THE POLITICAL ETHICS OF INTIMACY IN AMERICAN EVANGELISM

by

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Abstract
THE POLITICAL ETHICS OF INTIMACY IN AMERICAN EVANGELICALISM
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The Political Ethics of Intimacy is an ethnographic study of how conservative evangelical ethics are cultivated within religious communities and become linked to political projects. Based on fourteen months of participant observation research in evangelical churches and Bible study groups in Colorado Springs, I argue that evangelical ethical life is modeled on hierarchical relationships defined by gender and symbolized in the patriarchal family. As the heterosexual nuclear family has become both the central metaphor structuring evangelical ethics and the site where lived evangelicalism is practiced, issues perceived as threatening this family structure are seen as threatening to evangelical ethical life. Thus, abortion and gay rights receive continuing political concern by evangelicals, while issues not framed as directly affecting the family receive less political concern. I show how the familial ideals that shape white evangelical ethical and political life are tied to a racial history of seeing the normative, patriarchal family as the moral foundation of the nation, ideas that shaped resistance to racial equality in the United States from debates about abolition to the Civil Rights Movement.

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Introduction

I attended my first megachurch[i] service in the summer of 2006. I was spending the summer in my hometown in Washington State and was beginning my PhD program that August. Since I was considering focusing my dissertation research on the politics of evangelical ethics I decided that I should start getting to know my subject matter. White evangelicals were one of the most consistent national voting blocks, and I had been following the "pro-family movement" in the media for some time but I had no experience with evangelical churches. I was curious to start to explore the religious contexts that fostered such consistent conservative politics amongst evangelicals. On a sunny Sunday morning I dressed in my most conservative clothes, donning an over-the-knee black skirt and wool blazer (I was studying a conservative group so I had to dress the part, I told myself). I drove across town to the giant parking lot surrounding the church where orange-vested traffic ushers directed me to the closest parking spot, far away from the main door. Walking towards the church along with hundreds of others, both families and single people, I passed by a line of vintage cars on display in the center of the lot. A shiny, red, vintage Mustang was parked in the grass at the entrance to the church. Was this a typical Sunday service, I wondered?

Upon entering the auditorium/chapel I quickly realized that my conservative attire made me stand out. A tan, blonde woman in a tube top and short, cut-off jeans walked up and down the aisles greeting friends. Most of the crowd was in causal summer attire, looking as though they were on the way to the beach directly after church. When I made it to my pew, I sat behind a fifty-something suburban couple. Soon after I sat down their teenage son and his girlfriend joined the couple. The younger couple both had facial

piercings, wore funky plaid clothes covered in safety pins, and had dyed hair in splotches of bright color. Despite the son's unconventional appearance, there was not a trace of rebellion in how he interacted with his parents; they seemed cozily intimate and affectionate.

Soon after I arrived in the main chapel a seven-person rock band of young, hip, men began playing a raucous love ballad to Jesus, called "Now That You're Here," by the famous Christian South African band, *Hillsong United.* The lyrics began:

> Hold me in your arms
> Never let me go
> I want to spend eternity with you
> I stand before You Lord
> And give You all my praise
> Your love is all I need
> Jesus, You're all I need

After about twenty minutes of praise music, with the audience swaying and often lifting their hands into the air to better worship Jesus, the main pastor walked out on stage.

Wearing a Hawaiian shirt, knee-length kakis, and flip-flop sandals, Pastor Joe stood center stage momentarily with eyes shut, as the final music from the band began to die down. Hanging almost directly above Pastor Joe, suspended from the ceiling with steel cables, was a large Harley-Davidson motorcycle. "Good morning!" Pastor Joe finally yelled to the crowd of 3,000 gathered that morning, "Notice anything different this morning? What do you guys think about my bike?" Once the loud cheers finally died down, Pastor Joe enthusiastically explained that the focus of the day was fathers. The church leaders decided to celebrate in a unique way by transforming the church into a space more welcoming to men. He told us that far more women than men attend church every week across America, and that this needs to change. "See, folks," Pastor Joe

preached, “The problem is that we have turned Jesus into a soft guy, into a weak person. But, Jesus was a man’s man, Jesus wasn’t a sissy! Who made Christians and sissies the same?” He claimed a problem with the church in the United States is that Jesus’ message is domesticated and pacified. Instead of representing Jesus as a warrior, his humbleness is now seen as weakness, which we learned that morning makes men uninterested in church. “The thing is,” Pastor Joe implored, “Men want adventure, wildness, and risk. Jesus wasn’t about safety, he was into danger, into messing with them, with the authorities.” Referencing the earlier church music, he explained one of the reasons why men hate going to church is because they “have to sing love songs to another man, even if it is to Jesus.” The Harley hanging above the stage, the muscle cars in the parking lot, all were designed to make church a more inviting place for men. “We need more testosterone in the church!” Pastor Joe gleefully yelled.

After this thirty-minute sermon on how Jesus was a warrior and how the church needs to change to make men feel more welcome, the band returned for a final ten minutes of worship music, and the morning concluded with the band playing the song “Mustang Sally” while Pastor Joe invited us for barbecued hotdogs and a closer look at the muscle cars outside.

I left the church that day confused. Where were the overt political references that I set out seeking to find? Clearly there was an emphasis on gender in the sermon, but I had expected more explicit political discourse. Where was the discussion of abortion and the diatribe against gay marriage and Islam? I decided that this wasn’t the right church for me to study and spent the rest of that summer attending several different large evangelical churches throughout town. Eventually I did find a large evangelical church

with more overt political discussions. I found this new church through a local Christian radio station when they hosted an event with a retired US Army general discussing the US "War with Islam." I attended this new church several times and the pastor would occasionally make overt political comments, but I was surprised at how little "politics" I found in my summer tour of local megachurches.

Over time, I came to see my initial expectations about political discourse in evangelical churches as naïve. In the following six years I completed over fourteen months of fieldwork in Colorado Springs among Bible study groups and attended dozens of sermons, listened to countless hours of conservative Christian radio and podcasts, and attended five national Religious Right conferences. Through this research I learned that while evangelical churches boast a variety of approaches to politics, they consistently provide ongoing ethical training about gender and family ideals that have implicit political consequences. In the fall of 2010, near the end of a year of fieldwork in Colorado Springs, two friends visited for a weekend from New York. Though committed atheists, Diane and Toby wanted their trip to Colorado Springs to include their first visit to a megachurch. The Sunday of their visit I dropped them off at the front door of the main church that I studied while I drove across the parking lot to the Prayer Center where my Sunday morning Bible study meeting took place. When I picked them up an hour and a half later after the service I asked them about their experience. There was an awkward moment of silence. Diane finally replied, somewhat sheepishly, "It was actually kind of fun." Toby jumped in, "I have to say the band performed some of the best indie-rock I've heard in a long time. They were excellent, and really talented." Like me on my initial megachurch visit, they were both expecting the fiery, anti-homosexual diatribe that years

of exposure to media representations of the "evangelical voter" had prepared them to expect. Instead, they were struck by the joyous celebration of music and connection, of a lively Sunday-morning crowd of five thousand seeming to jump in unison and sing along to well crafted, emotive music. The actual sermon was short and focused on how to live a more meaningful life, and stressed the importance of being kind to each other and to one's neighbors. "It just wasn't political," Diane explained, "Not like I expected."

I saw in their response a reflection of my own initial bafflement at the politics of megachurch services. I then asked them, "Was it only male pastors who spoke on stage?" They both said yes. "And, did the pastor talk about either his wife or children, and give a story about some conflict or funny encounter he'd recently had with his wife or children?" They shook their heads yes. "And, was the emphasis of the sermon about how to improve one's marriage or parenting or other intimate relationship, or at least was this a major part of the sermon?" They nodded again. I explained that in my research I came to see that overt political references are uncommon in evangelical services, but that there is an indirect politics in Christian media and evangelical pastoral services: they are entirely saturated in messages about gender.

The Political Ethics of Intimacy

Evangelical Christian practice is framed by a hierarchical series of relationships, centered on developing an intimate relationship with God. Gender structures these relationships and they are symbolized in heterosexual marriage and the patriarchal family. For US evangelicals, this relationship involves symbolic and actual relations with many others, structured by a gendered hierarchy. In this relational ethics, the family is employed as both a central metaphor and the primary place of lived ethical engagements. The gendered and familial ideals that are celebrated in evangelicalism come from a very

particular history, one tied to modern racial and national imaginaries. In this dissertation I understand gender norms as assemblages connected to both racial histories and national imaginaries. Although evangelicals refer to the patriarchal family as Biblical, the specific nuclear, normative, patriarchal family they celebrate is connected to a very modern history, one related to racial projects and nationalist ideals. Throughout I work to show how these ideals about gender and the family are connected to both racial histories and potentially racial projects in the present.

I use the term ethics in the Aristotelian tradition, which sees ethics as embodied practices, as opposed to Kantian ethics that are based on rationality. While Kant reshaped Western debate about ethics to focus on rationality and intent, Aristotelian ethics are rooted in "one's inclinations, habits, and dispositions" (Mahmood 2005:25). My understanding of ethics is also influenced by Foucault's writings on ethics. In an interview titled, "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress," Foucault explains that regarding the study of morals, there is a moral code, and then there is "the kind of relationship you ought to have with yourself…which I call ethics, and which determines how the individual is supposed to constitute himself as a moral subject of his own actions" (Foucault 1997:265). Foucault lays out a methodology for the study of ethics which include four aspects: which part of the self is the main foci of moral action (such as feelings); mode of subjectivation (how people are invited to recognize their moral obligations); "the means by which we can change ourselves in order to become ethical subjects"; "Which is the kind of being to which we aspire when we behave in a moral way?" He summarizes this approach: "In what we call morals, there is the effective behavior of people, there are the codes, and there is this kind of relationship

to oneself with the above four aspects" (Foucault 1997:265). Exploring the ethical opens up how people are invited to practice and transform themselves into moral subjects, how this process is embodied and invested in feeling, shaped by ideas about time and ideals about gender, and connected to political imaginaries. Through understanding ethics as rooted in sensibilities and bodily training, not just in ideas or regulatory norms (Aristotle 1955; see also Mahmood 2005), this dissertation shows how ethical teachings often undergird political passions and affiliations.

Megachurch evangelicalism represents a new approach to Christianity. I was told countless times by informants that their religious lives were not focused on "rules, but on relationships." Most evangelicals actually only used the term "religion" to mean an emphasis on following rules, and contrast this with their own experiential relationship with God, something they feel on an everyday basis. Thus, church is a space to be oneself and freely express one's emotions in worshiping God. It then should not be a place where one has to conform to strict conventions regarding clothing and behavior. Omri Elisha (2011) argues that what structures these evangelical ethics is an emphasis on compassion and accountability, where Christian relationships provide an accountable relational structure that encourages others to live a godly life and avoid sin. Evangelical ethical action is balanced between wanting to embrace compassion while ensuring accountability.

In my research I learned that evangelical ethics are defined by a series of hierarchical relationships, centered on developing an intimate "relationship with God." Evangelicals are meant to see God as an intimate relation, as a loving and constant father, and an everyday intimate companion. This relationship with the divine serves as the

model for other unequal relationships between leaders and the led. While Elisha finds that a desire for accountability structures evangelical relationships, I found that it is gender that often frames and symbolizes these relationships. For instance evangelical women are taught to first prioritize a relationship with God, then with their male spouse (or future male spouse), then with their family, then in "fellowship" in weekly small-groups formed within the church, and then with others. Gender structures these hierarchical relationships and heterosexual marriage is a central metaphor used, symbolized in the relationship between Jesus and the Church as one between a Bridegroom and His bride. The most important relationships—husband and wife, father and mother—are gendered and are meant to reflect patriarchal ideals about leadership and submission. Biblical messages about gender, marriage, and family are stressed in sermons and in evangelical media. Most evangelical churches concretize a gender hierarchy through only allowing men to serve as main pastors and church elders and overseers. The importance of heterosexuality and cultivating a "Biblical" and thus "male-headed" nuclear family are difficult to overstate in evangelical ethical life (Bielo 2009; Erzen 2006; Griffith 1997). I argue that gender and the nuclear family play a unique structuring role in lived evangelicalism.

Beginning in the late 1970s, Religious Right political mobilizations have worked to specifically politicize this gendered ethics. This movement has mobilized primarily white evangelical voters around an agenda of defending the nuclear, patriarchal family, limiting access to legal abortion, challenging gay rights, and limiting governmental social programs. The secular state is framed by this movement as interfering with the godly relationships that structure evangelical ethics, leaving the state's role within this ethical paradigm limited to enforcing its moral (and, hence, sexual) codes, and minimizing other

activity such as poverty alleviation. There are different ways that this ethical framework could be mobilized politically, and the Religious Right represents only one possibility of many. Although this framing—valorizing the family as a private, moral space that requires limited government to flourish— is very persuasive for white evangelicals. Throughout this dissertation I attempt to explore exactly how ethical paradigms or worldviews get linked to political imaginaries and practices.

One way this ethic of intimacy is politicized is regarding the term "life," which might include health and the environment, but is limited in popular political discourse to only opposing abortion. Unlike the death penalty or high infant mortality rates, abortion directly challenges this relational ethics by framing reproduction as a woman's choice and not a gendered, familial relationship and responsibility (see Ginsburg 1989). Issues that do not effectively relate to this gendered ethics receive minimal attention. Helping the poor is a deeply Christian ethic, yet white evangelicals commonly criticized state-sponsored poverty alleviation programs for challenging evangelical relational ethics by displacing God from the center of charitable efforts. Instead church charity efforts and support for the patriarchal family are seen as the solutions for alleviating poverty.

I began studying evangelical megachurches out of an interest in studying the rise of a politics of the family in US evangelicalism. I was interested in why the family became the focus of an evangelical politics beginning in the 1970s when other possible foci were possible for a Christian politics: such as ending poverty or protecting creation from environmental threats. What became clear during my research is that developing a personal relationship with God for evangelicals is both wholly intimate and highly mediated, although this mediation is systematically not acknowledged. As I show,

particularly in Chapter 2, evangelical events often involve multi-media rich and highly choreographed displays, rife with emotional music, and the interplay of prayer, personal testimony, and professionally edited videos. Together this typical evangelical choreography creates an emotional experience for participants, where it is not unusual for participants to express emotional extremes at church services and other events (from crying to jumping up and down with joy). Despite the significant use of various mediations to produce these emotional reactions, they are experiences as intimate, personal, and as part of an individual's relationship with God. A wide variety of media formats are also used to encourage this gendered ethics of intimacy, including: widely circulated texts, songs, musical performances, and various media productions—radio programs, blogs, newsletters, books, etc.—by high-profile individual authorities. Media and pastoral messages sacralize the nuclear family as a main site of lived evangelicalism and a central model to understand one's relationship with God.

While taking part in a male-headed nuclear family is the ideal, it is not attainable by all members of the Christian community. During my research I met many people, from young adults to retirees, who were single and although all of them were open to finding a heterosexual spouse, this was often not a priority. One woman who I got to know well in a Bible study group was retired and had never married and had an extensive social network through a variety of Bible study groups she belonged to. I never had the sense that she felt left out or somehow deficient as an evangelical woman because she was single and did not have any children. We often met in a Bible study group on Sundays and she would talk about how she enjoyed watching the live stream of the Sunday morning service at home so she could dance around to the worship music in her

pajamas and really let loose in loving God. Many of the younger evangelicals I knew who were single seemed to be more actively seeking out a spouse, but they also understood this as something that is left up to God, and marriage is seen as something not everyone will achieve.

I also found that even evangelical married couples often do not live up to these gender ideals. While evangelical spouses would comment on the importance of male headship, in practice gender divisions and power differentials did not always follow the ideal male headship model. John Bartkowski similarly found in research among evangelical spouses in Texas, "although the everyday domestic practices of spouses [in this study] conform in some respects to the elite portrayals of the godly Christian husband or wife, these couples' actions also commonly amend or subvert such ideologies" (Bartkowski 2001:9). There is thus a significant gap between evangelical gender ideals and evangelical gendered practices. Pastors and media figures that address the Christian family understand that due to both cultural trends and what is commonly understood as the effects of sin, the ideal is not always achievable. This does not mean it should not be strived for, as I explore next, all evangelical practices are meant to lead to an ideal, even as the godly ideal is impossible to achieve consistently for many. Additionally, the patriarchal family serves as the centerpiece of a gendered structure that secures a variety of evangelical hierarchies, both symbolic and actual, which makes its ideal important to both celebrate in theory and attempt to encourage in practice.

Evangelical Personhood

People who convert to evangelicalism are literally introduced into a new world, and this new world requires them to become a new type of person. They are taught to develop an awareness of a Manichean, warring world: one that involves a constant battle

between the enemy, or the devil, and God. Both are active forces in this world, fighting for one's soul, speaking in one's mind, influencing events in the world, and it is an evangelical's job to learn to hear both of these voices and to interpret their actions in the world. Converts are taught that the further along they progress in their faith and the more responsibilities they take on in doing God's work—such as going on missionary trips or leading one's own Bible study classes—the more interest the enemy will take in their lives and in stopping their efforts. Many evangelicals believe in demonic presences and see demons as active agents in the world (although how much they emphasize this depends on how charismatic the church is). One demonstrates steadfastness by resisting the temptation to sin and to engage with the occult.

Religious conversion to evangelical Christianity then involves not just developing new "beliefs" about God and the afterlife, but also feeling and nurturing a daily relationship with God and assigning almost every action with agency for good or evil. Ethical evangelicals maintain relationships in this ethical and symbolic world through mentoring and peer friendships and, preferably, also in heterosexual marriage. Just as evangelical ethics are rooted in a specific cosmology, they are also rooted in a specific historicity and ideal subjectivity: they urge believers to prepare for and anticipate a future where Jesus will return to earth and the earth as we know it will cease to be. Although there are different perspectives on what the End Times will entail and what will facilitate it, evangelicals are uniquely directed towards hoping that at any moment in the future Jesus will return and make the world new. Exactly how one understands what the end times will consist of shapes what is required in the present to facilitate this. In turn, how one imagines the End Times will play out also impacts how one sees their political

responsibilities in the present. For instance, many evangelicals believe that the end times will only occur once the holy city of Jerusalem is under complete Jewish control, and this view shapes Christian Zionism, making US evangelicals some of the most steadfast supporters of the state of Israel. An emerging alternative conception that the post-apocalyptical future will not involve an escape to a distant heaven, but instead will involve the re-making of earth into heaven, is leading many evangelicals into more interest in caring for the environment.

This ethical world is a world of absolutes, of clear directives about right and wrong. Converts are to develop new awareness about their own habits and desires, and embark on what is meant to be a life-long attempt to sanctify one's heart to be more similar to God's heart. This is a world that involves significant self-transformation, which is why the names of so many churches are variations on "new life." New life is important in this ethical paradigm, and stagnation is discouraged. Christ-followers should never be comfortable with themselves as they are, and instead, they should always be on a journey with God, walking with Him as he leads each individual through the litany of sins they possess, trying to decrease them one by one. This is a world overflowing with emotions: shame, guilt, ecstasy, joy.

Just as pastoral teachings encourage Christ-followers to adopt a particular ethical framework and understanding of the world and the future, they also coach individuals to transform themselves into what I call an ideal evangelical subject. This involves developing an abundance of proper relationships and working to re-orient the self away from what is perceived as a naturally selfish sinfulness into a porous subjectivity, one open to God's presence and oriented towards relationships and responsibilities with one's

spouse, friends, and Bible study members. The evangelical subject is not meant to be singular and solo, the self is not one's own, but a channel for God. The ideal evangelical develops an internal dialogue with God and thus adopts a new language (Harding 2001) and learns the ability to hear God (Luhrmann 2007). Pastors often tell their congregants they must die to become a follower of Jesus, a process that can be called the desubjectification of the individual subject, and calling into being of a porous, relational subject. Pastor Bobbie, the lead pastor of a large church that I studied preached about this theme frequently. One Easter Sunday he said the following: "Only those that lay down their lives will survive. The only group of people who will make it through the toughest times are those who have already surrendered their lives: *only dead men walking will live*!"

To become a Christian or a Christ-follower, in this sense, is to develop a new identity, one rooted in relationships and feelings, in ideas about right and wrong, and rooted in a different cosmological and historical world. Developing this Christian identity, being interpellated by this title, often involves developing a new political identity as well. Evangelical cosmology is total, and a pastoral theme is against breaking your life into boxes where you practice your faith only on Sundays, or only in Bible study. Instead, pastors coach their flocks to challenge modern and secular understandings that separate the economic, political, and social and instead place God at the center of everything. This can have a variety of political consequences. Part of the political transformation that can attend conversion to Christianity comes from the introduction of a particular worldview, an ethical framework that directs one's understanding of the Bible and highlights certain aspects of ethical life as preeminent. This worldview requires a

specific identity. For example, the ethics of intimacy sacralizes heterosexual marriage as both the foundation and key symbol structuring ethical life, making the defense of heterosexual a significant concern. There are a wide variety of potential political projects that can be defined as Biblical, the worldview one has about Christian ethics shapes one's political persuasions.

Sometimes the evangelical view of the enemy is transposed onto overtly political phenomenon. For instance, I received the following email from a politically engaged Christian group affiliated with a local church shortly before the Colorado gubernatorial election in 2010:

> Remember to pray for this Primary. The enemy is bringing confusion, uncertainty and a whirlwind of last minute chaos in the run-up to Tuesday. STAY STEADY. Trust the Lord. Don't buy the premise that any candidate "can't possibly beat Hickenlooper" [the liberal, Democratic candidate]. That is not the way the Lord works and He is not short on power and might.

The most significant arena involving this transposition of evangelical ethical language into the political arena has been around the ethics of intimacy, specifically around politics defending the patriarchal family.

The ethical framework makes "the family" the solution for social and political problems. At an awards breakfast sponsored by Focus on the Family at the Values Voter's Summit in 2008, I sat next to a conservative activist, a middle-aged white lawyer from Tennessee, who explained that while 30% of American families were living in poverty, poverty affected only 5% of two-parent families (his numbers). "Isn't that amazing?" he said. "It just shows how important the family is, and how much we need to support it." This position is broadly held and was made clear in Vice-President Dan Quayle's famous critique of the popular television character Murphy Brown. Brown, a

fictional television reporter, became perhaps the first single mother to be depicted on primetime television. In a speech about the 1992 LA riots against police brutality, Quayle criticized the show as supporting a culture that devalues fathers. To the broader non-evangelical audience, Quayle's speech was a laughable example of an antiquated and incoherent moralism. Yet, to evangelicals, the framing of Quayle's speech followed a familiar and logical pattern. It framed the patriarchal family as the center of a moral universe, and blamed social problems on a culture that failed to value this family. For Quayle the riots were a product of an anti-family culture of fatherlessness:

> I believe the lawless social anarchy which we saw is directly related to the breakdown of family structure, personal responsibility, and social order in too many areas of our society. For the poor the situation is compounded by a welfare ethos that impedes individual efforts to move ahead in society, and hampers their ability to take advantages of the opportunities America offers (Quayle 1992).

Instead of systemic poverty and institutional racism, and ignoring the reality of police brutality and the vicious police beating of Rodney King, Quayle sees broken families. Instead of government interventions and responsibility, Quayle advocates the bolstering of the patriarchal family as the solution to both poverty and violence. The specter of racist police violence is entirely missing in the speech.

Along with seeing properly structured families as the solution to social problems, evangelicals see the family as an embattled institution that requires legal protections. They see social changes that unsettle heterosexual and patriarchal norms or challenge parental control over their children as major political issues. Legal abortion, by placing reproduction solely within a woman's choice and outside the bounds of the male-headship family, is a central issue of concern. The widespread evangelical political stance of being "pro-life" typically exclusively refers to a political position against abortion.

Issues that do not effectively relate to this gendered ethics based on the nuclear family—such as the death penalty— receive minimal attention. A prime example is environmental issues. Despite mass biocide of a significant number of species globally and environmental catastrophes on virtually every scale, these issues have been marginalized by the broader evangelical right, even as they are championed by some segments of the "Christian left." Even with respect to human health, there is similarly no common evangelical critique of high infant mortality rates or the effects of environmental toxins on human reproduction.

History and the Political Ethics of Intimacy

I argue that the *gendered ethics of intimacy* that dominates US evangelicalism is a product of the historical and geographic context of racially segregated, suburban context in which the white evangelical sub-culture was formed prior to the 1970s. Lisa McGirr's (2001) post-World War II history of politicized evangelicalism in Orange County argues that the suburban development model that dominated this period created spatial isolation, lack of community, and racial homogeneity. Churches provided an important sense of community in these newly formed suburbs. Stephanie Coontz (1992) argues that these heavily subsidized suburban communities popularized and produced the nuclear family that was later idealized by the evangelical movement. Importantly, this formative historical context was shaped by racial segregation.

Beginning in the late 1970s, an evangelical political mobilization calling itself the "pro-family movement" emerged on the national political scene in the United States. Between the Scopes trial in the mid-1920s and the battle over the teaching of evolution in schools until the end of the 1970s and the battle to defend the patriarchal family, the

evangelical movement was growing in numbers and was developing a conservative political language and focus (McGirr 2001), but was largely silent in national politics.

I argue that the relational ethics of intimacy that shapes the evangelical movement was formed within these segregated, suburban communities and thus the "pro-family" movement was formed in an attempt to shore up what was perceived as a faltering way of life. Although it is commonly assumed that the pro-family movement emerged as a response to either *Roe v. Wade* or the feminist movement and changes in gender norms, the first national conservative evangelical political battle was actually against attempts by the Carter administration to desegregate private Christian schools (Balmer 2010; Edsall and Edsall 1992). President Carter was the first evangelical president, inspiring evangelicals to become more involved in national politics, but he also inadvertently provided the spark that created the first national Religious Right mobilization. Under Carter's leadership, the IRS threatened to revoke the tax status of racially segregated Christian schools if they did not prove they were desegregating. After Civil Rights gain towards desegregation, private Christian schools expanded rapidly across the south providing a private segregated alternative to desegregated public schools. Evangelicals primarily in the South mobilized quickly against these efforts in the late 1970s to desegregate these private schools, framing them as an attack on the moral Christian nation.

I am not arguing that the pro-family movement is a racist movement, but I am arguing the ethical framework upon which it draws has a racial history. The emergence of a politicized evangelical movement in the late 1970s was clearly connected to attempts to defend segregated, Christian communities, as represented in private Christian schools,

but the movement has developed a more complicated view of racial differences in the past thirty years. Howard Winant (1997) writes that there are various forms of racial mobilizations of whiteness today, some of which are racial, some racist, and some anti-racist. Religious Right leaders today vocally speak about desires to diversify the movement, and to attract specifically more African Americans to join the movement, but on a political level deny the existence of institutional racism. While the movement has a complicated relationship to race and whiteness, the family that structures the movement is a definitive product of a racial history.

The family valorized by political evangelicalism and celebrated in Sunday morning sermons is far more modern than Biblical. The nuclear family, divorced from an extended family, is not represented in the Bible, and the family model in the Old Testament is radically different from the idealized nuclear family. This emphasis on the family as the moral foundation of the community and nation is part of a much longer history, much of it tied not to religious mobilizations, but to secular nationalism. The nuclear family played a key role in modern, western nationalism. Building on Hegel's (1991[1820]) understanding of civil society, Habermas (1989) argues the institutionalization of the public sphere was accomplished through establishing both an intimate sphere of the bourgeois, conjugal family along with a reading public of novels and newspapers (see also Calhoun 1992). For Hegel the family was an essentially gendered space, seen as the foundation of civil society. The nuclear family and intimate relations have served as a central axis for the construction of European nationalism (Mosse 1988), modern governance (Foucault 1991), and United States' racial categories (Dorr 2004). In the United States, racism was most commonly justified as a protection of

white sexual morality, particularly the purity of white women from a perceived threat from African American or Native American men (Collins 2004; Dorr 2004). Mobilizing the respectable family then, even in the name of defending religious values, comes with a long history of connecting an idealized family and sexuality to nationalist and racial discourses. I argue that it should be no surprise that this mobilization emerged when it did, responding not only to changes in gender and family structure, but also responding to an emerging neoliberal economic consensus. Beginning in the late 1970s wages began to stagnate for the majority of Americans, creating a decreasing middle-class, and decreasing the possibility that single-wage earners could support a spouse and children. The relationship between the family and neoliberalism is different from that of Fordism: the normative, patriarchal, nuclear family was not awarded the same privileged position and protection beginning in the late 1970s. The "family" thus required a new shoring up, and the Religious Right emerged to attempt to defend it, even as they blamed secular and feminist forces for these changes.

Authority, Media, and Affect

Nondenominational evangelical churches are shaped by a unique authority structure, allowing for Christian media to play a tremendous role in shaping conceptions of interpretation and ethics. Nondenominational evangelical churches are not connected to national or international governing bodies. Instead of rooting their authority in such bodie they are often led by elders and overseers, often pastors at other churches and media figures. Such nondenominational churches do not have a clear structure then for staging debates about theology and deciding on doctrine. Susan Harding (2001) finds that evangelical preachers "stand in the gap" between the "language of the Bible and the language of everyday life," thus translating Biblical text into contemporary language and

cultural idioms (12). Every Sunday, evangelical pastors invoke stories about their wives and children in sermons relating the Bible to everyday life, enforcing the idea that a Biblical life is lived within the nuclear family. Various forms of media also "stand in the gap" between the Bible and its interpretation and application, giving many media producers more power and influence than most pastors.

The mediated space of the megachurch is also designed for optimal emotional experience. Many Sunday services at large evangelical churches begin with forty minutes of live rock music, called "worship," often replete with smoke machines, rock-concert lighting and sometimes as many as seventy-five people on stage, with multiple video screens projecting the musicians' images. Bialecki (2008) writes, "sincerity, spontaneity, and deep affect are arguably the guiding principles" in worship music (381). This "deep affect" conflates truth with feeling and provides the context for such amorphous political constructs such as "pro-family values" or "Biblical values" to have strong resonance, even as their meaning and referents can shift over time.

Today Christian books, radio programs, and music can be just as influential as pastoral teachings in individuals' religious practice. It was rare for me to complete an interview where I did not receive suggestions of various Christian books to read, attesting to the breadth and influence of the "Christian lifestyle market" (Hedershot 2004). This widespread circulation of Christian media is significant as a large portion of this media comments on and blurs ethical life and political responsibilities, self-help and political commentary. Christian media often link these personal projects of ethical self-cultivation to attempts to sanctify the nation, they employ the self-help genre to encourage particular ethical practices just as they encourage their audience towards specific political

engagements. Unlike most pastoral teachings, Christian media is often explicitly political. Many Christian radio stations host programs featuring local pastors and national Bible experts alongside explicitly political, conservative news updates. Christian media often combines self-help themes with directives on political responsibilities.

Constructing and Changing Worldviews

While this gendered relational ethics is dominant within suburban large church evangelicalism with the post-WWII generation of white evangelicals, I also found that a new evangelical ethical paradigm is in development among primarily younger evangelicals. This emergent ethical framework, which Melani McAlister (2008) calls "enchanted internationalism," is rooted in international obligations, missionary work, and what evangelicals describe as "a heart for the poor." It often involves some form of an embrace of social justice.

I found several factors lead to shifting and adopting a new worldview. The younger generation that is challenging and expanding this ethical framework most often has international missionary experience in poverty-stricken areas. An awareness of the suffering caused by poverty and an immediacy about needing to alleviate this suffering often stays with them when they return to their suburban, church communities from which they came, shifting their perspectives on Biblical responsibilities. Additionally, I found that building relationships with people who identify as gay or lesbian and seeing the ways that homophobia has caused suffering at times has the effect of changing one's worldview. Finally, shifting understandings of temporality and the end times has a significant impact in shaping one's worldview and ideas about responsibilities for protecting the environment.

Colorado Springs, Evangelical Mecca

Evangelicals don't have a Pope, but Colorado Springs has been called, always tongue in cheek, "the evangelical Vatican." Just as Vatican City serves as the symbolic and administrative capital of Catholicism, Colorado Springs houses significant evangelical organizations and symbolically important churches, although the authority structures of each are radically different. Colorado Springs, Colorado, plays a unique role in global evangelicalism. With a population of just under 400,000, it has housed over a hundred evangelical organizations since the late 1980s. Although the region has a conservative and libertarian history, the city had a political-religious makeover beginning in the late 1980s. The city was facing significant financial problems due to depleting military funding and the city became known as the "Foreclosure Capital of the World." The local Chamber of Commerce's Economic and Development Council (EDC) developed a study of how the city could best improve its economy by attracting new employers. The commissioned study determined that Colorado Springs was an ideal place to attract nonprofits organizations. One evangelical member of the EDC, Alice Worrell, decided to focus on attracting evangelical organizations. This plan was remarkably successful. By the mid-1990s over seventy religious ministries[ii] had relocated to the city (Burlein 2002).

The largest recruited ministry is Focus on the Family, which relocated from southern California in the early 1990s. It publishes over a dozen monthly magazines, numerous books, and produces radio programs heard by over 200 million people daily in over 160 countries. Because of the confluence of evangelical ministries and influential megachurches, Colorado Springs has become the self-appointed world capital of conservative evangelicalism. The now infamous ex-president of the American

Evangelical Association Ted Haggard frequently stated, "God chose Colorado Springs to globalize Christianity." The pastor of the city's second largest megachurch, with roughly 5,000 members, described Colorado Springs as "America's spiritual NORAD," referencing the North American Aerospace Defense Command, located nearby (quoted in Burlein 2002:171,177).

Since World War II, several military institutions have been developed in Colorado Springs. The city is now bordered on three sides by: the Air Force Academy, Peterson Air Force Base, Schriever Air Force Base, Fort Carson, and NORAD and Cheyenne Mountain Air Station. Due in part to an increasing military presence and general population growth in Colorado, the city's population has more than doubled since 1970. This has left a small downtown with massive urban sprawl in primarily the northern and eastern parts of city, with sprawling suburban neighborhoods. People sometimes joke about Colorado Springs, saying it is "a suburb looking for a city." From my apartment downtown it took me over 20 minutes to get to the main church I studied driving on the freeway, the town is so spread out.

Like most US cities, Colorado Springs is largely segregated by race and class, with the majority of people of color living south of downtown. But, the city is also unique in that it is politically divided. The northern suburban part of town is where the three largest evangelical churches are and where the largest evangelical organizations' campuses are based. And in this section of town, whether you are in the cafeteria at Whole Foods, a corporate coffee shop, or a bakery, it is not uncommon to overhear at the next table over people talking about God as an active force in their lives. Bible study friends frequently told me some version of the following: "God brought me to the Springs

to…" The coffee shops in northern Colorado Springs are filled with Bible study groups and young hipsters reading Bibles and talking about God. One gets the feeling that in this part of town that evangelicalism is the mainstream, the dominant majority. During my time in Colorado Springs I lived downtown, which had a much more secular public culture. I frequently had neighbors tell me they didn't feel comfortable spending time in the northern part of town, because it was so conservative. I also heard from a couple of different evangelical friends that when they moved to the Springs they were told not to live south of Austin Bluffs, a road that cut across the city east to west north of downtown, because it was dangerous further south. This was starting to shift slightly, as I knew several young people who were moving downtown, and working on ministering to the downtown area.

Colorado Springs is a unique field site for studying evangelicalism. The high concentration of evangelical parachurch ministries provides a unique economic context where many Christians are employed in Christian ministries. The Colorado Springs Christian Leadership Alliance lists a directory of 106 Christian ministries in Colorado Springs in 2012, many of which are the headquarters of very large organizations with global reach. The largest organization is Compassion International, with a staff of around 2,000 organizing a global child sponsorship program. Focus on the Family had a staff o around 750 staff in 2012, down from over 950 in 2009. Several other ministries have staff over 100, while many are smaller. Several of the largest organizations have budgets from $100 million to over $300 million annually. This concentration of Christian organizations meant that many people that I met over the course of my research worked for explicitly Christian employers. This also leads to an unusually high social concentration of

evangelicals. During interviews I would often ask my informants what percentage of their friends were Christian, and often people would say over 90%, especially for people who worked for Christian ministries. This was sometimes referred to living in a "Christian bubble," where one was distanced from secular culture by spending most of one's time around fellow Christians.

The region surrounding Colorado Springs is stunningly beautiful. The city sits right at the base of the Rocky Mountains in the shadow of Pike's Peak. The striking vistas around Colorado Springs inspired Katharine Lee Bates to pen "America the Beautiful." To the east begin prairies that extend into Kansas, and at the base of Pike's Peak is Garden of the Gods, a majestic park with enormous bright orange rock formations. Storms that come over the mountains create the most stunning lightning I've seen. I saw one lighting storm so intense that lightning filled the sky and actually did full circle loops in the air. There are frequent rainbows that take up the entire sky, and because of urban sprawl into what was recently natural habitat one frequently sees all manner of wildlife even in the city. Brown bears and mountain lions are a frequent sight in private yards and on the University of Colorado Campus, the foxes are a frequent problem for small pets in town. On the north end of town, on the large campus of New Life Church, the World Prayer center sits facing Pike's Peak and the towering Rockies. When the light and clouds are just right you can see strips of light pierce through the clouds and descend upon the city. People call this light "God light," and from the vantage point of the framed view in the World Prayer Center it is clear that the natural beauty of the region can lead one to think that this city stands out, that it is special, that it is indeed the city on the hill.

