a Christian ethic for gays and lesbians. In February Mark Olson favorably reviewed Robin Scroggs’ *The New Testament and Homosexuality*. Scroggs had persuasively demonstrated, he believed, that biblical injunctions against homosexuality condemned only pederasty or other sexual practices dissimilar from contemporary loving, committed same-sex relationships. Olson elaborated upon this interpretation in a lengthy

³⁵⁴ Letha Scanzoni, “Can Homosexuals Change?: Understanding the nature of homosexual orientation,” *The Other Side*, Jan 1984,, 12-15; idem, “Putting a Face On Homosexuality: Why don’t Christians treat homosexuals like human beings?” *The Other Side*, Feb 1984, 8-10, 48.

article two months later. He offered brief exegeses of all “the passages of Scripture that refer in one way or another to homosexual behavior.”³⁵⁵ In each case, Olson concluded, either the biblical authors were condemning only egregious or exploitative same-sex acts or the passage in question no longer applied to Christians. “Nowhere, then, except for two nonapplicable verses in Leviticus, does the Bible address the question of homosexual behavior in general,” he wrote. Although conceding “the Bible assumes heterosexual relationships are the norm,” Olson found no biblical principle “that denies the validity of committed, caring homosexual relationships.” John Alexander reached a similar conclusion in an accompanying editorial. “The Bible gives no indication that Jesus condemned homosexuality,” “no Old Testament passage seems to apply,” and only “three Pauline passages *may* condemn homosexuality,” Alexander wrote. Recognizing that “sensible” Christians could disagree, he stated that the lack of clear biblical teaching

³⁵⁵ Olson concluded that the condemnation of homosexual gang rape in the story of Sodom (Genesis 19) shows that “such behavior is unconscionable” but “tells us nothing about the validity or nonvalidity of loving sexual relationships, homosexual or heterosexual.” Likewise, as part of the larger Levitical code, the two verses (Lev. 18:22 and 20:13) that explicitly condemn male homosexual activity (but ignore lesbian acts) are no longer “applicable” or “operative” for Christians and thus “shed little or no light on what God wants for us today.” Indeed, Olson argued, Christians look primarily to the New Testament and the model of Jesus for guidance. Yet he found it strikingly significant that the biblical accounts contain no mention by Jesus of homosexuality. “Either homosexual behavior was not an issue for Jesus—or he (and the Gospel writers) deliberately chose not to address it.” The only references to homosexual behavior in the New Testament occur in “three brief, passing remarks of Paul” that Olson regarded as “often misinterpreted and mistranslated.” Drawing upon the research of Robin Scroggs and other New Testament scholars, he suggested that Paul’s statements in 1 Cor. 6:9-10, Rom. 1: 26-27, and 1 Tim. 1:9-10 most likely refer to exploitative sexual activity such as prostitution or pederasty. To be sure, Olson admitted that Paul’s condemnation of homosexual acts in Rom. 1 “might have larger implications.” Yet he regarded efforts to apply of this censure to “faithful, loving homosexual relationships” as “moving onto shaky ground.” Mark Olson, “Untangling the Web: A look at what Scripture does and does not say about homosexual behavior,” *The Other Side*, Apr 1984, 24-29.

against homosexuals in “permanent, covenant relationships” led him to cautious approval.³⁵⁶

Even as they affirmed homosexuality, *The Other Side* strove to appear faithful to the evangelical emphasis on biblical authority. To do so, the editors insisted that biblical texts provided only ambiguous guidance regarding modern same-sex unions, and thus the Bible failed to offer definitive guidance. In the process, they reframed debates surrounding homosexuality. “We’re not talking about the authority of the Bible,” Alexander maintained, “as much as we are about the authority of an *interpretation* of the Bible.” Olson began his exegetical article by decrying the effects of misinterpretations. “Well-meaning, unthinking heterosexuals have banged homosexuals over the head with Scripture,” he declared, calling not only for their exclusion but even their execution. All Christians make mistakes in their interpretations of Scripture, he claimed, but interpretive errors seemed especially rampant with respect to the subject of homosexuality. “Scholarly insights are suppressed. Gross mistranslations are accepted,” Olson wrote. “Contexts are ignored. And all sense of balance is thrown out the window.” As a result, Olson called on heterosexual Christians to amend their “particularly appalling—sometimes downright frightening—record on this topic.” He intended his article to demonstrate the inadequacies of traditional biblical interpretations that condemned *all* expressions of homosexuality. Ultimately, Olson concurred with Robin Scroggs that the New Testament proved inconclusive in debates about homosexuality “not because the

³⁵⁶ Mark Olson, “Review of *The New Testament and Homosexuality*,” *The Other Side*, Feb 1984, 50; idem, “Untangling the Web,” 24, 29; John F. Alexander, “What Harm Does It Do?: Do permanent homosexual relationships hurt anybody?” *The Other Side*, Apr 1984, 30-31.

Bible is not authoritative, but simply because it does not address the issues involved.” Alexander revealed his dual commitment to obey biblical teachings but also to avoid unsubstantiated judgments. “I hate to ignore even one passage of Scripture,” he wrote. “But I also hate to condemn something that I don’t see any harm in and that the Bible isn’t terribly clear on.” *The Other Side* attempted to persuade readers that traditional reliance upon biblical authority proved insufficient for resolving contemporary debates about homosexuality.³⁵⁷

If the Bible did not offer definite answers, *The Other Side* determined that scientific and sociological evidence (as summarized in Scanzoni’s articles) and the experiences of gay and lesbian Christians proved decisive. The latter occupied a central role in not only Scanzoni’s but also Olson’s analysis of homosexuality. “I have seen God blessing and using homosexual Christians who have united with each other in loving sexual relationships,” Olson claimed. “We must not be too attached to a few verses of Scripture—or our own interpretations of them—that we miss this witness of God’s Spirit. God is still speaking.” Alexander fully accepted the evidence for involuntary homosexual orientation, and thus he refused to believe that God intended for gays and lesbians to abstain from appropriate sexual activity. “Forbidding permanent homosexual relationships seems more like a straight jacket than the loving provision of a wise God,” he reasoned. By contending that the biblical testimony proved ambiguous, *The Other*

³⁵⁷ Alexander, “What Harm Does It Do?,” 31; Olson, “Untangling the Web,” 24; idem, “Review of *The New Testament and Homosexuality*.”

Side urged its audience to rely upon both social scientific research and the testimonies of gays and lesbian Christians themselves.³⁵⁸

The willingness to honor homosexual relationships represented the distinguishing feature of *The Other Side*'s defense of gay and lesbian Christians. The magazine's leadership refused to insist upon celibacy as the only legitimate option for gay and lesbian Christians. To be sure, *The Other Side* made clear that traditional Christian sexual morality must govern same-sex couples. "Both heterosexual and homosexual Christians are responsible before God to uphold the same ethical standards," Letha Scanzoni assured readers. Olson criticized groups that rightly accepted the legitimacy of homosexual orientation but "promote and endorse promiscuous, self-serving, free-wheeling sexual behavior." He respected gays and lesbians who "have felt called to celibacy" as a result of "seeking to be open to Scripture and God's Spirit." Yet celibacy reflected a particular calling—one that many heterosexual Christians had also felt, Olson noted—rather than a universal expectation. Likewise, John Alexander wrote, "I can't finally see asking someone to be celibate for life on such flimsy [biblical] evidence." If, as *The Other Side* concluded, the Bible did not conclusively prohibit all homosexual behavior, then committed same-sex unions could parallel heterosexual ones. Olson cited both biblical and experiential evidence for affirming "faithful, loving homosexual relationships." Not only did these unions fail to "violate the teachings of Jesus or any larger biblical principles," but also "gay and lesbian Christians find God at work" in these "faithful, committed relationships." Alexander criticized simplistic arguments that a

³⁵⁸ Olson, "Untangling the Web," 29; John Alexander, "On Defending Homosexual Behavior: Thoughts on exegesis, the self-esteem worldview, and killing with kindness," *The Other Side*, Aug 1984, 6; idem, "What Harm Does It Do?," 31.

homosexual orientation allows one “a right to full sexual expression.” He believed that such logic could justify all forms of sinful sexual activity. Nevertheless, he neither saw “anything wrong with permanent, homosexual relationships” nor thought “homosexuals have any less right to sexual expression than heterosexuals.” *The Other Side* therefore regarded a committed same-sex union as an appropriate analogue to heterosexual marriage.³⁵⁹

As part of its campaign to affirm homosexual Christians, *The Other Side* published in its April 1984 issue an analytic directory of Christian organizations devoted to gay and lesbian issues. Olson accused many “denominations and church traditions” of taking “a harsh, homophobic approach to sexuality.” He therefore applauded the development of specialized organizations that ministered to gays and lesbians. Yet *The Other Side* did not endorse every group that it listed. Some of these organizations are “nothing but disastrous,” Olson warned, and exacerbated the problem by insisting that one “cannot be both gay and Christian.” As a result, the editors intended the guide to steer gays and lesbians to groups that would affirm both their spirituality and sexuality. The six criteria by which the editors judged the groups epitomized *The Other Side*’s priorities: (1) support for full civil rights of gays and lesbians; (2) affirmation of “the acceptability before God” of homosexual orientation; (3) commitment to help people “understand and accept the permanence of sexual orientation;” (4) support and encouragement for “faithful, covenantal relationships;” (5) support and encouragement

³⁵⁹ Scanzoni, “Putting a Face on Homosexuality,” 10; Mark Olson, “Where to Turn: A Guide for Gay and Lesbian Christians,” *The Other Side*, Apr 1984, 16; idem, “Untangling the Web,” 29; Alexander, “What Harm Does It Do?,” 31; idem, “On Defending Homosexual Behavior,” 6-7.

for those called to celibacy; and (6) discouragement of libertine sexual behavior. Reflecting their concern for biblical authority, the editors also noted each organization's "attitude toward Scripture." While groups such as Evangelicals Concerned and the Roman Catholic organization Dignity overwhelmingly met these criteria, others such as the ex-gay organization Exodus International received a positive rating only in guiding people away from illicit sexual activity. Thus, according to Olson, some of the groups appeared "misguided or based on a faulty understanding of homosexuality (or Scripture!)." Nevertheless, he still expressed thanks that "all remind us that it's time for Christ's church to turn toward homosexuals with open arms." Throughout the first half of 1984, *The Other Side* opened its own arms to welcome and affirm gay and lesbian Christians.³⁶⁰

In published letters and solicited responses to a questionnaire, many readers approved of *The Other Side*'s proactive defense of homosexuality. Such writers thanked the magazine for its "serious and empathetic treatment," "excellent articles," and "incredibly enlightening" analysis. One reader testified, "I found myself coming to terms with my own homophobia" just as he struggled to "come to terms with my own racism and sexism." Several self-identified gays and lesbians wrote letters of appreciation, and one encouraged the editors to publish articles that went "beyond arguing morality" and addressed "the positive contributions that gay people can make to the church and society." In February *The Other Side* asked readers to complete a questionnaire on homosexuality. The June issue carried the results. 94% of respondents agreed that "a person can be both gay and a Christian." 78% opposed the claim that a homosexual

³⁶⁰ Olson, "Where to Turn," 16-17.

orientation was inherently sinful, while 72% disagreed that people chose their sexual orientation. Only 17% believed “the New Testament condemns all homosexual behavior—and that’s the standard we should go by today.” With respect to same-sex relationships, 63% affirmed “a loving, long-term, committed relationship” as “a valid option for Christians.” A full 31% of respondents identified themselves as either homosexual (24%), bisexual (3%), or unsure of their sexual orientation (4%). This relatively high percentage may have resulted from the disproportionate participation in the survey by non-heterosexual readers. It may also have indicated that gay and lesbian Christians comprised a disproportionate percentage of *The Other Side*’s readership as a result of the magazine’s welcoming stance. Mark Olson concluded his report on the questionnaire by noting that *The Other Side* had received many “appreciative letters for our articles on homosexuality”—a “gratifying” sign “in light of the storm of protest we’ve gotten on the subject in the past.” While objections may not have seemed like a storm, critical readers nonetheless thundered against the magazine’s position.³⁶¹

Numerous writers rebutted *The Other Side*’s claims concerning both the meaning of homosexual orientation and the Bible’s ambiguity. Although these dissenters were in the minority among respondents to the survey, their protests comprised nearly half of the published letters to the editors. Dale Aukerman, a frequent contributor to *Sojourners*,

³⁶¹ Gary Cate, letter to the editor, *The Other Side*, May 1984, 3; Florence Davis, letter to the editor, *The Other Side*, May 1984, 3; Scott Denlinger, letter to the editor, *The Other Side*, May 1984, 3; Bill Pierce, letter to the editor, *The Other Side*, Apr 1984, 2; Tom Hoey, letter to the editor, *The Other Side*, May 1984, 2; Mark Olson, “A Commitment to Hope, A Commitment to Justice: A look at how readers responded to our questionnaire on homosexuality,” *The Other Side*, Jun 1984, 26-27. Although the magazine received well over five hundred responses to the questionnaire, the editors used only the 446 received by the end of March in order to tabulate and publish the results in the June issue.

chastised Scanzoni for ignoring a recent study by Christian psychiatrists that offered evidence for potential changes in sexual orientation. Other writers testified to success in such transformations. A self-described “former homosexual” serving as “director of an ex-gay ministry” protested that he counseled many Christians who were making tough yet “substantial changes in their sexual identity.” Another reader who had “struggled for over ten years with my homosexual orientation” declared that “Jesus has changed me” over time. Several respondents did not dispute the deeply rooted nature of homosexual orientations but instead compared them to other sinful inclinations. “Homosexual orientation is in the same category as being oriented toward violence and greed,” wrote one critic. Another reader likened his “overeating orientation” to same-sex desire. “Orientation is never a means to justify an act,” he concluded. “We radical evangelicals must work to heal all ungodly orientations—heterosexual [and] homosexual.” Finally, many readers rejected *The Other Side*’s arguments that the biblical texts did not condemn categorically same-sex relationships. “Scripture is clear on prohibiting homosexuality, adultery, and other sexual immoralities—no ifs, ands, or buts,” wrote a frustrated reader. “I don’t know what Bible Mark Olson is reading,” another complained, for “lots of scriptures condemn homosexuality.” *The Other Side*’s affirmation of gay and lesbian Christians alienated readers who remained unconvinced of the legitimacy of homosexuality.³⁶²

³⁶² Dale Aukerman, letter to the editor, *The Other Side*, Apr 1984, 2; Andy Comiskey, letter to editor, *The Other Side*, Apr 1984), 2; Kathy Howdeshell, letter, *The Other Side* Vol. 20 No. 5 (May 1984), 2-3; Jane Tucker, letter to the editor, *The Other Side*, Jul 1984, 3; Charles Earp, letter to the editor, *The Other Side*, Apr 1984, 3; Bill Sloggy, letter to the editor, *The Other Side*, May 1984, 2; Shirley Simms, letter to the editor, *The Other Side*, Jul 1984, 3.

A Divisive Debate

As *The Other Side*'s controversial position evolved in the late 1970s and early 1980s, *Sojourners* struggled to determine its own response. In 1977, contributing editor Donald Dayton first broached the subject of homosexuality in a review of three books that addressed Christian responses to the issue. One of these, *The Church and the Homosexual* by John J. McNeill, argued that God designs some people as homosexual and thus Christians should accept "the existence of an ethically responsible homosexual relationship." Although Dayton did not endorse this argument, he clearly believed that McNeill had mounted a strong case for affirming homosexuality. "This is the book that must be answered by those who would maintain a traditional position," he wrote. Yet *Sojourners* pursued the issue no further, leaving its response to homosexuality still undefined. As with *The Other Side*, however, a reader challenged the perceived insensitivity to gays and lesbians. In a letter published at the beginning of 1978, an anonymous writer identified himself as "an evangelical Christian who is also a homosexual." He appreciated the magazine's work but found its lack of attention to homosexuality disappointing. "Never in my many years of subscribing to *Sojourners*," the reader complained, "have I seen the issue of homosexuality raised in a significant way." He urged the magazine to "take those steps to at least begin to deal with the plight of many of your Christian brothers and sisters." While the choice to print the letter represented a modest acknowledgement of the issue, the editors left the reader's hopes

unfulfilled. They took no discernable steps to address gay and lesbian issues. In fact, the magazine retreated into silence on the subject over the next four years.³⁶³

Sojourners' virtual silence regarding homosexuality prior to 1982 represented a curious decision. The journal had developed a reputation for tackling controversial and pressing social issues. Yet its prophetic pretensions failed to produce a published analysis of homosexuality as a matter of either Christian ethics or public policy. In contrast, the other leading progressive evangelical journal, *The Other Side*, responded to its own readers by producing its controversial 1978 issue welcoming gay and lesbian Christians. Likewise, the most visible magazine of mainstream evangelicalism, *Christianity Today*, named homosexuality its "Issue of the Year" in 1978 and regularly covered gay and lesbian issues.³⁶⁴ Thus the relative absence of coverage within *Sojourners* seemed a glaring omission. In addition, for many years the editors of *Sojourners* overlooked the homophobic features of the political and social agenda of the burgeoning Religious Right even as they decried its perceived sexism, economic injustice, and militarism. At the beginning of 1981, for example, Jim Wallis challenged Christian conservatives to broaden their interpretation of "family values." "Defense of

³⁶³ Donald Dayton, "Reviews," *Sojourners* Jun 1977, 39; [Anonymous], letter to the editor, *Sojourners*, Feb 1978, 39.

³⁶⁴ Tim Stafford, "Issue of the Year," *Christianity Today*, May 5 1978, 36-40. For additional examples of the magazine's coverage of homosexuality in the late 1970s and early 1980s, see also Guy Charles, "Gay Liberation Confronts the Church," *Christianity Today*, Sep 12, 1975; Roger Koskela, "Open Doors to Gays: Grounds for separation?" *Christianity Today*, Mar 12, 1976; "St. Paul Speaks: "No" to gays," *Christianity Today*, May 19, 1978; Robert K. Johnston, "Homosexuality and the Church," *Christianity Today*, Jul 20, 1979, 28-30; "Homosexuality: Biblical guidance through a moral morass," *Christianity Today*, Apr 18, 1980; and Tom Minnery, "Homosexuals Can Change," *Christianity Today*, Feb 6, 1981.

the unborn must be connected” to prevention of “nuclear genocide;” “concern for the family” must extend to families starving as a result of economic injustice; and “support for sexual morality must include support for women in a culture that still exploits them and refuses to grant them equality,” Wallis wrote. Despite the apparent opportunity, Wallis omitted from his latter comment any defense of homosexuals, a group deemed by leaders of the Religious Right as guilty as abortion advocates and feminists for undermining “family values.”³⁶⁵ As with abortion, then, homosexuality appeared to perplex *Sojourners*’ leadership. They struggled to reconcile traditional notions of Christian sexual morality with their instinctual sympathy for marginalized groups and sense of equality.