Methods and Research Design

To explore my research questions I spent June-July of 2008 and January-December of 2010 conducting ethnographic research in Colorado Springs, funded by the CUNY Graduate Center and the Wenner-Gren Foundation. Throughout this research I attended weekly church services at two area megachurches and participated in a total of ten weekly small-groups affiliated primarily with North End Church[iii], one of the largest church in the area. I chose small groups that covered a range of topics and included a variety of demographics, seeking a broad range of interests and age groups. I spent eight months attending a Bible study group that brought together homeless men with suburban, middle class church goers; four months attending a group for middle-aged women on emotional healing so women can be the "heart of the home;" ten months attending a small group focused on deepening one's path as a Christian; five months attending a small group for young adults; and several months in general Bible study groups. Additionally I attended five national religious right conferences between 2007 and 2010 and spent January 2008 conducting archival research at the Sara Diamond Collection on the US Right at the University of Berkeley's Bancroft Library where I had access to pro-family movement publications dating back to the early 1980s

Through participant observation and interviews I gathered data addressing the following: (a) what is the relationship between evangelical discourses about intimate relations and broader political persuasions and participation in political projects? (b) how, when, and in what context do individuals, religious leaders, and media producers discuss political responsibilities, ideas, and behaviors? (c) what allows or disallows for political language about the family and intimate relations to resonate with individuals and to link certain political messages to embodied trainings, belief, and emotions? I collected

fieldnotes addressing these questions during my participant observation and interviews. I used these notes and coded interview transcripts to generate data on the relationships between the family, intimacy, emotions, and political orientation.

In this project I use Randal Balmer's (2010) definition of evangelical Christianity, which includes belief in: the Bible as the inspired work of God, the significance of being "born-again," and the need to evangelize. In this project I am specifically examining a predominantly European-American evangelical tradition, as the churches I studied were primarily white in terms of leadership and membership. While many African-American churches also can be defined as evangelical, the history of racial segregation within evangelicalism has created racially distinct religious ethical frameworks (Emerson and Smith 2000) leading to different aggregate politics (Lindsay 2007). White evangelical ethics have consistently linked to a conservative political agenda since the late 1970s, however this link between Christian ethics and conservative politics has not occurred with African American evangelicalism. The global evangelical picture is also extremely varied. Through studying Colorado Springs I have studied the politically pivotal demographic of white evangelicals of the post-World War II generation.

Interviews

During my time in Colorado Springs, I conducted 90 primary interviews and 15 follow-up interviews including: over 20 individuals involved in the ex-gay movement; interviews with over 30 adult converts to evangelicalism; 15 interviews with pastors; 15 interviews with Christian media producers; and over 30 small-group participants. I was able to interview a number of small group leaders and congregants I met during my time with various small groups. The interviews I completed were semi-structured and in-depth, lasting between 1-3 hours. This allowed me to follow up on patterns and themes I

observed ethnographically, to gather histories of informants' political and religious beliefs and practices, and to clarify my research questions (Spradley 1980). I began each interview with a personal spiritual/religious history, where my informants recounted their earliest memories about God, church, or religion, and described their relationship to these ideas throughout their lives. During the course of the interview I would ask about my informant's media habits and where they received their news, their understandings of what were the most important aspects of living a godly life, and what types of responsibilities Christians had to society and politics. I recruited interviewees largely through my participation in small-groups as cluster sampling. I used a diverse sampling to ensure heterogeneity of race, gender, and age diversity to generally reflect the broader population (Johnson 1990).

Participant Observation

My most important source of data was participant observation, which I used for collecting and analyzing data for this project. Ongoing participant observation of evangelical small groups, social activities, and family gatherings provided the opportunity to observe patterns around religious belief and familial and political practice that would not be visible through interviews or media analysis alone (Schensul, et al. 1999; Spickard, et al. 2002). Participant observation increased the overall quality of data generated and proved useful in comparing results from other methods (Pelto and Pelto 1978). While I could follow the circulation of discourses through individual interviews, I needed participant observation to explain the emotions, bodily practices, and sensibilities associated with sanctification and conceptions of politics, sexuality, and secularism. Participant observation additionally allowed me to build rapport with informants that assisted with conducting successful interviews.

Through participating in small groups, attending church services, and additional socializing activities, some one-on-one, I had the opportunity to observe ideas and/or critiques expressed informally about the family, dating, sexuality, or childrearing. I also noted informal discussions of politics, race, and nationalism. At the start of my research I suspected that generational differences would serve as key sites of different political perspectives and consistently noted how these generational differences played out. In these observations I tracked which political issues people respond to and how these ideas fit in with the cultivation of intimacies within these small groups.

The bulk of my research took place in Bible study groups affiliated with North End Church, with a membership over 7,000. North End hosts dozens of small groups each season. Proliferating in similar megachurches, small-groups facilitate relationships that allow for enormous churches to maintain the feel of a community; they provide the tools for the imagined community of a large church to feel intimate. Bible study groups typically with eight to fifteen members that meet weekly around any theme that leaders choose, from hobbies to parenting to women's Bible study. Some of the groups are organized around study specific sections of the Bible (i.e. the Book of Revelations or the Gospels of John), while others may involve weekly hiking or motorcycle riding where the only overtly Christian activity is the group prayers that open and close the activity. It is these informal observations that allowed me to explore the relationship between everyday practices, sensibilities, emotions, and broader political persuasions and engagements.

Often small-group meetings turned into social outings. Small groups typically meet in individual houses and often involve sharing food and celebrating "fellowship." Fellowship is discussed frequently in church services as an important part of any godly

life, for it is relationships with others, other Christians in particular, that help to strengthen one's Christian walk. Because of the emphasis on socializing and small groups, I had an easy time meeting evangelicals during my research. In these informal settings and discussions I learned the most about evangelical subjectivity and ethics. One example happened my second week in Colorado Springs. I met Alice[iv] after a church service and when she found out I was new to the city immediately invited me over for "Taco night," which her family had every Tuesday. Alice had moved to Colorado from southern California five years earlier and empathized with the difficulties in moving to a new place. The following Tuesday I drove to the northwest tip of the city, past empty subdivisions already carved out with roads and stoplights, waiting to be filled with houses, to Alice and Dan's sprawling suburban home, which they shared with their five children. When I arrived, Dan was making the tacos fixings, three of the kids were watching TV, and Alice took me out to the back porch to look at their view. At the start of dinner Dan asked who was going to lead prayer. Their middle daughter, Tiffany, volunteered and led a sweet prayer, thanking God for allowing their guest to arrive safely that evening. After dinner Alice told me the story of her niece who was recently diagnosed with a brain tumor a month after the family moved to North Carolina, having randomly moved to a house that was a half hour drive from the Duke University Hospital, a global leader in brain surgery. Alice talked about how the family was taken care of, that the state paid for all the expenses because the parents didn't have jobs yet. I responded to her story saying, "Wow, that's so lucky for them!" And Alice immediately interjected, "They don't think they are lucky, they think that the Lord looks out for them." It was

largely through such informal interactions that I learned the nuances of the everyday enactment of evangelical ethical life.

Data Analysis

After completing my research in December of 2010, I spent four months transcribing my fieldnotes and interviews. During this time I generated a list of 30 qualitative research codes related to my research questions. I then used Atlas.ti to code these dominant themes from my fieldnotes, generating a list of linked codes and data, allowing me to both generalize my data and to make larger patterns and dominant themes visible (Fielding 2001). A sample of the categories I used include: narratives of sexual conversions; religious conversion to Christianity; religious conversion away from Christianity; family/God metaphors; and Christian social responsibilities.

Chapter Organization

This dissertation takes on one of the most contentious questions in contemporary American religion: what role should religion play in the public sphere? By showing the relationship between lived religious ethics and political persuasions, I seek to elucidate why the separation of religion and politics is so difficult to do in practice, and why different histories and geographies produce such different types of ethical/political engagements. This study expands understandings of religious mobilizations as embedded in historical and social relationships shaping their formation, while also asking new questions about possible future directions these mobilizations may take (Smith 2008).

Chapter One, "Rebirth of the Christian Nation: Family Values and Nostalgic Longing in Evangelical America," provides a history of the rise of the pro-family Movement in the 1970s, an overtly political movement that used new media to politicize

evangelical and fundamentalist Christianity. Through analyzing an important text to the early pro-family movement, this chapter shows the relationship between this movement and nostalgic longing for an imagined simpler past. I place this defense of the family within a historical framework of the role of the family in securing modern racialized nationalism.

"Mediating Relationality: Family, Feeling, and Faith in Megachurch evangelicalism" is the second chapter and defines the gendered ethics of intimacy cultivated within evangelicalism and the political implications of these ethics. I show how an emphasis on bodily training and sensory experiences in highly mediated evangelical services and other venues involves the shaping of affect in congregants. This is primarily done through "worship," specific performances of emotional, Christian rock music and this aspect of evangelical performance is just as important, I argue, as sermons. Often more time is given to worship than to sermons, and worship music is a staple at all forms of evangelical events including conferences, celebrations, political events, etc. I also show in this chapter how pastors and Christian media use the metaphor of the nuclear family as a model for living a godly life, and Christ-followers are encouraged to apply this metaphor to their own familial relationships. Specifically, individuals must heal from their relationships with their earthly fathers before they can develop the required trusting relationship with the heavenly Father.

Chapter 3, "Religious Worldview and the Political Imaginary" explores how specific worldviews are constructed through religious/ethical training and how these worldviews have political impacts. Studying worldview is an entre into uncovering the links between religious ethics and political behavior, as one's worldview shapes both

one's understanding and application of religion and of politics. In this chapter I also trace how the dominant evangelical worldview is connected to a white racial history. While there is a significant body of literature analyzing the African American Christian tradition, there is very little analyzing the role of whiteness and Christian ethics. In contrast with the African American Christian tradition that most often links Christian ethics to struggles for freedom, the white evangelical Christian tradition valorizes personal relationships at the expense of seeing structural inequalities. This individualistic bias is sacralized in a worldview that emphasizes personal responsibility as the only relevant site of Christian ethics, having significant impacts on the racial politics of white evangelicals. This is complicated by a widespread desire to engage in anti-racist behavior amongst white evangelicals, when the only terrain this can take place in is personal relationships and not in changing structural realities.

Worldviews are constructed through everyday ethical trainings, but they also can shift due to a variety of forces. Chapter 4, "Political Conversions: Ethics and the Temporality of Politics," explores some of the ways that worldviews may shift. The most common way I saw worldviews shift was through religious conversion, and here I analyze several narratives of people who converted to evangelicalism as adults and experienced a simultaneous political conversion. I also found that worldviews often shift after Christians are exposed to either new conceptions of time, specifically of the End Times, or have personal experiences with people who have suffered due to some aspect of the politics of the evangelical worldview. A key example of this is evangelical views of Israel. Evangelicals are often told that unquestioned support for Israel is a Christian responsibility, but in Colorado Springs I found a group of young evangelicals who were

spreading the message that support for Israel must not come at the expense of Palestinian suffering. Due to exposure to evangelical media critical of Israeli policies in Palestine and a mission trip to Gaza, a number of evangelicals were developing a new ethical worldview about the role of Israel, a change with political impacts. Finally, exposure to different conceptions of the end times has the impact of significantly re-shaping one's views on environmental ethics.

The final chapter, "Incommensurate Identities: Christianity, Homosexuality, and the Ethics of Desire," analyzes narratives of "sexual conversions" by people who identify as having "left homosexuality" in order to explore the relationship between religious ethics, identity, and sexual desires. Conversion to evangelical Christianity involves entering into a new ethical world and adopting a new identity, one that is incommensurate with an identity that embraces same-sex attraction. I show how different ethical discourses—conceptions of the divine, the cultivation of particular emotions, the training in dominant gendered metaphors as a tool to live out one's ethical lives—have dramatic effects on one's sexual identity and the meaning one gives to their desires and acts. Contrasting ethical paradigms shape opposing views of the stakes of these struggles, framing whether same-sex attraction is seen as a key expression of the self and thus deserving political protection, or as a distraction from God and thus something to be discouraged.

In the conclusion I explore several potential new ethical/political possibilities that I saw emerging within evangelicalism. I contrast messages that are common at Religious Right conferences that valorize the free market with pastoral messages that caution individuals against consumer identities. I also explore the emergence of a new

evangelical ethical/political paradigm that frames protecting the environment as a Christian responsibility.

In this dissertation, I attempt to show how a specific evangelical ethical worldview was constructed in a particular historical context, how it comes to be embodied through the cultivation of specific feelings, how it comes to link ethical life to specific political projects, and how it can be transformed. I also show some of the struggles individuals have with embodying the ethical subjectivity required by this worldview when their desires don't match the emotive order that shapes this ethical paradigm. I address the following questions: Why did the predominantly evangelical conservative movement that formed in the 1970s in the United States focus on "the family" and conservative political ideals, instead of around other forms of Biblical values such as moral obligations to the poor or preserving Creation from environmental threats? Why has this emphasis on the family and small government had such staying power? Why does this focus so successfully connect white evangelical ethical life with political praxis?

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[i] I am using the Hartford Institute for Religious Research's definitions of a megachurch: a church with over 2,000 members. http://hirr.hartsem.edu/megachurch/definition.html. While megachurches are represented by various denominations, I focus on here are non-denominational evangelicalism.

[ii] Evangelical organizations that are not affiliated with specific churches are called "ministries" or parachurch organizations.

[iii] This is a pseudonym.

[iv] I use pseudonyms to refer to all individual informants, except in cases where the informant has a public position and they allowed me to use their name.

Chapter 1: Rebirth of the Christian Nation: Family Values and Nostalgic Longing in Evangelical America

> "They call it the Reagan Revolution and I'll accept that, but for me it always seemed more like the Great Rediscovery: a rediscovery of our values and our common sense." Ronald Reagan's farewell presidential address

"We need to remove the heavy hand of government so that [welfare recipients] may hear the Lord, like I did to crawl out of my dark cave," Star Parker told the crowd of two thousand Religious Right activists at the Values Voter Summit in 2009. "It is God or government," she continues, "one or the other." The crowd went wild with applause and, as usual at such events Parker received an extended standing ovation. Star Parker achieves this audience reaction because her testimony justifies the ideology of the movement. Her early life was spent in poverty and addiction prior to her encounter with God that brought and a born-again experience that made her an evangelical Christian eventually brought her into the center of the Religious Right. The middle-aged African American now makes her living touring the conservative conference circuit and running CURE (Coalition on Urban Renewal and Education), a conservative organization that does outreach to inner-city neighborhoods. She also writes a syndicated column and has launched her own radio show. She receives funding through speaker fees, grants, and donations to her organization. For Parker, the state can only offer material resources, but cannot offer salvation. Since the state is not supporting the infrastructure of this spiritual relationship it is seen as an oppositional force. Thus for Parker, it is one or the other, God or government.

This negative framing of state-sponsored welfare is common in conservative evangelical discourse, which seems to contradict the directives to help the poor within Christianity. Evangelicals do indeed feel obligations to help the poor, but like all of evangelical ethical life, poverty alleviation must fit within a very specific relational ethics. Instead of prioritizing the practical needs of the poor, evangelicals prioritize bolstering their relational ethics, beginning with a relationship with God. For conservative Christians, the secular state cannot be a conduit for godly relationships, and thus in Parker's language the state and God are competing for the same territory: our souls. The state's role within this ethical paradigm is then to enforce the moral (and, hence, sexual) codes that shape these ethics, and minimize other issues such as welfare and poverty alleviation. Rhetoric like Parker's draws on the relational ethics of evangelicalism to "make sense," and allows it to be felt as an accurate and authentic perspective. The welfare state is fairly unanimously critiqued in this movement as opposing the work of God, however the punitive state—either through police, prisons, and military—is celebrated as having the potential to be blessed by God.

The movement hosting the Values Voters Summit was thirty years in the making, and the two thousand attendees and dozens of organizations with booths in the exhibit room demonstrate the maturity and institutionalization of the movement. The annual conference, which began in 2006, is the largest gathering for a movement known as both the Religious Right and the pro-family movement. The speakers on stage at this annual conference move seamlessly from prayer to politics and back again, and at times audience members responded to political comments not with applause, but with the hallmark sign of evangelical worship: open arms extended in the air to better feel the

presence of God. For many white evangelicals, political messages are often understood, and felt, as messages from God. This represents a significant historical achievement, from three decades of political organizing. Movement events borrow language, prayer, and structure common in evangelical churches to make political events feel like evangelical church services. Many believe that to be a Christian is to embrace a particular type of conservative politics, one summarized well by Jim DeMint: "When you have a big government, you're going to have a little God."

This alignment between evangelical identity and a specific conservative politics has not always been the case. The 19th century saw a variety of evangelical political mobilizations which focused on moral reform through prohibition campaigns, but also through the defense of what are now seen as progressive causes: suffrage for women, the abolition of slavery, and prison reform (Balmer 2006; Young 2006; Young and Cherry 2005).

In this chapter I focus on the *emergence* of what came to be known as both the "pro-family" movement and the "New Christian Right" in the late 1970s and early 1980s.[i] First, I trace the emergence of the movement, exploring the actual actors and articulations that "formed" the movement, specifically leading to the creation of the most noted organization in the movement, the Moral Majority, founded by Rev. Jerry Falwell.[ii] I also show the implicit role that whiteness has played in the formation of this movement. Second, I analyze the discourse articulated in Falwell's 1980 "blueprint" for the movement, the book *Listen America!* Through analyzing this text I am attempting to uncover the symbolic framework that links evangelical ethics, the normative family, and this broader political movement. Of particular interest to me is how the symbols used in

this moral frame conjure affective ties that succeed in mobilizing people politically, why these symbols and moral framework make sense, and the hierarchies of power they protect, enforce, and create.

The 1960s saw a new conservative political evangelical movement emerge in the suburbs of Orange County in Southern California. Lisa McGirr's *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (2001), traces this history of how "kitchen table activists" reshaped American politics and created the possibilities of the emergence of the New Right, combining a fear of communism with an evangelical ethos and a suburban aesthetic.

McGirr argues that these radicalized politics, which helped give Ronald Reagan his first political victories were a response to a shifting regional economy. The well-funded military presence in the area and government subsidies of new subdivisions created a growing middle- and upper-middle class. White-collar activists then "saw their own lives and the affluent communities where they made their lives as tributes to the possibility of individual entrepreneurial success" (8). Within the race- and class-segregated suburban milieu, Conservative churches and organizations provided "a sense of coherence, community, and commitment that was otherwise absent from the larger world of Orange County" (9). The suburban development model created spatial isolation, lack of community, and racial homogeneity, creating conditions ripe for the growth of conservatism (42). Churches helped to provide a sense of community and purpose in these suburban contexts.

It was as though their neighborhoods, with homogeneity reflected in the identical rows of houses, spotless lawns, and similar phenotypes, reflected back to them the idea

that individual effort ensured one's success in the world. There is deep irony in this of course, given that it was the G.I. Bill, a governmental program, that helped to build the suburbs and create this model of individual success, even as the structural role of governmental subsidies was consistently denied by the conservative social movement the suburbs helped to spawn. And while the G.I. Bill was helping to reshape US cities it was also reshaping US racial geography, as redlining and racist covenants ensured that the middle-class suburbs filled almost exclusively with European immigrants and their descendants (Katznelson 2005).

The conservative political movement of Orange County remained fairly localized and it was not until the late 1970s that multiple conservative Christian lobbying groups formed with a national presence. During the late 1970s various regional groups formed to fight the desegregation of private Christian schools as well as to defend the normative family. These various groups were brought into a national movement through the formation of the Moral Majority, which organized meetings in every state focused on teaching pastors how to engage in political organizing strategies from the pulpit (Ammerman 1998; Casanova 1994; Hunter 1983; McGirr 2001). The press was paying close attention to this swelling interest in faith-based politics. In January 1980, the *New York Times, Chicago Tribune,* and *Los Angeles Times* each carried multiple articles on the new political mobilizations occurring in fundamentalist America.[iii] The preachers and the press agreed that something quite unprecedented was occurring in both evangelicalism and in politics.

Jerry Falwell and other leaders were resolute in their need to organize politically to defend their morality. Through their actions, and their dramatic representations in the

national and Christian media, they were building a movement that would dramatically change the political landscape of the United States.[iv] Conservative religious leaders had been mobilizing politically for almost a decade but, as Nancy Ammerman writes, "did not yet know that they were a movement" until the late 1970s (1998:96). It actually took several years for the movement to solidify as a commonly accepted social fact.[v] The late seventies saw the formation of a new political category that continues to shape political debate through political activity, organizations, and media representation. Coming to the fore in Ronald Reagan's electoral success was the association of religion with the right. Although Reagan's faith was more ecumenical, his frequent invocation of God in his political speeches and careful outreach of evangelicals curried him broad favor with evangelical voters. At the height of his electoral campaign in 1980, Reagan famously told an evangelical convention in Dallas with an audience of over 15,000, "I know you can't endorse me … but I want you to know that I endorse you and what you are doing."

Not only did these actors create a new political presence, but through the introduction of "moral values" or "family values" and the specter of "secular humanism" into the political process they succeeded in significantly altering and often reshaping the political lexicon. "Family values" provided the texture of the 1990s presidential election debates,[vi] and, although by a slightly changed name, "moral values" was stated by pundits to have been the deciding factor in the 2004 presidential election guaranteeing George W. Bush another four years in power.[vii]

At the 2009 Values Voters summit, several conference keynote speakers expressed concern that they were characterized as racist by the popular media, and cautioned the overwhelmingly white audience that they should not be afraid of this

accusation and should speak their truth about criticisms of Obama. Star Parker also addressed the fact that many people in the Religious Right were being accused of racism. Parker told the audience not to worry about these allegations, that they were only an attempt to attack the moral conservative movement. "They're not really calling me racist, well… They might be calling me racist because I know *you,*" she whispered breathily into the microphone. Through attempting to deny that racism helped to shape the movement, she was also pointing out a basic truth about the racial dynamics of the pro-family Movement. While people of color, particularly African Americans, are commonly invited to speak at this annual conference, racial diversity is less visible off the stage than on stage. This is also reflected in fairly racially homogeneous political support for Religious Right candidates, an issue that many in the movement are uncomfortable with.

During the same Summit, I observed as a fervent prayer broke out. The Prayer Room is a space in the conference where snacks and drinks are served and people can gather for impromptu prayer about issues related to the conference. Generally there are ten to twenty people gathering in the room, playing guitar, singing songs, and praying collectively and individually. At one point an African American woman came in to the room to make an announcement: her husband was going to speak at the Black Congressional Caucus later that day to encourage African Americans to support the Tea Party. She asked the group to pray for her husband to speak the truth and to change hearts. An impromptu prayer circle emerged around her. With eight white Christian men and women praying over this one African American woman, surrounding her, some with their hands on her shoulders and some kneeling at her feet, bowing their heads with hands on her shoes. During a fervent ten-minute prayer, the group called on God to make sure

more African Americans "learned the truth" and started to embrace conservative causes. Many white conservative Christians feel a sincere desire for more racial diversity in their movement, and express incomprehension over their demographic homogeneity.

The pro-family movement has changed significantly since it first emerged in the mid-1970s. While the movement has expanded institutionally, it has not expanded racially. And as the anxiety in Parker's words and the fervent prayers in the prayer room demonstrate, many recognize this lack of racial diversity as a deficit. While many white evangelicals dream that one day African American and Latino Christians will come to see the truth in the conservative evangelical political agenda, and Religious Right leaders build alliances with African American pastors whenever possible, their political-ethical framework foundational to Religious Right politics is tied to a complex racial history that continues to reproduce a significantly racially homogenous movement. Race, I will show, is central to its cohesion. Leaders of this movement frame their motivation as protecting a family they understand as ahistorical and deemed sacred in the Bible, yet the normative, nuclear family this movement valorizes comes from a specific political history.

The Old Right, New Right, New Christian Right, and the Pro-Family Movement

Given the current focus on abortion within evangelical politics, it is important to note that politicized evangelicalism formed several years after the passage of Roe V. Wade (Balmer 2006). Rather, there were two factors that occurred towards the end of the 1970s that led to the formation of this new movement. The first factor was evangelical's conflicted relationship with Jimmy Carter, the first US president who identified as an evangelical Christian. Carter, who espoused political liberalism and a born-again personal faith, became the unwitting catalyst for the emerging conservative evangelical movement (c.f. Flippen 2011). His proud and open proclamations of his "born-again" religious

convictions helped to encourage the evangelical community to mobilize and become an active political force, spawning a movement that rose against him and ensured his defeat after only one term. In addition, Carter inadvertently provided this new evangelical mobilization with the issue that came to shape and define its politics and focus: the family. The irony in this history is that Carter's religious faith and his commitment to supporting the family took a drastically different shape than the movement responding to his legacy.

Carter understood the family as an institution troubled by a multitude of forces, including poverty and crime. He pledged in his 1976 presidential campaign to focus his administration on addressing the problems facing American families. Attempting to fulfill this campaign pledge he planned to host a White House Conference on the Family in 1978, but this conference quickly became a political millstone for his administration. Multiple forms of opposition to the conference mandated its postponement until 1980, its name was changed to the White House Conference on Families (reflecting a recognition that families take on many forms), and its first coordinator received significant criticism due to her status as a divorced, single mother. During the regional conferences leading to the national conference a new movement began to form that became known as the "pro-family movement" or the "New Religious Right." A 1978 *New York Times* article commented: "'family' has become a fighting word."[viii] Howard Philips, director of the influential Conservative Caucus and New Right leader, thanked Carter for making the family a political issue and stated, "It's going to be one of the significant issues of the [19]80s."[ix]

Philips was correct, of course, but his prediction held salience well beyond the 1980s. Following the White House Conference on the Family a variety of conservative lobbying, organizing, and outreach groups and think tanks adopted the "pro-family" moniker.[x] Their language made the family into something to be "for" or "against" and within this movement talk of the family was inseparable from talk of morality and traditional or Biblical values. This discourse came to infiltrate and frame political debate on a national level for decades to come. "Family values" were ubiquitous in national electoral politics throughout the 1980s and 1990s. While Carter's vision of the family in politics involved specific legislation (challenging poverty, addressing childcare and healthcare needs, etc.), the politics of "family values" are more elusive and less connected to specific legislation.

The second factor helping to shape the formation of the movement was the political ambition of several activists interested in creating a "New Right." A new movement was needed to distance conservative interests from the explicit racism and economic elitism associated with the "Old Right" after the Goldwater defeat in 1964. Howard Phillips, Paul Weyrich, and Richard Viguerie, the much-touted leaders of the New Right, worked together throughout the seventies to reframe the right in the language of social issues (Dionne 1991:231; Jorstad 1981:20). While attempting to appear new, the three maintained strong attachments to the "Old Right." One of their first joint efforts involved an attempt to run an independent party presidential ticket with Ronald Reagan and George Wallace in the 1976 election. Wallace, famous for his earlier pro-segregationist politics, had infamously remarked, "Segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever," in his 1963 Alabama gubernatorial inauguration address.

Reagan declined to join their campaign. Viguerie, who became a key political player through his direct mail fundraising business for conservative candidates, expanded his mailing list by several million people while working to raise money for George Wallace in 1973 (Himmelstein 1983:15). These leaders saw the potential to revitalize conservative politics through mobilizing a religious base. As Weyrich claimed, "The alliance between religion and politics didn't just happen. I've been dreaming and working on this for years" (Bennett 1988:394).

The three leaders approached Jerry Falwell in 1976 with the proposal of founding a conservative political organization with the goal of mobilizing conservative Christians to participate in politics (Harding 2001). Falwell had always been a vanguard charismatic preacher. After founding the Thomas Road Baptist Church in Lynchburg, Virginia in the late 1950s he went on to found a university, several bible institutes, and a television and radio program, *The Old Time Gospel Hour,* which broadcast his sermons to millions. He originally declined the offer to join forces with these New Right activists, but in 1979 Falwell met again with the three activists and soon launched the Moral Majority. Falwell then began directing his extensive ministerial and publishing outreach lists, including 250,000 *Old Time Gospel Hour* donors, to his new mission of politicizing fundamentalist Christianity (Guth 1983:32; Harding 2001:128-129). Harding describes how Jerry Falwell and other preachers and activists began to change the orientation of fundamentalist Protestantism away from private piety and toward public participation. This process involved reframing the evangelical goal of proselytizing to cover not just the private sphere, but the political sphere. Sara Diamond would eventually dub this movement dominionism, the idea that Christian values should have dominion over the

political process and the state, although Evangelicals do not usually use this term (Diamond 1995). Within a year of heavy promotion through "I Love America" rallies, Moral Majority claimed forty-seven state chapters, the majority of which were pastor-led. While claiming national representation, Moral Majority remained a largely Southern and Southwestern organization (Guth 1983:33).

Within a few years, Moral Majority and other religiously identified conservative political organizations (including Christian Voice, National Christian Action Coalition, and Religious Roundtable) had made a name for themselves in national politics. Yet, the Moral Majority garnered by far the most attention. Although the actual impact of the Moral Majority and other religious groups in the 1980 presidential elections is debated (c.f. Shupe and Stacey 1982), the group received a significant amount of public recognition for Reagan's victory. In the first press-conference following his 1980 election, Reagan was asked two separate questions specifically inquiring about the expected role of the Moral Majority in influencing his presidency.[xi]

There is a case for understanding the pro-family movement as a response to the primarily African American organizing in the 1960s. For, following the desegregation ruling of *Brown v. Board of Education*, private Christian academies had opened throughout the South claiming a focus on teaching traditional Christian values, but also maintaining racial segregation. In *Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights and Taxes on American Politics*, Thomas and Mary Edsall (1992) trace the beginning of the Religious Right to a court ruling that overturned the tax exempt status of these segregated Christian academies (also see Balmer 2006). While this ruling was passed in 1969, it was not actively enforced for almost a decade. This changed Carter appointed a new director

to lead the IRS who enacted new regulations to more stringently enforce the anti-segregation ruling. Under the new policy, any academy that failed to actively desegregate their student bodies would lose its tax exempt status. New Right leader Richard Viguerie recalled that this policy "galvanized the religious right. It was the spark that ignited the religious right's involvement in real politics" (quoted in Edsall and Edsall 1992:132-133). Over 126,000 protest letters were sent to the IRS in protest of these changes.

The campaign against IRS pressure to desegregate IRS schools led directly to the first national Religious Right organization. Robert Billings, Sr. led the campaign against these IRS changes before becoming the first executive director of the Moral Majority.[xii] Billings stated,

> The Christian school issue was the one thing that turned everyone on. Moral Majority came on the heels of that. The reason we could do chapters for Moral Majority was that there were already chapters in existence (quoted in Edsall and Edsall, 1992:133).

Viguerie went so far as to credit he new IRS director and his decision as having "done more to bring Christians together than any man since the Apostle Paul" (quoted in Edsall and Edsall, 1992:133). This mobilization was successful: Republican legislators passed a rider to block the regulation. The 1980 Republican Party platform included a statement that Reagan would "halt the unconstitutional regulatory vendetta launched by Mr. Carter's IRS Commission against independent schools" (Diamond 2000:66).

The threat of racial desegregation in the South appears to be one of a variety of issues spurring the formation of a conservative Christian political movement. As Balmer writes, "Whereas evangelical abolitionists of the nineteenth century sought freedom for African Americans, the religious right of the late twentieth century organized to perpetuate racial discrimination" (Balmer 2006:17). Given the direct links between

leaders of the Moral Majority, George Wallace, and the anti-IRS desegregation fights, as well as Falwell's own history of supporting racial segregation, it is likely that race played some role in the new organization.[xiii] But, what role race may have played amongst the movement's membership is difficult to analyze given the significant changes in racial discourse in the post-Civil Rights United States, altering even articulations of race in explicit white supremacist organizing.[xiv] New forms of racial discrimination were couched in the language of color-blind or non-racial prose, making the workings of race more complicated to address and explore. Jean Hardisty writes that the new racism states that everyone should be treated equally, therefore eliminates the need to acknowledge race through Affirmative Action and other means (Hardisty 1999:132-135).

Though its political effects are difficult to discern, the emergence of the pro-family, Christian Right coincided with significant changes in voting behavior for evangelical voters. While Jimmy Carter received over half of the white evangelical vote in 1976, by 1980 two-thirds of white Evangelicals voted for Reagan (Dionne 1991:227). This shift cannot be fully credited to the pro-family movement, but is connected to broader changes. E.J. Dionne argues that many evangelicals, who are largely white and Southern, had already begun abandoning the Democratic Party in the early seventies over civil rights issues (Dionne 1991:234).[xv]

A Revolution in Christian America

This movement was however not simply the product of a successful group of politically savvy activists and religious leaders, but was also responding to broader cultural changes, changes that were dramatically reshaping Christian America. Beginning in the early 1970s, a shift began in Protestantism to an increased focus on evangelicalism and fundamentalism. James Hunter describes a changing religious orientation

characterized by a "search for a purer, simpler, and more authentic form of religious truth, and ecclesiastical authority" (1983:9).

A 1975 *New York Times* article frames a debate in the Protestant community between the emerging trend towards evangelical clarity of doctrine and Biblical purpose and the Christian commitment towards social justice.[xvi] Responding to a perceived instability in the church beginning in the 1960s, the article states, "as the national mood has changed, the style and tone of the churches have undergone a major adjustment as well as gradually turning toward a 'back-to-basics' approach that stresses the need for sound beliefs and personal faith."[xvii] This is articulated in the president of the Lutheran Church in America's statement: "we need to know what the church stands for…We have come to the time when these assumptions about Christianity are so eroded that there is increased need for clarity and simplicity."[xviii] This was contrasted with the President of the National Association of Churches cautioning that new emphasis on reflective faith should not decrease the commitment of the churches to "social issues." The article's author comments:

> At the same time that a reassertion of certain traditional convictions seems in order, there is caution against lapsing into forms of fundamentalism or private religion that ignore the questions of social justice. If a new style of orthodoxy is emerging, observers say, it has been tempered by the heightened awareness of human needs brought about by social involvement.[xix]

In hindsight, the debate featured in this article reveals how much has changed regarding assumptions about Christianity and politics.

There is of course great retrospective irony in this debate, given the liberal call for the church to continue to focus on social issues. The conservative evangelical movement that emerged a few years later did fully focus on social issues, though with a profoundly

different politics, one devoid of the concept of social justice.[xx] This article resolutely associates Protestant Christianity with commitments to social justice, an association that is no longer dominant, pointing to a dramatic shift in relationships between Protestantism and politics.

The 1970s and the Emergence of the Religious Right and the New Evangelicalism

Throughout the 1970s there were simultaneous increases in the number of evangelical publications and publishing houses, increasing attendance at evangelical colleges and universities, and participation in patriotic evangelical rallies around the country drawing tens of thousands of the faithful. New uses of media, sometimes called the "electronic church," involving TV and radio broadcasts, were also increasingly popular and profitable. In 1979, Falwell and Pat Robertson together raised over $100 million dollars in donations through their networks.[xxi]

The proliferation of megachurches—defined as churches with over 2,000 or more attendees—in the United States over the past thirty to forty years has been a major change in US religious practice (Chaves 2006; Thumma and Travis 2007; Warf and Winsberg 2010). In 1970 there were just 50 megachurches in the United States, today there are over 1,300. This has placed pressure on mainline Protestant denominations to change the way they are structured or possibly perish (Ellingson 2007). Often smaller churches and mainline churches have a hard time competing in this new religious market due to either the increased financial burden of running a church (Chaves 2006) or the fact that large churches are able to provide a variety of social services and other resources that small churches cannot (Stonebraker 1993). "In every denomination on which we have data, people are becoming increasingly concentrated in the very largest churches, and this is true for small and large denominations, for conservative and liberal denominations, for

growing and declining denominations" (Chaves 2006). These churches often use secular means to attract new members, such as music and cultural events (Warf and Winsberg 2010). David Snow argues that the cause of,

> the growth and uniqueness of the larger megachurches is the interpretive work of defining problems and framing solutions that effects conversion or regeneration of the spirit and maintains adherence to the church and its mission. These churches provide increasing numbers of potential and actual members with an alternative to the more conventional self-help market…In this way, megachurches make themselves relevant to the problems people experience and create spaces where people can turn when faced with difficult situations such as debt, weight loss, same-sex attraction, or alcoholism (Snow, et al. 2010:184).

While historically churches have also focused on self-help of their congregants, "that focus has expanded through a process of frame extension so that now nearly all aspects of the secular and personal lives of megachurch congregations fall under the sacred canopy" (Snow, et al. 2010:184). Thus, just as an evangelical conservative political movement was emerging in national politics in the US, evangelical megachurches were expanding in size and significance, just as they were offering an interpretation of Christianity that applies to all aspects of a congregant's life.

Moral Majority and the Crisis in the Family

According to a popular telling, the last major battle between secular and religious authorities in the US took place in 1925 with the Scopes trial and the very public defeat of evangelical and fundamentalist Protestantism. American evangelicalism focused then on institution building and separation from politics until the 1970s when the battle between secularism and religion moved back into the public square. But the question remains: what turned a subculture into one of the most consistent voting blocks in US politics, lasting through the 2010 elections? There are different ways to frame what inspired this politicization.

One way to understand the emergence is through the lens of changes in secularism. Susan Harding (1991) argues that the 1925 John T. Scopes that famously debated the legitimacy of teaching evolution versus creationism was a distinctive battle for hegemonic control between a modernist narrative and a fundamentalist one. Harding argues the trial constituted "the beginning of liberal Protestant hegemony." Through the very public loss of this battle, Harding writes, "the modernist story encapsulated [fundamentalist's] story," where "under the sign of 'fundamentalist,' Protestants who believed the Bible was true were 'othered,' internally 'orientalized'" (Harding 1991:390). One reading then of the political emergence of fundamentalism in the late 1970s is to understand it as a counter hegemonic movement and an attempt by a marginalized religious/cultural group to challenge the dominant modernist, secular narrative and morality. But, just as the emergence of the Christian Right can be understood as a counter-hegemonic movement, the moral order it defended was embedded with its own regimes of power and hegemonic debris. The legal regulation of sexuality in the United States, as Jakobsen and Pellegrini (2003) argue, has also consistently involved "an interest in maintaining religious— specifically Christian— authority" (4). Supreme Court decisions on homosexuality over the previous few decades have repeatedly used "the Judeo-Christian tradition" as the basis for upholding sodomy laws. Jakobsen and Pellegrini show that the Supreme Court "seems to draw on theology as easily and as often as case law and precedent when rendering decisions that touch on sexual life and homosexual life in particular" (2003:3).