This commitment to justice finally compelled *Sojourners* to address homosexuality in the summer of 1982. In an editorial entitled “A Matter of Justice,” publisher Joe Roos outlined the magazine’s interpretation of homosexuality as a civil right but religious wrong. Recent attempts by Christian conservatives “to legally deny the civil and political rights of homosexuals in this country” had taken on new significance with the introduction of a Congressional bill entitled the Family Protection Act (FPA). “The Christian Right considers [the FPA] the centerpiece of its political program,” Roos wrote. Its wide-ranging measures included “provisions that would violate the basic civil rights of homosexuals” by preventing them from receiving any federal funds (such as Social Security to student aid) or governmental legal aid if they experienced discrimination based on their sexual orientation. Roos acknowledged the polarization that tended to characterize Christian attitudes. The Christian Right “would

³⁶⁵ Jim Wallis, “Recovering the Evangel,” *Sojourners*, Feb 1981, 5.

deny civil and political rights to homosexuals and exclude them from the life of the church,” while “the gay church movement” regarded “homosexual practice” as “entirely compatible with Christian faith” and deserving of “affirmation.” Yet *Sojourners* rejected both views. “While we do not believe that Scripture condones a homosexual lifestyle,” Roos explained, “we do believe that homosexuals, like anyone else, deserve full human rights” that are not “conditional upon agreement over sexual morality.” Within their own communities, Roos argued, Christians must wrestle with “the biblical teachings and assumption on sexual morality,” the “mysterious nature” of sexual orientation, and the pastoral needs of those “who feel they’ve never had a choice about their homosexuality.” Within “the public arena,” however, he insisted that “the first Christian duty is to love”—an act that need not entail approval but “must always include justice.” And justice, Roos concluded, required Christians to defend the full civil rights of gays and lesbians.³⁶⁶

Thus *Sojourners* welcomed but did not affirm gay and lesbian Christians. According to Roos, they sought a mediating path between “condemning the existence of Christians who are homosexual” and “simply accepting the verdict of a liberal culture that homosexuality is a lifestyle that should be affirmed and celebrated.” Roos attempted to justify *Sojourners*’ previous silence and even to curtail expectations that the journal would explore the legitimacy of same-sex relationships for Christians. “Certainly,” he claimed, the subject of the proper Christian approach to homosexuality “is much more appropriately worked through in pastoral and confidential contexts than debated on the pages of a magazine.”³⁶⁷ Yet the significance of the editorial remained clear as it set the

³⁶⁶ Joe Roos, “A Matter of Justice,” *Sojourners*, Jul-Aug 1982, 6.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

course for *Sojourners'* subsequent coverage of homosexuality. The magazine's leadership rebuffed both the antigay political agenda of Christian conservatives and the increasing endorsement of homosexuality within secular society and more liberal religious communities.

Published responses from *Sojourners'* readers ranged from indignation to appreciation. Two letters suggested that the editorial had been too lenient toward gays and lesbians. "If murderers and thieves, once convicted, must surrender their rights because of their lifestyle," one writer asked, "should not homosexuals also be denied certain privileges?" Other readers had the opposite reaction. Two self-identified homosexuals castigated *Sojourners* for its failure to affirm gay and lesbian Christians. "If your faith assumptions pronounce my sexuality 'sin,' you oppress me," one wrote bluntly. Another writer expressed incredulity that the editors had "so shallowly dismissed serious research which challenges the old view that homosexual acts are automatically anti-biblical." In particular, he regarded *Sojourners'* defense of biblical feminism and its rejection of homosexuality as inconsistent. "You have not hesitated to criticize literal interpretations of anti-woman scriptures on the basis of their cultural bias," he argued. "Why is homosexuality unworthy of such analysis?" Yet not all homosexual readers had such a negative response. Two letters from gay men expressed respect for *Sojourners'* position while dissenting from the editors' conclusion. "At long last, *Sojourners* has spoken on the gay issue—with a depth and sensitivity that one has to come to associate with the journal," one wrote. The other regarded the editorial as "thoughtful" and "responsible," but his own same-sex "loving relationship" left him no

doubt that “such relationships can be God-ordained and God-blessed.” Finally, several readers appreciated the editors’ mediating position that affirmed “the Bible’s clear teaching on this particular sin” but rejected “the destructiveness of hate.” “You have pointed out that we can both love homosexuals by not denying them basic rights,” one claimed, “and yet help them overcome their sin without condoning it.” As *The Other Side* had learned, no consensus regarding homosexuality existed among readers of progressive evangelical journals.³⁶⁸

In the aftermath of this editorial, *Sojourners* reverted to silence regarding homosexuality for another three years. The magazine appeared to take seriously the conviction stated by Roos that magazines failed to offer fruitful contexts for weighing Christian responses to homosexuality. Yet not only conviction but also confusion contributed to this neglect. As the editors confessed when they finally returned to the subject in 1985, “We have found the issue of homosexuality a difficult and complex one.” In particular, their empathetic relationships with gays and lesbians made them hesitant to issue definitive statements. “Many of us have friends and family who are homosexuals, some of whom deeply struggle with their homosexuality,” wrote the editors. “We struggle with them.” Despite professed “love” for these friends, *Sojourners’* leadership remained convinced that “a clear biblical word” did “not condone homosexual practice.” They again rejected the dichotomous positions that “plagued” Christian discourse on the issue. Opponents “condemn homosexuality and attempt to

³⁶⁸ George Barnes, letter to the editor, *Sojourners* Sep 1982, 41; F. Jay Deacon, letter to the editor, *Sojourners* Sep 1982, 40; Bradley Rymph, letter to the editor, *Sojourners*, Sep 1982, 41; James A. Kennedy, letter to the editor, *Sojourners* Sep 1982, 40; Gordon L. Myers, letter to the editor, *Sojourners* Sep 1982, 40; Darrel J. Hartwick, letter to the editor, *Sojourners* Sep 1982, 40.

deny them their God-given humanity and their civil rights,” the editors noted, while advocates “celebrate a homosexual lifestyle as entirely consistent with God’s intentions for sexual expression.” Polarized debates on abortion had contributed to *Sojourners*’ prolonged silence following the magazine’s 1980 defense of the compatibility of opposition to abortion and feminism. Likewise, uncertainty regarding the best way to articulate their mediating position on homosexuality caused the editors to wrestle “over what we might say in these pages.” In fact, they acknowledged, lingering “disagreement among our staff” remained. By July 1985, however, *Sojourners* decided they could not continue to avoid the ongoing debates among Christians concerning homosexuality.³⁶⁹

An article by Richard Foster served as the medium for *Sojourners*’ theological response to homosexuality. Foster had become a popular author among evangelicals for his 1978 *The Celebration of Discipline*, which *Christianity Today* named in 2000 as one of the “ten best religious books of the twentieth century.” His article—an excerpt from a forthcoming book entitled *Money, Sex and Power*—explored both “the joy and the responsibility of sexual expression” for Christians. The editors believed that Foster’s analysis appropriately celebrated sexuality as part of “God’s good creation.” Yet he also rejected “the sexual exploitation of a society that encourages sexual freedom without responsibility” in deference to the biblical mandates of “mutuality, fidelity, and discipline.” The final section of the article discussed homosexuality. Thus *Sojourners* endorsed Foster’s belief that a theological evaluation of same-sex desire must fit within the larger framework of Christian sexual ethics. In introducing the article, the editors described Foster’s treatment as “a clear word offered with sensitivity and compassion.”

³⁶⁹ “In This Issue,” *Sojourners*, Jul 1985, 2.

They recognized that its moderate conclusions would likely receive criticism from both “those who take a more condemnatory approach to homosexuals” and “those who have a more liberal perspective.” Nevertheless, the editors published the article with hopes that it would prove “helpful to the dialogue around this difficult and sensitive issue.” Their optimism would fade quickly.³⁷⁰

Foster attempted to construct a sympathetic but firm argument against Christian affirmation of homosexual practice. Although “genuinely wish[ing]” to avoid the subject, he believed that the potential to offer “helpful” and “healing” words on a painful topic compelled his analysis. To begin, Foster insisted, *all* people “wounded” in “so volatile a matter” needed to hear words of compassion: “homosexual persons who have been discriminated against and persecuted;” conservative Christians who felt “betrayed by denominations that want to legislate homosexuality into church life;” and “those who agonize over their own sexual identity” but felt confused by the “ambiguity” of the church’s response. But after this compassion, Foster maintained that biblical guidance must govern Christian responses. “The Bible is quite clear and straightforward,” he wrote. “From beginning to end it views heterosexual union as God’s intention for sexuality and sees homosexuality as a distortion of this God-given pattern.” Foster claimed familiarity with recent reinterpretations and “sophisticated” hermeneutical efforts that reached an alternative conclusion, but he did not “find them compelling.” To be sure, he admitted, one could feasibly argue that biblical authors understood neither homosexual orientation nor covenantal same-sex relationships. “But it is not really possible to say that the Bible is ambiguous about this matter,” Foster wrote, for

³⁷⁰ Ibid.; “Books of the Century,” *Christianity Today*, Apr 24, 2000, 92.