While Sara Diamond asserts that far from attempting a radical social and political overhaul the Christian Right is a "social movement focused fairly narrowly on questions

of proper family structure and 'moral,' that is, sexual behavior," this analysis fails to recognize that "questions of proper family structure" and "sexual behavior" come with their own very particular and highly political histories (Diamond 2000:7).

While most evangelicals believe that the Bible was written by God through human writers and is the sole source of truth, what is framed as "Biblical morality" or "Biblical order" is then a preacher's interpretation of the narratives, axioms, and values written in the Bible. This interpretation is also established through the use of accessing the "implicit social knowledge" of their community to ensure that Biblical narratives make sense and provide guidance to the laity. Michael Taussig describes "implicit social knowledge" as a form of knowledge which "moves people without their knowing quite why or quite how, with what makes the real real and the normal normal, and above all what makes ethical distinctions politically powerful" (1987:366). Taussig describes this form of knowledge as "an essentially inarticulable and imageric nondiscursive knowing of social relationality" in which history and memory combine (367). Within church communities, preachers are thus invested in both shaping implicit social knowledge as well as speaking to it. In this next section I am thus interested in exploring the implicit social knowledge within the moral framework of the Moral Majority.[xxii] Similarly Kintz argues: "we might also be able to analyze the way religious belief cements experience and produces what is felt to be unmediated sense perception, experiences as spontaneous, commonsensical, natural. The belief in the immediacy of perception elides the fact that perception, or 'sense,' is intertwined with the social commonality of experience, with conscience, and with consciousness, all of which are historical and thoroughly enmeshed in relations of power" (Kintz 1998b:18).

Published shortly after the creation of the Moral Majority, Jerry Falwell's *Listen America!* is a wake-up call to Fundamentalists and other Christians to see contemporary political struggles and issues within a Biblical framework. The text served as part of Falwell's campaign to lead Fundamentalism out of political and cultural exile and provided, "The conservative blueprint for America's moral rebirth" (Falwell 1980). The back cover blares the warning question: "Can America survive the 1980s?" Central to the book is the argument that America is at a crisis point, the nation is in a state of disrepair, both morally and militarily, and may not survive this crisis unless it is "brought back to God" (Falwell 1980:17). The Cold War still loomed large as an imagined threat to the United States, and Falwell sees the only solution is in a godly leader, willing to aggressively fund the US military and defend a godly vision.

In analyzing this text, I will begin with a metaphor that Falwell employs in his prologue.

> In the fairy tale known as 'Jack and the Beanstalk' Jack enters the giant's house when the giant has drifted off to sleep after eating and drinking his fill. Jack begins to steal the giant's vegetables: his harp, his gold. When the harp called out, the giant awakened and came to his senses. He pursued Jack down the beanstalk, but Jack, who was small and agile, beat the giant to the ground and chopped down the beanstalk and the giant was killed in the fall. In America today, pro-moral people have been the sleeping giant. (Falwell 1980)

Falwell's metaphor portrays Christian America as the giant's celestial home, dangling by a cord and hovering on the verge of destruction. His text is an attempt to sound the (harp) call about the danger facing the nation and to rally others to help restore it to its proper, protected, and celestial sphere. As the metaphor alludes, a sense of crisis permeates the text and the solution Falwell outlines is to "overtake the liberal 'Jacks' before they rob us of our valuable heritage." The solution to the imagined crisis is directed not to the future,

but against contemporary forces which are threatening the imagined past. Falwell calls on the faithful "to go against the tide and do what is right," and promises, "This nation can be brought back to God" (17). Harding writes that for Fundamentalists, "The point is not to reform the world… but to return to it its owner, and thus stay God's wrath for 'a little season'" (Harding 2001:165).

In many ways the framework Falwell articulates fits within Svetlana Boym's description of modern nostalgia. A product of modern changes in temporality and spatiality, nostalgia is one of the "side effects of the teleology of progress" and "a longing for that shrinking 'space of experience' that no longer fits the new horizon of expectation" (Boym 2001:10). A salve for the alienation felt towards one's prospective future and present, this "historical emotion" creates longing for an idealized past. Modern nostalgia, Boym argues:

> is a mourning for the impossibility of mythical return, for the loss of an enchanted world with clear borders and values; it could be a secular expression of a spiritual longing, a nostalgia for an absolute, a home that is both physical and spiritual, the edenic unity of time and space before entry into history (Boym 2001:08).

Following Bruno Latour, Boym posits a "codependency between modern ideas of progress and newness and antimodern claims of recovery of national community and the stable past" (Boym 2001:19). Thus, while nostalgic longings may produce and inform projects that appear anti-modern, they stem from and are thus part of modern temporalities. Arguing that the Moral Majority was driven by nostalgia is thus placing it decidedly within and a product of the modern narrative.[xxiii]

When Falwell wrote that "Americans are looking to the 1980s with uncertainty," he *was* expressing a broad cultural mood. The family was understood as an intimate form

of this temporal crisis, with a variety of transmogrified family forms emerging with increasing visibility: the "broken home," the "single mother," the "latch-key kid," and the escalating "crisis" of divorce. Gender roles were changing rapidly. This was particularly true with increasing numbers of women working in paid employment, resulting from both the feminist movement and neoliberal economic changes breaking the Fordist promise of salaries high enough so the single wage earner could support the entire family. These social and economic changes were also changing the demographics of family life. Many scholars and politicians expressed concern with these changes. Historian Christopher Lasch wrote extensively about this concern for these cultural and familial shifts, beginning in the 1970s:

> Children now grew up without effective parental supervision or guidance, under the tutelage of the mass media and the 'helping professions.' Such a radical shift in the pattern of 'socialization,' as the sociologists called it, could be expected to have important effects on personality, the most disturbing which would presumably be a weakening of the capacity for independent judgment, initiative, and self-discipline, on which democracy had always been understood to depend (Lasch 1991:31).

Jimmy Carter's 1976 pledge to strengthen the "troubled American family" was expressing broad agreement that this was an important issue. The White House Conference on the Family in 1980 was organized on the assumption that the family was in crisis. There is a strange agreement about this crisis in much of the literature on the pro-family movement, both critical and supportive, that society was changing too quickly in the 1970s, intimating a troublingly unstable future. Sara Diamond argues that in many ways the movement is in sync with the mainstream: "Who in society is fully comfortable with the rapid pace of social and technological changes, with high rates of divorce and illiteracy, with not knowing one's neighbors or not knowing what the future will bring?"

(Diamond 2000:8). There was thus a widely felt cultural consensus that familial, gender, and social changes were progressing at troubling rates. But, what really do illiteracy, anonymity, divorce, and technology have to do with each other, other than the fact that they all involved perceived changes in the social order? Much of this literature infers that the social change of the 1960s and 1970s had sped up time too quickly, making society progress dangerously fast, promising a deeply insecure future. In the late 1970s, at the time that various sources were troubled about social changes affecting the family, economic changes that have come to be called "neoliberalism" were excellerating and having lasting impacts.

Although economic changes were beginning to have significant impacts on families, Falwell and other members of the emerging Religious Right did not critique the increasing economic inequality and consolidation of wealth as negatively impacting families, and instead critiques changes in the family as stemming from either secularism, the feminist movement, and rapid technological change. Such perceptions of change seem likely to produce their counterparts in increased nostalgic longings for order. As Boym writes, "conspiracy theories flourish after revolutions" (Boym 2001:43). The 1960s and 70s were characterized, if not by revolutions, then at least by significant changes in the cultural and political realms. This change was especially troubling in fundamentalist circles and was perhaps part of the reason for its rapid growth in the 1970s.

The nostalgia employed by Falwell and the Moral Majority did not only involve pining away for the lost blessed nation, but active organizing to restore it. Boym argues that nostalgia in its restorative form is associated with two distinct narrative plots: "the

restoration of origins and the conspiracy theory" (Boym 2001:43). Falwell utilizes each, both of which are clear in his retelling of Jack and the Beanstalk. Various enemies are described as conspiring against the history and traditions connecting the present moral community to the birth of the nation. Falwell writes, "Liberal forces such as the abortionists, the homosexuals, the pornographers, secular humanists, and Marxists have made significant inroads in the giant's house and have carried off much of our goods." And just as Falwell conveys the threats conspiring against the nation, he also lays out the "blueprint" for "turning the nation around" and returning it to its original stature and path. Regarding the emergence of conservative Christian activism, Falwell states: "There has never been in our history, in modern history, a time when a nation, the great nation of America, that God could make a spiritual turn-around such as is occurring in this country" (quoted in Harding 2001:156). He continued, "We've got a long way to go, there is much to be done, but we have bottomed out of those dark ages, the two decades of the sixties and seventies, the dark ages of the twentieth century are now past" (Ibid:157).

The framework Falwell explicates as crucial to this spiritual turn-around takes three main forms: defending free-market capitalism (Falwell writes, "the free-enterprise system is clearly outlined in the Book of Proverbs in the Bible,"), through expanding the US military, and, "the deciding factor," defending moral values, which take the almost exclusive form of sexual politics. For Falwell, morality is the most important national issue, he argues, "we are economically, politically, and militarily sick because our country is morally sick" (103). The middle and largest section of *Listen America!* is focused on morality and includes chapters on "Family— The Basic Unit," "Children's

Rights," "The Feminist Movement," "The Right to Life," "Homosexuality," and chapters dedicated to drugs and alcohol abuse. The bulk of issues articulated in this section are connected to the normative, heterosexual, patriarchal family and the sexual mores and gender codes that sustain it.

What we find at the heart of this imagined past of the American nation is the family upon which the entire moral order, and thus the stability of the nation, rests. Falwell writes, "The family is the fundamental building block and the basic unit of our society, and its continued health is a prerequisite for a healthy and prosperous nation" (104). For Falwell the family takes a very specific form, "the God-ordained institution of the marriage of one man and one woman together for a lifetime with their biological or adopted children" (104). It is the salve for loneliness, a haven away from the pressures of the working world, a tool established by God so that man may "propagate and control the earth," and the foundation of the nation's moral strength (106). For Falwell this family is society's primary socializer, instructing children in proper gender and sexual identity and disciplining children to learn respect for authority. The parental relationship is based on male headship, where ideally the husband provides for and leads the family while the wife tends and works in the home.

While Falwell links this family to the very first family of Adam and Eve, the specific imaginary of this family is actually quite recent, a product of nineteenth century industrialization and the production of bourgeois separate, gendered spheres for work and home (Ammerman 1998:64; see also Bloch 1978). Stephanie Coontz argues in *The Way We Never Were* that this traditional family is a myth, not a reflection of a timeless tradition but a false idea that fails to reflect the diversity of types of family structures in

US history (1992:09). While Coontz frames the family as a myth in an attempt to expose it as a false representation of real history, it is productive to think of the family and its mythic resonance, particularly given Falwell's ability, as a preacher, to use the family as a myth. Through "standing in the gap" (to use Harding's language) between the social world and the Biblical one and framing contemporary stories within the "the sequence of Biblical events" the preacher is then in charge of constructing history, connecting the present to this imagined, sacred past. Through tracing a divine link between the contemporary nuclear family and God's first family, Falwell succeeds in mythologizing it, not in the means of falsifying it, but investing it with symbolic significance.[xxiv] Clifford Geertz argues that religion "deepens the concern with fact" and is felt as the "really real." Preachers thus play an especially powerful role in the production of truth (1973:112).

It is the family's function as a symbol that makes it such a productive term for the evangelical movement to use. In *American Kinship: A Cultural Account*, David Schneider (1968) argues that the US family is defined by heterosexual intercourse between a man and a wife. He writes, "All of the significant symbols of American kinship are contained within the figure of sexual intercourse" (40). The family is "a paradigm for how kinship relations are to be conducted and to what end," it also "specifies that relations between the family are those of love" (50). The heterosexual family is thus symbolically laden with affective ties, for, as Schneider writes, "love is what American kinship is all about" (40).

Donald Heinz argues it is the family's symbolic dimension which gives it such potency in the pro-family movement, serving as "a means to recover a lost meaning as

well as a lost past" (1983:142). Charismatic leaders such as Falwell are successful because of their ability to tap into the "symbolic dimensions of consciousness in such a way that responding to such a leader makes meaning, recovers identity, and revitalizes roots" (Heinz 1983:144). Victor Turner frames ritual symbols as "stimuli of emotion" that can work to condense multiple meanings into one form" (Turner 1967:29). Ritualized symbols can be described as "'forces,' in that they are determinable influences inclining persons and groups to action" (Turner 1967:36). Through various attempts at sacralizing the family and ritualizing many aspects of heterosexual marriage, evangelical culture imbues the nuclear family with significant meaning. This symbolically laden form can then be mobilized to encourage political and other forms of action.

Linda Kintz argues that the disparate symbols employed by the religious right, such as "God," "family," "life," "nation," and "free market," provide a framework for the movement because of the affective ties linking these seemingly disparate symbols together. "In fact, for this structure to be effective, these differences must be not articulated but merely felt deeply; depth of feeling is increasingly important as evidence of truth" (Kintz 1998b:8). It seems that it is somewhere in this affective domain of symbols where the potency of political movements can be found.

Yet, this explanation of the family as symbol and myth with affective ties to other loosely bound symbols fails to capture another important dimension to its symbolic function. For, "the family" existed as a social fact and symbol prior to Falwell and the broader pro-family movement's placing it in a recovered, sacred narrative. In order to understand the family's ability to "make meaning, recover identity, and revitalize roots" the historical symbolic dimensions must be unpacked. Why does this particular set of

symbols have such resonance as opposed to other symbols? And, what structures the affective links between the family, America, the military, and capitalism, making them sensible? To begin to explore these questions requires taking an interesting foray not into the depths of the religious subculture, but through it and into the making of the social landscape which produced the very conditions of possibility for such a religious subculture to develop: the modern order and the nation-state.[xxv]

Race and Nation in Historical Perspective

Many of the themes in the Religious Right valorizing the family have precedents in modernity. Modernity is often understood as a shift occurring during the 17th or 18th century where Western European societies transitioned from Christian feudalism to secular nationalism. This transition dramatically changed the dominant sense of time, with "rational prognosis" and the planning of the future replacing the previous dominance of Christian eschatological historicity, opening up new possibilities for the future and placing the control of time and the mobilization of the past within the bounds of the state (Koselleck 1990:12-17). But, with this secularization of time and space, the existential needs that Christianity had addressed, the context of meaning inherent in religious belief had to be replaced by other means. Benedict Anderson writes, "What then was required was a secular transformation of fatality into continuity, contingency into meaning," and, he continues, "few things were (are) better suited to this end than an idea of a nation" (Anderson 1983:19). It wasn't that nationalism, the idea of a shared, imagined community, replaced the certainties promised by religion, but that "nationalism has to be understood by aligning it, not with self-consciously held political ideologies, but with the large cultural systems that preceded it, out of which— as well as against which— it came into being" (ibid). This context of shared meaning, of a sense of continuity and

permanence connecting the present to an imagined past and future, thus came under the aegis of the nation. As the regulator of morality and meaning, Etienne Balibar writes that nationalism can perhaps be described as "*the* religion of modern times" (2002:232). But, as Anderson cautions, the national imaginary must be understood not in contradistinction from religious cosmology, but in relation to the preceeding religio-cultural frame. In the case of the United States, the nation was constructed as both attached to a Biblical, exceptional narrative, especially in the form of manifest destiny, but also the legislated separation of church and state. [xxvi] American nationalism, then, has always involved a complicated, perhaps haunted, relationship with Christianity.

Also writing on the emergence of nationalism, George Mosse (1988) argues that nationalism facilitated the bourgeoisification of society, absorbing and sanctioning "middle-class manners and morals," defined in the language of respectability. Similar to Anderson, Mosse argues that through its claim to immutability, nationalism "endowed all that it touched with a 'slice of eternity,'" an eternity connected to an implicitly racial lineage (Mosse 1988:9). Respectability, and its opposing force degeneracy, were defined in the language of sexuality and gender, determining proper and normal gender roles and enforcing the control of sexual passions. Respectability, however, didn't only solidify the national body, but policed its boundaries. As Mosse writes, "Tolerance, it seems, ended where respectability began" (1988:13). While the bourgeoisie in Europe defined their respectability in opposition to class-based others, Ann Stoler argues that for Europeans "in the colonies respectability was a defense against the colonized and a way of more clearly defining themselves" (Stoler 2002:71). Outsiders, both sexual and racial, were seen in the discourse of degeneracy as threatening the purity and health of the national

body, thus respectability in the form of sexual purity and proper gender roles were inherently connected to racism.

The nuclear family played a key role in training and defining respectability. Concomitant to the rise of nationalism, changes in traditional kinship patterns in Western Europe lead to the "triumph of the nuclear family" whose true function was to serve as "one of society's policeman of sexuality" (Mosse 1988:19). The family "gave support from below to that respectability which the nation attempted to enforce from above" (Mosse 1988:19) Families, however, historically often failed to comply with this role of respectability enforcer and often refused to align with the image of the patriarchal, nuclear structure. Jacques Donzelot, writing on the history of the family in France, shows that the state played a central role in actively shaping families and their practices in different ways depending on class (Donzelot 1997). In the colonies, Stoler shows that the perceived threats of moral and sexual degeneracy preoccupied the colonial state, playing out fiercely in debates about childrearing practices (Stoler 2002:112-139). In the Indies, colonial families were not trusted to have the capacity to educate children in the proper sentiments needed to produce respectability, generating a variety of forms of state intervention into the rearing of children, from debates on nursery education to directives on the proper relations between servants and children.

The point of this admittedly cursory foray into the modern order is to show that the connections Falwell and others make between respectable (hetero)sexuality, the family, and the nation are not of evangelical invention, but are deeply historical. These concepts share an intimate, even codependent, history in modernity. That they also shape the discourse and objectives of a contemporary evangelical Christian counter-hegemonic

movement opens up significant questions. How has the family, a product of the modern order which historically required significant state intervention, come to be seen as a sacred space which state intervention profanes? How did national morality (bourgeois respectability), which developed in relation to the shrinking public role of organized religion, come to be usurped and defended by a religious subculture? As Anderson cautions us to understand nationalism in relation to the cultural system preceding it, it seems provocative to explore how much of Christian morality was itself embedded and transitioned into nationalist morality. Or is the better question, as Fundamentalist Protestantism grew out of and in response to modern nationalism (with its increasing promise of public secularism), how much is it haunted by modern (nationalist) morality? Does the movement's mobilization of nostalgic longing for a more intact moral order represent a response to an emergent transition or break from modern bourgeois nationalism? What does this movement's formation and focus say about the historical moment out of which it emerged?

Through framing the nuclear family (product of the modern state and defender of nationalist respectability) as the traditional family ordained by God, Falwell and other pro-family leaders were not simply connecting the contemporary normative family with a Biblical history. They were reframing the modern nation-state and its foundational unit and moral structure in a transhistorical and "really real" frame. They were mobilizing a set of symbols and relations foundational to modern subjectivity. Their success with mobilizing such sentiments is profound. My approach to this movement is to not see it as countering modernity, or oppositional to it, but rather as emerging from modernity. Raymond Williams (1977) understands historical time is composed of emergent,

dominant, and residual elements, so that history is not linear or coherent but instead is contested and multiple. Through framing nostalgic longing for an imagined, diminishing past, Falwell's rhetoric serves to both cultivate an increased sense of time speeding up and encourage feelings of anxiety for the future and desire for a certainty and stability securely rooted in the past.

Lauren Berlant writes of the various social, sexual, and economic changes in the 1960s and 70s as having "called the national narrative into question… Suddenly no narrative seems to flow naturally from the identity people thought was their national birthright" (Berlant 1997:18). The movement responded to this sense of instability stemming from these changes by promising certainty. Falwell writes, "We are very quickly moving toward an amoral society where nothing is either absolutely right or absolutely wrong. Our absolutes are disappearing, and with this disappearance we must face the sad fact that our society is crumbling" (Falwell 1980). The "absolutes" asserted to salvage society were the absolutes of the modern moral order. Though framed as a counter-hegemonic battle with secularism, the pro-family movement was also focused on reasserting respectable nationalist hegemony.

As sexuality has always served to cohere and bound the nation, it is important to ask about the limits of the sexual nation imagined in Falwell's discourse. Clearly sexual others are demonized, Falwell bemoans that homosexuality was becoming more visible, when "Not too many years ago the word 'homosexual' was a word that represented the zenith of human indecency" (Falwell 1980:157). But, the sexual nationalism articulated by Falwell also seems to have a racial frame.[xxvii] It is not surprising that racism can survive through massive discursive changes, for it is defined by its "polyvalent mobility."

Stoler writes, "racisms gain their strategic force, not from the fixity of their essentialisms, but from the internal malleability assigned to the changing features of racial essence" (Stoler 2002:148). If and how racism functions through this sexual politics remains a significant question in need of further exploration, one that I explore further in Chapter 3.

Jerry Falwell and other evangelical leaders have played a significant role in not only shaping politics, but also in the growing popularity of conservative religion and Christian faith based on resolute fact. Falwell in particular has succeeded in tapping into the existential needs and desires of his community and guiding them spiritually and politically. Through this exploration I have attempted to expose the historical debris embedded in Falwell's moral order. The question remains how this debris has been so effective in mobilizing people and how it is connected to the affective domain. To conclude I will quote Jacqueline Rose who can perhaps direct us in how to go about addressing these questions. Rose argues that to understand the desire to participate in conservative social movements we need to explore "the set of convictions which hover somewhere between an articulable belief and a fantasy in which collective self-imaginings take shape… [I]t is in the crucible of subjective identities that political histories are forged- the issue not one of immediate or the most obvious forms of self-interest, but of how subjects 'envision' themselves" (quoted in Kintz 1998a:116-117). The relationship between the fantasy of the moral nation, the idea of the family and its actual practices, and the subjective attachments to this fantasy remain illusive and important sites of further exploration.

Evangelicalism and "Neoliberal Soul"

The pro-family movement emerged at a time when the national narrative in the United States was in flux and in struggle. There were many questions about how the

feminist movement would shift political and social power in the United States., and how the Civil Rights movement would continue to shift both racial power and the national narrative. But the late 1970s also saw the rise in a new economic order, one which saw wages begin to stagnate for most middle-class Americans, increasing critiques of welfare state policies, and increasing globalization of the economy and the global exchange of goods. Alongside these economic changes and the emergence of the politicized evangelical movement, evangelicalism itself began expanding in numbers and megachurches that gained in popularity throughout the 1970s began to increase rapidly in the early 1980s. I argue this represents an intimate relationship between the neoliberal ethic that gained in prominence at this time and evangelical ethics.

In 1997, presiding over the then-powerful Christian Coalition, long before his reputation sullied from a too-cozy relationship with infamous peddler of fraud Jack Abramoff, Ralph Reed declared: "If you want to reach the Christian population on Sunday, you do it from the church. If you want to reach them on Saturday, you do it in Walmart" (quoted in Moreton 2007). Reed's comments reflect an insight long understood by Religious Right leaders, one demonstrated in George W. Bush's winning of 85% of the votes of frequent Walmart shoppers in 2004. Walmart and megachurch evangelicalism share more than a similar architecture and history, with their sprawling parking lots and utilitarian designs both beginning to pockmark the American landscape in the 1970s. Their shared architecture reflects a shared socio-cultural zeitgeist, a changing economic landscape, and ever expanding suburban sprawl. They both reflect different aspects of the spirit of neoliberalism.[xxviii]

In her far-reaching exploration of the entwined globalizing histories of

contemporary evangelicalism and the post-Fordist economy, Bethany Moreton argues, "There is soul to neoliberalism" (Moreton 2007:117). Like all economic systems, neoliberalism includes it's own ethical system justifying it's logic. Moreton argues what evangelicalism has offered our current economic climate is the concept of "servant leadership." As a changing economic landscape in the 1970s began to find increasing numbers of women working in paid employment and of men working in traditionally feminized positions, this new service economy threatened the gender hierarchies of work and race that Fordism enforced. Abridging the "Washington Consensus" implemented by the techno-financial bureaucrats at the World Bank and IMF, Moreton argues a "Bentonville Consensus" emerged out of the Sunbelt that reshaped gender norms and expectations and provided a new moral geography to the neoliberal terrain: Bentonville being ground zero for the globalized Walmart Corporation. She writes, "Servant leadership, as produced in the halls of post-Fordist industry and postmodern Christianity, offered a distinct cosmology for the service economy" (104). Through re-defining masculinity as achieving power through submission, Moreton writes, "Servant leadership… was how the service economy made patriarchy safe for postmodernity" (111).

I argue this is just one of the ways that contemporary evangelicalism has worked to shape what Moreton calls neoliberalism's soul. The evangelical emphasis on shoring up the patriarchal nuclear family—both through providing marriage counseling and marriage workshops and political mobilizations against gay marriage—have also worked to defend the family against a variety of threats. Manuel Castells (2010) argues that both international capitalism and feminist and queer social movements together have

threatened and undermined the patriarchal family. For Castells, the patriarchal family provides the justification for patriarchal domination writ large, and, "Without the patriarchal family, patriarchalism would be exposed as sheer domination" (193). Decreasing numbers of married households, an increasing number of new household structures, and changes in social reproduction due to these new household and family forms are leading to "an end of the family as we have known it until now" (197). The evangelical movement's pedagogical and political resources defending the patriarchal family have emerged at a crucial time when shifts in global capitalism were beginning to undermine the patriarchal family.

In an interesting symmetry, it was also a primarily evangelical political movement that provided the impetus for and justification of what we can call neoliberal reforms beginning in the early 1980s. Following a long tradition of framing government bureaucracy as threatening the godly life, going back to Billy Graham's describing the government as a negative force (c.f. Dochuk 2011), the pro-family movement that formed in the late 1970s developed a critique of secularism, framing governmental welfare programs in particular as secular and thus against a Christian ethos. Ronald Reagan's presidential win helped to create the political world that reflected back the evangelical dream of limited government.

Jean Comaroff argues "there is much to suggest that the character of contemporary faith is integral to the advent of a new stage in the life of capital – less an historical rupture with the past than a reorganization of its core components, involving an intensification of some of the signature features of industrial modernity, and an eclipse of others" (Comaroff 2008). She asks, "How might this reformed social landscape speak

back – with latter-day insight—to classic accounts of religion and modernity, like Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*?" (Ibid). While Weber's thesis framed the Protestant Ethic as sanctifying the capitalist ethos, Comaroff argues that the new evangelical and Pentecostal movements do some similar work, though not in the exact same way. One way this plays out is that the retreat of government from social services allows the church to fill these voids. Additionally, the shift from ascetic to ecstatic Protestantism (which is one way that I describe evangelicalism) fits well within the late capitalist media-scape. Late capitalism's media saturated environments create shortened attention spans and fined-tuned affects, used to well-timed soundtracks in movies, commercials, and TV that take our emotions on tours. Well-choreographed megachurch services integrate a variety of forms of media and music to create maximum emotional effect.

Fernando Coronil argues that part of the shrinking safety net of the neoliberal state, what Subcomandante Marcos refers to as the "state strip tease," includes a decline in attempts to consolidate the nation, to foster the imaginary of a flattened civil society, resulting in increased racialization of social conflicts (Coronil 2000). Neoliberal globalization, which can be described as "anomic capitalism," involves the increasing commodification of social life and this is often accompanied by a discourse of crisis and the creation of conditions of instability for the majority (Ibid). Alongside this expansion of consumer values, increased social fragmentation, and a rise in instability, increasing suburban expansion in the United States has lead to increased social isolationism, and evangelical megachurches in particular, were poised to provide for the social needs of this new post-Fordist social and economic landscape. The expansion of large churches

allowed for the consolidation of a variety of services within one church structure, so that many churches provide discounted childcare, the rise in small groups provides both social relationships and social resources, often including free or discounted classes for children and adults in photography, painting, martial arts, dance, etc. These churches frequently offer free seminars for people dealing with a variety of types of crises: whether in their marriages, with childrearing, or with debt. Participating in a megachurch provides the possibility of accessing a variety of types of resources, both material and social, that make middle-class suburban living both easier and more rewarding.

The Demise of Front Porch Culture and Salve for Social Isolation

The megachurch plays an important role in offering emotional catharsis in the suburbs, where they have proliferated, but the suburbs and the broader social isolation they pose are also posing challenges to what evangelicals call the "Christian walk." Most evangelicals broadly support neoliberal state policies, specifically "deregulation, privatization, and withdrawal of the state from many areas of social provision" (primarily associated with welfare and social policies) and expanded in other areas (military and police) (Harvey 2005:3). This support for neoliberal policies contrasts with widespread critiques I heard while completing my research about the expansion of consumer values into many aspects of Christian faith. This critique however never extended to a discussion of economic policy, but rather remained in the realm of self-critique. During my research it became clear that some of the main tenants of the post-Fordist economy are seen as undermining the evangelical walk. Pastors frequently critiqued the tendency to define ourselves by our consumer choices, the fact that Americans today have fewer friendships than in the past, and suburban isolation.[xxix]

Stan Smith, a popular writer and scholar who works at a conservative Christian

organization talked about the dangers of consumer mentality in shaping ideas about marriage and family. He described to me what he called the Sears & Roebuck mentality:

> Just as you go to Sears and buy something, if it doesn't fit perfectly to you and what you need it for, take it back no questions asked. And, we think about marriage and family that way, as about personal fulfillment. Even something like eHarmony, their commercials and that feed that. The number of marriages around here that have been created by eHarmony...There are many good marriages created out of that, but their commercials feed that mentality.

Living in a consumer culture, with continuous messages about consumer identity is something that pastors frequently discuss. Dave, a small groups pastor at one of the larger churches in Colorado Springs told me of the challenges pastors face because "consumerism is leading the quest for finding a church, it's not theology that people are deciding by, but worship becomes what makes the decision: this is method over content." Vincent Crapanzano (2001) found a similar phenomena in his research on evangelical churches, where people frequently "shopped" for a church, sometimes visiting dozens of churches before deciding on a home church to frequent. In my experience in Colorado Springs, the 3-5 large churches in the area had a rotation of membership, and people would choose where to go based on what "felt" right, where they felt like home. But, Dave's concern saw their search in a different light, and clearly churches felt this pressure to attract and keep congregants. Pastor Bobbie often challenged his congregation to not seek the easy way out, something he framed as being tied to consumer identities. He often cautioned, "We just want our lives as consumer Christians, as though life was in Disneyland, and that's not what God wants for us!" This critique of consumerism however typically only refers to one's identity and attachments, and not material items. For instance, an evangelical pastor would create someone's desire to have a new car or large house, but would not critique someone having a large house or luxury car. At least

this was not a message I ever heard from the pulpit. Material objects then are not the problem, rather one's attachment to them is.

Suburbanization isolation was also widely critiqued by evangelical pastors. Pastor Andrew, a pastor who works with young adults, cautioned in a sermon:

> There's something deeper going on. The problem is our culture encourages rugged individualism; our country was founded on this. And it's not like we're going in the right direction. A recent Gallup poll on community showed Americans are among the loneliest people in the world.

Pastor Andrew said that this type of loneliness is called "crowded loneliness," since it is created in a context with social media allowing for so many chances to connect. Loneliness was not just blamed on social media, but also on what was referred to by some of my informants as the dominance of back yard culture over front porch culture. Denise, a marriage counselor at one of the large churches in Colorado Springs, told me, "A friend of mine says she thinks the demise of the family came with the demise of the front porch. When people moved from having front porches to back porches and yards, it lost connection to the community." The dominance of back yard culture creates both isolation and privacy that decreases social accountability and companionship.

Pastor Brett, a small groups pastor at a different local church, shared a similar analysis.

> When we all live with people with front porches then everyone has to communicate with each other, versus when we have a back deck then people have to be invited in. This goes as far as even the way we're structuring some of our subdivisions, where everything is privatized.

He described this emphasis on privacy and isolation as negative and continued: "Now I'm not talking we should all live in a commune where we all move in together [laughs], but I mean, just kind of a neighborhood kind of feel. Even the way we are structuring our

neighborhoods leads to more loneliness. Suburbia with a back deck isolates people."

While many pastors may critique the spatial and social isolation of the suburb, this critique does not extend to a critique of economic policy. Instead, megachurches are crafted to provide the salve for the alienating experience of suburban life. Pastor Fred, a small groups pastor at one of the largest churches in Colorado Springs, told me, "I think in the culture today a lot of people are starved for a few friends, so I think small groups are very important." Small groups that meet weekly in people's homes, in coffee shops, or on local hiking trails provide important social connections and relationships. Evangelical megachurches provide the intimate ties that create a sense of community and fellowship, a resource essential to the suburbs that they flourish within.

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[i] It is difficult to define what exactly makes a social movement, here when I use the term the "movement" I am meaning both the specific actors, organizations, and outreach focused around specific political causes as well as the idea of a movement as a *thing*, as a Durkheimian social fact that people understand as existing in the world. While defining a movement as a thing obscures a significant amount of complexity, it also provides a certain currency and social validity to an often dispersed and disparate group of political actors and ideas. The New Christian Right, New Religious Right, and the Religious Right are all used interchangeably to refer to the same movement.

[ii] The Moral Majority disbanded in the late 1980s and was reformed again in 2004. During the 1980s it received a significant amount of coverage as the leading conservative Christian political organization.

[iii] C.f. Russell Chandler, 'Christian Voice' Political Action Group Plans Massive Drive on Reagan's Behalf. *Los Angeles Times* Los Angeles, Calif.:Mar 6, 1980. p. b10; Eileen Oginitz, "Evangelicals open voter drive," *Chicago Tribune* Chicago, Ill.: Jan 18, 1980. p. a10; Eileen Ogintz. "Evangelists seek political clout," *Chicago Tribune,* Chicago, Ill.:Jan 13, 1980. p. 5; George Vecsey. "Church and state: Moral issues are drawing clergy into politics: Moral issues draw clergy into politics," *Chicago Tribune,* Chicago, Ill.: Jan 23, 1980. p. b1; Nadine Brozan, 'Pro-Family' Faction Quiet As New York Parleys Open: Proposal on Children's Rights," *The New York Times,* New York, N.Y.:Jan 14, 1980; George Vecsey, "Militant Television Preachers Try to Weld Fundamentalist Christians' Political Power," *The New York Times*, New York, N.Y.:Jan 21, 1980.

[iv] Goodman, Ellen. (1978). "The Eruption of a Now-Style Family Feud- 'Broken' vs. 'Intact,'" Los Angeles Times, June 28, D7; C.f. Dewar, Helen. (1980) "Conference on the Family is Rallying 'New Right' Activists," The Washington Post, Jan. 18, A2; Fedo, Michael W. (1980) "Second Parley on Families Opens Quietly," The New York Times, June 20, A18; Kelly, Erin. (1980). "7,000 Conduct Own Families Conference," LA Times, Jul 13, A3. Jerry Falwell in *Listen America!,* describes the need for speaks of "pro-moral" issues.

[v] For example, a *New York Times* article from 1980 described, "a rise in political activity by certain Evangelical Christian groups" regarding Reagan's election, not dubbing it a specific thing (Weisman, Steven. "Appeals Backing G.O.P Said to Portray Views as Contrary to Bible," The New York Times Nov 1, 1980; pg. 1). Similarly, a *Christianity Today* article from 1980 referred to "several Christian and New

Right lobbies" organizing around the White House Conference on the Family (Maust, John. "The White House Feud on the Family," Christianity Today 24: May`2, 1980, 47-50.).

[vi] C.f. Quayle, Dan. "On Family Values," Address to the Commonwealth Club of California, speech, May 19; Brownstein, Ronald. (1992); "Bush, Clinton both adopt 'family values' battle cry," Chicago Sun-Times, May 22, 1992, pg. 6.

[vii] C.f. Gorski, Eric. "The faithful have spoken, Chaput says," Denver Post, Nov 5, 2004, A18. "Moral values" are defined in this article by Archbishop Chaput as connected to "the really intimate issues like marriage, family, and sexuality." While the pundits proclaimed religious values determined the outcome of this election, the polls did not actually connect voting with conservative or evangelical "values."

[viii] Goodman, Ellen. (1978). "The Eruption of a Now-Style Family Feud- 'Broken' vs. 'Intact,'" *Los Angeles Times,* June 28, D7.

[ix] Quoted in Dewar, Helen. (1980) "Conference on the Family is Rallying 'New Right' Activists," *The Washington Post*, Jan. 18, A2 .

[x] This term continues to have popularity, with contemporary examples of groups describing themselves as pro-family including: American Family Association, Campaign for Working Families, Christian Coalition of America, Concerned Women of America, Eagle Forum, Defend the Family, Focus on the Family, the Moral Majority, and the Traditional Values Coalition.

[xi] "Transcript to Reagan News Conference," *New York Times*, Nov 7, 1980. p. 15.

[xii] Billings would eventually leave Moral Majority to work for the Reagan administration.

[xiii] It is important to note that by the time of the founding of the Moral Majority that Falwell had disavowed the pro-segregationist stance he had preached on in the 1950s and 60s. Susan Harding writes that Falwell's sermons from these decades were not included in his archive at Liberty College, but a few sermons from the era were available elsewhere and clearly articulated a pro-segregationist stance (Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell,* 22 and 286n24). In 1965, Falwell criticized Martin Luther King and other minister's political involvement, stating, "We need to get off the streets and into the pulpits and prayer rooms." At the time of the founding of Moral Majority, Falwell instead commented that, "This idea of 'religion and politics don't mix' was invented by the devil to keep Christians from running their own country" (Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell,* 22). In the late 1970s he invoked the Civil Rights movement in a very different vein, as a model for the political involvement of fundamentalist Christians. Harding writes, "the effect of Falwell's founding of the Moral Majority and equivalent barrier-breaking events of the early 1980s was, at least momentarily, comparable to the effect of the first black sit-ins at white drugstore counters in the South in 1960 (ibid, 23).

[xiv] Beginning in the 1970s many leaders of the Ku Klux Klan began to splinter from the century old organization to found a new white racial movement framed not in the language of supremacy, but in rights and racial pride. (C.f. Carol Swain, *The New White Nationalism in America: Its Challenges to Integration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002*)*.