“homosexuality is rejected as ‘unnatural’ and a departure from God’s intention.” Even so, belief in the Bible’s clarity did not lead Foster to deduce that homosexual orientation was “self-chosen.” He accepted social scientific evidence that a small percentage of the population—“constitutional homosexuals”—had “a confirmed sexual drive toward persons of their own sex.” Yet Foster compared this homosexual orientation to “clubfootedness”—a distinctly different analogy than the metaphor of left-handedness suggested by Virginia Mollenkott and Letha Scanzoni. Left-handedness denoted difference. A clubfoot, like homosexuality, represented a “distortion of God’s intention” that Foster believed deserved empathy rather than condemnation from Christians.³⁷¹

Even if homosexuals do not choose their orientation, Foster argued, they remain responsible for their actions. He outlined three “basic options” for gays and lesbians: change their orientation, control their orientation, or practice their orientation. Foster admitted the ambiguity of the evidence regarding the possibility for constitutional homosexuals to develop a heterosexual orientation. Although he wanted “to avoid a naïve optimism,” he insisted on retaining “hope of genuine permanent change.” If and when such transformation did not occur, Foster suggested that gays and lesbians could “control homosexual behavior” by choosing “celibacy as the route of moral integrity.” Finally, homosexuals had the option of engaging in same-sex practice. Foster made clear that Christians should reject this third choice: “The practice of homosexuality is sin.” Yet he refused to harbor any illusions that identifying homosexual activity as sinful would allow Christians simply to “close the discussion” and “wash our hands of the matter.” Indeed, Foster argued, “We live in a catastrophically fallen world,” and “sin’s

³⁷¹ Richard Foster, “God’s Gift of Sexuality,” *Sojourners*, Jul 1985, 18-19.

distortions can at times entangle us in tragic ways.” As a result, humans often fall short of God’s ideals and “engage in an activity that is less than best.” Foster therefore sought to proclaim both truth and grace to gays and lesbians. “The Christian community cannot give permission to practice homosexuality to those who feel unable to change their orientation or to embrace celibacy,” he wrote. “Neither can we cut off the person who has made” a “tragic moral choice” to enter a same-sex relationship. He called on readers to stand with such persons, “always ready to help” and “always ready to bring God’s acceptance and forgiveness.” Through Foster’s analysis, *Sojourners* reaffirmed its commitment to welcome homosexual persons but to reject homosexual practice.³⁷²

In published reactions, many readers regarded Foster’s article as hurtful rather than helpful. In both the October and November issues of *Sojourners*, objections outnumbered supportive letters three to one. Once again, several self-identified homosexuals criticized the magazine’s arguments and appealed to their own experiences. “It is your blindness and arrogance and refusal to accept our homosexuality that causes so much suffering,” one reader insisted. “I have no doubt that God blesses my lesbian relationship and is present in our love for one another.” Another lesbian felt “betrayed” by *Sojourners’* publication of the article. “It is incredibly presumptuous,” she wrote, “for one human being to categorize the sexuality of another as a ‘distortion of God’s intent.’” A gay reader found little difference between the responses of *Sojourners* and the Christian Right. “In an unlikely alliance with the likes of the Moral Majority and conservative church hierarchs,” he claimed, “*Sojourners* preaches that homosexuality is both sick and sinful, if not downright disgusting, and that to earn your non-

³⁷² Ibid.

condescending respect we had better straighten up.” Particularly for gay and lesbian readers, the manifest opposition to same-sex activity appeared to obscure the subtleties of Foster’s argument and *Sojourners*’ efforts to distance its position from that of the Christian Right.³⁷³ By choosing to print a predominance of critical letters, *Sojourners* sought to cultivate an image of itself as an open forum in which Christians wrestled with issues of biblical truth and justice. They refused to make one’s stance on homosexuality a test of faith.

The most significant protest came from a group comprised largely of non-evangelical leaders who supported *Sojourners*’ comprehensive commitment to justice. Among those jointly signing a critical response were Daniel Berrigan, a prominent Catholic peace activist and contributing editor of *Sojourners*; William Sloane Coffin, Jr., senior minister of Riverside Church in New York and celebrated social justice advocate; Walter Wink, a theologian at Auburn Seminary who had written several articles for *Sojourners*; and Virginia Mollenkott, co-author of *Is the Homosexual My Neighbor?*³⁷⁴ In a lengthy letter, the group expressed its disagreement “with the uninformed and patronizing treatment of homosexuality” in Foster’s article. First, they challenged the relevance of biblical condemnations of homosexuality. “The whole tenor of the Bible” also sanctions slavery and patriarchy, they argued, yet neither now seemed “biblically justified.” They implied that biblical prohibitions of same-sex activity should similarly

³⁷³ “Name Withheld,” letter, *Sojourners* Oct 1985, 48; Susan M. North, letter to the editor, *Sojourners* Oct 1985, 48; Larry Cohen, letter to the editor, *Sojourners* Oct 1985, 48.

³⁷⁴ The additional signers included Morton Kelsey, an emeritus professor at Notre Dame University; James B. Nelson, professor of Christian ethics at United Theological Seminary; and Robert Raines, director of Kirkridge Retreat and Study Center.

yield to a progressive understanding of God's will. "The Spirit has been and is leading us into new truth (John 16:12-13) and teaching us that what we once thought unacceptable is now clearly acceptable to God (Acts 10)." The group also denounced Foster's comparison of homosexuality to a clubfoot as "a gross analogy." Instead, they proposed the more apt metaphor of "a left-handed person in a right-handed culture." Finally, the authors appealed to "the reality of deep and abiding love between two gay persons" as evidence that God also intended homosexuals to express their particular "gift of sexuality." To these authors, affirmation of homosexuality represented a basic "question of justice." They concluded by urging *Sojourners* "to invite gay and lesbian scholars and theologians to speak for themselves in your pages" in order to create "a genuine dialogue on this matter." The group closed its letter "In love and friendship," but such sentiments did not mask their disillusionment with *Sojourners'* stance.³⁷⁵

Sojourners responded to these criticisms by reiterating their commitment to "the traditional biblical view" of homosexual practice as unacceptable for Christians. For their larger constituency, the editors published a response from Foster alongside critical letters from readers. He expressed gratitude that "such a large number of people" engaged themselves in "matters of tremendous importance for Christians today." Nevertheless, Foster stated again that his commitment to biblical authority compelled his rejection of homosexual activity. "I cannot endorse a homosexual lifestyle because I do not believe it squares with the witness we are given in the Bible and supremely in Jesus Christ," he wrote. As in his original article, he acknowledged that "respected thinkers"

³⁷⁵ Daniel Berrigan; William Sloane Coffin, Jr.; Morton Kelsey; Virginia Mollenkott; James B. Nelson; Robert Raines; and Walter Wink, letter to the editor, *Sojourners*, Oct 1985, 48.

had reached “quite different conclusions.” Foster even encouraged readers to familiarize themselves with works that affirmed homosexuality such as Mollenkott’s *Is the Homosexual My Neighbor?* “Although I have not found these compelling,” he clarified, “I do very much want to learn from their concern.” Foster concluded with regret that many readers criticized *Sojourners* so strongly. “*Sojourners* is one of the few magazines that seriously seeks to integrate the life of devotion with the demands of justice,” he asserted. While Foster offered this public response, Jim Wallis wrote privately to Berrigan and his co-signers. “In hindsight,” Wallis confessed, “the strong controversy generated by the publicity of the Foster article” confirmed that “the questions involved deserved more attention and discernment.” He also agreed that “some of Foster’s language and analogies proved unnecessarily hurtful, contrary both to his intentions and ours.” But Wallis refused to retract the magazine’s endorsement of Foster’s intent: “to take a traditional biblical view” but remain “deeply empathetic and pastorally sensitive.” *Sojourners* did not modify its original stance on homosexuality, but the intensity of this criticism from ecumenical Christian supporters clearly shaped the magazine’s subsequent coverage.³⁷⁶

In addition to *Sojourners*’ self-defense, sympathetic readers offered their support. A pre-marital counselor described his “deep appreciation” for how “Foster has beautifully and comprehensively spelled out the Christian concept of sex.” Another reader concurred and identified the particularly beneficial nature of Foster’s “compassionate and illuminating discussion of homosexuality.” In December, the editors

³⁷⁶ Richard Foster, [response], *Sojourners*, Oct 1985, 48; Jim Wallis, letter to Berrigan, et al., Aug 2, 1985 (Sojourners collection, Wheaton College Archives: Wheaton, IL).

printed three letters responding to the preponderance of criticism published two months earlier. Each author defended Foster and *Sojourners* on the same grounds: fidelity to the Bible. “It is saddening to me that the overwhelming response seems to be negative,” stated one writer, “and that the criticism for the most part does not deal with the question, ‘What is biblical?’” Like Foster, he could find “no compelling evidence that the Bible portrays God as condoning homosexual practice.” “My heart and support go out to Foster,” wrote another reader, for critics were rebuking him “unjustly for his opinions when he is being faithful to scripture.” Finally, a third respondent objected to both the tone and the content of the critical letter from Berrigan, Mollenkott, and others. “Why is it that such ‘open-minded’ Christians” resorted to characterizing Foster as “uninformed and ignorant” because he did not “share their acceptance of homosexual behavior?” he asked. The author refused to give testimonies of “true love” in same-sex relationships equal evidential weight with what he regarded as clear biblical teachings. “The Bible only provides for sexual intimacy between a man and a woman who have committed to each other as wife and husband,” he argued. As the debates within the pages of both *The Other Side* and *Sojourners* revealed, those within the progressive evangelical network who interpreted biblical bans on same-sex behavior as relevant, clear, and uniquely authoritative refused to affirm homosexuality as legitimate for Christians.³⁷⁷

³⁷⁷ Donald R. Lewis, letter to the editor, *Sojourners*, Oct 1985, 49; John MacDougall, letter to the editor, *Sojourners*, Nov 1985, 49; Ray Shiffer, letter to the editor, *Sojourners*, Dec 1985, 52; Charles K. Towner, letter to the editor, *Sojourners*, Dec 1985, 53; C. S. Kirkendall, letter to the editor, *Sojourners*, Dec 1985, 53.