[xv] Exit poll data from the 2012 election found that white born-again voters chose Romney over Obama at a rate of 79/20 (Center 2012), which is interesting given a broad evangelical distrust of Mormons.

[xvi] In *Marxism and Literature,* Raymond Williams outlines a method of understanding cultural and historical changes not as ruptures or stark epochal shifts, but involving tensions between emergent, residual, and dominant elements. While Williams suggests artistic forms as a primary means of finding emergent cultural strands, those not yet articulable in-formation cultural elements, I question whether changes in religious emphasis may also provide a fruitful space for locating emergent cultural forms. Williams writes: "organized religion is predominantly residual, but within this there is a significant difference between some practically alternative and oppositional meanings and values (absolute brotherhood, service to others without reward) and a larger body of incorporated mean-ings and values (official morality, or the social order of which the other-worldly is a separated neutralizing or ratifying com-ponent)." It seems then that within organized religion is a tension between residual forms of symbolic meaning with hegemonically oppositional potential versus the incorporation of hegemonically neutralizing and accommodating elements. As religion, like artistic expressions, is focused on symbolic meaning and interpretation, it also seems that within organized religion may be a way to uncover emergent cultural forms, "meanings and values, new practices, new relationships and kinds of relationship" (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

[xvii] Kenneth Briggs, "Protestant Churches Returning to Basic Beliefs; Protestant Churches Are Found Returning to Fundamental Beliefs," *New York Times* (New York, N.Y.: Mar 9, 1975, 1).

[xviii] Ibid.
[xix] Briggs, "Protestant Churches Returning to Basic Beliefs," 38
[xx] Donald Heinz actually argues that the New Christian Right was motivated to counter two dominant mythologies, that of secularism and that of liberal Christianity ("The Struggle to Define America." In The New Christian Right, eds Robert Liebman and Robert Wuthnow, [New York: Aldine Publishing Co., 1983: 133-34]).
[xxi] Ogintz, Eileen "Evangelists seek political clout," *Chicago Tribune,* Jan. 13, 1980: 5.
[xxii] Similarly Kintz argues: "we might also be able to analyze the way religious belief cements experience and produces what is felt to be unmediated sense perception, experiences as spontaneous, commonsensical, natural. The belief in the immediacy of perception elides the fact that perception, or 'sense,' is intertwined with the social commonality of experience, with conscience, and with consciousness, all of which are historical and thoroughly enmeshed in relations of power" ("Culture and the Religious Right." In L. Kintz and J. Lesage (eds), *Media, Culture, and the Religious Right* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998: 3-20] 18).
[xxiii] Charles Taylor makes a similar point that fundamentalism is a response to and a part of modern secularism ("Religious Mobilizations," *Public Culture* [18(2): 281-300]). Susan Haring also argues in a different vein that fundamentalism served as modernity's "other" and thus helped to define oppositionally, yet intimately connected with, the narrative modern secularism (Harding, "The Repugnant Cultural Other").
[xxiv] For an analysis of the role of myth in providing meaningful interpretation of social experience see, Karen Armstrong, *The Battle for God: A history of fundamentalism* (New York: Random House, 2001).
[xxv] Here I am using the terms "modern order" or "modernity" to refer to the cultural and political history of capitalism (R. Koselleck, *Critique and Crisis: Enlightenment and the Pathogenesis of Modern Society* [Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1988]), or as described by Ali Rattansi, the social order defined by "industrialization, urbanization, commodification and constant and increasingly rapid social change" ("'Western' Racisms, Ethnicities and Identities in a 'Postmodern' Frame." In A. Rattansi and S. Westwood (eds.), *Racism, Modernity, and Identity on the Western Front* [Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994]: 23). Additionally, especially relevant to fundamentalist movements is the association of modernity with the normalization of rationality (Armstrong, *The Battle for God*), the dominance of progressive temporality (R. Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time.* Trans. Keith Tribe [Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990]), the distinction between public and private spheres (Eli Zaresky, *Capitalism, the Family and Personal Life* [New York: Harper and Row, 1976]; Hunter, *American Evangelicalism*), and the dominance of the nation-state as a moral regulator and identity producer (Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* [New York and London: Verso, 1983]).
[xxvi] The actual presence or absence of public secularism in US history complicates the debate about the separation of church and state. While leaders of the pro-family movement identify "secular humanism" as an unfortunate and very recent turn in what has been a historical alignment between Christianity and the US government and opponents of this movement claim that the separation of church and state has been a foundation for establishing US democracy, both sides have some validity. Robert Bellah described the United States as governed by a "civil religion" and "moral order" stemming from the US historical experience which interpreted US policy as "transcendent." Vine Deloria, Jr. critiques this notion as assuming too much of a separation between Christianity and national morality, arguing instead, "there is no real difference between the Christian religion and the United States of America and its political institutions," and asserting that Christian morality is deeply implicated in national morality ("Completing the Theological Circle," in *For this Land: Writings on Religion in America* [New York and London: Routledge, 1976/1999]: 166-174). Charles Taylor argues that the United States was founded not on secularism, but on what he calls a neo-Durkheimian relationship between religion and the state. In this framework the "moral order" which comes to define the national identity stems from the idea that providence is guiding the national project. So, even if God is not considered the architect of the nation, the nation is conceived as still following God's design ("Religious Mobilizations"). In this analysis then, when Falwell writes that "Our Founding Fathers separated church and state in function, but never intended to establish a government void of God," he is not being entirely incongruent with the historical narrative of the nation.
[xxvii] Falwell contrasts the importance of maintaining the sovereignty of private Christian schools and critiques the IRS involvement in regulating them. Although Falwell does not mention segregation in his

depiction of these schools, he uses racially coded language to contrast the safe, moral climate of these private academies with the violence and danger in many urban schools. *Listen America!* 189-192,

[xxviii] Jean Comaroff writes, "What has come to be glossed as 'neo-liberalism' has been characterized in a variety of ways, few of which capture adequately the refractory mix of continuity and breach, intensification and transformation, at work" (Comaroff, Jean 2009, "The Politics of Conviction: Faith on the Neo-liberal Frontier." *Social Analysis* 53(1):17-38). I am trying to show some of these contradictions in practice and how they play out in daily life. I then want to be clear that what I mean by neoliberalism is a short-hand way of describing a variety of changes: increasing commodification of social life and the creation of conditions of instability for the majority with an attendant decrease by the state in attempts to consolidate the nation, to foster the imaginary of a flattened civil society (C.F., Fernando Coronil, 2000 "Towards a Critique of Globalcentrism: Speculations on Capitalism's Nature." *Public Culture* 12(2):351-374, and David Harvey, 1989 *The condition of Postmodernity: An enquiry into the origins of cultural change,* Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.

[xxix] For a similar discussion about consumerism and class identities in evangelicalism, see Omri Elisha, 2011, *Moral Ambition: Mobilization and Social Outreach in Evangelical Megachurches*. Berkeley: University of California Press: 121-152.

Chapter 2: Mediating relationality: Family, feeling, and faith in megachurch evangelicalism

Each week millions of people attend evangelical megachurches seeking community and a connection with God, and a large number of them share their personal lives through church-based small groups. They are also introduced through these processes to what I call a *gendered ethics of intimacy*. This relational ethics uses the family as a central metaphor and main site of ethical life. Pastor Bobbie, a popular pastor of one of the largest churches in Colorado Springs, framed it this way in a sermon:

> Some of you have never made Jesus your Lord. You've reduced it down to behavior modification, sin management. Let me tell you something, your sin will decrease; your behavior will get better. But what the Holy Spirit is inviting you into is a family! It's about family and being together! But it's more than this... Some of you have never experienced real family here on earth. But, let me tell you something. God is inviting you into His family, and He's the perfect dad!

A Christian is meant to *feel* this ethical relationship and create it in their personal spiritual lives, with pastors frequently emphasizing the importance of one's inner experience, feeling, and intention. The center of evangelical practice is thus emotion, not behavior. Or, to put this in evangelical terms, one's spiritual emphasis should is to build a relationship with God, not to just follow rules about how one should act. The spiritual family one is being called to join is also directly related to the specific familial relationships individual evangelicals are encouraged to develop. Fitting in to this ethical "family" thus requires cultivating specific emotional resonances, and, as this family is patriarchal and hetero-normative, it requires specific sexual and gendered practices. Most evangelical churches only allow men to serve as main pastors, church elders, and overseers, concretizing a gender hierarchy. In over 16 months of fieldwork amongst

evangelical megachurches it was rare to attend a church service where the pastor did not mention his wife and children, or grandchildren at some point in the sermon, enforcing the normativity of the patriarchal family.

As this gendered ethics is lived within one's everyday relations and interactions, and as it is *felt* so deeply, largely due to strategic mediations in megachurches, this relational ethic is seen as authentic and personal. Rooted in the emotions it belongs in the realm of *intimacy.* Although framed within the language of faith, this relational ethics also provides evangelicals with a far-reaching political ethic. Issues that effect reproduction or that challenge the normativity of the hetero-patriarchal family become of significant importance for evangelicals. For instance, this ethics most often limits the term "life"—which might include public health or the environment—to only opposing abortion. Unlike the death penalty or high infant mortality rates, abortion directly challenges this relational ethics by framing reproduction as a woman's choice and not a gendered, familial relationship and responsibility. I also argue this ethics of intimacy is a product of a decidedly racial history.

Evangelical Christians frequently told me something like the following: "I don't have a religion, I have a relationship!" I heard this phrasing so often that I found interviews challenging: how to navigate discussion of spiritual practice without ever using the offending word "religious"? Ethnographers of course often encounter this problem, when the social categories they employ differ from the indigenous categories their research subjects use to describe social life. However, in this instance I believe there is something larger occurring. This widespread rejection of the categorization of evangelical spiritual practice as "religion" raises significant questions. In spite of weekly

church attendance, bi-weekly Bible studies, and daily Bible readings, evangelical Christians consistently claim that they do not have a religion. Why? And, if evangelicalism is so deeply personal and intimate, why do so many Christians agree on how to practice their faith? And, as election polls demonstrate, why is there such agreement on how evangelical spiritual life connects to voting practice, at least with regard to white evangelicals? What creates this unity of practice and ideas?

Susan Harding's groundbreaking work on the politicization of fundamentalist Christianity in the United States argues that Christians are united by shared linguistic practices. She writes that fundamentalist language is a "bundle of strategies – symbolic, narrative, poetic, and rhetorical – for confronting individuals, singly and in groups, stripping them of their cultural assumptions, and investing them with a fundamentalist mode of organizing and interpreting experience." This bundle of strategies she describes as the "rhetoric of conversion" (Harding 1987:480). I similarly found during fourteen months of ethnographic fieldwork among evangelical megachurches and Bible study groups in Colorado Springs that evangelical religious life involves a particular linguistic framing of the world and one's experience of it. However, like Tanya Luhrmann (2004), I found that the "rhetoric of conversion" was part of a larger framework for shaping experience. She argues: "It is *not* words *alone* that convert: Instead, congregants— even in ordinary middle-class suburbs— learn to have out-of-the-ordinary experiences and to use them to develop a remarkably intimate, personal God," a God that is majestic while also being a "pal" (518).

Many evangelicals hold a deep distrust of "religion," which is seen as a set of inauthentic rules that prescribe behavior. They see themselves instead as participating in

spiritual practices, and embrace the idea of possessing a personal, lived relationship with Jesus Christ. Evangelicals are also taught to see the Devil, frequently called "the enemy," as an active, everyday force in the world. Evangelicals thus see the world as divided between good and evil, personified as living, communicative forces both seeking personal relationship. Developing a strong relationship with God protects one from the various influences of "the enemy." This relationship, as Harding writes, involves the development of new linguistic practices within oneself, so that one can start differentiating between one's own thoughts, and God's voice or the Devil's taunts. But, the development of tools for hearing this voice is situated within a variety of other disciplines: prayer, fasting, personal instruction, Bible-reading, and "worship" (how evangelicals refer to a particular style of Christian rock music performed largely during church services). As Pastor Bobbie explains, one must see their relationship with God in the same way as they would see a relationship with their biological family. Thus, central to the learning that goes into developing this "godly" relationship is coaching about the importance of a very particular ethics of intimate relations.

In this chapter I explore how this ethics of intimacy is constructed through emotional mediations (and media forms), how it is structured by hierarchical relationships modeled on the patriarchal family, and begin to show how this ethics connects personal and spiritual practices to political passions and persuasions. One of the key ways evangelical spaces—Sunday services, prayer meetings, conferences, luncheons, etc.—are imbued with feeling is through "worship," or specific types of Christian music. Worship music is paired with prayer, and often with sophisticated light shows and large video screens with inspiration images and song lyrics. Together these constitute what I

call a typical evangelical choreography, including the use of a variety of sophisticated forms of media that serve to "mediate" emotional experiences in believers. The presence of worship music and this broader choreography serves to both sacralize the meeting space and to call participants into a state of emotional openness.

Evangelicals are not only coached to develop a close and communicative relationship with God, but also to develop relationships with a variety of fellow believers, starting with one's own family. Scholars have shown how the family and reproduction are struggles over key symbols representing social struggle around various values and identities (Ginsburg 1989; Heinz 1983; Kintz 1998b; Luker 1984). David Schneider's important work, *American Kinship: A Cultural Account,* (1968) shows that US kinship ideas are based on symbols that reflect broader values in contemporary US society. Schneider frames cultures as clustered symbols that form "galaxies" of shared meaning. The "American family," is one such set of symbols, shaped by notions of blood and marriage, where: "The code of conduct of blood relatives ... should be governed by a common claim on the diffuse, enduring solidarity [of one another]" (215). The challenge of analysis is to understand just how "these symbols and meanings articulate into a total system" (219). Here I seek to expand these studies through asking how these politics are also related to ethical interpellations and embodied sense and sensibilities (see Hirschkind 2006a; 2006b). I use ethnographic methods to get at the intra-subjective, contoured elements of a question situated between the fields of religion and politics.

An Introduction to Worship

"Everyone says the best worship takes place at an Exodus conference," or at least so participants at the Exodus International conference I attended in Orange County in 2010 often told me. The first morning of the conference, the people I shared the shuttle bus

with seemed nervous on our way from John Wayne Airport to the sunny Orange County college campus where the conference took place. We sat listening to the radio and watching the smog-filled valleys, palm trees, and urban sprawl pass us by on our way to the conference. Throughout that first day, checking in, meeting our roommates, and beginning to mingle, many attendees were withdrawn, while others bounded from hug to hug, smiling and greeting old friends. By that evening's worship, the musical performance that ended each day of the conference, all guards were down, and emotion was raw. People swayed with arms around each other, others knelt on the floor, others openly wept, shouted for joy while jumping to the music, or shimmied in the aisles.

Attendees arrived from all over North America, and from as far away as Spain and South Africa, to attend the largest global gathering offering "freedom from homosexuality." Exodus International is the largest ministry focused on providing help to those wanting to "leave the homosexual lifestyle" or wishing to help those "struggling" with same-sex attraction. Each year Exodus hosts this national "Freedom Conference," which attracts around one thousand participants who spend four days attending workshops, keynotes, social hours, and worship together. During these four days participants share dorm rooms and meals in the college cafeteria. Many people attend the conference every year and see it as a space to reconnect with friends, talk late into the evening, and feel acceptance of the complexities of their experience.

Attending the first night's introduction in the college gym actually felt very familiar. A seven-person band was on stage for almost the entire evening's program, providing an ethereal background to a multi-media show introducing us to the themes of the conference. Prayer, authoritative Biblical speech, and testimonies were interspersed

with dramatic live Christian rock music replete with a sophisticated light show. The structure and content of the evening felt very similar typical Sunday morning services at a number of Colorado Springs megachurches I frequently attended as part of my fieldwork. It was also reminiscent of suburban megachurch services I have attended in Washington state and Durban, South Africa. This combination of prayer, worship, sermon, elaborate stage-lighting, professionally produced video clips, and large electronic screens is so common it can be called a standard evangelical affective choreography. The structure of the Exodus worship service thus follows a typical evangelical formula. As the vast majority of attendees are evangelical Christians, when the worship began, the crowd jumped right in to the spirit of the evening. Attendees sang along to the songs from the beginning of that first night.

The gym was dark and the stage was bathed in light, producing the effect created in rock concerts where audience members blend in with the crowd in darkness while the intensity of the stage lighting creates a feeling of intimacy with the performers. Alan Chambers, the charismatic president of Exodus, welcomed us. He tells us, "The opposite of homosexuality is not heterosexuality, but holiness, and if you're here to become heterosexual you are here for the wrong reasons." He acknowledges the long history of Exodus and the small group of men who started it in California in 1976. He tells us this is a space to let go of shame and is no place to hide, that God is here to accept our shame, our burdens, and all we have to do is to lay them down for God. Although Chambers' journey has led him out of homosexuality into a life with a wife and children, we were told not everyone can expect this.

Projected on large screens over the stage, a professionally produced video montage, somewhat resembling a Hollywood movie trailer, lists various questions over scenes of solemn faces looking at the camera. Instrumental music is played live in the background, setting an emotional tone to what is being said. Across the screen are written the phrases: Were you born gay? Can I be free from homosexuality? Can your marriage survive? What does freedom mean? Does God care? Can I help my friends?

Alan Chambers, onstage alongside the videos, asks us: "How many of you are in need of some hope tonight? How many of you are here for an encounter with the Lord?" He is greeted with shouts and wild applause. The live band accompanies his speech with background music. Chambers tells us, "God created us to be in relationship, first with him, then with one another. We are not created to be alone, to go it alone." He gives us the message that God loves us deeply, that no matter what burdens we carry in our hearts He is with us, and He loves us. The band and the speakers work in unison so that speeches are choreographed to emphasize emotional resonance.

After about an hour, Chambers leaves the stage and the band plays for over an hour. Song after song explores common themes in the repertoire of worship songs: the need to sacrifice one's ego, to develop a close relationship with God, and to feel the extent of God's love. An additional emphasis at this conference was shame, and the need to let it go. The speakers set the stage and then the band continued the emotional messages, with songs like the following:

A thousand times I've failed
Still your mercy remains
And should I stumble again
Still I'm caught in your grace…
Our shame was deeper than the sea
Your grace is deeper still

– "*You Alone Can Rescue*,*"* Matt Redman

Or like this:

My heart and my soul, I give You control
Consume me from the inside out Lord
Let justice and praise, become my embrace
To love You from the inside out
Your will above all else, my purpose remains
The art of losing myself in bringing you praise
-"*From the Inside Out*," Hillsong United

This is the space in the conference where participants are encouraged to experience the message viscerally and emotionally.

"Worship" is a particular kind of Christian musical performance and experience. It plays a central and significant role in church sermons and religious events. There is commonly more time dedicated to worship than preaching during a typical Sunday morning sermon. For example, many Sunday services at large evangelical churches begin with forty minutes of live rock music, led by the "worship" ministry, often replete with smoke machines, rock-concert lighting and sometimes as many as seventy-five musicians and singers on stage, with multiple video screens projecting the musicians' images. The sermon is often twenty or twenty-five minutes long. For evangelicals, worship is a means to directly experience God's presence. It is about feeling and congregants are encouraged to express that feeling in physical forms. At some churches it is common for young people to rush the stage/pulpit and jump up and down energetically to the music, raising their hands in the air as if they were at a large rock concert, even if it's 9-o-clock on a Sunday morning. The majority of the church sings along. Worship leaders (singers and song-writers) are trained to incorporate prayer into their music so that during emotional

breaks in the song, the band will continue to perform in the background, providing a soundtrack to the singer's invocation of Jesus, and reinforcing the theme of the song.

The hyper-mediated space of the megachurch is designed for optimal emotional experience. Jon Bialecki writes, "sincerity, spontaneity, and deep affect are arguably the guiding principles" in worship music (2008:381). This "deep affect" conflates truth with feeling and provides the means for evangelicals to experience their faith as personal. As sermons and worship music are often orchestrated to share similar themes, they also allow the message of the sermon to create a strong resonance between emotion and message. Combining sermons with music and strategically employing mediation techniques— the lighting, video montages, sound system, and large projection screens— cultivates a highly emotional space where the messages from the sermons are able to take root. The language of faith, what Harding calls the "rhetoric of conversion," requires significant emotional reworking to take hold. This type of faith is rooted in sense, in the senses. In a secular age, one where sexual and familial diversity are represented and accepted in popular culture venues, affect must be shaped to conform to what is understood as Biblical ideals. And, in an era shaped by mediated emotions, from internet pornography to TV dramas to the emotional ballad, evangelical leaders have adopted to this new technological landscape by employing technologies that encourage emotional resonance.

This is part of a larger trend in US popular religious practice, which has shifted over the past 40 years to reflect our new era of mediated emotions and now emphasizes "intense spiritual experience… at the heart of the relationship with God" (see also Fogel 2000; Luhrmann 2004:518-19; Ostling 1993; Roof 1993). In evangelical Christianity this

has involved an emphasis on developing an intimate "relationship with God," where God is seen as a buddy (for men) or as a boyfriend or husband (for women) (Kintz 1997:32; Luhrmann 2004:525). Church and spiritual experiences are not about practicing rules, but developing this relationship through experiencing feeling. Informants told me with such frequency that they did not have a religion but instead have a relationship that it was as if they were reading a script, signaling widespread agreement. Evangelical technologies of the self include prayer, fasting, and discipleship, all of which are aimed at learning about oneself and of cultivating the right feelings. Pastor Bobbi likes to emphasize that having the right feelings and closeness with God will lead to the right actions. Ethical life in this case is shaped not by the imposition of external rules, or orders (how evangelicals see religion), but is instead experienced as ethics flowing out of emotional resonance and personal experience. These ethics are brought to life, so to speak, through highly mediated experiences. They are also cultivated within and thus require the patriarchal nuclear family.

This connection was highlighted throughout the Exodus conference and is particularly demonstrated through the night in the program dedicated to fathers. Ted Mallon, ex- football star and now motivational speaker and author on fatherhood, gave a speech entitled, "What did your father name you?" He began with a personal story about his own father, who died early. Instead of growing up with his heroic and kind biological father, he grew up with a distant and angry stepfather who left emotional scars. When he himself had children, he also became an angry father. He stated: "Then one day God told me: 'You've learned to hear My voice through the broken voice of your stepfather.' I thought that God was judging me and angry with me. When I asked God why I was mean

to my children He said, 'That's how you talk to yourself.'" He felt judged by his stepfather, and so he assumed his Heavenly Father was also judging him. In order to really understand God, Mallon had to heal from those feelings of rejection and judgment.

The message for the night was that if your earthly father fails to give you a name, a valued place in the world, then you need and seek affirmation elsewhere and will seek out your own name and identity outside the Biblical order. For Mallon that name was "football player," he stated: "I needed to be successful to feel worthy… How about for those children who are abused and then they get confused: am I a boy or a girl? The enemy comes along gives you a new name, 'you're *gay!' And you can have a new community.* But, I'll tell you something. It's just as much a sin to be named a football player as it is to be named gay… The church says, 'get over your sexual sin,' but what we really need is to have a new name! We are adolescents unless we are given a new name by our father." His speech closed by asking everyone who did not experience a loving earthly father to come forward. Eighty percent of the room did, leaving the rows of chairs rather empty, and a huge majority of the 1,000 attendees surrounding the stage. Mallon states: "Your name is no longer about your brokenness, about your sexual sin, gay, your name is now 'beloved'."

As the tears, shaking, and weeping of so many attendees showed, this message devastated at least a dozen people there that night. The transition into worship that evening had many people crying. And I think it is this combination of emotionally provocative rhetoric and ritual, technically skilled musicians with romantic ballads, and sensitive personal issues that creates the "best worship" experience. The "best worship" is the most emotionally raw, pleading, and de-individuating. The groupness of these

rituals, taking place in a room, where visceral displays of impact are encouraged and widely demonstrated, where there is an *excess of feeling,* that God is said to move the most.

I have seen a similar emotionally fraught group ritual at an evangelical youth conference that had a similar call to the stage for youth to reclaim their lost virginity, replete with similarly raw displays of emotion. In these intimate rituals, where individuals are called on to reframe their sexual and familial histories and relationships, and memories of emotional wounds and shame are called forth and reframed and made new, emotions run to the surface and overflow. While these re-birth rituals are unique in their ability to offer emotional catharsis for participants, similar dynamics shape all evangelical worship. Participants are called upon to make their lives new, to let go of old identities, to be open to the presence of God, to be authentic, all of which require emotional openness. The central role of such emotional displays in evangelical practice shows the significance of particular forms of emotionality with evangelical ethical interpellation. This affective choreography—the emotional ballad, rhetoric connecting personal narratives and experiences to Biblical stories, group displays of emotion—encourage emotional responses felt in the body. They work on shaping a visceral ethics, an ethics that often takes a specific form.

Evangelical Ethics of Intimacy: Or, sinners in the hands of a loving dad

While an Exodus conference is certainly a unique evangelical space, the format and focus of the conference are representative of broader themes within evangelicalism. Churches frequently offer marriage counseling, marriage workshops, workshops on teen "sexual purity," and therapy on "overcoming" homosexuality. The importance of heterosexuality (Erzen 2006) and a "male-headed" patriarchal nuclear family (Griffith

1997) are difficult to overstate in this process. Weekly Bible study small groups are the sites for training individuals in prayer, in continually narrating their lives into religious language, and often are focused on cultivating a "Biblical" family life, from child-rearing to dating to marriage (Bielo 2009; Griffith 1997).

As in Mallon's speech, the patriarchal family is perhaps the metaphor most frequently used in evangelical speech and lived experience and one's relationship with God is interconnected to their relationship with their earthly father. This is both used metaphorically and as a model to shape family life. An evangelical friend in Colorado told me that she had been working on overcoming old wounds and fears that her father had rejected her, and until she healed from this she could not fully understand God's love for her. Now that she's healed from this feeling of rejection from her father, she can believe on a deeper level that God the Father loves her too and is now free to pursue a deeper relationship with Him. One young man I interviewed in Denver who identifies now as ex-ex-gay,[i] was raised in an evangelical family and underwent reparative therapy to try to leave homosexuality before deciding to leave the church instead. In describing his home-life while he was growing up he stated, "In my family, a traditional evangelical family structure, where parents represent God, I didn't know I could really challenge them." Pastor Bobbie would approve. In one sermon, he shared with his nine thousand congregants that he has taught his two young children to obey him and listen to his voice. If he calls his children's names in his house, then they come, the first time. He stated, "There is no re-calling their names up the stairs until they feel like answering. They know that if they challenge me there will be consequences so they come when I call. Because for now, my voice *is* the voice of God to them. If they learn to listen for my voice, then

they will also eventually learn to listen to God the Father's voice."

Jodi, a presenter at the Exodus conference on "The Roots of Lesbianism" refers to the importance of the father: "Dad's role is to individuate child from parent, if he is not speaking into that chaos [of gender identify development] then this doesn't happen." She thus cleverly conflates God's role in Genesis (speaking into the chaos of the world to create life) with a father's role with his children. The historicity of genesis is thus continually recreated in father/child relationships: a historicity in which God (or the father) faces an unformed and chaotic world (or child) that must be named to be brought to order, and to Godliness. She goes on to argue that God gave men more power than women because men have the power to name.

In addition to the father/child relationship, the metaphor of marriage similarly receives broad circulation in evangelical discourse. In a separate context, Pastor Dallas, a visiting pastor in Colorado Springs included the following in his sermon:

> Before sin, before Eve sinned, this is important, Adam is alone in the garden. Adam goes to God and says, "I'm having such a good time in the Garden, but there's something missing." God says, "I was too busy to name the animals, why don't you do that, and see if you can find a companion amongst the animals." So Adam falls asleep while he's naming the animals, and when he wakes up he sees his companion, and he says, "Woah! Man!" And that's where the name comes from!
> Do you know how God knew that the only thing that would have satisfied Adam's desire was a bride? Because that is God's desire as well! He wants you! So what if God went up to Adam and says, "I'm really sorry to tell you, but your bride has sinned and she has to die. I can make you a new one!" Adam would have said, "But, I don't want a new one, I love her!"
> I think a similar conversation happened in heaven, where God said to His son one day, "Son I'm so sorry to tell you this, but your bride has sinned and she has to die." And I think Jesus said, "But I don't want her to die! I love her!" Then God says, "Someone has to die," so Jesus said, "Let it be me then." Did you know that you're His greatest desire? That the God who had everything wanted you!

Re-narrating the story of both the creation of Eve and the death of Jesus through parochial language and through extending the metaphor of marriage, Pastor Dallas is

inviting the congregants to feel as deeply for Jesus as they would for their spouse. For, after all, this is how Jesus feels about us.

Through continually interpreting scripture through the metaphor of the patriarchal family and marriage, evangelical Christianity is reliant on this family for its structure. The symbolic use of this family form is also a means through which spiritual practices take root and are performed and practiced in everyday life. And it is through these familial relations that the emotional structuring of evangelical life is laid. This also means that one's familial life becomes the means through which one lives out their faith.

The fact that evangelicalism places such an emphasis on the family brings it into stark contrast with secular trends. For, the divisions that produce the notion of the secular, particularly the privatization of religion and the family, deny the interrelationality between the public and the private. However, as Talal Asad writes, the "private space of home and school is crucial to the formation of subjects who will eventually inhabit a particular public culture" (2003:185). Evangelicals understand this, they believe public culture should be Christian culture and thus should enforce their relational world: a relational world that connects everyone and everything from the human zygote to the heavenly God in a series of hierarchical relationships. The family is a solid requirement in this chain. The family— as idealized metaphor, lived experience, and ethical symbol— is also reinforced as sacred through an emotional economy nurtured within a variety of evangelical institutions. These connections, between emotion, family, and politics are part of what William Connolly (1999) calls "intersubjective judgment" or "visceral thinking." Connolly draws on Asad's exploration of the role of habitus as embodied aptitudes, to assert: "secular understandings of discourse, analysis, and

argument capture merely one dimension of thinking, intersubjective judgment, and doctrinal commitment in public life" (25).

The structuring of evangelical ethical emotional life, the moving and shaping of affect through worship and pastoral messages into a specific relational ethics, has far-reaching consequences that belie any attempted separation of the "religious" or "ethical" from the "political." In a discussion of the role of anger in feminist politics, Sara Ahmed writes: "It is not that anger at women's oppression 'makes us feminist': such anger *already* involves a reading of the world in a particular way… emotions are what move us, and how we are moved involves interpretation of sensations and feeling not only in the sense that we interpret what we feel, but also in that we might be dependent on past interpretations that are not necessarily made by us, but that come before us" (Ahmed 2004:171). Thus even in seemingly non-political arenas, the emotional-ethical interpellations of evangelical megachurches shape the possibilities of political behavior in significant ways, largely through forming interpretive frames to shape specific emotional responses.

The most important aspect of evangelical ethical life is an intimate relationship with God. Male pastors' weekly invocation of stories of their spouses and children and use of the metaphor of marriage to understand one's relationship with God serves to sacralize the hetero-patriarchal family as the site of a godly life. This gendered ethics creates particular interpretations of the world that valorize the patriarchal family as of primary importance, and thus incite emotional responses to defend it. And for evangelicals, emotional affiliations define their religious life. Proper action is important, but authentic feeling is required, and gender and the patriarchal family structure this framework.

Looking at evangelical ethical life, how it is affectively embodied, shows how ethics and politics are linked.

[i] There are no available numbers for how many people have gone through some version of "reparative therapy" or other therapy attempting to leave homosexuality, however the number is well into the tens of thousands. There are thus many people who have left what is sometimes called the "ex-gay" movement and some have formed the "ex-ex-gay" movement, who often call themselves "ex-gay survivors". See beyondexgay.com for more information on this movement.

Chapter 3: Religious Worldview and the Political Imaginary

I spent the summer of 2008 in Colorado Springs conducting preliminary research on the politics of the family in evangelicalism. I had spent the previous two years listening to evangelical radio podcasts, attending two national conservative conferences, and following several conservative Christian listservs that all identified themselves as part of the "pro-family movement." Upon arriving in Colorado Springs, I wanted to see what the "pro-family Movement" looked like in practice. I didn't realize how hard it would be to actually find this movement. When I first started meeting people during my research I typically introduced my interests saying something like the following: "I'm studying the politics of groups like Focus on the Family." And while many non-evangelicals had heard of Focus only in regard to their extensive national political work, the evangelicals I met didn't see Focus as a political organization. I met a man at a young adult picnic, a lanky thirty-something who sported a shock of near-white blonde hair, who gave me a characteristic response: "Hmm, that's interesting. I don't see Focus as a political organization, I guess the culture has changed and put Christians on the defensive, so that groups like Focus have to enter politics to defend Christian values. But, I don't see them as a political organization or part of a movement."

I did meet politically engaged evangelicals in my time in Colorado Springs who identified as part of the pro-family movement, and I met several evangelicals who vocally challenged the narrow political interests of this movement, but both of these positions were rare. Instead I found that while a variety of national political organizations and conferences define themselves as part of the pro-family Movement, and most evangelicals support the political positions of this movement, everyday evangelicals do

not consider themselves to be part of a political movement. For most evangelicals, they seem themselves as primarily spiritual, engaging in religious practices that connect them to God, and see certain political responsibilities that stem from their ethical obligations. Their political and religious/ethical identity are combined, with religious practice being the most important. Despite this disavowal, the evangelicals I met articulated remarkable agreement on politics. In almost a hundred interviews I completed with evangelicals, ranging in ages from 20-70, when I asked whether Christians had a responsibility to support any political issues, nearly everyone said yes, and these were consistently limited to two issues: challenging abortion and defending the family by challenging gay marriage.

I also found that almost everyone I met who had converted to evangelicalism as an adult described their religious conversion as a simultaneous political conversion, narrating shifts in religious belief and political perspective as though seamlessly stemming from the same source. Gregory Sessions, who worked for an overtly political evangelical organization in Colorado Springs, talked about being a womanizing, socialist, anti-war leftist in the 1970s until his boss introduced him to his Bay Area evangelical church and he found Jesus. "So here I am now!" he said to me with a jovial laugh. We both glanced around his office, filled with political books and stacks of newspapers and policy papers. Today he lives and breathes a religious right political agenda, and in his story this political conversion went hand-in-hand with his religious conversion. I asked him to explain this further, how his politics had changed and who influenced this, and he had a hard time understanding what I meant. In his narrative, politics, lifestyle, and religious identity, or lack of it, were all rolled into one. He eventually responded, "When

I became a Christian none of my old friends would talk to me anymore. They'd tell me things like, 'We can't hang out with you anymore. Now you're going to support war and nuclear power!'" So he developed a new community of Christians.

Another informant had been raised in a mainline Protestant family but was not actively religious as an adult. He recounted a dramatic conversion experience where one day he felt God's presence visit him, and this changed his life. As he says, "I woke up the next day and I just knew for the first time that I was wrong about abortion." In his telling there was no one else in his life with an anti-abortion message, but God Himself who educated him on this topic almost immediately after his conversion. Importantly this is a new idea for evangelicals, that God has a special concern for preventing abortion. Most evangelicals were pro-choice until the late 1970s. Professor Bruce Waltke, of the conservative Dallas Theological Seminary, published an article in 1968 in the preeminent evangelical magazine, *Christianity Today*, against the idea that fetuses have souls.

> God does not regard the fetus as a soul, no matter how far gestation has progressed. The Law plainly exacts: 'If a man kills any human life he will be put to death' (Lev. 24:17). But according to Exodus 21:22–24, the destruction of the fetus is not a capital offense… Clearly, then, in contrast to the mother, the fetus is not reckoned as a soul (quoted in, Dudley 2012).

In 1971, the Southern Baptist Convention, one of the key evangelical institutions, passed a 1971 resolution affirming abortion should be legal not only to protect the life of the mother, but to protect her emotional health as well. Evangelicals didn't start to change their views on abortion until after the establishment of the first national Religious Right organization, The Moral Majority, began conducting significant national organizing. And, as I outline in Chapter 1, evangelicals began to organize politically around issues other than those on which they currently focus, but rather around an overt campaign to

allow private Christian schools to remain racially segregated. Paul Weyrich, who helped to form the Moral Majority stated, "[W]hat galvanized the Christian community was not abortion, school prayer, or the ERA [equal rights amendment]. ... I was trying to get [evangelicals] interested in those issues and I utterly failed" (quoted in Hankins 2009:144). It was not until after a political movement of conservative evangelicals was formed that abortion became a focus of evangelical politics.

Numerous critiques by liberal politicians and liberal Christians have been lobbied against evangelical involvement in politics based on the assumption that church and state must be separate. However this separation is challenging to implement in practice. As Talal Asad writes, “If the secularism thesis no longer carries the conviction it once did, this is because the categories of ‘politics’ and ‘religion’ turn out to implicate each other more profoundly than we thought” (2003:200). The notion that religion is rooted in private beliefs that can be easily curtained off from public practices has been challenged by a variety of recent anthropological work (c.f. Asad 1993; Hirschkind 2006a; Mahmood 2005). In *Genealogies of Religion* (1993), Talal Asad argues that religion,has only been framed by scholars as apolitical in the modern west and instead articulates an understanding of religion as connected to power and produced by historical forces. Religious ethics clearly then cannot easily be separated from political impacts. This is especially true for evangelical ethics. Exit poll data shows that white evangelicals vote consistently as a block for the Republican Party, as is demonstrated in the following table, demonstrating remarkable political agreement.

Presidential Vote Among White Evangelical Protestants

	2004		Diff. GOP-Dem	2008		Diff. GOP-Dem	2012		Diff. GOP-Dem
	Kerry	Bush		Obama	McCain		Obama	Romney	
	%	%		%	%		%	%	
National exit poll	21	79	58	26	73	47	20	79	59
State exit polls									
Florida	NA	NA	NA	18	81	63	18	82	64
North Carolina	15	85	70	NA	NA	NA	21	78	57
Michigan	24	75	51	31	65	34	22	77	55
Wisconsin	NA	NA	NA	30	69	39	24	74	50
Ohio	24	76	52	25	74	49	28	71	43
Nevada	NA	NA	NA	24	74	50	29	71	42
Iowa	31	68	37	32	66	34	33	67	34

Source: Exit poll data from National Election Pool, provided by National Public Radio (NPR). Those voting for other presidential candidates are not shown. NA indicates data not available. The National Election Pool exit polls include voters who identify as "Mormon" and "other Christian" in the Protestant category. In this report, a few estimates for 2004 and 2008 differ slightly from previous Pew Forum analyses due to differences in data coding.