Defending Heterosexual Marriage

The leadership of Evangelicals for Social Action (ESA) fell into this category. Led by Ron Sider, ESA defended traditional Christian injunctions against homosexual practice while simultaneously supporting the civil rights of gays and lesbians. In contrast to the leading progressive evangelical journals, ESA's early references to homosexuality emerged in the context of stated concern for traditional families. In 1980 ESA printed a tract to help Christians address the question, "Can my vote be biblical?" The authors listed "the family is a divinely-willed institution" as a "basic biblical principle" that should guide voting. As a result, they firmly rejected any usurpation by the state of familial responsibilities such as childrearing. ESA also stressed the heterosexual norms of family life: "It is God's will for one man and one woman to live together in a life-long commitment." They encouraged legislation such as tax rates that would foster "the biblical understanding of marriage, family and sexuality." Although they took for granted the sinfulness of same-sex practice, ESA's leaders opposed public policies that would discriminate against gays and lesbians. "Homosexual sinners, like adulterous sinners, have inalienable civil rights (e.g. jobs and housing)," argued the authors. Yet ESA appeared conflicted. They objected to discriminatory policies that would punish homosexuals, but they also seemed to fear the creation of policies under which gay and lesbian couples received the same positive benefits as heterosexual spouses. "Legislation and public funds should not promote sinful lifestyles," they insisted. Like leaders of the Christian Right in the early 1980s, ESA advocated policies favorable to traditional

families. Yet they distinguished themselves by both opposing any attempt to restrict the civil rights of gays and lesbians and refraining from antigay rhetoric.³⁷⁸

A survey distributed at the end of 1983 indicated that ESA's members overwhelmingly approved of this strategy. 88% of respondents agreed that "basic civil rights, i.e. housing and medical care, etc., should be available to all persons regardless of sexual orientation." An even greater number—93%—affirmed that "a strong family is the basis of a strong society." Thus ESA's constituency felt little if any tension between supporting equal rights for gays and lesbians and ensuring the welfare of families. In other words, defending the importance of traditional families did not require restricting the rights of homosexuals. To be sure, ESA clearly believed that permanent heterosexual marriages remained central to ideal families, and thus the government should create policies conducive to such relationships. "We support all strategies and agencies that strengthen the family and support the view that marriage is a life-long covenant between one man and one woman," ESA's Board of Directors reiterated in 1984. Nevertheless, ESA's pronouncements on the family in the early 1980s never suggested regulations against gays and lesbians should serve as positive means for "strengthening the family."³⁷⁹

Ron Sider, chairperson of ESA, did not sit idly in the mid-1980s as debates over homosexuality occurred within the primary progressive evangelical journals. Not only did Sider serve as a contributing editor for both *The Other Side* and *Sojourners*, but he

³⁷⁸ "Can My Vote Be Biblical?," re-printed in *ESA Update*, Sep-Oct 1984, 4.

³⁷⁹ "ESA Member Survey Results," *ESA Update*, Jan-Feb 1984, 4; "Here We Stand: A reaffirmation of ESA's commitments," *ESA Update*, Sep-Oct 1984, 2.

also had become one of the most recognizable and respected progressive evangelical leaders. Thus when Sider wrote letters to each magazine in response to their respective stands on homosexuality, both published his opinions. ESA's previous characterization of same-sex acts as "sinful" foreshadowed Sider's reactions. "I must tell you how deeply disappointed I am," he told *The Other Side* concerning their affirmation of homosexuality in 1984. He did not dispute that many Christians "exhibited a harsh homophobia that failed to be loving of those with a homosexual orientation." Neither did he disagree "that the civil rights of gay folk should be defended." But Sider took strong exception to *The Other Side*'s arguments that the Bible did not clearly condemn same-sex behavior. "I cannot agree that Scripture is ambiguous," he insisted. In addition to examples of "infrequent prohibition," Sider emphasized that "the primary biblical case against practicing homosexuality" resulted from "the constant positive assertion throughout the entire Bible that God's will for human sexuality is a man and a woman in life-long covenant." A year later, Sider predictably commended *Sojourners* for publishing Richard Foster's article that employed the same argument. "Thank you," he wrote, "for having the courage to take a gentle and sensitive but also forthright biblical stand on practicing homosexuality." Once again, Sider acknowledged "we must repent of homophobia and insist on civil rights for all." But, once again, he argued that adherence to scriptural guidelines compelled this stance. "If we are to be biblical," Sider claimed, "we must gently yet firmly say no as Foster does to homosexual practice." Thus Sider shared with *Sojourners* a sense of both biblical clarity and authority that shaped their mutual resistance to affirming homosexuality.³⁸⁰

³⁸⁰ Ronald J. Sider, letter to the editor, *The Other Side*, Jul 1984, 2; idem, letter to the

Working with the organization's staff, Sider outlined ESA's welcoming but not affirming position in his 1987 work *Completely Pro-Life*. He believed that a consistent pro-life agenda included not only opposition to abortion but also support for economic justice, peacemaking, and healthy and stable families. In treating the latter subject, Sider reviewed the possible legitimacy of "a committed gay relationship" or "a gay marriage." He first repeated his avowal that "Christians must certainly repent of their homophobic past," for homosexual sin proved no more egregious than heterosexual sins such as adultery. Sider also explicitly distinguished between a morally neutral homosexual orientation and homosexual practice that "is contrary to God's will." He therefore urged Christians "to love, support and welcome in the church" those with a homosexual orientation who sought to remain celibate. "We must also weep and pray," Sider continued, "with those who fail and repent." But to condone homosexual practice in his view required following "current fashion" rather than "biblical revelation." Sider briefly reviewed several "clear" and "explicit prohibitions" against same-sex behavior. In particular, he believed, "it requires considerable exegetical gymnastics to argue plausibly" that Rom. 1:26-27 "does not exclude all homosexual practice." In a footnote, he listed Letha Scanzoni and Virginia Mollenkott's *Is the Homosexual My Neighbor?* as an example of "the special pleading of some recent pro-gay exegesis." Ultimately, Sider again maintained, homosexual behavior contravened "the constant, pervasive biblical teaching that sex is a gift intended only for the committed relationship of a man and a

editor, *Sojourners*, Oct 1985, 49.

woman in lifelong covenant.” Thus Sider framed the issue of homosexuality as an aberration of God’s ideal of heterosexual, covenantal marriages.³⁸¹

Sider also described more clearly his recommendations regarding homosexuality and public policy. He devoted an entire chapter to exploring the positive ways in which the government could promote and protect the norm of heterosexual nuclear families. One primary means entailed resistance to revisions in “the historic legal definitions of marriage and family.” Sider believed that “broader definitions of marriage and the family” sent “a troublesome moral lesson to the public.” From an ethical perspective, he argued that offering legal recognition—and thus attendant financial and other types of benefits—to marriages and families other than traditional ones would suggest their moral equivalence. From a practical perspective, Sider claimed that such recognition would further destabilize nuclear families and exacerbate troubling social trends. Governmental “policy should work with the assumption,” he wrote, that non-traditional families “are not in the best interests of society” and are not “equally valid moral options.” Yet Sider sought to draw a fine line between promoting traditional families and punishing deviations such as same-sex couples. He rejected “criminal laws against adultery, fornication, or homosexual practices between consenting adults conducted in private.” In “a pluralistic society,” Sider stated, “people should be free to make many foolish choices” if “they do not harm nonconsenting third parties.” Likewise, “homosexual sinners” should have secure civil rights “coextensive with the rights of all other sinners.” But Sider wanted to guard against public policies that promoted rather than merely

³⁸¹ Ronald J. Sider, *Completely Pro-Life: Building a Consistent Stance* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 114-115.

permitted homosexual behavior. “Government need not and should not allow itself to be used in campaigns to legitimize such practices.” Thus Sider and ESA showed more willingness than *Sojourners* to reinforce heterosexual norms through public policy. They did not believe that withholding benefits and legal recognition offered to heterosexual families violated the civil rights of gays and lesbians.³⁸²

By the mid-1980s, then, progressive evangelical leaders concurred on the civil rights of gays and lesbians but disagreed on the appropriate Christian response to homosexual behavior. *The Other Side*, *Sojourners*, and ESA repudiated the antigay political agenda often endorsed by the Christian Right. They also acknowledged that gays and lesbians did not merely choose their attraction to people of the same sex but possessed an ingrained, often permanent homosexual orientation. As a result, none believed that “homosexual Christian” represented an oxymoron, and they all declared that Christians must welcome and minister to gays and lesbians. Yet the question of the legitimacy of homosexual practice divided progressive evangelical leaders. *The Other Side* concluded that biblical interpretations failed to yield unambiguous grounds for rejecting faithful same-sex relationships. In turn, social scientific evidence and the testimonies of gay and lesbian Christians proved influential in persuading the editors to affirm and to embrace homosexuality. Neither *Sojourners* nor ESA agreed. Both groups upheld traditional interpretations of the Bible that they regarded as definitively precluding their approval of homosexual practice. Over the coming years, this disagreement would increasingly distance *The Other Side* from the broader progressive evangelical movement.

³⁸² Ibid., 132-133.