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http://www.pewforum.org/Politics-and-Elections/Election-2012-Post-Mortem--White-Evangelicals-and-Support-for-Romney.aspx

During my first research trip to Colorado I realized that I had to change the frame of my inquiry about this topic. Despite evidence of significant political agreement and political effects from practicing one's faith as an evangelical, I realized I could not study evangelicals as a political community, because almost everyone denied they were part of one. Instead I came to see my research question as: How is political consensus fostered in an evangelical religious community, particularly given lack of an awareness about being part of a political movement? Is there something in these religious communities that shapes not only ethical life but political persuasions? I came to understand two factors as shaping this alignment with ethics and politics: 1) the cultivation of a specifically evangelical worldview and 2) the prominent role of Christian media and the unique

authority structure in evangelicalism.

Media, Authority, and Worldview

Pastor Lance is the main pastor of a Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) in Colorado, which is not an evangelical church. I first interviewed him out of a curiosity of how this church that is open to all sexual minorities related to the dominant evangelical churches in the area. Many Christians who experience same-sex attraction seek out ex-gay therapy to attempt to leave homosexuality, although some also seek out new Christian churches that are accepting of their sexual identities. I attended a few MCC services to provide some contrast to the large evangelical churches that served as the primary site of my research to see how this different approach to sexuality was reflected in services and the congregation.

Lance told me that it's common for people to weep during their first visit to an MCC church. For people who are used to hearing messages that same-sex attraction is sinful and incommensurate with Christianity, attending a gay-affirming church, one that attempts a non-judgmental approach to sexual ethics and familial relations, is often an emotional experience. Once when Lance and I met for coffee, I told him how I was puzzled that everyone at the large churches I studied seemed to identify as a Republican politically. He sheepishly responded, "Well, we deal with the same thing at MCC. Everyone is pretty much a Democrat. We try to be welcoming to everyone, but we seem to mainly only attract politically liberal people." This is especially of note given that many MCC members come from conservative Christian churches and political backgrounds.

The first time I attended an MCC church I was certainly struck by the different message about sexuality being shared than the ones I was used to at the large evangelical

churches I studied. However, I was more struck by the vastly different political messages that were interlaced throughout the sermon and singing. The songs for that day focused on the importance of peace and justice, themes that were not dominant in large evangelical churches. The sermon that day floored me. Pastor Lance read from Hebrews 13:1-4:

> [1]Let mutual love continue. [2]Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. [3]Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured.

Pastor Lance stopped here, letting this message sink in. This was in the Summer of 2010, two years into Obama's presidency and during a time when many Americans were considering the morality and legitimacy of the use of torture by the CIA under the George W. Bush administration. This verse, explicitly discussing torture and framing those being tortured as also part of the body of Christ, encouraged us to empathize with them as though we were also suffering in the same way, held us in a contemplative space, almost mandating we consider our political positions alongside our ethical responsibilities. He told us that what is translated as "strangers" would have also meant foreigners. Pastor Lance continued, "We all think God has our prejudices, He just expresses them differently. Instead, God is really just about love. How did we forget to love our neighbor?" And God values our neighbor, he reminded us, as much as He values "foreigners." Pastor Lance connected this verse to a national debate about the building of Park51, a proposed Islamic Center near the former World Trade Center site. He shared a recent poll that 64% of Americans believe Muslims have the right to build a Mosque wherever they want, but 63% say there shouldn't be a new mosque in lower Manhattan. In closing he reminded us about the message from Hebrews 13, God loves all people, and

as followers of God, we must not perpetuate prejudice against the people whom God tells us to love, which includes our neighbors and others who we see as foreign.

I was intrigued by this sermon. In the hundreds of sermons I had heard during my fieldwork in large evangelical churches I had heard no similar critique asking me to consider the religious/ethical implications of torture. I was also not used to hearing such overtly political commentary in sermons. After the sermon I went home to look up this Bible verse. Unlike at large evangelical churches, it is not as common for MCC congregants to bring their own Bible's to the service to read along with the pastor. Two things struck me about this verse. First, Pastor Lance had used the New Revised Standard Version Bible, which uses the word "tortured" in Verse 3, but the New International Version, the translation most commonly used by evangelicals, instead uses the word "mistreated." This language has significantly different political impacts. But, I was also struck by the verse immediately following the one read by Pastor Lance:

> [4]Let marriage be held in honour by all, and let the marriage bed be kept undefiled; for God will judge fornicators and adulterers.

This verse, valorizing marriage and condemning adultery, was a verse I was familiar with in evangelical churches. It is also a verse that I would be surprised to hear an MCC pastor focus on, at least not without context and commentary.

Reading these different verses together, I felt like different strands of Christianity could find their base in the different verses, that selectively reading Bible verses fed and framed radically different political interventions. And despite the fact that white evangelicals vote very similarly as a block, evangelical pastors are rarely as overtly political in their sermons as Pastor Lance's commentary. At first this surprised me. When I began studying evangelical churches I expected more overt political commentary during

sermons, but I hardly ever heard this. Instead I came to see the training in a particular ethics as shaping political passions. Evangelical and conservative Christians, particularly in the ex-gay movement, commonly critiqued the MCC church for selectively interpreting sexual ethics based on their own interested positions, but I found instead a complicated relationship exists between ethical paradigm and Biblical interpretation. Adults who converted to Christianity would frequently tell me that before their born-again experience they could not read the Bible. Converts would say things like: "It didn't make sense," "I found the Bible boring," or "I just couldn't concentrate on the Bible." After having a born-again experience, and developing a Christian identity, people would describe the Bible as "coming alive." People relayed this experience in language: "Suddenly I could understand everything so clearly," or "It was almost as though some sections were highlighted, calling me to read them, and I understood them so clearly, like God was speaking directly to me through these passages, guiding my reading." Part of the process of developing a Christian identity is learning how to read one's Bible, and for many evangelicals this involves significant note-taking in the actual text (Bielo 2009). Evangelicals will claim they engage literalist-reading practices and that they interpret the Bible solely based on what is written in its pages. But, in practice I found that one's ethical frame shaped how one interprets scripture.

This point was made clear soon after I arrived to Colorado Springs. It was summer and I was attending a small evangelical young-adult Bible study. It was an informal group, we'd meet in someone's house, read the Bible, sing songs with someone playing guitar, and then close with a praise reports and prayer requests. One night we discussed Mark 10:17-31. We were slowly working our way through Mark and had

gotten to the section often titled, "The Rich and the Kingdom of God." This passage recounts a conversation between Jesus and a disciple:

> 21 Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." 22 At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth. 23 Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!" 24 The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, "Children, how hard it is[e] to enter the kingdom of God! 25 It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." (NIV)

The passage ends with the enigmatic phrase, "But many who are first will be last, and the last first." As is common practice in Bible study groups, we took turns reading through the passage, spent a couple of moments in silence, and then started to discuss what we took the passage to mean. I was surprised that none of the six people in our group took up Jesus' discussion about wealth, money, or inequality. Instead, everyone agreed, at least vocally, that Jesus was condemning any practices that get in between a Christian and their relationship with God. This could involve many things, and examples were given including: loving food too much, choosing your friends over worshipping God, or even playing video games too much could get in the way of your relationship of God.

I sat through this discussion not really knowing how to participate. For me the passage seemed so clearly about excessive wealth being incompatible with a Christian walk and a critique of materialism. The "first shall be last, and the last first," coming so soon after the critique of wealth, read as a clear statement about one's class position not securing one's ethical position. Yet, no one else in our small group that summer evening said anything about class or money into this passage. During the discussion I sat silent and baffled, feeling as though I was missing something. How could we be reading this passage so differently? Especially since the Christians I was with all claimed to use a

literalist interpretation of the Bible and the meaning of this passage seemed so clear.

Within the next two years, after attending dozens of sermons by megachurch pastors and spending countless hours listening to Christian radio, I came to see this interpretation as part of a particular ethical training that dominates most evangelical teachings. Despite a dominant Biblical theme against wealth, with numerous directives valorizing poverty over wealth, suburban megachurch pastors and evangelical Christian media did not highlight this theme, certainly not seeing poverty as a structural condition. Poverty was almost exclusively talked about as existing in the "Third World," and mission trips were highlighted as a way to help the poor by providing resources and a relationship with Christ. Pastor Bobbie, who headed one of the largest megachurches in Colorado Springs, frequently talked about the importance of assisting people in need, and for him, as in the Bible, this meant "widows and orphans." Instead of focusing on poverty, most pastoral teachings educate on a gendered relational ethics of intimacy. This relational ethics prioritizes relationships above all else, first a relationship with God, then with your family or spouse, and then with other Christians. And my fellow Bible study participants dutifully interpreted scripture through this lens. Instead of seeing a critique of wealth in this passage, they saw a critique of anything that hurts your relationship with God. Maintaining an intimate, lived, daily relationship with God becomes the defining element in evangelical life, and sometimes even trumps literalist interpretations of the Bible.

Leaders of the pro-family movement call this ethical paradigm a "worldview," and actively try to teach Christians to adopt a worldview. Focus on the Family published a DVD series used by Bible study groups across the country called *The Truth Project*

designed to educate Christians in a Biblical worldview. The series talks about such diverse things as "Sociology: The Divine Imprint" and "The American Experiment: Stepping Stones," which states "America is unique in the history of the world." While I frequently encountered discussions of the importance of developing a proper Christian worldview in Christian media, I found that most of the education in religious-ethical worldview did not come from such overt means, but through the repetition of what is focused on in sermons. For MCC members, sexual ethics are not the focus of their interpretation of the Bible; instead there is a focus on alternative elements of Biblical ethics, most often the ethic of love and of justice. In dominant evangelical ethics, a gendered ethics of intimacy shapes the worldview and interpretation of the Bible, which also directs political interests.

The White Evangelical Worldview

In the summer of 2008 a dramatic political shift was being felt in the capital of conservative evangelicalism, at the headquarters of Focus on the Family in Colorado Springs. The eight-year presidency of George W. Bush was coming to an end and a liberal, Christian senator was threatening to win the presidency. Obama's candidacy terrified the leaders of the Christian right, not only because of his liberal views, but because of his aggressive outreach to evangelical voters that was beginning to show success in gaining the support of many young, white evangelicals.

Not long after Obama secured the presidential candidacy, James Dobson dedicated two of his radio broadcasts to talking about Obama's candidacy, and his theology. These broadcasts were sponsored by Focus on the Family Action, the political arm of Focus on the Family that is not tax-exempt and so legally is able to engage in political debates. In the first broadcast, Dobson interviewed Southern Baptist Theological

Seminary President Albert Mohler on the Obama candidacy and the state of evangelical America. Southern Baptists are one of the largest denominations that are defined as evangelical. Their conversation was telling. In contrasting Obama's "liberal theology" with the evangelical worldview Molher and Dobson articulated what the evangelical worldview entails.

Dobson discusses a recent *Newsweek* cover story about Obama's faith and calls Obama's theology "liberation theology." Molher responds, "He believes that Christianity can be an impetus for social change in a liberal direction. Now I don't really think this is what most evangelical Christians think of when they think of a basic understanding of Christianity." He continued:

> Here's a basic reading: if you believe that the Civil Rights Movement is the model for every single social issue, then you'll paint every single social issue as one of relieving oppression… I don't think evangelical Christians share that worldview, but I don't think they understand, at least many do not understand, just how radical Barack Obama is on this.

Molher states he is concerned that evangelicals are not paying enough attention to Obama's liberalism, Dobson then asks: "Is it your impression that [evangelical Christians] are asleep at the switch?"

While Molher and Dobson critique Obama's Christian worldview as seeing all issues through "the Civil Rights Movement" model, the policy issues they focus on is telling. Dobson states that while he is not very fond of either candidate, that: "[T]here's no doubt, at least no doubt in my mind, about whose policies will result in more babies being killed. Or who will do the greatest damage to the institution of marriage and the family. Later on in the program Molher states of Obama's politics, " I don't think America is ready to sign on to the full normalization of homosexuality and to the

elimination of marriage as the union of a man and a woman as a distinctive institution." It is interesting to note that while their critique of Obama's Christianity is that it is implicitly clouded by race, that his worldview makes him misunderstand the Bible, they emphasize that the correct worldview is to defend the patriarchal family and limit access to abortion. They fail to recognize that this worldview, defending a relational ethics of intimacy, is also a product of a distinctly racial history.

Both Molher and Dobson are correct that most evangelical Christians do not "share that worldview" that Christianity can be a tool for social justice. While they are describing Obama's theology as liberation theology, his spiritual mentor (at least until he was forced to denounce him due to public pressure), Reverend Jeremiah Wright, espoused not liberation theology, but a particularly American tradition of Black Liberation Theology. And Molher and Dobson are acknowledging race impacts these very different understandings of Christianity, although admittedly in their telling they hold the correct understanding of Christian ethics and it is only Obama's Christian that is influenced by race.

Molher, the then-president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, was articulating a much larger truth about the role of race in shaping Biblical worldview. Michael Emerson and Christian Smith (2000) drew on national survey and extensive interview data to study the role of race in shaping Christian ethics. They find that while conservative white evangelicals desire racial reconciliations, they are trained to not see the structural barriers that make this impossible. They argue that it is not class or region that separates white evangelicals from the rest of the population but worldview. Their religion has "a clear and consistent effect" on explanations of black/white inequality

(Emerson, et al. 1999:413). Conservative white Protestantism has an anti-structuralist frame, it emphasizes clear prescriptions about right and wrong conduct rooted in individualistic actions. They call this frame "relationalism," which is a rooted in the idea that salvation comes through a personal relationship with Christ, the most important aspect of a Christian's life. They write:

> By *transposing* these theological understandings, white conservative Protestants place strong emphasis on family relationships, friendships, church relationships, and other forms of interpersonal connections. Healthy relationships encourage people to make right choices" (Emerson, et al. 1999:401).

Thus, white Protestants often see "social problems as rooted in poor relationships or the negative influence of significant others" (401) and surveys of conservative white protestants- stated blacks lacked the forms of relationality needed to succeed. Emerson and Smith argue that despite embracing the ideal of racial equality, that through dismissing structural barriers perpetuating racial inequality "white evangelicalism likely does more to perpetuate the racialized society than to reduce it" (Emerson and Smith 2000:170). This emphasis on relationships as opposed to structure impacts not only the possibilities of evangelical political interventions around racial inequalities, but also around environmental problems.

When Mohler says most evangelicals don't have a worldview that sees Christianity as a vehicle to relieve oppression, he is describing the dominant white, conservative interpretation of Christianity. This view of Christianity valorizes relationships above all else, and defending the hierarchies that define this relational world become of preeminent political importance, and advocating relationships becomes the model for addressing all social problems. As this relational ethics is defined first by one's relationship with Jesus, hierarchy in relationships is extremely important to maintain, as

marriage is a central metaphor used to define this relational ethics, patriarchal sexuality is a requirement for this relational order to survive. Thus Molher's description of what Obama's agenda would mean for evangelicals focuses on sexuality and marriage: "I don't think America is ready to sign on to the full normalization of homosexuality and to the elimination of marriage as a union between a man and a woman as a distinctive institution."

It is no coincidence that white evangelical ethics ignore structural inequalities as race has shaped US Christian traditions in a variety of ways. Unlike African American Christianity, white evangelicals have benefited from structural racial inequalities. And, while white evangelicals are in general very supportive of embracing an ethic of color-blind tolerance, the aggregate effect of evangelical ethics produces and reproduces racial inequalities in complex ways.

African American religious traditions in contrast have always had to contend with the reality of structural inequalities of white supremacy: starting with the problem of slavery, then the issue of emancipation, facing Jim Crow laws, the freedom struggle, and ongoing struggles against racism (West and Glaude 2003). Eugene Genoveses argues that the church in early US history helped to inspire the beginnings of a black national identity (Genovese 1976). Similarly, W.E.B. DuBois writes that the Black church was "peculiarly the expression of the inner ethical life of a people in a sense seldom true elsewhere" and provided a space outside of racist culture to develop self-consciousness (Du Bois 2005:130). Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham goes so far as to say that in the post-Reconstruction South the church became a space for racial and gender self-help because it was "the only space truly accessible to the black community," as the church was often

the only place where African Americans were able to gather publicly (Higginbotham 1993:7). The political role the Christian church played historically in African American life has lead to specific, historically and culturally rooted interpretations of scripture, related to this history of institutional racism. This is not to say that African American Christianities are homogenous politically or ethically, but rather to suggest that racial histories play an important contextual role in the development of various religious-ethical traditions. An example of this is the Exodus narrative, which has played a significant role in African American Christianity. This narrative was appropriated by African Americans which helped to articulate "their own sense of personhood and secured for themselves a common history and destiny" (Glaude 2000:9).

Just as African Americans have developed a variety of historically specific interpretations of Christianity, so too have European Americans. While the majority of white evangelicals articulate a desire to embrace anti-racism, in practice their inability to conceptualize larger, structural inequalities limits their ability to engage in either race-neutral or anti-racist politics (c.f. Emerson, et al. 1999). Contemporary conservative evangelicalism is a product of the racially segregated suburbs that began to dominate US cities after WWII.

Evangelical Media and Authority

Catholicism represents one example of the organization of religious authority, where a complex global bureaucracy and clear hierarchy determines doctrine and organizes religious administration. Evangelicalism has no similar authority structure, but instead describes a general approach Christianity: emphasizing the Bible is the word of God, born-again religious experiences, and the importance of evangelism. While some

denominations are defined as evangelical, such as the Southern Baptist Convention, many evangelical churches, such as the nondenominational megachurches that I studied, are not part of a national or international governing body that provides such leadership. Most large evangelical churches instead are led by a group of elders who are members of the church, and then a number of overseers, who are often pastors of other churches or people who produce Christian media. This raises questions about how doctrinal and other decisions are debated and decided upon, as there are no national conventions or elections or appointments of authority figures to determine changes in leadership or debate Biblical interpretation for nondenominational churches.

In times of crisis, such as after the gay prostitute scandal involving Pastor Ted Haggard at New Life Church, the elders and overseers make the decisions about the direction of the church and how the church will respond to crisis. Part of this unique structure stems from the process by which many megachurches are formed. North End Church, for example, began in small basement meetings in its first pastor's home in the 1980s. As the group grew, the church began to meet in strip malls and other venues: eventually, with a membership of over 7,000, they constructed a massive campus at the north end of the city that could seat over 5,000 congregants. These independent churches typically do not follow a prescribed doctrine, and instead develop their own unique doctrine through "Mission Statements," "Vision Statements," and "What we Believe" statements that outline their approach to Christianity. Although these differ based on each church, they share significant themes: highlighting the importance of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and openness to the Holy Spirit, and a dedication to evangelism and often to missionary work. Although age does not determine who can

serve as an elder, sometimes people in their thirties or forties serve in this role, these positions are limited to men. Only men can serve in senior pastor positions and as elders or overseers.

Just as nondenominational churches began to rise in popularity, beginning in the early 1980s, so too did evangelical media organizations begin to grow in size and stature. Starting in the 1990s evangelical organizations started flocking to this city in the mountains and at one point in the early 2000s it boasted dozens of evangelical organizations. Focus on the Family (Focus), the largest and most influential evangelical organization, moved to Colorado Springs from Southern California in 1991. The organization is a giant media mogul, publishing over a dozen monthly magazines and at its peak popularity produced radio programs heard by over 200 million people daily in over 160 countries. It has also been involved in almost every national policy debate on gay rights for over a decade. The organization receives so much mail from around the country that it has its own zip code

Child psychologist James Dobson is the founder of Focus and served as its charismatic president until 2010. Dobson became a household name amongst evangelicals after publishing his book, *Dare to Discipline,* in 1970. The childrearing guide served as a counter to Dr. Spock's popular approach to parenting, which emphasized non-violent nurturing and understanding of child development instead of parental control. Dobson criticized this style of parenting as destructive to society, and emphasized the need to discipline one's children and maintain authority over them, including using corporal punishment. It is not a stretch to say that the majority of evangelicals under the age of 40 were raised by the principles of this book

In 1977, Dobson founded Focus on the Family in Southern California to produce Christian radio programs and other media formats. In 1991, the organization had grown immensely, boasting a budget of $63 million and receiving, and answering, around 10,000 letters a day from listeners. Due in part to receiving a $4 million grant from the El Pomar foundation of Colorado Springs, Focus moved to a new 45-acre campus in 1991. The annual budget grew consistently until around 2005, when the annual budget hit a high of around $160 million for Focus and around $25 million for *Citizenlink* (formally Focus on the Family Action), the political arm of Focus. In the past seven years the organization's budget has shrunk each year and their staff has diminished by around 25%. However, Focus remains a prolific media producer, publishing: over a dozen monthly magazines for young children, pre-teens, teens, adults, and parents as well as a political magazine; children's radio programs; marriage radio programs that frequently host Christian sex therapists and couples counselors; political radio programs; and DVDs. Its campus receives so many visitors it has its own state highway sign on the highway coming into Colorado Springs, and it houses a museum and a large indoor playground and café. The campus hosts a large bookstore, an accredited semester long program for university students called the Focus Institute, a free counseling department that fields over 1,500 calls per week, and an army of letter writers who respond to over 250,000 letters each month from people asking for prayer and advice

While legally the organization must financially separate political and non-political activities in order to retain their tax-exempt status, their psychological help and political directives are framed as two sides of the same coin: supporting families and parents in personal crisis while trying to shore up policy to defend the family in the political arena.

They maintain an active listserv discussing political issues and frequently produce videos discussing current events. Given how active they are in national and regional politics, I was surprised that many evangelicals didn't view them as a political organization. I met several people who supported Focus' efforts to support families, but criticized their methods for political organizing because it was divisive and hurt Christian outreach efforts. But, most evangelicals in Colorado Springs that I met saw Focus as a ministry that provided help for families in need.

Due to its unique role as a religious leader and political leader, Focus' political directives have held significant power, although this power began to wane under the broader political transition from the Bush years to Obama's presidency. In October of 2008, just before the presidential election, Focus on the Family Action published a paranoid "Letter from 2012 in Obama's America," a mock letter sent from a patriot from the future about the devastation that an Obama presidency would hold. The letter is a fascinating document given that Focus' mission is to "help families thrive" by following Biblical principles. It sets out a fearful vision of the US downfall under Obama's presidency. The letter begins:

> Dear friends, I can hardly sing "The Star Spangled Banner" any more. When I hear the words, O say, does that star spangled banner yet wave O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave? I get tears in my eyes and a lump in my throat. Now in October of 2012, after seeing what has happened in the last four years, I don't think I can still answer, "Yes," to that question.

It goes on to outline a series of tragedies that have befallen the nation in four years including: the disbanding of the Boy Scouts in protest so as not to have to comply with new gay rights legislation; new legislation on pornography that makes it "almost impossible to keep children from seeing pornography;" gun policy that makes it illegal to

own private guns in many states; a Russian invasion of Ukraine, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania;" an Iranian terrorists takeover of Iraq; and due to Obama's suspending of wiretapping and military tribunals, "Since 2009, terrorist bombs have exploded in two large and two small US cities, killing hundreds, and the entire country is fearful, for no place seems safe."

Evangelical media producers such as Focus can play a unique role in framing connections between ethical and political. And figures like Dobson have incredible power to shape perspectives and perceptions not just about lived evangelical ethics, but also how these relate to politics. And particularly under Dobson's leadership, Focus Action often framed evangelical responsibilities as aligning perfectly with a conservative economic and social agenda, making it seem as though fighting against the legalization of gay marriage was just as important to one's Christian walk as being a loving parent and spouse. Since both were emphasized by the organization, and the organization has such influence over so many Christians, the blurred lines between ethical and political responsibilities drawn by Focus make it harder to separate them.

Evangelical media figures have significant power to interpret what it means to be a Christian. As I mentioned previously, Focus often gets over 250,000 letters each month from its listeners with request for prayer and advice. I met a former employee of Focus named Dick who told me that he was fired from his position as a letter writer because his letter output was not high enough. As a correspondence assistant for James Dobson, he was required to write 7-8 letters a day. The content of these letters had to be based not on the Bible, but on Dobson's writing. The correspondence center had a computer called the Joshua computer that housed the corpus of James Dobson's writing and every letter

coming from Focus had to reflect Dobson's writing. Dobson thus enforced a close symmetry between evangelical Biblical reading practices. Just as the Bible is seen as the inerrant word of God and must be read literally, Dobson's own writing were treated as inerrant in this process.

Since the 1970s, we have seen the rise in a variety of evangelical venues and media stars through televangelism, music, and Christian radio stations, the conservative equivalent of NPR, as these stations combine talk radio shows, marriage counseling shows, preaching, and political commentary. Particularly conservative Christian radio stations blend ethical life and political life seamlessly. The proliferation of Christian media that blends ethical and political messages has helped to define evangelicalism as an inherently politically conservative faith.

Countering dominant ideas that religion is inherently about belief, Talal Asad (1993) writes that this is a modern notion based on understandings of Protestant Christianity. Instead we need to understand religion as always functioning as a historically informed authorizing force, as a form of power, and to study a religious group is to at least in part study how authority works within that religion. For evangelicals, media producers often have the most sway in terms of creating consensus about how evangelicalism ought to be practiced, sometimes rivaling the authority of pastors. Media producers such as Focus on the Family hold a significant amount of authority in shaping the practice of evangelicalism, and the political imaginary that stems from evangelical ethics.

James Dobson left the organization in 2010 and immediately started a new radio ministry with his son called *Family Talk*. Since Dobson's retirement, Focus has lost significant funding, but it remains perhaps the most powerful body within the evangelical

movement. Importantly, the new president of Focus, Jim Daly, has focused less on political mobilizations. He is currently beginning to speak of a broader political vision for Focus as well, wanting to expand a political focus beyond fighting against gay rights, gay marriage, and access to abortion. It is too early to tell how these changes in the most influential evangelical organization will affect evangelical conceptions of politics.

Political Worldview in Practice

I attended one Bible study group that was explicitly focused on politics. The leaders were a couple in their late forties who were passionate about conservative politics and often hosted Bible study groups focusing on political engagement. One meeting took place at their house, which is organized to facilitate such meetings. Their living room held about a dozen chairs in a u-shape, around a large, flat screen TV that could be hooked up to a computer. Their children quietly played downstairs during the meeting, and seemed used to the rules of needing to remain quiet and out of the living room until snack time when the meeting closed. Like almost every Christian home I visited, it was orderly and the children clearly followed strict rules, but there was also a prevailing sense of peace in the house. At the start of the meeting, the leader, Bill, lead us in a prayer. He then maneuvered us through almost a dozen political issues with such speed and so few transitions it was hard to keep up. The main topic we discussed was the homosexual agenda, and each time he mentioned this, Bill would reach out his hands like they were trying to grab something, as though he was embodying an agenda he saw as bent on destroying all that he valued. Bill told us that his brother is a homosexual but is not politically involved, so he knows not all people who identify as homosexual are pursuing a political agenda, but, he reminded us, most are.

For Bill, and the other members of this group, Christians are the last to get involved

politically, they're twenty-five years too late and are just starting to wake up. "Only 11% of believers actually vote!" Bill worried. He reminded us of the need to do voter drives at church. I received a pamphlet at the meeting, asking for a $3 donation, called "Pastors, Pulpits, and Politics," encouraging pastors to get involved in politics, within the realm of the law. Everything was framed as an attack on *us*, leading us into a fight we didn't want or choose.

The first 15 minutes were spent with stories about a variety of anti-Christian sentiments, but these stories were just as much about anti-nationalist sentiment as anti-Christian sentiment. Bill told us the story of a young boy whose dad is a soldier in Afghanistan who decided to bike to school with an American flag on his bike. Other students were "offended" by the flag and asked him to remove it. "And that's all they have to say now. I'm offended by that," Bill lamented. Dorris, an elderly woman in the group responded, "An American flag! But, this IS America!" Bill assured us that Canada is even worse and told us that several pastors have now been arrested in Canada for reading the Bible, because the Bible is now deemed hate-speech there because it is anti-homosexual. "You know this could happen in Colorado too," Bill warned us, "The bathroom bill has language in it against hate speech." [i] The group responded vocally: "No!"; "That's crazy!"; "I can't believe it."

We then watched part of a Family Research Council webcast that aired that day against the repeal of Don't Ask Don't Tell legislation, although others had already watched it. Then we started to watch a *Citizenlink* (the political wing of Focus on the Family) video, but Bill stopped it in the middle to give us an update on Proposition 8, the anti-gay marriage proposition which had passed in California, and was still in court. "The

homosexual agenda people are trying to rush it to the Supreme Court because they think they have a favorable court right now," Bill told us. Bill then showed us the Heritage Foundation's website as a great place to get more information about the START treaty, which we should all know about because it makes America, but especially Israel, less safe. We then watched a short clip from a group I hadn't heard of, Parentsrights.org, against the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, a polished video about the encroachment of the UN between parents and their children. Bill told us that Hillary Clinton is really behind this attack on parent's rights. Denise, a middle-aged blonde wearing a t-shirt emblazoned with the American flag, gasped: "She does! Even as a parent!?" Edith retorted, "Well she did write that it takes a village, remember." The video warned that if the convention passes then our children will believe everything the government tells them. They won't know what is right and wrong. And we will lose our nation. Edith, Bill's wife, said, "They need this kind of treaty in Africa where kids are being drafted to be child soldiers, but in the US and Canada where we have clean drinking water we don't need this treaty!" The video showed a father who was arrested for spanking his child, which everyone in the room found terrifying.

Bill then spent some time trying to locate a map of the "thirty places in America where Shari'a law is already being practiced!" Bill gave up and said it would take him awhile to find the map, and Edith jumped in to tell us the differences between natural law and Shari'a. "Natural law is all about respecting life, but Shari'a is all about saying you must kill your daughter if she disobeys you," Edith told us. We concluded our formal discussion with a critique of the recent overhaul of the FDA and a reminder that: "This is a spiritual battle, we must remember, not a political battle."

We closed in a prayer for Israel. Amber, an elderly group member, said tentatively, "Maybe it's good that Obama is not following the history of being Israel's best ally because they will realize it isn't America that is protecting them but God. Maybe they will learn to rely on God more. That God will bring the leaders of Israel back to Him." Then the closing prayer was opened up for individuals to share their own prayers. They prayed against the demonic influences in American politics today and the demonic strategy that makes many homosexuals distrust Christians because they think Christians hate them, and then push aside the people who could most likely help them. They prayed for congressman Jim DeMint to not get bullied into forgetting about the Tea Party. They gave thanks for Jesus stopping some legislation and prayed for Jesus to be present in Washington, then they prayed for me, my research, and an end to my gluten allergy, which I communicated with having to turn down the donuts they had brought to the meeting. So they prayed for Jesus to restore my health the way He intended, and for me to get to know Jesus better.

After the closing prayer, we began practicing fellowship, informally chatting and drinking apple cider and donuts. Edith started talking more about the inefficiencies of the Food and Drug Administration, which led to Doris talking about problems with our food. She said she was cutting out wheat from her diet for a few months to see if she feels better, but she was concerned about the number of food allergies occurring today. She wondered whether it was really the wheat that people are allergic to, or instead perhaps it is all the chemicals used as fertilizers and pesticides that are hurting us. "The soil is totally depleted," Doris said, "So we have to add all these synthetic fertilizers, then we add pesticides, then we think about all the other products and foods we eat. We get it in

our food, our water, from the animals we eat. We're overloaded, so it's causing all these allergies. Isn't it only in the past fifteen years or so that the peanut allergies are so bad?" For a moment everyone was quiet, nodding in agreement, pondering this possible problem that cut so deep, affecting our ability to achieve sustenance that didn't harm us. But this moment was brief, and then Bill interrupted our reverie saying dismissively, "Well, what can we do about it?"

This is indeed the question: what can be done about a food system that many suspect is causing harm in the form of food allergies and other health problems. Better yet, the question should be: what allows us to conceptualize certain problems as political problems with distinct political solutions, while other problems remain critiques without imagined political responses and interventions? The only suggestion mentioned to address concerns over out food supply was Doris stating that she tries to buy organic food when she can, but she blamed governmental regulation on making organic food cost-prohibitive. No one in the room could imagine a political response to this problem so expansive it covered the bulk of our food supply system, and instead only proposed a private solution, through consumer choices of organic products. The vast variety of potential political interventions— from industrial agricultural practices to genetically modified foods to limited regulation of pesticides and herbicides in our food production— were not imagined or up for discussion. Even when all of these issues could be easily understood and defined as Biblical responsibilities— caring for our food supply, caring for animals, caring for the health and "life" of individuals— in this small group these were framed as of lesser concern and importance than defending the heterosexual family and the nation. While everyone in the room could imagine this problem of a

broken and polluted food supply system, no one could imagine a political response to it. This is the power in worldview: some issues come to life as problems which pulls them into a political perspective that begs solutions and the promise that something can be done. While a vast number of silences leave large realms of issues difficult to imagine and acknowledge.

[i] The "Bathroom Bill" is a name that *Focus on the Family's* political arm, *Citizenlink,* gave to a transsexuals rights bill that passed in Colorado in 2008 granting people of either sex access to public institutions including public bathrooms.

Chapter 4: Political Conversions: Ethics and the Temporality of Politics

"Not a single one of our unalienable rights will be safe in the hands of a president who believes that we evolved from slime and that we are the descendents of apes and baboons." Bryan Fisher, at Values Voters Summit 2010

I met Jarrod at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs while he was completing a Master's degree. Sporting a charming and easy smile and shaggy brown hair, Jarrod seemed easygoing and passionate about his studies. He was in his early 30's. When he heard about my research from a mutual friend he wanted to meet to tell me his story. He was raised in a saturated Southern Baptist environment in Oklahoma. His grandfather was a pastor and his father worked as a pastor and a missionary. Jarrod grew up attending Christian schools attached to his father's church and eventually received a football scholarship to a state university, making him the only one of his siblings to not attend a Baptist college.

In high school he became friends with other football players who had recently transferred into the Christian school, and in conversations with these friends he started to question his faith. But his world was too saturated in the Southern Baptist tradition to openly share his questions, so his doubts remained largely passive and private. When he began college two things started making him question his relationship to Christianity further. First was an astronomy course. Learning about a scientific view of the universe and recognizing our solar system as only one of many galaxies changed his perspective significantly. As he states, "I realized how small we are, and this made me question whether we were the center of the universe. I started seeing the Bible as a myth, just like all people tell themselves myths." He also started to befriend local artists at his university

and these friendships encouraged him to question his faith further.

His college experience led Jarrod to eventually stop identifying as a Christian, but he didn't want to tell his parents, fearing they would take it as a sign of rejection. It took him almost ten years to finally tell his parents about his changed religious identity, and when he finally did so it was not planned, and the discussion was not about religion, but about politics. In 2008 his dad was visiting Colorado Springs and noticed a book about Barack Obama on the coffee table in Jarrod's apartment. In a discussion about the book his dad said, "If I didn't know any better I would think that you're a liberal!" Jarrod responded, "I kind of am dad." And this is how Jarrod came out as a non-Christian to his father. His admission of a political change was also taken as an admission of a religious one.

This story Jarrod shared contains many typical elements of religious/ethical conversions: exposure to new information and worldview; encountering new social environments; and the accumulation of increasing numbers of experiences and exposure to perspectives that question a previous worldview. It is also telling that in describing his conversion from Christianity, he uses political affiliation as a marker of this change, one that both he and his father recognized. For Jarrod, the Christianity he grew up with went hand in hand with conservative politics, so that changing his political perspectives was a clear sign of a changed religious perspective. This was a common dynamic I found in adults who had converted to or from Christianity, that developing a new ethical paradigm often resulted in a changed political paradigm as well, and sometimes vice versa.

In the previous chapter I explore the history of a religious worldview and how it shapes interpretations of religious texts and ethical life. In this chapter I explore the ways

that religious worldviews shift, what influences these changes, and, through analyzing what I call *political conversions,* this chapter helps to uncover how these worldviews come to take root, and what allows them to shift. First, I analyze various narratives of political conversions, descriptions of the ways that religious conversion can also lead to political conversion. Second, I explore the narratives of Christians who have adopted a new ethical worldview while remaining firm in their Christian identity to show the role of temporality in shaping worldview and political perspective.

Some of the political conversions that I trace in this chapter are conversions to the dominant evangelical ethical paradigm that I call the political ethics of intimacy. However, many of the conversions I document here are shifts away from this ethical/political paradigm. For a variety of reasons many evangelicals, particularly but not only younger evangelicals, are developing more diverse political perspectives.

Political Conversions

Gary Schneeberger is a tall, confident man who gives the impression that he might once have played varsity football. I met Gary, balding and handsome, in his large office at the Christian ministry in which he held a senior position. His beaming smile, kind face, and welcoming presence made him look like he would be just as comfortable as a sportscaster on the nightly news as he was in his position as a communications expert for the organization. A friend, Joseph Troess, recommended that I interview Gary, and helped to set up the interview. Joseph is a Christian counselor who I met soon after first arriving in Colorado Springs. After meeting with me he introduced me to several people working in Christian media who had converted to the faith as adults. One of these was Gary.

Gary told me at the beginning of our interview that his first introduction to God

was through joining Alcoholics Anonymous in the late 1980s. He "gave [himself] to Christ" a few years later, partly from the influence of meeting an evangelical woman who is now his wife. But, he wanted to assure me, "She didn't date me into Christianity." Instead, through their friendship he became a Christian, which was a long process and only after his conversion did they start dating. At first he didn't want anything to do with Christianity, and he credits AA's policy of talking about a higher power as opening a window for him to start thinking about God, without being turned off by language of God and Jesus that he was not interested in. As he describes himself:

> I mean I was a selfish, self-focused human being. I still am prone to that, but what's changed in me long-term is that I'm much less harsh to others. I'm also less devastated by personal failure, because I look at as though God is going to teach me something about this process. My motivation now is that I try to treat people the way that Christ would treat them and I try to see them the way God sees them. I'm a lot calmer, I'm more cognizant of people's feelings and opinions. I'm content now, whereas I was restless before. Before I was like a caged animal, I hated to be alone.