The Response to AIDS

Progressive evangelical leaders responded empathetically to the devastating effects of AIDS on homosexuals. *Sojourners* offered an early and paradigmatic response. In early 1986 associate editor Danny Collum lamented that the intensifying “public spotlight on AIDS” had created “a wave of panic and bigotry.” He blamed the “AIDS hysteria” in part on the identity of most victims—male homosexuals. In the best of times, Collum wrote, gays and lesbians “are victims of social discrimination, legal persecution, and violence.” The popular association between AIDS and homosexuality now made many fear that “a witch hunt” would further erode their civil liberties. Collum regarded these fears as justified, for Christian Right leaders flamed an “incipient holy war by claiming that AIDS is God’s punishment for sexual immorality.” But he insisted that theological differences concerning same-sex practices must not undermine commitments to care for the sick and to defend fundamental human rights. “Increasingly,” Collum concluded, “issues of compassion and justice are the ones being raised by the AIDS crisis.” A year later, Jim Wallis echoed this appeal. “Ignorance and fear” were becoming “as dangerous as the disease itself,” he wrote. Wallis notably avoided associating AIDS and homosexuality. He mentioned only that the confusion of “moral questions and health issues” contributed to a lack of political and educational resources committed to the crisis. Without easy answers or a foreseeable cure, Wallis argued that Christians must respond to those suffering with AIDS as Jesus would—with compassion. In 1990, *Sojourners* devoted two more articles to AIDS. Each called for Christians to reject the

“homophobia” that had slowed or even prevented a loving response. “The call of Christ summons us to compassion, not judgment, for those who suffer with AIDS,” wrote Calvin Morris. *Sojourners* condemned insinuations that homosexuals deserved AIDS and urged greater efforts to search for a cure and to care for its victims.³⁸³

With *The Other Side*’s unreserved affirmation of gay and lesbian Christians, AIDS proved an especially poignant subject. In 1987 the journal examined both the tragic consequences and theological concerns created by the disease. Mary Beth Danielson related the story of her friendship with a gay man who died from AIDS. His suffering taught her lessons about the frailty of life and God’s promise of love in the midst of tragedy. John Fortunato offered a theological reflection on AIDS from a gay perspective. “It always seems to be the oppressed who must lead the church and society toward whatever revelation they must embrace next,” he argued. Perhaps God intended, Fortunato suggested, to use gays and lesbians to remind the world of “the holy truth of mortality.” If “our journey with AIDS” refocused people on “the resurrection hope,” he claimed, then “perhaps we will glimpse the meaning of AIDS for our spiritual journeys.” Fortunato insisted that Christians must “stop trying to blame the victim” and instead offer to love and to serve those suffering. In 1988, *The Other Side* profiled a ministry to people with AIDS that sought to counteract the hostility many gays and lesbians experienced from Christians. A year later John Alexander addressed such lack of

³⁸³ Danny Collum, “Addressing the AIDS Crisis, *Sojourners*, Feb 1986, 6; Jim Wallis, “AIDS: The Need for Compassion,” *Sojourners*, Nov 1986, 6; Calvin Morris, “AIDS: Does the Church Care?” *Sojourners*, May 1990, 20. See also Joyce Hollyday, “A Deeper Response to AIDS, *Sojourners*, Feb 1990; idem, “At Home in Joseph’s House,” *Sojourners*, May 1992; and Joe Nangle, “The AIDS Pandemic: Challenge to the Church, *Sojourners*, Jun 1992.

compassion in a column. In response to suggestions “that AIDS was a scourge sent by God so that evil people would die in well-deserved ways,” Alexander reminded readers that God offered not only justice but also grace. To be sure, he warned against “cheap grace” that condoned sexual promiscuity. Nevertheless, he acknowledged that “society’s harshness toward homosexuality” drove gays and lesbians “underground and made widespread promiscuity—and consequently the spread of the disease—among gays predictable.” *The Other Side* culminated its sympathetic treatment with a 1990 article by an AIDS victim who told readers that their love and simple presence could assuage the pain of living with AIDS.³⁸⁴

While continuing to differ with *The Other Side* regarding homosexual practice, ESA likewise defended the dignity and rights of AIDS victims. A 1987 article by Ron Sider—published in both ESA’s *Update* newsletter and the *Christian Century*—outlined what he identified as “an evangelical perspective on AIDS.” He began with the premise that AIDS victims possess “inestimable worth” as persons “indelibly stamped with the divine image.” Regardless of their frailty, marginalized status, or even immoral choices, people with AIDS “are persons enjoying the full sanctity of human life.” Sider chided Christian conservatives who so vigorously defended unborn children but failed to show the same concern for people with AIDS. “Precisely the people who speak most often about the sanctity of life should have been the first to champion” the right “to adequate

³⁸⁴ Mary Beth Danielson, “Transfiguration,” *The Other Side*, Dec 1987, 12-13; John Fortunato, “Mortal Journey: The Spiritual Challenge of AIDS,” *The Other Side*, Dec 1987, 14-15; Robert Hirschfield, “Out of the Palace: Bill McNichol’s Ministry Confronts AIDS,” *The Other Side*, Apr 1988, 10-11; John Alexander, “Cheap Grace and AIDS: Giving Promiscuity its True Name,” *The Other Side*, Mar-Apr 1989, 48-49; Terry Boyd, “Sunflowers in Small Places,” *The Other Side*, May-Jun 1990, 44-46.

health care rather than lobbying against government expenditure for AIDS research.” Sider rejected both the “prejudicial untruth” that AIDS is “a homosexual disease” and arguments that “God created AIDS as a special divine punishment for the sin of homosexual practice.” Nevertheless, Sider did assert the immorality of same-sex behavior and his conviction that *all* sins have consequences. Like John Alexander in a subsequent issue of *The Other Side*, he decried promiscuous practices and drug use by which AIDS often spread. (With respect to the consequences of sin, Sider repeated a quip that “if AIDS is divine punishment, then surely the people who bring us economic oppression, environmental pollution and devastating wars should at least get herpes.”) Ultimately, Sider urged Christians to build compassionate ministries, to reject homophobia, and to “err on the side of spending more resources rather than less” on the “weak and marginalized.” While ESA addressed AIDS less frequently than *Sojourners* and *The Other Side*, its leaders attempted to show the same compassion for victims, regardless of their sexuality.³⁸⁵

Conclusion

The different responses to homosexuality marked the most visible fracture in the progressive evangelical movement. In the late 1980s, *The Other Side* increasingly made the affirmation of gay and lesbian Christians a central focus of its calls to justice. In 1985 the magazine hired John Linscheid as an associate editor. After coming out as gay, Linscheid had been forced from his pastoral position at Lawrence (KS) Mennonite

³⁸⁵ Ronald J. Sider, “An Evangelical Perspective on AIDS,” *ESA Update*, Jan 1988, 1-6. See also idem, “AIDS: An Evangelical Perspective,” *The Christian Century*, Jan 6, 1988, 11-14.

Fellowship.³⁸⁶ His addition to *The Other Side*'s staff represented both a symbolic and substantive expansion of the magazine's affirmation of homosexuality. In particular, Linscheid introduced a gay-centered interpretation of the Bible.³⁸⁷ *Sojourners* largely avoided discussing the legitimacy of homosexuality and instead published regular articles in support of gay and lesbian civil rights.³⁸⁸ When it did address homosexuality as a matter of Christian ethics, the magazine adopted the same approach as it had taken with abortion. Although the editors did not repudiate its welcoming but not affirming position, they committed *Sojourners* to the goal of fostering dialogue for those who disagreed about the acceptability of same-sex behavior for Christians.³⁸⁹ ESA continued its affirmation of gay civil rights while simultaneously arguing for exclusive marriage benefits for heterosexual relationships. Different interpretations of the Bible remained at the root of these different responses. Unconvinced that the Bible sanctioned same-sex relationships, *Sojourners* and ESA refused to extend the meaning of justice from the public sphere into private religious communities.

³⁸⁶ John Linscheid, "Prophets in Our Midst," *The Other Side*, Jan-Feb 1991, 50-54.

³⁸⁷ See, for example, John Linscheid, "Our Story is God's Story: Reading the Bible with Gay Eyes," *The Other Side*, (Jul-Aug 1987), and idem., "A Thousand Trains to Heaven: Why I Love the Gospel of John," *The Other Side*, (Sep-Oct 1993).

³⁸⁸ Jim Rice, "Saying No to Bigotry," *Sojourners*, (Feb-Mar 1993); idem, "Gay Christians March for Rights," *Sojourners*, (Jul 1993); idem, "When Dignity is Assaulted," *Sojourners*, (Feb-Mar 1994).

³⁸⁹ For example, see "The Need for a Better Dialogue: A Forum on Gay and Lesbian Sexuality," *Sojourners*, (Jul 1991).

Conclusion: A Public Theology of Community

We must challenge the church to realize that our social responsibility does not come out of the political or economic times but out of scripture—the mandate we have to do justice. We need to do justice constantly. We don't do justice because it's good politics. We don't do justice because it's good economics. We do justice because we are followers of Jesus Christ.

— Bill Kallio, Executive Director of Evangelicals for Social Action (1983)³⁹⁰

At the beginning of 1980, John Alexander pondered which social problems deserved the most attention over the next decade. Regular readers of *The Other Side* recognized his responses as favorite causes promoted by the magazine: ending racial discrimination, opposing sexism, guaranteeing human rights, addressing Third World poverty, and nuclear disarmament. Defense of “family values”—the mantra of the emerging Christian Right—did not appear on the list. Alexander asserted that the inequalities and injustices that he named shared the same root cause. “Humans dislike those who are different,” he wrote, “especially if they are weak.” An attitude of superiority creates the desire to control and to exploit other people, Alexander believed, and in turn this desire manifested itself in racism, male chauvinism, slavery, and war. Eight years earlier, at the height of national debates surrounding both desegregation through school busing and the war in Vietnam, Alexander had urged his evangelical audience to embrace a politics that gave as much priority to their neighbors' welfare as to their own. “We must be concerned with black schoolchildren, Vietnamese peasants,

³⁹⁰ “Frank Talk About ESA: An Interview with Bill Kallio,” *ESA Update*, Jan-Feb 1983, 5.

Midwestern farmers, and Russian proletariat as much as with people like us,” he argued in *The Other Side*. Despite the obvious differences between these diverse people and white American evangelicals, Alexander regarded them all as “neighbors” effectively joined in community. Communal bonds transcend individual differences, he claimed, and obligate Christians to support political agendas that benefit one’s neighbor as much as oneself.³⁹¹

The question of “Who is my neighbor” and the implications of its answer have resounded within the Christian tradition since circulation of the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). As John Alexander suggested, progressive evangelical leaders understood the scope of their neighborly relationships broadly. Endorsers of the 1973 “Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern” acknowledged the existence of “a billion hungry neighbors,” and representatives of the movement consistently echoed this comprehensive interpretation. They believed that both local and extended communities linked all people as neighbors, regardless of differences in race, sex, class, and national identity. In articulating their political priorities, therefore, progressive evangelical leaders adopted the images and rhetoric of community as the context for identifying neighbors and how to treat them. Through both words and actions, they constructed a public theology of community that prioritized the ideals of social justice.

As activists, progressive evangelical leaders spent more time analyzing perceived injustices than producing systematic political philosophies. Theories of public theology did not necessarily precede practice but more often took shape in the midst of activism.

³⁹¹ John Alexander, “Corporate Power and Our Priorities for the Eighties,” *The Other Side*, Jan 1980, 10; *ibid.*, “A Politics of Love,” *The Other Side*, Jul-Aug 1972, 3.

Nevertheless, authors in *Sojourners*, *The Other Side*, and ESA's publications regularly appealed to a core set of theological principles that inspired their progressive pursuits. In addition, several leaders in the movement—including the two most prominent representatives, Ron Sider and Jim Wallis—did publish explicit, sustained analyses of the biblical themes and interpretations that shaped their public engagement. Taken together, these writings outline a public theology of community that characterized the contemporary progressive evangelical movement.

Constructing a Public Theology of Community

The appeal of progressive evangelicals to community reflected two fundamental convictions. First, they insisted that God endows each individual with essential sanctity, equality, and rights. As a result, leaders argued that social conditions and public policies must affirm and preserve these universal, inherent human qualities. Second, progressive evangelicals asserted that God has also created humans as interdependent communal beings. Membership within communities entails reciprocal relationships, they believed, in which people accept mutual responsibilities for the needs and welfare of all other members. Such responsibilities extend beyond the personal to the public sphere, as political practices codify these expectations and coordinate collective social programs. Thus within the public theology of community advocated by the progressive evangelical movement, loving one's neighbors as oneself required support for universal equal rights and just conditions for community participation.

Progressive evangelical leaders expressed a deep reverence for the value of each individual person. Their political philosophies began with the affirmation that God

creates humans in the *imago dei*. “Every human being—and only human beings—is made in the image of God,” wrote Sider. Therefore he identified the “special dignity and sanctity of every human being” as one of the cardinal biblical paradigms that should shape Christians’ political engagement. As a unique creature of God, each individual possesses inherent worth and rights, including the right to liberty. “Every person’s human right to life, freedom, and all the other things the Creator reveals as human rights flows from God’s creative design,” Sider maintained. Thus neither governments nor societies establish human rights but rather only provide contexts for their full recognition.³⁹²

Progressive evangelicals supported the ideal of equality on the same grounds as they defended the “inestimable value” of individuals. They claimed that humanity’s common origin and reflection of the *imago dei* confirms the essential and universal equality of humans. In fact, Wallis asserted that this acknowledgement of both human worth and human equality transcends religious boundaries. “Most of the world’s great religions teach that humankind and every human being is created in the divine image,” he wrote. “That most foundational premise gives each person an equal and sacred value.” This sacrosanct egalitarianism establishes the basis for the formal equality of all people in human societies. Formal equality denotes that each person should receive equal social

³⁹² Ronald J. Sider, “Toward an Evangelical Political Philosophy,” in *Christians and Politics Beyond the Culture Wars*, ed. David P. Gushee (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 87; Ronald J. Sider, “Justice, Human Rights, and Government: Toward an Evangelical Perspective,” in *Toward an Evangelical Public Policy: Political Strategies for the Health of the Nation*, ed. Ronald J. Sider and Diane Knippers (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004), 167; “Can My Vote Be Biblical?” *ESA Update*, Sept-Oct 1984, 4; Ron Sider and Charles Mott, “Economic Justice: A Biblical Paradigm,” in *Toward a Just and Caring Society: Christian Responses to Poverty in America*, ed. David P. Gushee (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 18-19.

and legal treatment without regard to differences of race, gender, class, or other personal characteristics. Discrimination based upon such grounds represents a fundamental form of injustice, and thus progressive evangelicals eagerly joined campaigns against racism and sexism.³⁹³

As isolated principles, the commitments of progressive evangelicals to the inestimable value, essential rights, and formal equality of each individual represented conventional convictions. Yet the leaders of the progressive evangelical movement insisted that additional biblical themes should direct both the interpretation and application of these broad affirmations. In each case, the connotations of community affected how progressive evangelicals understood both the latitude and the limits of human equality and individual rights. In order to meet high standards of equality, they argued that essential obligations toward other members of the community serve as necessary restraints upon personal liberty.

Progressive evangelical leaders claimed that a thorough interpretation of human identity recognizes both its personal and its social aspect. God creates people not only as invaluable individuals but also commensurately as communal beings. Thus an immutable connection exists between individuals and communities. Stephen Mott, an original endorser of the 1973 “Chicago Declaration” and a professor of social ethics at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, argued that “according to biblical doctrine, the person is truly human only as a member of a group.” He and Sider co-authored an article in which they described people as “made both for personal freedom and communal solidarity.”

³⁹³ Jim Wallis, *The Soul of Politics: A Practical and Prophetic Vision for Change* (New York: The New Press, 1994), 72.

While humans possess independent worth, therefore, they cannot achieve fulfillment independently. “The Creator made us individual persons so completely designed for community,” Sider explained, “that we cannot be whole unless we enjoy mutual interdependence with others.” Wallis likewise discerned such dependency. “The moral and political foundation for community,” he wrote, “is that, fundamentally, *we need each other*.” Wallis claimed that rejecting the view of individuals as autonomous beings, free from all but voluntary social associations, should deepen awareness of humanity’s shared identity and obligations. As a result, progressive evangelicals considered interdependent responsibilities within communities as essential as individual rights.³⁹⁴

To fulfill what Sider and Mott described as the “inherent duties of care and responsibility for each other,” progressive evangelicals promoted the ideal of the common good. The common good represents a comprehensive vision for the shared welfare of all members of a community. It consists of “the sum total of all the conditions of our social life—economic, cultural, spiritual, and political,” Wallis stated. “Those conditions must make it possible for men, women, and children to be protected and fulfilled in their basic human dignity.” God’s intention for people to live interdependently in community thus moderates personal rights and liberties. “Because our communal nature demands attention to the common good,” Sider and Mott wrote, “individual rights, whether of freedom of speech or private property, cannot be absolute” and “dare not undermine the general welfare.” In fact, Wallis insisted, God intends

³⁹⁴ Mott, *Biblical Ethics and Social Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 119; Sider and Mott, “Economic Justice: A Biblical Paradigm,” 19; Sider, “Justice, Human Rights, and Government,” 167; Wallis, *Who Speaks for God? An Alternative to the Religious Right—A New Politics of Compassion, Community, and Civility* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1996), 83; *ibid*, *The Soul of Politics*, 40.

individuals to exercise their rights on behalf of establishing communal conditions that affirm the sanctity and worth of all people. “Individual rights are always seen in the context of promoting the spirit of community,” he claimed. “Human dignity will only be recognized and protected in relationship with others.” In their public theology of community, therefore, progressive evangelicals advocated a communitarian ethic that called upon members to advance the common good by sacrificing self-interests for the benefits of others.³⁹⁵

This commitment to the common good represented a conscious alternative to the perceived idolization of the individual in American culture. “Individualism lies at the very core of American culture,” the sociologist Robert Bellah and his colleagues wrote. Most Americans believe that “anything that would violate our right to think for ourselves, to judge for ourselves, make our own decisions, live our lives as we see fit, is not only morally wrong, it is sacrilegious.” In denouncing this individualistic ethos, numerous progressive evangelical leaders have echoed Wallis’s diagnosis that the United States suffers from “broken community.” “Individualism in our society, as I look at it today, is the greatest threat to an understanding of the church and the meaning of being a Christian,” wrote John Perkins in *Sojourners*. “The unique contribution of America in the history of humankind has been the perfection of individualism.” Mark Olson, editor of *The Other Side*, agreed that the exaltation of “individual freedom” produced a selfish mentality. “Here in the United States, freedom has become an obsession. It’s become not only our goal but our god,” he stated. “We think it’s our right to do what we want—

³⁹⁵ Sider and Mott, “Economic Justice: A Biblical Paradigm,” 19; Wallis, *Who Speaks for God?*, 86, 139.