He told me that he has not wanted a drink since the day that he dedicated his life to Jesus.

Gary not only experienced significant personal and emotional changes with his conversion, but also political changes as well. He had worked as a journalist for over a decade and before his conversion lived a life of drinking, practicing infidelity, and not caring much about politics. When I asked him how he went from being a liberal editor to working for conservative political ends he laughed, saying:

> God has a sense of humor. I came to a point where I wanted to use the gifts I had for God. I wanted to work on behalf of Biblical principles, not things that are more temporal, like really good stories that are written really well that make people happier or whatever. Politically speaking, I began to see God's view on abortion and the sanctity of marriage that began to inform my political decisions. That being said, it's not as simple as Republicans versus Democrats. I wasn't really a political person before, and I'm still not an avid policy wonk. My views on policy changed right away when I became a Christian.

He thus frames a classic conversion narrative. He is introduced to a new ethical world, has it reaffirmed by another source, and eventually adopts this ethical worldview, experiences dramatic emotional changes and changes in identity and community, and eventually political changes.

Noah Shultz has a similar conversion story to Gary, in that he worked as a journalist and became a Christian partially through a friendship with an evangelical woman whom he eventually married. He was raised by atheist parents and worked in journalism for years before his conversion and transition into working for a conservative Christian media producer. When he was considering converting he prayed to have a tangible experience with God. He describes his upbringing as very analytical, as he comes from a family of scholars, so wanted tangible proof that God exists before he could fully commit to becoming a Christian. I asked him what proof entailed and he described the following:

> I could feel God. The presence was more real than hearing Him. Before I became a Christian I thought, frankly, that Christians were stupid. So that's why I don't bash people in the press who think that Christians are weirdos and freaks, because I was there. And frankly the Bible talks about it, that we're going to have tribulation and we're going to have opposition. For me, I felt God's presence, I heard him, and that was a big transformation for me. I couldn't turn back from there and I hope I never will.

After this experiential evidence of God's existence, Noah found it easy to identify as a Christian. He describes his post-conversion life as radically different, as he put it, "Essentially I am not living for myself any more, I am living for God." For Noah, political changes happened more gradually, and he describes needing to overcome stereotypes he held about Christians before he could change his mind about abortion. He stated,

> Christians have done a lot of bad things over the issue of abortion. But God sincerely convicted (sic) me about abortion a few years after I became a Christian and really showed me what abortion was. So my politics, it wasn't like my whole belief system was just turned over, as a Christian that happened, but my politics shifted much more gradually.

I found his explanation of his changing perspective on abortion interesting as it was his wife's pregnancy that eventually changed his perspective on abortion. Seeing sonogram images of his daughter in utero made him question his perspective. He said, "I mean, I saw my little daughter, however little, with arms, feet, and hands, or whatever it was, and to me that's pretty straightforward, that's life!" He started then to question abortion more, and since he no longer thought that people should live their lives for themselves, and instead should live their lives for God, he decided there was no ethical justification for abortion. What convinced him about abortion then, was recognizing that his daughter's fetus had a miniature human form, and connecting this image to rhetoric from the pro-life movement. The image confirmed for Noah, "That's life!"

Many evangelical converts trace less dramatic political conversions, they may change their perspectives on abortion and gay rights but not identify as a political person. For some, political conversions are more dramatic and are coached by pastors. Marnie Stafler went from identifying more as a libertarian to a religious right activist quickly with her conversion to Christianity. Marnie was one of the first people I met during my fieldwork and I spent a lot of time with her in a large group of twenty-something evangelicals. She is strikingly beautiful, with a beatific face and a kind disposition and had shared with me that she had become a Christian towards the end of college when she was living in the Northeast. Before she became a Christian she embraced more of a libertarian perspective, believing each person was entitled to his or her own opinion and

was not involved in many political issues. Now, she is strongly against abortion, but she states: "I've never been to a rally or worn a t-shirt or even talked about it, but I think that [my conversion] did affect my views. Like, I can't support choice because these are babies, and God created them." She describes her political change as dramatic.

> And part of that was because I went to a church that was really political, and the pastor was really driven in that way. I came from a pretty apolitical family and was just developing my own perspectives, so if anyone said a political view was Biblically based, I wanted to be there.

For Marnie, conversion to Christianity was sudden and came with many changes. She broke up with her boyfriend and took a vow of celibacy until marriage, changed her political views, and became an active part of a new social and spiritual community. While many of these changes have remained, she has developed a more nuanced view on politics, and this she credits as well to the same pastor who initiated her initial political conversion. The charismatic pastor who led her new church was involved in a scandal a few years after her conversion where he had to come out as having engaged in homosexual acts. This particular pastor had been very political and preached against gay rights, and the scandal ended up breaking up the church. Marnie describes how many of the younger people, who were brought up in the church, started to question their faith and many people left the church. Not long after this scandal Marnie moved to Colorado Springs and began attending New Life Church under Pastor Ted Haggard. Four months later a similar scandal rocked her new church, where the charismatic, political pastor also became embroiled in a scandal involving homosexual behavior, this time with a gay prostitute. In contrast to her previous church, New Life Church did not fall apart in the wake of the scandal, while some people left the church, the church stayed strong and survived. These experiences, of watching two pastors who railed against homosexuality

get caught up in homosexual scandals, made Marnie start to question a dogmatic embrace of conservative politics. Although she continues to hold anti-abortion political views, she also believes it is important to protect the environment and doesn't see politics in a black and white, "Republican or Democrat" way, but embraces more flexibility around her politics.

Constructing and changing worldviews

At times church platforms are used to explicitly coach political views and one of the most explicit issues I saw this manifest in was the issue of support for the state of Israel. Many Christians believe that the Second Coming will only occur once the contemporary nation-state of Israel matches the historical, Biblical Israel's boundaries. There are also strong anti-Islam and Islamaphobic elements in some strains of evangelicalism, and support for Israel is sometimes seen as an important part in an imagined war with Islam (Spector 2008).

In the Spring of 2010, at the "Mission Sunday"—a weekly meeting about missionary issues, attended by around a hundred people at North End Church— Pastor Jeff Cohen led a lecture on why the church should focus on a "To the Jew First" missionary strategy. Pastor Jeff is a "Messianic Jew," a Jew who converted to Christianity. He is originally from South Africa and is now a pastor at a church in Texas. He had been invited to visit North End Church to officiate a Seder commemorating Passover. The Jewish population in Colorado Springs is very small, and most of the five hundred Christians who bought the $15 tickets to the Seder were unfamiliar with the customs that went along with the event. The event is advertised to this end, and in the promotional material about the dinner it offers to "enrich your faith by revealing your Jewish roots and the prophetic elements in the life and death of Jesus." The emphasis is

the Jewish roots of Christianity. At the Seder, a charismatic, Christian band led us in worship before, during, and after the meal, and Pastor Jeff lead us through many of the ritualistic elements of the Seder. The Seder ended with someone at each table being asked to drink the wine (grape juice) from Elijah's cup, for, "Because of Jesus, we no longer have to wait for Elijah's return!"

Pastor Jeff was invited to speak to the Global Sunday School on Jewish outreach and "To the Jew First," a missionary strategy based on a phrase credited to Paul in Romans 1:16. He began by asking us:

> Why to the Jew first? Why is it so important for Christians to focus their evangelizing on Jews? During the First Century, a handful of Jews evangelized the known world- without TV or a marketing plan. Could you ask for more evidence about why Jews are important? Whenever evangelizing didn't focus on Jews first, evangelizing goes down.

He critiqued the Nicene Counsel as separating "Jewishness from Christianity," which he argued, "laid the groundwork for what happened in the sixth century where Muhammad could have such a big influence that we have what we have today." So for him the separation of Jews and Christians, and Judaism from Christianity, is both dangerous and leads to ineffective proselytizing for Christians, and he frames the emergence of Islam as an evil that was allowed to occur because Christians and Jews were not cooperating. The crowd that morning was already well primed for the message of this speech. North End Church emphasizes missionary efforts, one of which is a popular annual two-week missionary trip to Israel. The church often has an American flag alongside an Israeli flag hanging outside of the church.

Pastor Jeff encouraged the importance of missionary efforts directed at Jews, and discussed his own conversion from Judaism to Christianity. He then shared the following,

"The Lord spoke to me this morning and said, 'Speak about the delegitimization of Israel." He described this as the "enemy's" new strategy and referred to this as the "new spiritual warfare, delegitimization." He stated, "What the enemy is trying to do is delegitimize the Jewish right of the land of Israel. He wants to see the delegitimization of 'political Israel'- the land of Israel with an actual government." He quoted Romans 13:1, That there shall be "No authority established except for God's," to which the crowd gathered that morning responded with shouts of, "Absolutely!" and "Yes!" He went on to describe many delegitimizing strategies currently employed by the enemy (the Devil) against Israel, including "delegitimization of Jerusalem as the Israeli capital" and questioning settlement building in Jerusalem. Why critique settlement building in Jerusalem, he asked, "When, you can build homes in Washington, DC any time you like. Why? Because you own it!" He quoted Luke 21:24, "'Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.' That took place in 1967." He then went on to say the strategy includes delegitimizing the Jewishness of Jesus and Scriptures and continued:

> This is the kind of warfare we are dealing with. The enemy is trying to delegitimize the gospel message. The enemy is trying to challenge the word of God. People will say, 'Did he really mean a nation, or just a group of godly people?'

For Pastor Jeff, the stakes of perceptions of Israel could not be higher, and he connected the delegitimizing of Israel with broader attacks on Christianity, for, "You start off with one little lie and eventually you're attacking the whole foundation." He concluded by threatening that if the enemy gets his way and Israel loses legitimacy, then the losses can be significant.

> Jesus is Lord, God in flesh. The Word of God is the Word of God. This is very basic, but you witness on the streets of Europe and England and it will take an hour to argue that this is the word of God. You think this can't happen in America?

The crowd was somber and moved in response to this message.

Support for Israel is an important part of dominant contemporary evangelical historicity, or understandings about time and particularly the future, because Israel is seen as playing a central role in facilitating the return of Jesus and the apocalypse. Christian Zionists believe that the establishment of the Israeli state in 1948 as a Jewish state is following Biblical prophecy. There is a long history of US evangelicals seeing the return of Jews to historical Israel as an important part of Biblical prophecy, going back to John Nelson Darby's dispensationalism, which he laid out in a lecture series in the 1840s (Wilkinson 2007). Menachem Begin, the Israeli Prime Minister elected in 1977, is widely regarded as helping to foster close ties between the US evangelical and religious right and Israel. Begin and Jerry Falwell developed a close relationship, as Falwell was an avid supporter of Israel and had visited Israel since the 1960s (Spector 2008). Begin actually awarded Falwell a prestigious Jabotinksy Award in 1980 for his support for Israel (ibid, 147-148).

The focus on daily Bible reading and the emphasis on Biblical literalism and the central presence of Israel and Israelites in the Bible leads to a curiosity and interest in the contemporary state of Israel for many evangelicals. Paired with Christian political and media groups emphasizing the need to support Israel due to issues of prophecy has lead to widespread support of Zionism amongst US evangelicals. Missionary and tourist trips to Israel are also common for evangelicals. Christian radio and television often includes advertisements for "adopting Jewish families" to migrate to Israel. For only $700, the

International Fellowship of Christians and Jews will help evangelicals sponsor the "return" of Jews, mainly in Russia, to their "ancestral home." And this understanding that supporting the Bible requires supporting the state of Israel has significant political consequences.

I was familiar with many aspects of this message; I was not accustomed to hearing such overtly political messages in megachurch settings. Six months later, however, the same Global Sunday School received a very different message about Israel and Israeli policy. A group of about fifteen mainly young adults affiliated with the church went on a missionary trip to Palestine in early Fall of 2010. The missionaries were well versed in why evangelicals need to support Israel, but their experiences of conducting outreach in Gaza changed many of their perspectives. Several of the participants from that missionary trip, including some pastors from the church, shared their experiences that were critical of Israeli treatment of Palestinians, and the audience had a mixed response. Many talked about Pastor Jeff's previous discussion, and critiqued the presenters for challenging Israel.

At a housewarming party shortly after the Global Sunday School Gaza report-back I chatted with two missionaries who had been on the trip. A mutual friend had just moved into a cozy two-bedroom apartment downtown, closer to a North End Church downtown church plant where she worked, and had a housewarming party to celebrate her move. I chatted with Jake and Tracey who had recently returned from the Gaza mission trip and were clearly moved by their experiences. They talked about the strangeness of being able to leave Gaza after spending days getting to know people there, and learning that the majority of people there cannot leave at will. The missionaries' easy

exit from Gaza was a stark reminder of the privilege they experienced that most Gazans lacked. Part of this missionary trip focused on sharing medical supplies, including distributing donated prescription glasses for Gazans with vision problems. In Gaza they set up a make-shift clinic where people in need of glasses came to try on the donated pairs. Tracey talked about how a blind, teenage girl came to their clinic after hearing about the glasses they were giving out. She tried on every pair but didn't find the correct prescription. They realized that despite her proximity to modern Israeli hospitals that she could not get any help to see. They heard of countless stories of Israeli bulldozers demolishing dozens of thousand-year-old orchards and olive groves to better the conditions for surveillance of Palestine. They heard of Palestinian fishermen getting shot without warning by the Israeli navy for straying too far out to sea on fishing outings.

Through meeting Palestinians, including many Palestinian Christians, and seeing their suffering, they developed a new framework for seeing Palestinian protest. Tracey said, "It just was so different there than what we hear about, where it seems Palestinians are just angry people, as though there isn't any cause to be angry." In Gaza they saw immense suffering clearly caused by Israeli policy, and through this they started to question their support. During our conversation, a late-twenties blonde man approached us and started asking Jake about his experiences, but kept asking similar questions, "But, were you able to talk to people about Jesus?" Jake responded, "It wasn't exactly like that, a lot was going on." Then he asked where they visited that was in the Bible and Jake talked about visiting the Sea of Galilee on the "Jesus Boat," but how artificial the whole experience felt, since their boat started with raising an American flag and singing Star-Spangled Banner. Here they were floating in this beautiful sea, so important to Jesus' life,

listing to a recording of the Star-Spangled Banner blaring from their boat, surrounded by other boats with British and Australian flags.

A couple of weeks later I chatted with Tracey more about her experiences on the trip. She told me that the previous Spring, about the time when Pastor Jeff Cohen was preaching about the Enemy's attempts to delegitimize Israel, a local youth mission group held a meeting and showed a film about Israel and Palestine called *With God on our Side,* which started a discussion about the treatment of Palestinians by Israel. A copy of the film was being circulated amongst a group of younger evangelicals, and Tracey lent it to me to watch. The film is polished, professionally edited, and contains interviews with many leading scholars and religious leaders in the United States, Israel, and Palestine. It was produced and directed by Porter Speakman Jr., the son of an evangelical minister who grew up supporting Christian Zionism and began to question uncritical support of Israeli policies as a young adult. The film follows a similar journey to Speakman's, and through contrasting video clips of John Hagee, founder of Christians United for Israel, with the reality of Palestinian suffering, the film narrates a clear critique of Christian Zionism from an evangelical perspective. The film is described in promotional materials as offering a "biblical alternative for Christians who want to love and support the people of Israel."

The circulation of *With God on Our Side* was having a dramatic impact on political perspectives on Israel. For Tracey, watching this film prompted her to want to go on the mission trip to Gaza and to get more involved in this issue. In our conversation she kept quoting information from the film. She asked, "What is Israel? It's a secular state, that's not the same as in the Bible!" She talked about how leading up to the trip, one of

the women wanted to back out when she discovered they were going to enter Gaza and not just stay in Israel. Everyone convinced her to still go, and the women had a complete change of heart when she saw the amount of suffering in Gaza. She talked about this change of perspective at the Global Sunday School, and described her new perspective as favoring not dispensationalism or Zionism, but the Kingdom of God. And the Kingdom of God includes both Palestinians and Israelis. Tracey contrasted her experiences in Israel and in Gaza, how in Israel it is, "Like here, the streets are clean and people have cars. You cross into Gaza and suddenly there is garbage burning in the streets, people use donkeys and carts, and don't have cars." She found the contrast troubling.

I found her transformation fascinating, her position was so different than the Christian Zionism that is so common amongst evangelicals and her critiques sounded like they were informed by a social justice framework. In our conversation I told her about how Religious Right leaders at the Values Voter Summits that I've attended are so worried that younger evangelicals are going to start to focus on social justice. She was shocked and asked, "Why would they be worried about this?" I explained that they were worried that young evangelicals would turn their backs on traditional Religious Right issues such as abortion and gay marriage. "I don't understand why they would worry about this," she implored, "I care about the suffering of Palestinians, but I also still care a lot about those traditional issues." While she was now embracing a changed political perspective on Israel and Palestine, her views on other political/ethical issues were unchanged.

The circulation of media proposing a different perspective on Israel was having significant effects on many young evangelicals. Having to consider the reality of

Palestinian suffering due to Israeli policy made many young evangelicals question the dominant narrative about Israel's prominent role in facilitating the End Times. Many asked: Why would a loving God favor such suffering, and how could this suffering be a cause of something good? These political/ethical conversions around views of Israel took place because of either exposure to media representations or actual experiences, calling into question previous views about the future. Importantly, these critiques were able to get traction because they were created by other evangelicals and framed as Biblical.

It is also interesting to note how these opposing ethical/political frameworks were presented at the same church venue within a six-month window, each encouraging radically different political perspectives. It is important to remember then, that because of their diversity of people in pastoral roles and their sheer size, megachuches are not monolithic in terms of theology or political education. Rather, these large churches can sometimes represent the confluence of divergent trends within evangelicalism, and serve as spaces for debate and discussion.

Ethics, politics, and time

Views of Israel represent one aspect of evangelical understandings of the End Times, but more broadly, a specific view of time provides the organization of the evangelical worldview. This temporal frame is best described in a sermon by a youth pastor in Colorado Springs, Pastor Andrew: "The cross of Jesus Christ is the center and beginning of history, the end of history, it is also the center of my life." Evangelical time is not seen as progressive or linear, instead there is a distinct beginning and end, both of which, and everything in between, God is in control of.

I came to see that evangelical understandings of historicity shaped individual political views in significant ways. The term historicity is used in different ways, and the

definition I am working with is best described as: a "social and personal *relationship* to the past and future." "Historicity in this sense is the manner in which persons operating under the constraints of social ideologies make sense of the past, while anticipating the future" (Hirsch and Stewart 2005:262). How evangelicals "anticipate the future" then has significant impacts on their understandings of their political responsibilities in the present. This was made especially clear at a conference I attended in Colorado Springs in 2008 entitled: "The Beginning and End of the Universe." The conference was held at a large convention center downtown and hosted over 1,800 people for two days of lectures. The large number of vendors selling home-schooling books and supplies in the lobby implied the conference was largely catering to home-schooling parents as well as local pastors. A dinosaur and fossil display in the front hall showed "evidence" that evolution is a lie. The conference was advertized on the local Moody Radio station and hosted lectures about creationism and millenialism. The keynote of the conference was John MacArthur, an evangelical pastor, author, and radio host, whose lecture at the conference was titled, "The end of the universe." In his lecture he critiqued environmentalists, and named Al Gore in particular, for going against God's work in the world, labeling environmentalists as "scoffers" who are willingly ignorant in refusing the "knowledge of the flood."

> During the flood God killed millions, and saved only eight. God spoke the world into existence and spoke judgment to drown the entire world as well. The flood catapulted all the people, who I estimate at 8 million, into an eternal hell. God's given us some previews of what's to come, as in with Sodom and Gomorrah. Somebody said years ago that if God doesn't destroy us soon He's going to have to apologize to pre-flood society because we have to be worse than they were.

He framed this work, of punishing the world for sin, as "uncreation," for just as God spoke the world into existence, so to can He punishes it out of existence.

MacArthur went on to accuse environmentalists as minimizing both God's power, and His purpose. He preached the following with clear anger in his voice, rising to a crescendo before finishing with a slow lull:

> This is a disposable planet, a disposable universe. This is only a means for God to be put on display, for how else would God reveal his wrath, anger, grace, mercy, compassion, and love? This planet is a theater through which He can put himself on full display and when He is through with this purpose He can lay it to *waste*. This *is* a disposable universe. He can then create a better one in an instant!

MacArthur reminded us, "This is uncreation folks. The atomic implosion of the universe will be faster than it was created. This is Al Gore's worst nightmare, folks! That a new world will be created." And here he was interrupted by raucous laughter by the audience, before he continued: "Just as God created the world with water, what was used to destroy the population? So too the atom was created." This vision of the future, where the earth is destroyed in a cosmic nuclear war, was savored in this conference hall of 1,800 on this sunny summer day. MacArthur paused for a moment in this part of his speech, already interpellating the audience as following God's plan by opposing environmentalist concerns with protecting the planet, concerns that he framed as going against God's interests and desires. He thus sat silently letting the violence of his rhetoric sink in, before reminding the crowd that this is, of course, something we all should be looking forward to.

MacArthur concluded his talk by reminding the audience that he is looking forward to witnessing the destruction he just described, because, "The same day He judges the inglorious, He takes the glorious to heaven. Despite my fear, I look forward to this day. Amen. Get your life together folks, in Godliness!" In his closing prayer he hastened the day when Lord Jesus would return, and thus begin to unravel the destruction he just laid

out.

MacArthur's apocalyptic vision was unique in its elaboration of violent details, but he did express a hegemonic view of temporality within US evangelicalism. Theological debates put evangelicals into various camps about how they believe the end times will unfold, but there is broad consensus of the following: the world will end in apocalypse, the righteous will be saved and brought out of the chaos into heaven, the rest will be punished in an eternal hell, this could happen at any moment, and we should hope that it will happen sooner than later.

Given the centrality of this view of time, it is clear why the idea of biological evolution is so controversial to so many evangelicals. At the same conference, The Beginning and End of the Universe, Dr. Jon Sanford gave a lecture on the human genome that articulated this common understanding of evangelical temporality. He described himself as a reformed evolutionist, someone who spent much of his professional career believing in the theory of evolution but has since changed his mind. He is a retired professor from Cornel University, where he taught courses and conducted research in genetic engineering for twenty-five years. He describes himself now as a "scientific convert to six-day creation" and is the author of the book, *Genetic Entropy and the Mystery of the Genome,* which proposes a theory that human DNA is deteriorating at such a rapid pace it disproves the theory of evolution. This was the topic of his talk at the conference.

Dr. Sanford articulated what he called a shifting paradigm, with the old view favoring evolution, creative selection, and an "onward and upward" attitude about the future. This old paradigm he articulates as no longer relevant and should be replaced by a

new paradigm that in place of evolution sees degeneration. And instead of seeing extinction as a sign of evolution, instead sees extinction as a sign of things to come. He introduced the idea of "genetic entropy," while projecting a slide of a photo of blonde girl with half of her face pixilated and falling apart, almost as though half of her face was turning into a zombie. "We are personally experiencing entropy, so is our species!" Dr. Sanford lectured. "In Peter 1:24:25, Peter tells us we are fading, we are wearing out... Just like you buy a car and it rusts, entropy applies to physical species and to morals." So the universe was created in perfection, in the garden, and because of sin there has been entropy ever since, a process that will continue until Jesus' return sets everything right again. The common understanding of Jesus' return is that He will make things right by finally destroying the earth and bringing all of the faithful, all of the "saved" as they often call themselves, to a distant heaven. And while I didn't hear much discussion of details about heaven, there was a common consensus that it existed far away from the perils and challenges and difficulties we experience here on earth. The consensus also included a view that since sin was introduced into the world in the Garden of Eden the world is a place of evil. This framing of the earth as representing the post-Garden of Eden den of sinfulness, the remnant of the garden only awaiting Jesus' return and its final destruction, has a variety of significant impacts on political perspectives, particularly regarding the environment.

The world is framed as sinful, full of evil and selfishness, and conversion to evangelicalism is framed as an ongoing transformation into a more peaceful life. This is a process, conversion is not a one-step event, rather it should continue throughout one's life, slowly turning away from the influences of the "world" or the "enemy" and

influenced instead by God. The process is known as "sanctification." Whereas one's life is "justified" as worthy when one swears to dedicate one's life to Jesus, they must always work on sanctifying themselves to become more godly, and this process is meant to last a lifetime. Pastor Bobbie described this in a sermon, "God is much more impressed with who we are becoming than what we do. There's a lot of people doing, but who are we becoming?" In another sermon he critiqued consumerist temporality, "We are a microwave culture. There's a sign at McDonald's that reads, 'We guarantee three minutes.' Well sorry folks, the Kingdom of God is about marinating." This is a life-long process, and he encouraged his congregation to ask themselves, "Have you become more Christ-like in the past year? Look at your life, your spouse, your finances, how you treat your body." The theme of change and new life was touched on in almost every weekly sermon, and consistently conversion was talked about as moving from death to life, as God gives you new life and new purpose, and sets your sights on eternity. One Sunday, Pastor Bobbie talked about how when one becomes a Christ-follower they gain new life, where they start experiencing life for the first time. He said, "When we come to life our lives change. Aren't you glad you're not living the life you used to live? That you're no longer living in darkness, but life? Those who live in the flesh too long become numb to life. Guard your heart above all else. The condition of your heart affects everything else in our lives." Evangelicals are thus part of a well-structured view of time that invites constant change and should never be stagnant, and as Pastor Bobbie reminds everyone, the future is a known quantity, and "We all know when we're with Jesus it ends well!"

In a November sermon discussing Peter, a disciple of Jesus, Pastor Bobbie addressed the concept of the End Times directly:

> Talking about Peter, he knew the end of all things is nearing for me. Now all generations think that theirs will be the last generation: during the Bay of Pigs, during the 1940s when Israel was established as a nation many people thought they were at the end of days. During the Great Depression people thought it was the end of days. But I look around at all these signs and I believe we very well could be the terminal generation. We could be the last generation. We could be the anchor leg, the last leg, of this glorious race that's been running for thousands of years.
>
> This is not a call to collect water and rice in the basement! This is not a panic button! Christ followers should be the calmest people, no matter what the news says from Washington, DC or wherever you get your news from.

While I found such overt discussions of the End Times were fairly uncommon, it was constantly referenced in passing in sermons. And each time he mentioned the possibilities of the End Times, of Jesus' return, Pastor Bobbie's speech would slow, and often he would close his eyes, sometimes saying, "We pray this is soon." And here his voice would trail off: hopeful, prayerful, belying a fervent desire for this to occur. For the return of Jesus signals the return of righteousness, the changing of all evil into good, the final and absolute justice so that everything is made right. Only then will there be justice, and only then will there be peace.

It is common for evangelicals to refer to the "Kingdom of God" in opposition to the "Kingdom of Earth." Distinguishing between these two was a theme of a Bible study study meeting I attended for a group that brought together homeless men and "suburbies," as the leader liked to call the suburban, middle-class participants. The group met twice a week in a small church downtown that did homeless outreach, but it was also officially listed as a small group at one of the large churches on the northern, suburban part of town. I learned about this small group from Mike, the group's leader, in the lobby of a megachurch on the northern end of town during a Sunday dedicated to advertizing small groups. He was trying to attract "suburbies" to participate in his mission of

evangelizing to the homeless community in town. When I started attending the small group meetings I thought the group would be split between homeless men and suburban megachurch attendees, but the meeting most often consisted of homeless men, the middle-class retired leader Mike and his wife, me, and sometimes a middle-class retired businessman from a downtown Presbyterian church. Most of homeless men were not working or seeking to find paid employment, and many of them saw themselves as following Jesus' example and understood unpaid evangelizing as their main vocation.

At this particular meeting the theme of the discussion was how to get into heaven, given that we all have "Adam's blood," making us all sinners. In the conversation, many of the men in the group began to talk about the "kingdom of the earth" which soon turned rhetorically into "the enemy's kingdom." Caleb, one of the informal leaders of the group who had been homeless since he was released from a long prison term, said, "See, the enemy is tempting us to be in his kingdom, but if our heart is close to God's then our actions will show up in His kingdom." Mike, the leader of the group, asked everyone to think about how God's Kingdom differs from earth's kingdom, and the differences were stark. The group agreed that God's Kingdom included the "fruits of the spirit": kindness, peace, patience, and selflessness. The kingdom of the earth, on the other hand, was defined by selfishness and what was referred to representing "anti-fruits": anger, impatience, and no peace.

Inherent in this conception of the End Times is a tradition that sees the earth itself as fallen, as a place of darkness and despair beyond salvation, where the only just ending is one of destruction. Popular 19th century evangelical preacher and publisher Dwight L. Moody canonically described this view. Moody founded the Moody Bible Institute and

Moody Publishers, both of which are still prominent today. Moody Radio is one of the most prominent and popular conservative Christian radio stations currently broadcast nationally on over 700 affiliate stations. In a sermon Moody articulated a view of evangelical historicity that has remained popular:

> I look upon this *world* as a wrecked vessel. God has given me a *lifeboat* and said to me, '*Moody*, save all you can.' God will come and burn up this world, but the children of God do not belong in this world; they are in it, but not of it. The world is getting darker and darker; its ruin is coming nearer and nearer. If you have any friends on this wreck unsaved, you better lose no time in getting them off (Moody 1989:109).

Faith in Jesus thus promises a needed lifeboat to escape a world that is forsaken to become "darker and darker" until it is burned in an apocalyptical fire. This framing of the earth as fallen and a certainty that the future, whether it occurs tomorrow morning or in millennia, will involve a rapture away from the sinful, fallen world and into a distant heaven has significant consequences for political as well as theological thought. This is nowhere more true than regarding views on the environment. If the earth is already condemned, then what is the purpose of protecting it for the future, when the hope is that the rapture will happen soon, prayerfully today?

During my research I often wondered if a lack of concern for environmental issues was related to this conception of the earth as corrupted and sinful and the notion that the End Times would provide the saved with an escape, or "lifeboat," to a distant heaven. MacArthur's speech clearly outlined this logic, but it was uncommon to hear evangelicals talking negatively about environmentalism and environmentalists. Instead, I observed a lack of discussion in general about issues pertaining to the environment. This question was very clearly answered when, towards the end of my year of research in Colorado Springs, I met several young adult church members and pastors who helped me

understand the close relationship between views of the End Times and the ability to conceptualize caring for the environment as a Biblical concern. Jake, who I discussed in the previous chapter and participated in the missions trip to Gaza, was one of these young adults. He is a veteran and converted to evangelicalism in his mid-twenties after several years of what he describes as "partying" and promiscuity, which ended when he became a Christian and his life changed dramatically. He developed a new friendship network and a new purpose in life. He spent several years in the US Army and was stationed in the Middle East. He now is attending college classes and hopes to eventually go to seminary, but over the past few years his politics have become more defined, and increasingly contrast with most of the other evangelicals he spends time with. Jake and I attended the same young adult Bible study group for a few months, and around the election in 2010 he posted "Go Dems!" on his Facebook page. Many people in the group were incredulous. Members of the group talked about his posts and said they were curious about how he came to these political positions with a genuine awe, they could not understand how a dedicated Christian such as Jake could also support the Democratic Party. It was a shocking act of political non-conformity.

Jake and I met once for coffee at a local café to chat. The café was on the north end of town and had a view of the Rocky Mountains to the east and prairies to the west. There was a stunning lightning storm during our meeting, with over forty lighting strikes among the majestic landscape of central Colorado. We talked about his political Facebook posts, and their responses. He said, "I just get so upset that so many of my friends just seem to want to protect their lifestyle here. It's true in the United States we have a great lifestyle, but why should we just defend it and not help the poor." He said he

wants to forge a new way of interpreting the Bible, not having to choose between liberal or literal, but focusing more on the complete context. He also talked about how his travel to many poor countries had shaped his views on politics. Although he had seen poverty throughout his travels, he'd never seen anything like the poverty he saw in Gaza. There were kids without shoes and horrible foot problems. There were no eyeglasses or other medical care for people who needed them.

For Jake, becoming a Christian settled his mind and allowed him to alleviate some anxiety that he'd felt before he became a believer. And while he experienced significant conversions in terms of his sexual behaviors, social network, and ethical paradigm, his politics, while becoming more pronounced post-conversion, did not follow a typical conservative course. Part of this was due to travel that made him critical of any political positions he perceived as only defending a middle-class US lifestyle, but he also became exposed to several authors associated with the "emergent church" movement, particularly the author Brian McLaren. This nondenominational movement is identified primarily with newer churches, self-defining themselves as "emergent," representing a shift in evangelicalism. James Bielo writes, "Emerging Evangelicalism is, fundamentally, a movement of cultural critique" (2011:5). This movement challenges many of the common orthodoxies within evangelical Christianity, instead embracing new hermeneutic approaches and attempting to address life in "postmodern" society. Evangelical leaders often criticize pastors and authors affiliated with the emerging or emergent church, and Brian McLaren in particular, for being un-Biblical.

I did not study any emergent churches in Colorado Springs, but the ideas affiliated with this movement were changing the perspectives of many pastors and laity in the area

through the circulation of books offering different views of ethics, politics, and time. And at the center of this ethical framework was a new conception of Christian temporality. In *Everything Must Change,* McLaren critiques "theocapitalist faith" as a type of carelessness about the future, sacrificing the health of the environment and thus future generations for corporate greed and consumption. In many ways McLaren's conception of time, ethics, and responsibilities is a response to the dominant evangelical conception of the earth as fallen, corrupted, and beyond repair, where hope is only couched in Jesus' return and through the apocalypse the chosen will be led away from the fallen earth and into heaven.

Glenn Packiam, a full-time pastor at a large evangelical church in Colorado Springs, even more clearly articulates a clear link between conceptions of the End Times and views on the environment. Pastor Glenn was raised abroad by Christian parents and attended a conservative Christian university. He then moved to Colorado Springs and led a school for worship for several years, teaching music, theology, and leadership. He has since moved on to lead his own church, a church plant of the large church he was based at previously, but at the time when I met him he led a Sunday evening service. Like many evangelical leaders, he maintains a blog and has published books on living one's faith. Pastor Glenn articulated an ethical paradigm with vastly different political implications than the one articulated most Sunday mornings in the main hall of the church he preached in.

I had attended several of Pastor Glenn's Sunday evening sermons and he often preached about the need to take care of the environment and to help people in poverty. I wanted to talk to him more about his perspectives and so we met in his office at the

church. He told me that several other young pastors he works with share his ethical perspective. What differentiated his ethical paradigm the most from the dominant evangelical paradigm was a distinct concept of time, specifically his view of the end times.

> Why we are concerned with social issues and things like that is we have a broader view of what the Gospel story is, and the Gospel story is not an evacuation plan from an angry God or from Hell or anything like that. It's remembering that the Bible begins by a creator… God loves this world, all of it. And when the fall came he started right away to try to rescue it. This is the story of a loving creator who wants to make all things new. So, If God does love this world and wants to protect all things, then what should we do in the meantime? Shouldn't we anticipate that?

Through anticipating that it is God's desire to make the world new, and challenging the common conception of the end times not as an "evacuation plan" off of the earth, Pastor Glenn articulates a distinct ethical obligation to care for the environment. He continued:

> I think there are a lot of Christians who don't get that God still cares about this earth. They will say, "But doesn't it say in the bible that this earth is going to pass away?" Sure, but I take that to mean pass away to be reborn in some ways.

He continued by talking about how when God had the opportunity to start over, with Noah's flood, he didn't "wipe everything out," but instead chose to protect His creation. "Maybe because what He's trying to do is redeem. I mean, redemption and restoration are what the Bible's about, not damnation and re-creation, or whatever. All that to say, I think we should be green."

The ethical framework Pastor Glenn articulates also shapes a specific view of justice.

> We have this view, where the Kingdom of God coming to the unlucky is as simple as: food, shelter, wells for clean water, orphan homes. All of that is carrying the Kingdom of God. So for me, and for a lot of my peers, there is no division between justice work and evangelism.

In articulating this approach he raised critiques against Christians who don't fight against greed as leading to injustice and asked, "What about creation? Don't we care?" He continued:

> I think an older view of this is to say, "It's fine that you're giving them clean air and water but are you talking about Jesus!?" And in our view, it's all Jesus' work, every time you go to the poor in Jesus' name and say, "Here's a cup of water, a loaf of bread," you're doing Jesus' work. And you're foreshadowing the day when Jesus comes when He will undo injustice. It's because we have a clearer picture of the end, that it is restoration and Jesus setting things right, then this is how we should now live to anticipate that. I think the older generation had a different vision of the end, you know, the end was hell and all that, so therefore, "We just got to get people evangelized." And I don't think like that and many of my peers don't either.

For Pastor Glenn, the end is not even heaven, at least not in a way that "one day the earth disappears and we all end up in heaven." Rather for him heaven involves the remaking of the earth as new, and a place of justice.

When I asked Pastor Glenn who helped to inspire his shifting views on time and justice he mentioned another author often affiliated with the emergent church movement, British Anglican Bishop N.T. Wright. Specifically he mentioned Wright's book, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, which argues Christian hope should lie not in escaping to heaven after death, but in recreating the world in life. Wright proposes, "Heaven, in the Bible, is not a future destiny, but the other, hidden, dimension of our ordinary life—God's dimension, if you like. God made heaven and earth; at the last he will remake both and join them together forever" (19). Thus, in Wright's understanding, people do not go to heaven after death, rather heaven will come to earth. Wright insists this understanding shifts the purpose both for individual Christians and the church as a whole towards making a difference here on earth, where individuals should offer their artistic talents and work for justice in the

political realm.

When I told Pastor Glenn about my findings where so many evangelicals express a very narrowly articulated sense of ethical-political obligations, he shook his head.