both individually and corporately. And the notion that freedom is to be exercised, in consideration of others, has gone out the window.” Yet Olson underscored that the common good must take precedence. “In freedom, we are to love our neighbor as ourselves,” he urged. “In freedom, we are to put the needs of others first.” Progressive evangelicals recognized that their focus on community clashed with one of the most dominant American presuppositions. “Those who have been raised in Western culture with its heritage of individualism have difficulty in grasping the biblical perspective of the person in society,” Stephen Mott wrote. Yet leaders of the movement continued to promote the common good as a central tenet of their public theology of community.³⁹⁶

The context of communal life determined how progressive evangelicals defined the practical connotations of humanity’s presumed equality. Beyond the commitment to formal equality, progressive evangelicals advocated forms of substantive equality that secure individuals’ full participation in the community. While formal equality assumes equal treatment by preventing discrimination, substantive equality approximates equal outcomes by redressing the effects of previous discrimination or institutionalized disadvantages. At a minimum, progressive evangelicals believed that substantive equality allows people to participate as respected citizens in the essential aspects of community life: “decision-making, social life, economic production, education, culture, and religion.” Thus formal equality represents a necessary but not sufficient condition for having equal opportunities. For example, anti-discriminatory laws that grant the

³⁹⁶ Robert N. Bellah, with Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton. *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985) , 142; John Perkins, “Individualism: Antithetical to Community,” *Sojourners*, May-Jun 1976), 19; Mark Olson, “A Perversity of Freedom, *The Other Side*, Feb 1984, 13; Mott, *Biblical Ethics and Social Change*, 119.

equal right of all people to own means of production do not take into account the capacity to exercise this right, i.e. one's access to financial resources. Therefore, progressive evangelicals declared, societies must remove disadvantages that hinder respected participation in community life. Public policies and efforts should further the elimination of what Mott described as "barriers that interfere with the chances to be equal in the good of society or to be participating members in the community." For progressive evangelicals, rhetorical commitments to equality appeared sincere only to the extent that they empowered equitable community participation.³⁹⁷

In order to realize substantive equality of opportunity, progressive evangelicals accepted that underprivileged community members should receive disproportionate benefits. "Because of handicaps some people need to receive quantitatively more in order to be qualitatively equal," Mott argued. While acknowledging the conventional application of this conviction to those with physical disabilities, progressive evangelical leaders insisted that the most objectionable handicaps resulted from the crippling effects of persistent prejudice and poverty. Many community members face inequalities in social power and financial resources, they contended, that prevent them from exercising their rights to equal opportunities. To combat these hindrances, communities must offer what Mott identified as "special consideration to disadvantaged groups by providing essential social and economic assets when they cannot otherwise obtain." Progressive evangelicals insisted, therefore, that authentic equality endows individuals not only with the rights of freedom and legal equality but also with the more controversial right to basic

³⁹⁷ Sider and Mott, "Economic Justice: A Biblical Paradigm," 31; Stephen Charles Mott, *A Christian Perspective on Political Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 76.

socioeconomic resources. True substantive equality requires, Sider and Mott claimed, that “every person or family has access to the productive resources (land, money, knowledge) so they have the opportunity to earn a generous sufficiency of material necessities and be dignified participating members of their community.” These conclusions regarding communal obligations for substantive equality stemmed from the interpretation of what progressive evangelicals regarded as the highest ideal of public life: justice.³⁹⁸

As the centerpiece of progressive evangelicals’ public theology of community, justice held together the central convictions of their movement. “Justice more than any other concept provides the positive meaning of politics,” Mott wrote. Leaders grounded their interpretations of the social aspects of justice in God’s commands for ancient Israel and prophetic denunciations of failures to meet these standards. They defined justice as the protection of both individual rights *and* the common good of all. “Justice identifies what is essential for life together in community,” claimed Sider and Mott, “and specifies the rights and responsibilities of individuals and institutions in society.” As noted, progressive evangelical leaders regarded the right to dignified communal participation among these prerogatives. Since such participation requires access to basic social and economic resources, they argued, members of society must accept collective responsibility for providing this access. “Biblical justice,” Sider summarized, “includes socioeconomic benefits, which are the responsibility of the community to guarantee.” Thus progressive evangelical leaders advocated forms of distributive justice—the fair

³⁹⁸ Mott, *A Christian Perspective*, 76, 77; Sider and Mott, “Economic Justice: A Biblical Paradigm,” 40.

allocation of social goods “so that everyone in fact enjoys, or at least has genuine access to, what is needed to earn a certain level of physical and social well-being.” Throughout their political engagement, they sought to define both the meaning of justice in practical situations as well as the best means for realizing the common good.³⁹⁹

Applying a Public Theology of Community

Progressive evangelicals’ anomalous political agenda reflected an application of their public theology of community. Both racism and sexism denied the equality of minorities and women, and each injustice became a natural target of progressive evangelical activism. Leaders identified patterns of injustice that continued to place racial minorities and women at a disadvantage. They therefore campaigned both for anti-discriminatory laws such as the Equal Rights Amendment and for distributive justice programs such as affirmative action. With respect to abortion, however, most progressive evangelical leaders concluded that unborn children deserved the same protection as other community members. As a result, these pro-life advocates prioritized the community’s responsibility for the welfare of fetal life over the individual rights of women to choose whether or not to terminate a pregnancy. Finally, progressive evangelicals committed themselves to defending the full civil rights of gays and lesbians. Leaders who remained convinced that biblical teachings against same-sex behavior remained applicable refused, however, to affirm homosexuality as a matter of Christian

³⁹⁹ Mott, *A Christian Perspective*, 74; Sider and Mott, “Economic Justice: A Biblical Paradigm,” 24; Sider, “Justice, Human Rights, and Government,” 176, 165.

ethics. Thus these progressive evangelicals distinguished between the demands of justice within public and private religious contexts.

A complete analytical history of the contemporary progressive evangelical movement requires attention to two additional themes that reflected participants' public theology of community: economic justice and a critique of American nationalism. With respect to the former, Marxist critiques of capitalism and liberation theology's emphasis upon "God's special concern for the poor."⁴⁰⁰ Leaders consistently criticized the gross inequalities created and tolerated by America's capitalistic system. They also believed that addressing economic inequality required more than attention to immediate needs. "Poverty must be clearly described as a matter of justice and not charity," wrote Jim Wallis in 1985. "Charity requires no fundamental or systemic change, while justice challenges root assumptions, popular attitudes, and basic structures. The prophets and Jesus cry for justice, not charity."⁴⁰¹ Perhaps the single most known—and most controversial—book produced by a progressive evangelical leader was Ron Sider's 1977 *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*.⁴⁰² Indeed, identifying the appropriate means for achieving economic justice represented a recurring Achilles' heel of the movement.

Reared in the shadow of the Vietnam War, progressive evangelical leaders consistently criticized American nationalism and militarism. They always placed their Christian identity and their common humanity above any loyalty to the nation. Leaders

⁴⁰⁰ Sider and Mott, "Economic Justice: A Biblical Paradigm," 27-30.

⁴⁰¹ Jim Wallis, "Poverty is a Scandal," *Sojourners*, Nov 1985, 4.

⁴⁰² Ronald J. Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger: a Biblical Study* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press), 1977.

argued that they had the same obligations to members of other countries as they had to fellow Americans. “I am committed to a global perspective rather than a narrow nationalism,” Sider explained in 1988. “The self-centered jingoism of much modern patriotism is simply sin. Because everyone in the world is my sister and brother on the basis of creation, and because every single person is so precious that my Savior died for them, I must be a citizen of the world before I am a citizen of a particular country.”⁴⁰³ Unlike mainstream evangelicals who patriotically supported American causes and military action as much as (if not more than) any group, progressive evangelical leaders regularly refused to acknowledge the superiority of the United States even in comparison with communist countries. They protested America’s involvement in foreign nations over the past decades as manifestations of economic and cultural imperialism. Opposition to nuclear build-up pre-occupied many progressive evangelicals in the latter stages of the Cold War. In contrast to many conservative evangelicals, progressives reject any notion of the United States as a “Christian nation.” “The powers of this world—and specifically the ideology of American culture and worship of American nationalism—threaten to become idolatrous, seeking to win our uncompromised allegiance by the pervasive claims they make on each of our lives,” Wes Michaelson wrote in the midst of bicentennial celebrations in 1976. “What Christians in America must pray for this year is a spiritual detachment from the destiny of their nation so that we might be bold in our witness for Christ Jesus.”⁴⁰⁴

⁴⁰³ Ronald J. Sider, “Towards a Political Philosophy,” *ESA Advocate*, (Oct 1988), 4.

⁴⁰⁴ Wes Michaelson, “No King But Caesar,” *Sojourners*, (Jan 1976), 6.

Thus progressive evangelicals' public theology of community and its comprehensive vision of the common good and social justice resulted in broad political agendas. In his 1996 book *Who Speaks for God? An Alternative to the Religious Right*, Wallis articulated this vision well.

We believe that social responsibility is also at the heart of our biblical traditions, that racism and sexism are also sins, and that the best test of a nation's righteousness is not its gross national product and military firepower but, according to the prophets, how it treats the poorest and most vulnerable.

We call ourselves and our churches back to a biblical focus that transcends the Left and the Right. We call the Christian community to carefully consider each social and political issue, diligently apply the values of faith, and be willing to break out of traditional political categories. By seeking the biblical virtues of justice *and* righteousness, the Christian community could help a cynical public find new political ground.⁴⁰⁵

In the context of American religion and politics in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, progressive evangelicals offered an alternative "soul of politics."

⁴⁰⁵ Wallis, *Who Speaks for God?*, 27, 29.

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