> Yeah, why those two issues above everything else. How about war!? We should not be people of war, you know. I do think though you may not see it in this city as much, because of some of the overtones of Christian ministries here, I do think across the country a ground swelling of young people are saying, "Yes we do care for the unborn, we do think marriage is one man one woman, but there are way more political issues than those two things."

And he saw this change not as "something millenials are making up," but rather recovering a tradition from the early church that focused as much on the practical aspects of looking after one another, and not just focusing on proselytizing.

Matthew Ayers is another young pastor who works with Pastor Glenn and articulates a similar ethical paradigm. Like many young evangelicals I met who espoused a broadened ethical paradigm, Pastor Matthew speaks of his views with a missionary zeal. When we met in his office he spoke quickly and passionately, with urgency, as though he felt change was in the air and he needed to help it move forward. He comes from a Lutheran family, and although strayed from Christianity somewhat in high school started attending evangelical churches soon after that and these churches helped him to change his life significantly. Eventually he felt called into ministry work and began working in global ministries before taking on a newly created position directing local outreach efforts. When I told him about how common it was for my informants to list Christian responsibilities as extending only as far as limiting abortion and defending heterosexual marriage, like Pastor Glenn, he also shook his head. "It's just not like that! It's so much bigger than that." He talked about how evangelicals find missionary work abroad central to their faith, but that a disconnect has meant less outreach and efforts at

alleviating poverty and suffering closer to home. Expanding these efforts to impact the local community is the focus of his ministry. I asked him why he thinks there is a shift happening amongst primarily younger evangelicals and he responded he doesn't think it's generational, but instead is more about "postmodernism." He explained:

> We are radically deconstructing modernism and realism and a system that relies on the scientific method, and this notion that we can have it all figured out, has lead to many negative things, so you see the results of that like wars, and disasters. So we are deconstructing some of those ideas. We didn't even know that how we did missionary work or evangelism were based in the Enlightenment, and so now we are seeing the Gospel work in a new light. Which is exciting.

He sees postmodernism as allowing for a focus on relationships, instead of rules. When I asked him who was the most influential in developing these new ideas, he pulled out Wright's *Surprised by Hope* for me to look over.

From an Ethics of Intimacy to an Ethics of Justice

Pastor Glenn and Pastor Matthew are not unique in their embrace and excitement of an evangelical ethical paradigm broad enough to protect the environment and help the poor. This changed ethical/political paradigm is often framed as the emergent church movement, but as I found in my research, ideas central to this movement, specifically in the form of alternate ideas about evangelical historicity, are also impacting pastoral teachings in large conservative churches. The emergent church movement is thus shaping a changing theology and ethical-political paradigm of a swelling number of young adults, even amongst those affiliated with a conservative megachurches. This theological and political movement has a number of historical precedents. An "evangelical left" has existed for some time, attempting to mobilize a national movement in the early 1970s, and, as David Swartz argues, has remained a "moral minority" within evangelicalism (Swartz 2012).

This shift is often generational, and many Religious Right leaders are in equal parts afraid and angered by these shifts. In a Focus on the Family Podcast on July 24st, 2008 Southern Baptist Theological Seminary president Al Mohler and James Dobson discussed the changing perspectives of young evangelicals. The context of the interview was the 2008 presidential election, which was decidedly the end of an era, when Bush held the White House leaving a clear line of power between Religious Right leaders and the presidency. The interview began with a complaint by Dobson about negative media discussions about evangelicals in general and Dobson in particular. He complained, "Our local paper, The [Colorado Springs] *Gazette*, recently put a ridiculous cartoon of me on the front page, above the fold, making the case that my influence was done for, was over. They didn't explain if that was true, why they put me on the front page of the paper and why I've been in over a thousand newspapers this summer. So that's the way it is." He went on to critique a recent article being printed in the secular press, claiming that evangelicals are adopting new political perspectives and "that its leaders are old and aging." Mohler's take was somewhat more tempered. He said many younger evangelicals believe the evangelical movement "has gained a bad reputation as being against things rather than for them." He sympathized with some of their critiques, saying: "I think the younger generation of evangelicals looks at a lot of older evangelicals and says: 'You just don't get it. You're not connecting with the issues. You're too happy. You're too consumerist. You're too materialistic. You're living in an evangelical subculture,' and they're not all wrong about that."

I found that several factors were responsible for shaping this new ethical paradigm amongst primarily young evangelicals. If the political ethics of intimacy that

has shaped evangelicalism for the past few decades is a product of the suburban milieu that fostered its growth, it is largely the emphasis on international missionary work that has helped to nurture an alternate political/ethical framework. It became clear during my research that the combination of international travel to poverty stricken areas along with the circulation of Christian media, mainly books, that proposed different accounts of historicity and understandings of the End Times had significant impacts on individual understandings of Christian responsibilities and politics.

In the summer of 2008 I met with Walt Stephens, a forty-something man who worked for a conservative evangelical organization doing outreach to young adults. Through his work he helped to moderate a blog where young adults could discuss different issues. He articulated a passion for understanding the perspectives of young adult Christians. This work was challenging. Walt was tasked with creating a fragile bridge between a politically conservative organization—one that in many ways exemplifies the defense of the political ethics of intimacy—with a growing number of young adult Christians who were experimenting with and embracing a very different ethical/political paradigm. He worked for an influential evangelical organization that was involved in a variety of types of political issues defending heterosexual marriage and a general conservative political agenda, issues that many young evangelicals were challenging. He told me that he thought the new politics embraced by young adults was not a sign of a changing evangelical politics, but that it was simply a cohort effect, where people in the youth and young adult cohort would always embrace a different perspective and politics. When they got older, he assured me, they would change their perspectives once again to match those of their parents, he assured me. While he was certain this was

just a passing phase, he also had sympathy for and insight about where these new perspectives were coming from. He talked about how few Christians are worried about consumerism, and that "most of them don't even know that they're drinking the water. They don't know how consumerist they are." He went on to link international missionary work with new ideas about justice:

> You'll see a lot of the social justice work amongst Christians or people doing environmental work is among people who have gone out of the country, done a missions trip, and seen another country and seen that we are eating ourselves to death, we're not leading sustainable lives, and being wise stewards. So there is a lot of good intention to those Christians using social justice language.

Although he disagrees with some of the direction and politics of evangelical young adults who embrace social justice, Walt is also sympathetic to what has lead them to these perspectives.

Jake's experiences, which I discussed earlier in this chapter, demonstrated Walt's hypothesis well. Because of his travel experiences exposing him to extreme suffering under poverty, Jake is uncomfortable with any political frameworks he sees as simply defending a suburban lifestyle. I found another clear example of the effects of missionary experience on political perspectives when I met Andrea, a young mother who grew up "on the mission field" in Ethiopia. I learned early on in my research that one did not simply grow up with missionary parents; rather if a family is engaged in a long-term missionary trip the whole family participates in the missionary work. Andrea and her family lived in Ethiopia throughout the early to mid-1990s, and were there during the war with Eritrea and the Black Hawk Down incident. She told me that she grew up embarrassed to be an American, and would often tell people she was Canadian to avoid the stigma of anti-Americanism. The disparities between her own family's resources and

the poverty of the surrounding community also led to feelings of privilege and guilt. She told me, "Out of all the people who lived in Ethiopia I questioned God why I was the only one living in a house, and not just any house but a nice house." She said that this experience shaped both her career goals and her politics. "I wanted to go do something that was helpful," she said, "not be a missionary." Her parents were not happy with the political impacts of this experience on Andrea. "My father just abut died when I was 18 and registered as an independent, he said, 'We are Republicans!' But a politician's views on international affairs are very important to me. You can support our troops, but if you want to go invade every other country I don't support that." Currently Andrea works as a teacher in a public school, which is where we met for an interview during her lunch break. She has five children who all attend the school. She told me that someday she would love to be involved in international NGO work with her husband, and she would rather work for a secular organization than a Christian one. While Andrea's views about international affairs and foreign policy were impacted by her experience living abroad, she also believed that Christians had a responsibility to defend marriage as a heterosexual institution.

Religious/Political Tensions and the Transformation of how Politics Are done

The final political/ethical transformation I encountered during my research involved not as much a change in political perspective, or even political behavior, but rather a transformation in how politics are done. This change was a response to seeing the polarizing effects of a pro-family/Religious Right political agenda in the public sphere. For example, Roger Jones is an ex-gay counselor in Denver. He dropped out of college and moved to Denver when he was 21 to "deal with" his same sex attraction, and has

continued working with the same ministry there for over fifteen years. He talked about how he began to realize that the more political agendas of some of the ex-gay and pro-family organizations hurts his ability to do outreach to gays and lesbians. "Focusing on politics means you're not focusing on the heart," he said. "They can only minister to those who agree with them politically, which is admittedly a lot of people. For me, I'd rather be able to sit down with a gay person and hear about the pain they've experienced in life, whether that comes form the church or wherever. For me that seems more real." The ministry he works at still leads ex-gay counseling groups and focuses on helping Christians leave homosexuality, but it has stepped away from more overt political engagements and affiliation with more overt political organizations.

Gary Schneeberger, who I discussed earlier in this chapter, has had a similar political conversion recently in terms of how he expresses his politics. In his work in communications he is often representing the politics of the pro-family movement in the press, and thus often represents controversial and polarizing views since his organization is against the legal recognition of same-sex rights. Gary had a significant political conversion years earlier when he became a Christian, but he told me, "Where God has me lately is not so much my view on issues, but how I express them and whether or not it's in a Christ-like way." He admitted, "I can flow negative sound-bites like the best of them, but I'm working on changing my way." An example of this change is in a new relationship he's developed with one of the country's leading gay-rights activists, whom I will call Bernie.

> And periodically we would debate each other in the press, and we'd say really snarky things about each other, and one day I just felt overly condemned by the Lord about that. And we're supposed to be able to take criticism with a grain of salt, but this guy, everything he said bothered me. So I prayed about it, why does

> he bother me so much. And the Lord, I felt very clearly the Lord tell me, every once in a while I can hear His voice, but I could feel very clearly Him telling me, "It's because you're basically that guy just on the other side of the line." That's not something I wanted to hear.

Gary then decided that he could do something about changing the dynamics of this debate. Soon after he was convicted about changing the tone of his work, he and this particular activist were going to be at the same event, Gary was going to be at an awards ceremony that Bernie was leading protests at it. Gary said, "So I called him up and said let's meet for pizza. We did, and I told him after we met, and I really like the guy, I characterize us as friends." Since meeting for pizza a few years ago they have stayed in touch, and Gary is willing to admit, "we are very much alike." During their meeting Gary made a commitment that while he was not going to change his political views or agenda, that he would stop engaging in personal attacks. And in Gary's perspective the tone of their disagreements in the press have become much more tempered since their meeting.

Recently when Gary and his wife were travelling they met up with him and his partner for lunch. This opening in friendship has led to interesting political conversations as well. Gary explained:

> He gave a speech at an event protesting an ex-gay conference, and he invited me there. And I brought some of my staff with me, and at this event there were men dressed as women and all that, and I was like, we need to do this more often. Because when I met this activist, I found out he was a human being who I liked, and it was the same thing about being in this room. The people there couldn't have disagreed with us more, but they were as respectful as could be to us. He's a good guy, and we still totally disagree, but that's ok. Because at one point, he's kind of a non-practicing Jew, and at one point I felt like I needed to tell him that God loves him as much as anyone. And I said I didn't want him to be offended, and he laughed and said, "Ok, how about I'll give you three proselytizing attempts a year." And the fact that he felt comfortably enough with me that he could joke about it shows that he really trusts me.

Gary's demeanor dramatically shifted when telling me this story. His confident tone softened and his voice slowed down. It was clear that this relationship and the transformation it represents in his own approach to politics mean a lot to him. He finished telling me this story with the following: "there are people who don't know the Lord out there, but they don't need my poison pen, they need my love and compassion." It was clear that this was part of his new mission.

Gary transformed how he does politics, but his position at a conservative evangelical parachurch ministry means that he still engages in political efforts attempting to limit legal protections based on sexual orientation and same-sex marriage. For others, a change in approach to politics has lead to a broader change in their politics as well. Kevin Feldotto is a pastor at one of the largest churches in Colorado Springs. While he identifies as a member of the Religious Right, he has over the past several years come to take a more nuanced position on his political engagements. A few years ago Pastor Kevin was inspired to write an op-ed in the Colorado Springs weekly paper, the *Independent,* about political polarization in the town. The article begins,

> I live in Colorado Springs, home of God. There are more Christian ministries in this town than you can shake a Harry Potter book at. Apparently, this makes us some sort of Christian Mecca. I'm not buying it. The ugly truth is that we are a town divided by hate. It's the granola eating, pacifist, pro-homosexual tree-huggers versus the holier-than-thou, flag-waving, pro-life, Bible-thumpers, and we have been divided for a decade. We don't have time to stand in the park and yell at each other, so we wage war with our bumper stickers. "FOCUS ON YOUR OWN DAMN FAMILY" is a popular bumper sticker that reveals more about our community than about any organization. (Feldotto 2006)

In the article he talks about driving in town and seeing a car with the bumper sticker, "Doing my part to piss off the Religious Right," and laughing when he saw it. He fantasized about being able to take people in the car out for a beer and being able to

actually listen to their perspectives and how they feel about the religious and the right, a type of conversation that doesn't happen very often. He then writes, "I was still laughing about the 'religious right' sticker when it hit me: If Jesus had a car, he might have had that bumper sticker on it, right next to the one that said 'WHAT WOULD I DO?'" He talks about how in the Bible, "Whenever Jesus went on the attack, who did he launch against? It wasn't the liberals; it was the religious right, the conservatives. It was the religious leaders who knew the Scriptures like they were written on their underwear. The pious people who were convinced that they had the corner on being right." This type of arrogance and righteousness was the target of most of Jesus' attacks, and while Pastor Kevin identifies politically as a member of the Religious Right, he was nervous about the attitude held by many Christian conservatives that correlated being right politically with being correct and beyond reproach. He asks rhetorically "what this says about evangelicals," and responds: "We need to be willing to honestly ask ourselves if we have been wrong. No, I take that back. The question should not be 'Am I wrong?' but 'Where am I wrong?'" He ends the article with the following proposal, "That may be OK. If you're a pro-homosexual, tree-hugging pacifist, let's talk."

I met Pastor Kevin in his church office and he told me about the response he received from this article. He said he received over a hundred emails from a variety of types of people, many of them were long and thoughtful and described how people have been "wounded by Christians." Many of the respondents were gay and Kevin corresponded with many of them. He told me,

> I ended up meeting this one man who was gay, and he has a lot of friends who are Christian and he doesn't want to let them know that because he is afraid of what will happen. He's worried he'll get judged or ostracized and they'll start working on behavior management instead of just loving him. The thing is, God doesn't

> love him if he stops being gay, God just loves him. So if we say, "You can only be in our camp once you stop being gay," then we're telling him that the God that we represent will only love you once you stop being gay.

Pastor Kevin was surprised than so few of the responses he received were critical of his approach. I asked him how politics fit into his views, and he said that the focus should not be on one's politics, but on one's attitude.

> There are just so many issues about the sanctity of marriage, and sex before marriage, that I believe in so strongly, but I'm surrounded by people who don't believe those things, so what do I do in this situation? Do I want to try to get them to be just like me? Do I want them to hold my same views and if they don't do I push them away? Do I spend all my energy trying to get them to be like me? I think the obvious, hopefully the obvious answer is no.

But this is more complicated in practice. Pastor Kevin went on to talk about how the emphasis should not be on behavior modification, but on relationships, for if someone has a relationship with God then their desires will start to line up with God's desires. For, "If someone does not have a relationship with God and their character is contrary to God, it's like, 'Well duh!'" This is of course an interesting take on the relationship between the ethics of intimacy that structures much of evangelicalism and political involvement. For, Pastor Kevin's critique is a logical extension of this ethical framework: legislation is all about behavior, either protecting or prohibiting different behaviors, and can be seen as working in opposition the logic of relational accountability that structures so much of evangelicalism. For Kevin, he began to change his views on political engagements when he started to see how divisive they could be, and how much harder it is to build relationships with non-Christians in a politically polarized environment. But, in our conversation, it also seemed clear that for Kevin, developing relationships with people

who identify as gay and openly listening to their stories of pain and ostracism from the Christian community led him to soften his political rhetoric further.

It seems then that just as travelling outside of suburban enclaves into a global mission field has led many young evangelicals to question the Religious Right politics of their parents, so too does moving out of the homogenous, evangelical enclaves and meeting people with different sexual identities sometimes change perspectives. And even if these encounters don't diminish evangelical dedication to defending heterosexuality, building relationships with people who have been harmed by both Religious Right rhetoric and policy and seeing the pain this has caused can lead to more complicated political positions.

Chapter 5: Incommensurate Identities: Christianity, homosexuality, and the ethics of desire

Sitting on a bench in the sunshine, the manicured green lawn and flowering bushes of the campus sprawled around us, Coreen began to cry. I met Coreen two nights before on the first day of the Exodus International "Freedom conference," an annual Christian conference originally organized to offer "freedom from homosexuality." As the largest organization in the "ex-gay"[i] movement, Exodus promises support and community for Christians who either experience same-sex desire or have friends or family member who do. A long-time conference attendee, Coreen is a "struggler," Exodus-speak for someone who "struggles with same-sex attraction." Gregarious and with an easy, beaming smile, when I was introduced to her on my first night at the conference, she asked if I was a Christian. I told her I was not and she responded immediately, "Well, the God I believe in doesn't create random encounters sister, everything He does has a purpose. I'd love to talk to you." In her late forties, Coreen seemed to always wear an open, button-up shirt and knee length shorts, her casual style, shoulder length hair and sporty sunglasses made her look, to me, like an evangelical Indigo Girls member.

In the condensed social space of the conference where attendees bunk and eat together, spend the days at emotionally charged workshops and worship sessions, and late nights socializing and playing games, I had come to see Coreen as an important member of this ex-gay social world. Her confidence and friendliness made her an informal mentor for many of the younger women. She lives in the South and works in retail management, and often hosts weekend working parties with other women from the conference at her house, building a deck or a fence, playing guitar and singing together. This afternoon,

Coreen and I were finally having the interview that she'd promised. I wanted to learn more about her history and how Exodus had come to play such an important part of her life. We found a quiet corner of the campus where the conference was taking place, and she shared with me what I found was a common and affecting story for ex-gays, a story that included dramatic disruptions in her sexual identity and her relationship to God, community, and politics.

Coreen was raised in a mainline Christian family and started dating women in college. She met her first girlfriend when the woman approached her by saying she was a lesbian and wanted to hang out, but didn't know if she could because Coreen was a vocal Christian. They soon started dating and Coreen began to feel accepted for the first time in her life, even though she also felt like it was wrong to be in a same-sex relationship. Coreen states, "It was then I started to put together feelings I had. I didn't feel like a man or a women, and felt like other women had something that I didn't have." With her newfound sexuality she also found a new community. Eventually she created a new social network reflecting her sexual identity. She had gay doctors, went on gay vacations, and felt very much a part of a gay community.

Coreen eventually came out to her evangelical brother as a lesbian and he remained loving to her even as he shared with her a consistent message that homosexuality was not part of God's plan. Coreen recalled:

> In 03' I was yelling at my brother, "Why did God make me this way?" And he responded, "God does not see you as damaged goods! You come to God and God cleans you up. That's the message of the Bible. All you have to do is go to God and He will clean you up." I had thought God helps those who help themselves. I had had the wrong idea about religion! This broke me, changed me. That was my first experience with the Holy Spirit, which comes to you and helps make the right desires in you. I realized it is not about the right behaviors. My ideas about Christianity had been wrong all along, I had thought of it as a set of rules and

behaviors.

This new understanding of God encouraged Coreen to seek counseling and support groups helping Christians leave homosexuality, and these in turn gave her hope that she could change, not just "to become straight," as she put it, but to be happier and to grow closer to God. Her new understanding of Christianity as based on desires and not behaviors gave her tools to work on changing her sexual identity. I asked her what role Exodus played for her in this process and she responded: "People who don't know they're sick don't know healing. People who have never been so far along that they needed God, that they were so along that you know there is no other hope except for God…" And this is where Coreen began to cry. She continued, with tears running down her face and with a broken voice: "You think the worst place to be is on your knees and desperate for God. But this teaches you how to love God, to need Him." Exodus valorizes the pain and alienation many strugglers experience, turning these feelings into resources that make them better Christians, and closer to God.

As I learned in my research on the role of sexuality in evangelical ethics, exploring this topic involved navigating emotionally complex histories about conflicting desires and sexual and spiritual identities, histories of abuse, rejection, and trauma, and experiences of spiritual ecstasy and rejection. Through interviews with eighteen adults who have left either homosexuality or who identify as ex-ex-gay, additional interviews with counselors and parents of Christians who struggle with same-sex attraction, and attendance at one national conference and an ongoing local support group for "strugglers," I explore why sexuality plays such an important role in evangelical ethics. Through analyzing the narratives of Christians who claim to have left homosexuality this

chapter explores the relationship between sexuality, ethics, and identity in evangelical culture.

As representations of same-sex relationships and desire have become increasingly common and acceptable in mainstream US culture, so too have Christian organizations' efforts at advocating and promoting conversion to heterosexuality grown in sophistication. And just as complex new identities and language have formed to define all things queer, as in the now-common and ever-growing acronym LGBTTIQQ2S[ii], so too have new identities and language emerged in the ex-gay movement.

The political stakes of this topic, the deeply felt and complicated work of constructing sexual identities, the wide range of emotions and experiences that shape this process, all posed significant ethnographic challenges. It was not uncommon for my interviewees to cry during interviews, such as Coreen did, to disclose a history of child sexual abuse, or to discuss pornography addictions within minutes of starting the interview. Additionally, the polarized political climate regarding same-sex rights meant my objectivity as a researcher was far from assumed. During the course of my research on ex-gay topics I was asked during interviews if I had experienced child sexual abuse myself, I was interrogated for twenty minutes by an ex-gay counselor about my research intentions before she would speak with me, and I was made to answer whether or not my research agenda involved potential harm to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans people prior to being allowed to interview the director of a local gay community center. I learned through this research that the neutrality of the researcher is never assumed when the political/ethical stakes of your topic are as polarized and in flux as mine were.

Although they posed challenges to the research process, I came to see these

complications as important ethnographic data: they demonstrated the inseparable relationship between sexuality and politics, the stitched-together affective worlds that must be constructed to fit into some ethical communities, and the always-incomplete work of constructing one's sexual identity. They also elaborated the important role heterosexuality—and desire more broadly— plays in evangelical ethics. While interviews on this topic often involved emotionally wrought descriptions of rejection and trauma, importantly, this was not always the case nor was it a common narrative. For many strugglers these experiences were only part of their experiences and not the center of them. Many of the ex-gays I came to know through my research expressed joy and peace in their identity as a Christian who has left homosexuality.

Non-evangelicals are often most interested in this aspect of my research, and often express pity that I had to spend time with "ex-gay" people, frequently sharing assumption that ex-gays must be depressed and repressed. Yet, the ex-gay people I came to know through this research lived a different reality, and expressed a world-view where sexuality was far from the center of significance to their identity. Instead, as Coreen so clearly describes, evangelical ethical life is based on developing a deeply felt relationship with God, one based in one's emotional life and the proper aligning of one's desires to fit within a prescribed pattern. Homosexual identities and acts are seen as not fitting into this prescription for relational living. For evangelicals who experience same-sex desire, there are more important things than expressing one's sexual desire. I came to see the non-evangelical fascination with this topic as data in itself, demonstrating that liberal or secular worldviews most often see sexuality as foundational to subjectivity, and that stifling this natural expression of one's true desires will only lead to depression and

despair. In a fascinating parallel, desire is also central to evangelical ethical identity, whereas secular understandings see sexuality as the key expression of the subject, evangelicals see desire as the link between the individual and God.

Evangelical sexual ethics have actually changed dramatically over the previous forty years. Responding to shifting popular sexual norms, popular evangelical authors have adopted a radical new approach to the role of pleasure in sexual ethics, while decidedly rejecting any sexual practices outside of heterosexual marriage. Changing a significant tradition, going back to Paul's framing of sexuality as an unfortunate necessity, and early twentieth century evangelical taboos against discussing sexuality, Tim and Beverly Lahaye's *The Act of Marriage* (1976) influenced a new approach to sexuality through advocating the importance of mutual sexual pleasure within heterosexual marriage. Tim Lahaye eventually rose to international fame through co-authoring the highest selling Christian novel series of all time, the *Left Behind* series. One of the most influential evangelicals over the past few decades, near the beginning of his writing career he co-wrote this how-to sex guide with his wife, with content so sexually explicit that the introduction contains a warning that it should only be read by people already married or engaged. *The Act* includes graphic images and explicit detail about sexual activity in marriage, and provides advice on how to make sex as pleasurable as possible for both husband and wife. Two marriage pastors I met in Colorado Springs cited this book as the most influential book for their ministry. This text represents a dramatic shift in evangelical cultural understandings of sexuality, one that is definitively influenced by the sexual revolution of the 1960s and the Second Wave Feminist movement of the 1970s. Sexual pleasure in marriage has become an important concern

for evangelicals, and it is not uncommon to hear Christian sex therapists on conservative Christian radio talk shows. Why then has evangelical sexual ethics shifted so dramatically in some areas, particularly around the significance of sexual desire in heterosexual marriage, while retaining an unswerving commitment to an ethic of compulsory heterosexuality? Although many sexual practices are condemned by evangelicalism, in particular pornography and extra-marital sex, homosexuality continues to receive a dominant amount of attention by Christian parachurch organizations, pastors, media, and political efforts.

In his study of Bible-believing churches in Philadelphia, historian David Watt found widespread marginalization of non-heterosexuals in the churches he studied. He found that discrimination and prejudice was widespread and justified through "a carefully worked-out set of axioms and arguments in which 'God' provided the warrants for discriminating against those who do not conform to heterosexual norms. Indeed, in the Bible-carrying Christian churches I studied, that was one of the most important things that 'God' did" (Watt 2002) 116). The pro-family movement has defined evangelical political life since the late 1970s, combining conservative ideals around a diminished welfare state and a focus on limiting access to abortion and fighting against rights for sexual orientation. While I did find a number of churches and Christian activists in Colorado Springs are currently working on mobilizing evangelicals to engage in more outreach to the poor and homeless and to adopting more children out of the foster care system, this was often talked about as a new emphasis for evangelicals. For the past thirty years the dominant political interventions made by white evangelicals has been around debates around rights for sexual orientation and reproduction.

Evangelical pastors and lay people frequently told me that there is no ranking of sins, that homosexuality is one sin among many sins. But, it became clear in my research, particularly through spending time with people who have left homosexuality and people who identify as ex-ex-gay,[iii] that in practice homosexuality is not treated simply as one of many sins, similar to say gluttony or greed, but that sexual sins carry a significant ethical weight in evangelicalism. But, I heard of no similar division for other sins in my fieldwork. People struggled with many habits and desires they considered sinful—pornography, alcohol and drug addiction, overeating, selfishness, anger—but none received the vitriol that same sex attraction and sexual habits and desires did. Lynne Gerber's study of evangelical support groups similarly found that despite rhetorical attempts at "democratizing sins," that "there is, in practice, a hierarchy of sins that measures sins of sexuality by a very different yardstick than those of judgment or of food and body size" (2011:49). None received the displacement of self, of unbearable feelings of non-belonging, of expulsion from God's banquet that non-normative, non-heterosexual, non-marital sexual habits and desires received. It is as though sex is the fastest way out of God's benign kingdom, and cultivating the correct, read respectable and normative, sexual habits and desires is a requirement for remaining in this ethical world. Gerber writes, "[O]pposition to homosexuality has become a core component of identity for many evangelical individuals and institutions— an example of evangelicals engaging with salient cultural issues and developing an increasingly distinctive subcultural identity" (25). Gerber gives the example of the Southern Baptist Convention's rules for expelling a particular church from its fellowship, the two means for doing this

are either failing to contribute financially to the convention or "if it acts to 'affirm, approve, or endorse homosexual behavior'" (FN14, 234).

Incommensurate Identities

As evangelical identity has come to be defined in many ways as opposing homosexuality, this leaves Christians who experience same-sex attraction, such as Coreen's, facing a dilemma: feeling as though they have to choose to prioritize either their own desires or their understanding of God's desires for them. Looking back Coreen describes this experience in dramatic terms. She told me, "If you're separated from God then you're separated from life, which is hell, that's how I define hell." And in her understanding of Christianity and sexuality, being gay and being a Christian were incommensurate identities. She had to choose.

For a few years she defined herself as ex-gay, and now she feels like she is beyond this identity. Her evangelical church family is now central to her life, and regional and national conferences provide her with a rich social life with other Christians who have left homosexuality. Coreen juxtaposed mainline Protestant and evangelical Christianity, saying: "Evangelicals say: 'I want to be as real as I can be as a sister, brother, father, or mother, I take feelings and line them up with scripture.' And mainline Protestants say: 'I want to be real, I take scripture and make it fit with how I feel.'" She is describing a key aspect of evangelical ethical life, that feelings are central to one's religious experience and there are proper feelings to cultivate. Becoming an evangelical requires cultivating the right feelings toward the right people. When I asked Coreen how her life has changed since her conversion to evangelicalism she didn't talk about the dramatic changes in how she lived her life and who and how she loved, she talked about developing a new emotional landscape. She describes a transition from "hopeless to hopeful" which has

changed her thoughts and choices. While her life looks radically different from before she became a Christian, it is her internal landscape that she experiences as the most altered.

Correen describes the dominant understanding of these complex shifts in ethics, practices, and desires within the ex-gay community by framing these shifts under the umbrella of "identity." She states: "I used to be gay and had that identity, then had an ex-gay identity. But, our identity shapes our behavior, and that wasn't all God wanted for me! God showed me women can love power tools and still be women! My core identity is a child of God!" And being a "child of God," for Coreen and for so many Christians, precludes her ability to also be a "lesbian." To be a "Christ follower" is to be straight, or at least not practicing same-sex relationships. For evangelicals I met who have "left homosexuality," there is an acute awareness that, as Coreen states, one's identity shapes one's practices, and one's practices determine the ethical community one can reside within.

Eating from the "garbage heap" or redefining Christianity

Until recently, Dustin worked for a conservative evangelical organization lobbying against gay rights, and was a vocal supporter of the position that homosexuality is a choice. Another employee of the organization suggested that I meet Dustin for my research and we met for an interview at a downtown coffee shop. During the interview we realized that we lived two blocks away from each other and both enjoy travelling, so we began to meet for coffee at a coffee shop near our houses where he loved to bring his two Schnauzers. In his late forties but looking much younger, Dustin sported short red hair and a slim build and was always immaculately but casually dressed. Dustin was raised in a mainline Christian home and struggled with same-sex attraction throughout his youth. He knew from a young age that he was attracted to other boys, but didn't think his

family or small farming town would accept him if he lived out his desires. In college he came out to his Episcopal priest, who then came out to Dustin as also gay. The priest then introduced Dustin to gay-affirming theology, giving him the message that one could be gay and a Christian. This religious support provided Dustin with the confidence to finally come out as a gay man and embrace his same-sex attractions. He eventually moved to Washington DC where he worked for a nonprofit association. He described his life:

> I knew I could be out and proud and it wouldn't be a big deal. And it wasn't! For 13 years. And, um, in a way it was a big deal because in a sense I didn't feel quite right about it. But, I was going to a gay church, lived in a gay neighborhood, I went to a gay gym, I was in a gay bowling league, I was in a gay volleyball league, I lived in a gay world. I had a gay boss: he had a gay boss. I mean, life in some ways was really awesome, in terms of being out. But, you know, deep down, I was still like, I'm not sure this is really right.

For Dustin, his immediate world was affirming of his sexual orientation. However, at least in retrospect, he was always uneasy with his orientation. At the age of thirty-five, Dustin had a born-again experience. He had not been going to church regularly, and had decided he wanted to. One evening he had an experience he describes as a personal encounter with the divine where he felt enveloped in a white light full of grace and mercy that left him in tears. Dustin felt that God was offering him forgiveness in exchange for returning to God's plan and Dustin quickly began to change his life in dramatic ways. In his words, "I woke up the very next day and I realized I was wrong about a number of things… I used to be about as far left as you can be, on every topic you can imagine, and the next morning when I woke up I realized I was like, 'I'm wrong about abortion!'" Within the next six months he eventually came to believe that homosexuality was also not part of God's plan. He found and joined a local ex-gay ministry, helping him to leave homosexuality. He describes a significant re-orientation in

his life after his born-again experience, what he calls his "theophany," describing a new peace that he had not experienced before. Today, Dustin is single and says that he now is attracted to women, but doesn't know if he will ever be able to start a family.

His conversion led to radical changes in not only his personal beliefs and behavior, but his politics as well. After participating in support groups for years actively working to change his sexual orientation, he eventually was recruited by an evangelical organization in Colorado Springs that actively fought against gay rights and advocated that people could indeed leave homosexuality. Before his conversion Dustin worked for a large arts-based non-profit in D.C. Interestingly, Dustin's sister is an out lesbian, and the two of them are very close and travel together on occasion. He meets all of her girlfriends and the siblings talk on the phone frequently. When he told me about his sister I showed surprise about their relationship, assuming that his political work would have created tension in their relationship. "Yeah, that's a common response. But, you know, I really love lesbians!" he said with a smile and a laugh. "They are some of the most genuine people I know!" I was fascinated by the different worlds he had inhabited, and his ability to straddle his work advocating against gay rights and his relationship with his lesbian sister and avowed "love for lesbians."

While he referred to his former gay self as very politically liberal, it became clear to me that he had likely always experienced discomfort with some aspects of queer culture. He told a story about a gay pride parade in DC, where a dominatrix wearing a leather bra performed for the crowd, hitting volunteers with a 25 foot whip. Dustin was shocked by the dominatrix's display, saying it felt like he was watching an archaic, Roman ritual. This act seemed to symbolize for Dustin a general moral laxity that he now

associates with gay culture. Telling me this story in the sunny café, with his Schnauzers tied up outside, Dustin gazed contemplatively out the window. After a silent moment he said, "You know, it's like they don't realize what they are missing. It's like they're eating out of the *garbage* instead of dining at the *bounty* that God created for us. It's just so sad," accenting and drawing out the "a" in sad so that the word was inflected with melancholy. I asked if he thought this was really true for everyone, and he replied, "Maybe not," explaining that perhaps it is worse for men because (in his estimation) lesbians are better at monogamy.

Like so many Christians who experience same-sex desire, Dustin's conversion to evangelical Christianity brought him into a new ethical world, one he found emotionally and spiritually rewarding, but also one that didn't allow for the expression of his sexual desires. It isn't just that Dustin's same sex desires are unwelcome in this new ethical world, it's that there is no place for them within it, they are abject, following through on them displaces him from this world and into another, from the bounty of God, into the garbage heap. He expresses this truth with methaphorical language, that living outside the bounds of normative heterosexuality is to live in refuse, the remainder.

The struggle individual Christians face in attempting to conform to heterosexual ideals plays out in different ways, and Lance's experience is almost an inverse of Dustin's. Lance was raised in a conservative Christian home and comes from a long line of preachers. Slight with dark-brown hair and a boyish face, he looks even younger than he is, in his early thirties. Lance came out to his parents when he was sixteen by telling them that he experienced same-sex attraction and wanted to change. With his parent's support he began participating in ex-gay therapy as a teenager and now jokes that in the

years he dedicated to changing his orientation he spent more on therapy than he did on tuition. When he was in college he was trying to date a women, and also participating in intensive reparative group therapy each week. He states:

> Six months into that intensive therapy… I just couldn't handle it any more. I'd gotten to the point where when [my girlfriend] was around I couldn't stand to have her touch me because it made me want to vomit. I just couldn't, I would go to sleep at night and honestly wonder if I was going to wake up sane or not. I felt my being being torn in two. There was this person that I was trying so hard to be and the person who I was and I was pulling those so far apart that I wasn't sure that I was going to… stay as one person.

Lance's inner turmoil led to him breaking up with his girlfriend and giving up on "getting cured." This had a dramatic personal impact when he stopped believing in God, which was particularly significant because he was in a Biblical Studies program. He describes beginning to doubt God, "I had no idea who God was if God wasn't a God who could fix this for me. Cause every prayer I had prayed for some decade at that point had been asking God to fix it. And, when God wasn't going to it became clear to me… I just believed that God couldn't exist, that there must not be a God. Cause a God of love would have fixed this." He continued to go to therapy and when he graduated contemplated different career paths. He considered getting a Social Work degree but hesitated because he was afraid the message of the program would be, "Come out and live your life, whereas the seminary would not. And I wasn't ready to give up on God at that point, though I think I was wrong to think this way, I felt like the Social Work path was giving up on God." And so instead of pursuing Social Work he decided to try to continue to pursue God and the dream of changing his sexual orientation, and so enrolled in a conservative seminary program.

In seminary Lance continued to feel a division between his commitment to God and his internal desires, a struggle that eventually led him to visit a Metropolitan Community Church (MCC), a Christian church that is gay-affirming. He describes having received the same message all his life, that one cannot be gay and a Christian, and hearing and seeing the opposite message for the first time resonated so much with Lance that he cried through the entire first service he attended. He describes the process of joining the clergy and membership of the MCC as healing his relationship with God, and becoming a part of a Christian community that felt like home, a home he had not experienced before. In the process of beginning to come out, his conservative seminary revoked his scholarships and forced him to find a new seminary, and he switched to a seminary that was more progressive. He now is the pastor at an MCC church.

Lance learned to change his interpretation of Christianity and sexual ethics. He credits his conservative Biblical upbringing with teaching him to place Biblical lessons within the cultural context within which they were written. Growing up, he was taught in his conservative Christian education, that Biblical writings on slavery and about the treatment of women, based on bondage and ownership, were reflective of the patriarchal cultural context of the writers, and not to be taken as God's desires. As these interpretations have changed based on new understandings and values, Lance believed that so too can scriptures about same-sex sexuality also be understood as stemming from bias, and not God's rules. Lance has rediscovered a relationship to God, and a new way of being a Christian, but through this process he also realized he would never be able to serve as a minister for the congregation he grew up in, an earlier goal that led him into seminary. However he has also found new communities to belong to, participating in the

local gay pride festival each year and actively working to support gay rights. He remains friends with many people from his college and seminary days, including his college girlfriend, and many of his friends now challenge heterosexism and homophobia within Christianity. Yet his relationship with his family has often been strained, and while he remains close with his family, his choice to identify as a gay man has meant he remains an outsider in key ways to the community he comes from.

Dustin and Lance represent two dominant responses to Christianity and sexuality, either prioritizing desire or dominant understandings of scripture, and for many this is an impossible choice, to end up on the garbage heap or to be torn in two.

Sexual Politics

It looked like a typical night at Vanguard Church, one of the large evangelical churches in suburban Colorado Springs. The fluorescent lights showering the cavernous chapel chased away shadows from the row upon row of standard-issue chairs to create a feeling reminiscent of large anonymous conference rooms in airport hotels. Friends greeted each other in the aisles with hugs and smiles; others came in alone and sat quietly in the seats. The event started with several hundred people in the church. While it had the feel of any regular evening service at the megachurch, instead of a band providing a raucous invitation to worship, Pastor Kelly, the lead pastor of Vanguard, welcomed us to the event and introduced a short video. The speakers in the video let us know that this was no ordinary megachurch event. Jim Daly, the new president of the conservative evangelical organization Focus on the Family, beamed from the large screen over the stage, thanking us for attending the event and saying how happy he was to help support it. Then a similar message came from John Weiss, the founder of the Colorado Springs *Independent*, a local weekly paper known for its liberal bent and the dozens of medical marijuana ads

covering the last several pages of each issue. The flier for the event boasted the endorsement logos of Focus on the Family, the Colorado Springs *Independent*, and the Colorado Springs Pride Center, serving the area's gay, transgender, lesbian, and bisexual community, a trio of sponsors that not only disagreed on a number of issues, but had been engaged in a series of political battles against each other for decades.

Vanguard Church's Community Discussion on Homosexuality was a unique affair. At the time, Vanguard described itself as a "post-modern" church, and was known within the local Christian community as a church that challenged some of the orthodoxies of the other local large evangelical churches. Part of this mission included hosting community discussions on various controversial issues, including a previous discussion on Christians and Muslims. The flier for the event included a message from Pastor Kelly where he explained: "Vanguard hosts these community discussions in an attempt to add a name and face to the topic so that we can show love and respect to one another as we interact with the similarities and differences we find with the topic we are addressing." He continues, "we do not believe you can influence people in a post-modern world like ours today unless you are in relationship with each other. Tonight we come together in relationship hoping to show the love of Jesus Christ to everyone who is present." While the stated goal was to increase understanding and build relationships, like all evangelical outreach, the underlying goal was to bring new souls to Christ.

Six panelists spoke at the event, three evangelical men who all identified as having left homosexuality and two Christian men and an agnostic woman who all identified as gay/lesbian, with one having participated in reparative therapy attempting to unsuccessfully change his sexual orientation. The event consisted of each presenter

sharing a brief autobiographical sketch and concluded with a question and answer period, the entire event had an overall civil atmosphere and the discussion remained respectful, even as many people in the audience voiced various critiques of the panelists.

While the conversation remained civil, the discussion showed significant barriers to increased understanding. Wes Mullins, the pastor of the local Metropolitan Community Church, a gay-affirming Christian church, talked about having spent over $30,000 on reparative therapy trying to leave homosexuality when he was in college. He spoke of the emotional turmoil he went through in this process and how it led him to the brink of a nervous breakdown. Eventually Pastor Wes decided that he could be a Christian and be gay, and in the panel contrasted his experience to that of Jeff Johnston, another of the panelists who worked at Focus on the Family and identifies as having left homosexuality and is now in a heterosexual marriage. Wes described his Christianity this way: "There are different ways of establishing authority, for me experience is more important than scripture, for Jeff scripture trumps experience." At this Jeff nodded his head in agreement. For Jeff, a conservative evangelical, all authority lies in his reading of the Bible, and this he takes as his guide for how he should live his life, regardless of his internal desires. For Wes, his desires led him to a new understanding of scripture, one that saw taboos against homosexual acts as based on historical bias and not God's laws. These different approaches were paradigmatic of broader disagreements about homosexuality, with perspectives on sexuality shaped by beliefs about the importance of and relationship between ethics and desire.

Sexuality and the Substance of Soul

Jeff Johnston works at Focus on the Family and has publically shared his story

about leaving homosexuality. Similarly to Coreen, Jeff criticized the prevalence of gay identities: "See for hundreds of years, homosexuality was seen as a behavior, now it is seen as an identity, as what someone is, an essence. What I came to understand is my homosexuality was not about my identity. God didn't make a separate group of gay people!" Jeff's historical analysis of the emergence of gay identity is of course true. But, this statement is reflective of a common trend in the ex-gay movement to de-center sexuality from one's identity, challenging a historical trend. David Halperin writes, "Unlike sex, sexuality is a cultural production: it presents the *appropriation* of the human body and its physiological capacities by an ideological discourse. Sexuality is not a somatic fact; it is a cultural effect. Sexuality, then, does have a history" (1989:258). Understanding sexuality as foundational to—as constitutive of— subjective experience is a decidedly modern project (Foucault 1990a; Foucault 1990b). As Robert Padgug puts it, "'Homosexual' and 'heterosexual' behavior may be universal; homosexual and heterosexual identity and consciousness are modern realities… To 'commit' a homosexual act is one thing; to be a homosexual is something entirely different" (1979:14). Sexual subcultures (Chauncey 1985), constructed through transnational circuits of people and media (Rofel 2007), are required to allow for the creation of new identities based on sexual preferences.

A common trend in the ex-gay movement is to criticize homosexual identities as privileging one's sexuality above other aspects of their identities, but their strategy for doing this is also to offer the liminal identity of the ex-gay (c.f. Erzen 2006). Despite widespread criticism of this term for continuing to privilege sexuality as the center of one's identity, the prevalence of conferences, support groups, and friendship networks

amongst ex-gays shows that this liminal identity—an identity not entirely heterosexual but not entirely homosexual either— remains important and is still bound and determined by sexuality.

Christy Ponticelli (1999) conducted research in an Exodus International based ministry and studied Exodus literature to understand the process by which lesbians reconstruct their sexual identities. She focuses on identity reconstruction and asks "What leads a person, in this case a woman, to choose one universe of discourse over another? Why did these women choose Exodus and a frame that defined them as sinful and in need of change?" (170). Ponticelli argues that exposure to and adoption of different discourses shapes behavior, but she uses discourse to mean a system of language and meaning, arguing that exposure to a new language that frames homosexuality as both sinful and a choice allows for women to change their relationship to and understanding of their sexual desires.

I argue instead that it is exposure to different discourses in a Foucauldian sense that shapes people's sexual conversions, with discursive frames shaping what can be talked about and understood as meaningful language and action (See Hall 2001). Exposure to different ethical discourses has a dramatic effect on one's sexual identity and the meaning one gives to their desires and acts. My observations show it is not just competing linguistic frames that shape these conversion experiences, but exposure to different ethical worlds based on distinct norms, ideals, and experiences of time, feeling, power, priority, and belonging. Evangelical Christian practice is framed by a hierarchical series of relationships, centered on developing an intimate "relationship with God," where God is seen as a buddy (for men) or as a boyfriend or husband (for women) (Kintz

1997:32; Luhrmann 2004:525). This relationship with the divine serves as the model for a series of hierarchical relationships, for instance evangelical women are taught to first prioritize a relationship with God, then with their male spouse (or future male spouse), then with their family, then in "fellowship" in weekly small-groups formed within the church, and then with others. As I argue in Chapter 2, gender structures these hierarchical relationships and heterosexual marriage is a central metaphor used, symbolized in the relationship between Jesus and the Church as one between a Bridegroom and His bride. Biblical messages about gender, marriage, and family are stressed in sermons and in evangelical media and a gender hierarchy is concretized in most evangelical churches that only allow men to serve as main pastors and church elders and overseers. Susan Harding (2001) writes it is the preacher's task to "stand in the gap" between the "language of the Bible and the language of everyday life," thus translating Biblical text into contemporary language and cultural idioms (12). Evangelical pastors weekly invoke stories about their wives and children in sermons relating the Bible to everyday life, enforcing the idea that a Biblical life is lived within the nuclear family. The importance of heterosexuality and cultivating a "Biblical" and thus "male-headed" nuclear family are difficult to overstate in this process (Bielo 2009; Erzen 2006; Griffith 1997).

Lived evangelical ethics are rooted in the nuclear family, defined by patriarchal heterosexuality. Homoeroticism and homosexual identities and acts are seen as incommensurate and out of place with the evangelical ethical order. The privileging of heterosexuality in evangelicalism reflects a wider historical pattern, particularly in North America (Carter 2001; Jakobsen and Pellegrini 2003). Judith Butler writes that a heterosexual imperative is so strong that it is inscribed in our ideas about basic human

biology, she argues there is no pre-cultural, biological "sex," and instead a heterosexual imperative "enables certain sexed identifications and forecloses and/or disavows other identifications" (Butler 1993:3).

> This exclusionary matrix by which subjects are formed thus requires the simultaneous production of a domain of abject beings, those who are not yet 'subjects,' but who form the constituent outside of the domain of the subject. The abject designates here precisely those 'unlivable' and 'uninhabitable' zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject, but whose living under the sign of the 'unlivable' is required to circumscribe the domain of the subject (3).

What Butler is describing as a general social phenomenon, that sex is itself materially constituted through discourse, I argue takes place on a spiritual level for evangelicals. Whereas Butler is describing how the physicality of the body cannot "be thinkable apart from the materialization of that regulatory norm" (2), for evangelicals the substance of the soul is shaped by a similar process. A regulatory norm requires dimorphic gender ideals and compulsory heterosexuality for legibility and emplacement within God's kingdom. While evangelicals debate whether there will be gender in heaven, on earth the individual soul lives in a sexed body and a gendered ethical domain, divergences from this are seen and talked about as divergences from God's plan.

At the Q and A during the forum that I began this chapter with, an audience member asked Jeff Johnston where hermaphrodites fit into his understanding of the sacred and the sexual. Jeff had told a common evangelical story about the importance of heterosexuality in God's plan, whereas beginning in Genesis there are "no longer two but one." He stated, "I understand God's design for sexuality: one man, one women, coming together as one." In response to where intersexed people fit within this understanding, Jeff responded without pause, "God made us in his image, but because of sin there are

miscarriages and other tragedies. Hermaphroditism is an unfortunate consequence of the fallen world we live in." This understanding is based on a historicity that sees life as beginning in perfection in the Garden of Eden, with pristine gender dimorphism and absolute heterosexuality, but with the introduction of sin this pristine order is challenged. For evangelicals, living God's design is thus attempting to go back to the garden. A heterosexual imperative is so important within evangelical Christianity that to be a Christian is to be heterosexual.

Colorado Springs, battleground for gay rights

The city has a unique and troubled history regarding the conflict between the LGBT community and evangelicals. In the early 1990s the Colorado Springs City Council set up a Human Relations Commission and one of their first tasks was to consider an ordinance similar to one other cities in Colorado had implemented extending legal protection for sexual orientation. At the time, residents had no legal recourse if they were fired or denied housing due to their perceived sexual orientation or transgendered status. The debate about extending civil rights to LGBT people set off a firestorm of political controversy. Dan Snow, a local layer who served on the Human Relations Commission, described the ensuing melee: "This may be an exaggeration, but it felt similar to what I think the Scopes trial must have been like." People serving on the Commission received threats and required guards to accompany them to and from meetings and the meetings were accompanied by significant protests. As Dan described it, "It had a kind of carnivalesque atmosphere, there were guys on the cross, people saw people with baseball bats in the crowd, and they made it pretty clear that we were going to hell." In response to these protests the City Council requested the Commission not send recommendations on the ordinance and disbanded the Commission.

Shortly after the Human Relations Commission's disbanding, several local conservative Christians formed Colorado for Family Values, headed by Will Perkins, the owner of a large local car dealership. In 1992 the group worked to place a referendum on the statewide ballot that forbid any city or county government in the state from granting protected legal status for sexual orientation. Campaigned under the banner of not allowing homosexuals to have "special rights," the passing of the referendum ensured that lesbian, gay, and transgender citizens of Colorado lacked basic civil rights protection from basic forms of discrimination.

Although the US Supreme Court eventually overturned Amendment 2 in 1996, the campaign left lasting scars on the LGBT community in Colorado, particularly in Colorado Springs. Nori Rost, a lesbian and Unitarian Universalist minister in Colorado Springs, described the local queer community in the early 1990s as demoralized. "You'd kind of look at your co-workers and think, 'Did you vote for this?,'" she said. "To feel that stripped of citizenship, it was a hard time here." A decade later the city began offering same-sex partner benefits and another controversy ensued with significant protests. That year the Pride center was set on fire and largely destroyed, the arsonist was never found.

In 2008, the governor of Colorado, Scott Ridder, signed new legislation prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity (being only the 12th state to grant legal protections for transgendered individuals). Ryan Acker, the then director of the Colorado Springs Pride Center, described the time before passage of this legislation as traumatizing for the local LGBT community, and said it wasn't until gays and lesbians were able to secure basic legal rights that they could begin focusing on community

building at the Pride Center. Yet, even with the securing of these rights came significant protest from evangelical groups in Colorado Springs.

Focus on the Family was a vocal opponent of this new legislation. Tom Minnery, then senior vice president at Focus on the Family Action (the political arm of Focus on the Family), warned in a *Denver Post* editorial that they knew legislation would "forcibly normalize all varieties of sexual orientation." He went on to argue that this legislation would harm women and children, because the transgendered protections would mean no more segregated bathrooms. Local conservative Christian radio stations ran hourly advertisements warning against this "Bathroom bill," which I discussed in the last chapter. Minnery continued, "With SB 200… we no longer have two 'sexes'; we enter a brave new world with a myriad of 'sexual orientations' that must not be discriminated against, upon pain of the substantial civil and criminal penalties contained in the bill" (Minnery 2008).

Given the political stakes and consequences of these ongoing conflicts over civil rights it is fascinating that parties representing both sides can both decide that meeting in a neutral space to dialogue was important. And, given this history and Focus' significant efforts to try to stop any legal protections for sexual orientation, I was surprised that Christians frequently did not see Focus as a political organization, or part of a political movement. My informants often understood political behavior to be limited to voting and overt political organizing, such as signing pro-life petitions and attending rallies. They then typically saw Focus on the Family as an unwitting political player, an organization that loved children and families and unfortunately was drawn into politics because of the politicization of homosexuals. I was told by someone who worked at Focus that James

Dobson used to refer to "Love Won Out," a one day conference that Focus used to sponsor advocating that sexual orientation can be changed, was "the heart of the political work" that Focus engaged in. I found this was exactly the role that the ex-gay movement played for evangelicals. Framing sexual orientation as a choice allowed Christians to say they are not hateful of gays and lesbians, but instead wanted them to make more godly choices. On a special two-hour individual tour I was given of Focus' headquarters, my two tour guides took me to Whit's End for a chocolate soda. The soda fountain is featured in one of Focus' most popular radio programs, *Adventures in Odyssey,* a Christian children's show that follows the escapades of a group of children in a fictional utopia "Odyssey." The patriarch of the show, Mr. Whittaker, is the proprietor of the "Whit's End" ice cream shop, making the ice cream shop at Focus one of the most popular stops for families visiting the welcome center. Handing over a large glass of chocolate soda and whipped cream, my tour guide, a kind, fit forty year old woman with pale skin and cropped black hair, gushed that often groups of lesbians and gays will take tours at Focus. "They are always so surprised that we don't hate them!," she said with wide eyes and a big, genuine smile, "I always say, 'Of course we don't hate you! We love you!' I don't understand why they think we hate them."

The stakes of this conflict are clearly significant and it is startling that people on different sides understand this conflict in such radically different ways: either feeling "stripped of our citizenship" or wondering why "they think we hate them." I argue that it is contrasting ethical paradigms that shape these opposing views of the stakes of these struggles. On the one hand, the argument goes that homosexuality is only a lifestyle, a choice, and is against God's order. Within this ethical frame, largely shaped by

conservative evangelical culture, the individual and individual happiness are entirely subordinate to an interpreted divine plan. The focus is not on individual happiness but about organizing one's life around a common understanding of God's desires for your life. The center of evangelical spiritual life is cultivating a proper emotional landscape, of lining up one's emotions and desires so that they lead to approved behaviors. Pastors and Bible study leaders would frequently caution Christians to not focus on fixing their "behavior," but instead to deepen their emotional relationship with God, a relationship based on intimacy and submission, a relationship that exits in the realm of emotions. Individuals must submit their own desires to live out God's plan. Homosexuality is framed here as a "choice" and a "lifestyle" that goes against this plan. Although never described in this way, this worldview frames a particular type of heterosexuality, expressed solely in a monogamous patriarchal marriage, as a *divine lifestyle*, sometimes as *the* most important aspect of a godly lifestyle.

On the other hand, the opposing political argument advocates rights and a world that accepts one's desires. Key to this argument is an assumption that sexual orientation is a key expression of one's authentic self. This ethical frame prioritizes the integrity of the individual and prioritizes the legal protection of individuals to freely express themselves and form the types of relationships that they choose. The state, this perspective argues, must protect people who identify as gay, lesbian, transgendered, bi, queer, questioning, inter-sexed, and etc., it must create room for them to belong. Concepts of the divine may or may not play a role in this worldview. Non-Christians with whom I would discuss my research were always most interested and most troubled by my research with the ex-gay movement, and people shared a widespread assumption that this

movement is made of sad, self-hating individuals. What I began to see in these responses is a common, seemingly secular assumption that the key to an individual's authentic self is through their sexuality, and that attempting to change one's sexual orientation is horrifying, as though they were stifling a key link to their authentic self.

It is fascinating then that both sides are focused on emotions and desire, one on attempting to model one's desire on hierarchies that are perceived as Biblical— as a link to God— and the other on pursuing the freedom to express one's desire— as a link to the self. These very different ideas about the role of the individual, desire or sexuality, and religion show the significant relationship that ethical or ethical-religious life plays in politics. These divergent ethical frameworks also show why so many evangelicals have such a hard time understanding why they are seen as hateful by so many. While evangelicals see cultural and political legitimacy of same-sex attraction as threatening their ethical world, the LGBT community has seen primarily evangelical opposition strip them of citizenship.

Gender confusions

Mary Jean is tall and blonde with a muscular build. Passionate and intelligent, I met Mary Jean at a downtown coffee shop after finally getting in touch after many people encouraged me to speak to her about my project. Wearing pumps and a pencil skirt, she talked to me about her transition from male to female, and from the center of the religious right and into an activist who successfully fought to secure civil rights for transgendered citizens in Colorado. While she was born biologically male, as she put it, "This is what I believed when I was three years old, that I am a girl and I just came out in the wrong wrapping paper!"

Mary Jean grew up in a religious family. When she was a child she travelled and performed in a singing group in West Virginia with her seven siblings. Although her parents were Christians in her early life, they left church when she was still young. In high school in West Virginia, one of Mary Jean's teachers told her that the Bible was true and should be followed, encouraging a life-altering conversion to Christianity. She recounts a long line of miraculous occurrences following this conversion, with God intervening in her life, providing financial resources when needed through strangers, and helping her on each aspect of her spiritual journey.

Mary Jean eventually made her way to Colorado Springs, had a successful career as a software developer and played a significant role in her megachurch as a senior Bible study instructor. Tall, blonde, and friendly, she once counted leaders of the conservative Christian organization, Focus on the Family, among her closest friends. Married with children, her life from the outside appeared ideal, except for one thing: although Mary Jean knew she was a woman, she was born with a male body and was living as a man.

Living as a man, Mary Jean had a successful career in technology, a happy marriage and children, and belonged to a tight-knit religious community, but then in the late 1990's a mountain biking accident led to a brief hospitalization. In her words, "That near-death experience caused me to go, 'I have to live my life honestly and I haven't lived my life honestly since I was three years old.' So, for awhile I just kept it under, and while I was recovering from this bike wreck all of a sudden I remember, I felt like I was winding up and winding up, like someone was winding up a clock inside me, and pretty soon I was going to go cha-ching! And I said, 'I'm going to explode, something's going wrong inside me and I don't know what do to!'"

Although Mary Jean struggled with her gender identity, and not her sexual orientation, the experience she relates is similar to that described by many evangelical Christians that experience same-sex attractions. Their inner feelings are calling them to be different types of people than the one their Christian community is calling them to be, leading to significant emotional turmoil.

For Mary Jean this turmoil was extreme and lead to what she describes as, "a complete nervous breakdown." She says, "It was like 9/11 where the buildings caved in and all that was left was the shell. The shell was still standing, I couldn't talk, I couldn't think, my brain was like, 'I quit! I don't want to do this anymore.' I went to the hospital for awhile, I was non-functioning. The doctors came and said, 'What went wrong?'. I finally said, 'I need to tell the truth, I am a girl.' I had tried to do what society wanted and I couldn't deal with it anymore. I was trying to do what my family wanted and what society wanted and I didn't want that mental breakdown, it was like the rug was pulled out from underneath me."

After asking her doctors to put her "on the girl's side of the institution" and starting to wear feminine clothing Mary Jean almost immediately started recovering. It was in the institution that Mary Jean transitioned, and changed her name. She came out as a woman to her children, telling them: "This is who I am, I am Mary Jean. If I try to be different then I die. If I go to church as a man it is a hypocrisy, it would be lying to God." Her children responded by "crying like it was my funeral," and Mary Jean's wife kicked her out of the house.

This change precipitated a variety of other changes in Mary Jean's life. However she has retained many of the values from her former life, particularly regarding

monogamy and a dislike for divorce. And it was out of concern for her wife that she decided to save her marriage. As she puts it, “I thought if I could just roll this back and stuff it back then I would be ok.” But, unlike other sins she had overcome in the past easily, this one was harder to overcome. Out of concern for her wife Mary Jean went to the pastors of her former church for guidance, who encouraged her to stay in the church but to seek out reparative therapy, and insisted that she must be gay.

This began a three-year experience with pastoral counseling and reparative therapy designed to make Mary Jean identify as a man again. Although Mary Jean wanted to change her gender identity, and not her sexual orientation, her pastors had a hard time understanding what she was going through or what to suggest. They encouraged her to attend Focus on the Family’s Love Won Out conference, which is focused on homosexuality, and then continued to encourage her to attend a three-year group-counseling program for people with sexual addictions. She describes the awkwardness of the program for her. “So they put me in this class with rapists, and child molesters, and all that. And all I am is Mary Jean, all I am is the girl that is transgendered and I am surrounded by all these mega-sex-offenders. And I was scared, but they said no you're safe because God is in control.” Because she never exhibited symptoms of sexual addiction she excelled in the program and was complemented for not practicing promiscuity. They taught her that every time she wanted to wear women’s clothing to do something to cause herself pain, one of a multitude of tactics used by support groups and counselors attempting to change sexual behaviors. Despite her doing so well in the program, her desire to dress as a woman did not decrease. “They were trying to take down the real me, because they thought it wasn't important. They told me I just need to

pray harder. Now, they are talking to someone who taught Bible study for twenty years, don't you think I'm someone who knows how to read scripture and pray!?"

Then one day Mary Jean arrived to class early and overheard her teachers talking about her.

> And they are saying, "This student is so good, he's the best student we've ever had. No failures in the sexual area whatsoever." Then they said, "We'd just have to tell him he'd make an ugly girl!" And they were laughing. So I walked in and told them, "I am done with this!"

At this point Mary-Jean began taking hormones. She spent half a year trying not to be a Christian because all of the messages she had received telling her she could not be a Christian and a trans person. Eventually she went to the Metropolitan Community Church and became an active member in the community.

It took her several years to fully transition to presenting as female in all aspects of her life, and in this process she suffered significantly. Mary Jean lost her wife in this transition, and eventually lost her job. When she committed to living as female all the time she called a company wide meeting to announce her transition, where she gathered everyone in the company and led them through, as she put it, "Trans 101." The next day she was fired, and has not worked in her field since. And, because of heavy evangelical lobbying over the previous twenty years, largely from groups she had once supported, transgendered people could be fired at will at that time with no political recourse.

For Mary Jean, transitioning her gender led her to a variety of significant changes. She described herself as having been a dogmatic person, but began to challenge those dogmas because of her experiences. She also radically changed her politics. After losing her job because of her gender identity she became active in statewide politics and helped to ensure that the sexual orientation protections that were passed into law in 2008

included protection for transgendered citizens, something she is very proud of. She says that that the day she was fired was the day she became an activist. “I took the money that was supposed to go to surgery and used it driving back and forth to Denver, trying to change the laws, and we were successful. I have fought to secure the American Dream, life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, if you're trying to take that away from me that is not the American way.”

When I asked Mary Jean why she thought that evangelical Christians focused so much on sexuality and were so against transgender rights, she said she thought the focus on sexuality was about defending patriarchy. “I mean, why would I want to give up my male privilege?,” she asked me. Interesting, this was the same response that Lance gave on why he thought that evangelicals were so concerned with homosexuality, because it challenges patriarchy.

Just as Mary Jean was politicized and changed to a new understanding of her Christianity, so too are people politicized when they experience sexual conversion from homosexuality. Dustin, for example, left homosexuality and in the process went from being moderately politically liberal to working for the most prominent organization fighting against gay rights. Gregory Quinlan was also politicized through a sexual conversion. The president of PFOX (Parents and Friends of Ex-gays and Gays), when I met him at the Values Voters Summit in 2010 he first took off his wire-rimmed glasses to show me a scar across his face he received when a gay man punched him because of his position supporting ex-gays. “Ex-gays need protections, we are persecuted!,” he emphatically told me. PFOX was founded in 1998 as a Christian counter to PFLAG (Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays), and does political lobbying on

behalf of ex-gays. Their website claims that, “Former homosexuals are the last invisible minority group in America.” The organization hosts information tables at the Values Voters Summit each year in Washington, DC, which is where I met Gregory.

Gregory and I met in the enormous lobby of the Omni Shoreham Hotel, and just after we sat down the Duggar family walked by. The Duggar family, famous for their reality TV show “19 Kids and counting” and their embrace of Biblical patriarchy and eschewing of birth control, were being honored at the conference for their cultural work supporting the family. Before we began our interview, Gregory and I sat and watched as Michelle and Jim Bob and their nineteen children passed our seats. Gregory has dark hair and gives the impression that he is most comfortable in a suit and tie. He has a stern face but emotive voice and talks quickly. Within two minutes of us sitting down Gregory was in the middle of his testimony, telling me about his abusive father, early sexual abuse by a neighbor, and his fleeting spiritual life as a child. Just as every Christian is encouraged to develop a shareable testimony about how their relationship with Jesus has changed their life for the better, so are ex-gays encouraged as part of their sexual conversion to develop their testimony to describe what lead to their same-sex attractions and what lead them out of them. For Gregory, as a young adult in the 1980s he struggled between his sexual attraction to men and his Christianity. As he describes it,

> I came to a point in my life where the struggle was so deep and so heavy, and remember, this was 1983, 84 there was nothing out there to give me help if I wanted help. I had some fear of God, so it was either commit suicide or come out of the closet. So that's what I did, and that's during the disco days of John Travolta and all that and I was having a lot of fun.

But, soon after he came out of the closet, his community in Dayton was plagued by GRID (Gay Related Immune Disease), the first label given to what became AIDS.

His experience as a nurse and volunteer with the AIDS task force during the 1980s was traumatizing. He states, “As time went on I watched one hundred of my friends and acquaintances die of AIDS before I quit counting.” During this time people knew of his Christian background so would ask him questions like: "Does God hate me?"; "Am I going to hell?"; "Would you read my favorite Bible verse at my funeral?”; and "Would you tell my son and daughter what happened to daddy?" It got to the point where he stopped going to funerals, but he did become active in the Human Rights Fund (later the Human Rights Campaign) and started lobbying for funding for AIDS research.

Throughout this period it seems he had a complicated relationship with Christianity. He wanted to be a Christian but didn’t feel like he could because he identified as a gay man. Because of his work supporting gay rights he would sometimes watch *The 700 Club* with Pat Robertson to “see what the other side was doing.” He said when he would see ex-gay testimonies he would both hate the individual giving the testimony and want to believe that they were lying, but also secretly hope that he too could leave homosexuality. One day he was watching *The 700 Club* and a panel of ex-gays was on, and as he says: “So I'm watching all of this, and finally it came to the point where I was done with homosexuality, I was done with it, I'm sick of this, I'm tired of it, I don't know what to do. Everything felt shallow, lustful, and immature. That's how I define the lifestyle.” He called into the free prayer line from the TV station, was prayed on over the phone, and quickly began his transition into an ex-gay man. He likes to boast that the political training he received fighting for gay rights he now uses to challenge them, or as he puts it, “What the Human Rights Campaign taught me to do I am now using for the Lord.” Interestingly, for Gregory who had never come out as gay to his

family, coming out to them as ex-gay man ended his relationship with his mother who found even his identity as an ex-gay troubling her sense of normative attachments. While he experienced significant political shifts with his sexual conversion, Gregory had always been a Republican. Laced throughout his testimony, particularly in the horror of surviving the early AIDS pandemic, is a desire to no longer be a homosexual, and a dissatisfaction with his gay life, a life he found shallow.

Ethics, Identity, and Sexuality

Most evangelicals will say they read the Bible literally and that they receive knowledge about the family and sexual prescriptions directly from the Bible, and often the secular media takes evangelicals at their word that this is true. The problem with this focus however is found in a recent interview with Allan Chambers, the president of Exodus International. Jennie Rothenberg Gritz recently interviewed Chambers for an article in *The Atlantic* (Gritz 2012). The focus of her questions was about the confusion that comes from assuming the evangelical stance on homosexuality is a product of a literalist Biblical reading. Chambers is known for changing the direction of Exodus, the largest organization focused on helping Christians leave homosexuality. Under Chamber's leadership, and in the context of a number of very public suicides by gay teens, Exodus stopped supporting the "Day of Truth," an annual day where teens were encouraged to vocally promote heterosexuality as central to God's vision. While Chambers has a more liberal approach to the work of Exodus, he continues to argue that homosexuality is not part of God's plan. Grtiz repeatedly asks for clarity from Chambers about which scriptural verses are against homosexuality and then challenges why certain aspects of the Levitical codes are not followed ("eating shellfish or lighting a fire on the Sabbath"). She then continues to challenge him about his interpretation, asking how he

knows this is the true meaning of scripture. Chambers does provide a number of scriptures, specifically about marriage, as evidence that God's desire for one man/one woman marriage is condoning of heterosexuality. Yet this approach—of a non-Christian (or liberal Christian) challenging a conservative Christian's interpretation of the Bible—is flawed because it fails to take into account both the interpretive frame evangelicals use to understand the Bible and the ethical framework that brings sexuality to the fore of evangelical concerns. The evangelical emphasis on sexual ethics stems from a particular historical reading and cannot be linked solely to specific Bible references.

In my research some evangelicals would cite Bible verses when discussing why they felt homosexuality was not part of God's plan and the most common reference used was Sodom and Gomorrah. But, as Lance told me,

> Sodom and Gomorrah really can't be about sexual ethics because Lot offers his daughters to be raped. Like, this is not a good sexual ethic to live your life by. So, if it's not about sexual ethics then it has to be about something else. Ezekiel says it's about hospitality, and it's real hard for a conservative to argue with how the Bible interprets itself.

Most often during interviews when I asked why it was so important for Christians to reject homosexuality and fight against rights for same-sex couples I wasn't given Bible verses. Instead I was most often either given general homophobia (i.e. "It's Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve") or told simply that this is not part of God's plan. Although described as a literalist approach, the evangelical ethics of intimacy that prioritizes gender and patriarchy is not based in a literalist reading of the Bible but in a historically produced ethical framework that is harder to articulate.

Emotional Turmoil and Political Consequences

Ex-gay narratives in general support the political argument that sexual orientation is a choice. If it a choice then it more easily escapes protected legal status. The widespread circulation of so many people who claim to have left homosexuality supports the claims by politicized evangelical organizations that they are not hateful, because they are able to argue that homosexuality is merely a lifestyle, a chosen identity, not a protected status. This is Dustin's and Coreen's narratives. They see homosexuality as a lifestyle that is displeasing to God, so they left it. It may be a lifestyle based on the internal desires of the individual, but the individual still has the choice to act on those desires. Implicit in ex-gay narratives is also an assumption that commonly accepted interpretation of scripture trumps personal experience and feeling. The individual will and desire is subordinate to interpretations of God's larger design and plan. For many in the ex-gay community this means a life of celibacy.

Conservative Christians who experience same-sex attraction are caught in a bind. They can prioritize their own sexuality, often experiencing discrimination from or the loss of their religious communities, friends, and families: trading in one form of belonging for another. Or, they can utilize a variety of resources available to reshape or submit their sexual orientation to attempt to fit within the heterosexual order that is prioritized by conservative evangelical Christianity, and often finding community within ex-gay conferences and ministries: trading in one form of belonging for another. It became clear during my research that one's relationship to their sexuality was a pivot upon which many aspects of their identity and worldview rested. Becoming a Christian would shift one's relationship to their sexuality, but shifts in one's sexuality often lead to shifts in one's Christianity and also politics.

The polarized sides of this debate, either framing heterosexuality as the only ethical choice or emphasizing the ability to choose one's own sexual identity as an important part of subjectivity, each proposes that only they can offer emotional wholeness. And, while many people who identify as having left homosexuality told me that leaving homosexuality brought them a new experience of peace, this was not the case for everyone who attempted a journey out of homosexuality. Christine Bakke spent several years attending ex-gay ministries and therapy before she decided to eventually come out as a lesbian and leave Christianity. She described the effects of this process on her psyche:

> I don't think I've ever had a five-year period in my life where I have had a totally stable emotional experience. Doing the ex-gay thing is a very tumultuous existence, you have these highs where you feel closer to God, and then lows. You have to throw your whole self into it and you're told if you don't throw everything into it you can't have success.

She also talked about the challenges of leaving the ex-gay movement, and describes her experience after leaving this movement as needing to "spend years detoxing." By the time she left the ex-gay movement she felt "broken" and spent several years in secular therapy trying to heal from her experiences being told her sexual desires meant she was indeed "broken." She told me,

> One day I did this art piece where I broke a mirror, smashed it, and glued it all back together in this frame and then put, "If you see a broken image, examine the mirror." I finally realized I was never broken, they [the ex-gay movement and ex-gay therapists] were just holding up this broken mirror.

Christine has since started the only support group for ex-ex-gays and organized a conference for ex-gay survivors that was attended by over 200 people. She currently works as a consultant and writer.

For ex-ex-gays, or people who identify as ex-gay survivors, leaving the ex-gay

world often comes with its own tumult. Stan Hernandes works with Christine in doing ex-ex-gay support work. When he was in college he spent 18 months in reparative therapy with the most famous and controversial reparative therapist in the country, Joseph Nicolosi. His conservative Christian parents could not accept his identity as a young gay man so found Nicolosi and had him start going to therapy. Stan says that when he was in therapy he had to wear "rose-colored glasses" all of the time, looking at everything and all his attractions through that lens. He found that type of management of his behaviors and attractions challenging and exhausting. He was taught that demystifying his desires would decrease them, so when he eventually came out as gay he was worried that if he pursued a relationship with another man that the desire would go away once he got to know him. Each week in therapy they'd talk about his recent attractions and they'd analyze why he had these attractions. And this habit was hard to break down after he came out.

Stan explained that Nicolosi had a challenging time with his diagnosis, because Nicolosi couldn't find Stan's "root." This is a common technique in ex-gay therapy where one searches their emotional pasts to "uncover" the psychological trauma that caused the beginnings of either gender confusion or same-sex attraction. Stan couldn't find his root, his parents were not abusive and he hadn't experienced sexual abuse, so his testimony was always somewhat incomplete about why he had same-sex attraction. And, if there was no cause then it was harder to work on a plan to undo the trauma that led to his desires, a common process in ex-gay therapy. Interestingly, almost all of my interviewees who attempted to leave homosexuality and eventually came out as gay or lesbian described a similar process. Christine told me,

> It wasn't until I left the ex-gay community and I started meeting people who had never been abused and had wonderful relationships with their parents and were still gay. And I was like, “How did that happen!? Where were you guys when I was in the ex-gay ministries." They don't do well in them because they don't have anything to repair. So when someone says we have unwanted same-sex attraction then you have to ask why.

While many Christians who experience same-sex attraction find needed support and community in the variety of ex-gay therapeutic and support resources available, for many Christians the work of constructing a new identity and new desires a treacherous process. Ryan Kendall grew up in a conservative Christian home in Colorado and when he was 13 his parents read his journal where he had grappled with his attractions to other boys. His parents started having Ryan participate in various forms of therapy to overcome his homosexuality, including phone counseling with Nicolosi. During this time his family was going through significant problems, and his parents eventually divorced, but in his counseling sessions Nicolosi didn’t want to talk about his current family problems. Ryan said,

> Dr. Nicolosi would try to get me to talk about the big “H,” homosexuality. And I just wanted to talk about my family, because my family was imploding on me and I needed an outlet for it. And I had figured out that being gay wasn't a choice, I woke up every day and knew it wasn't.

The psychologist would tell Ryan that “this is something that makes God cry.” His parents were unhappy that his therapy was not progressing, and at one point Ryan’s father locked him in their home’s basement watching Focus on the Family videos. And, like many teens who experience same-sex attraction, eventually his parent’s disapproval was too much and Ryan ran away from home, and was emancipated from this family when he was 16.

Today Ryan is a successful college student and is planning on going on to receive a law degree, and he has been able to secure a national platform for talking about his experiences. In 2010 he testified about his experiences at the federal Proposition 8 trial, arguing that ex-gay therapy is harmful to gay youth. Ryan told me, "I was so excited when gay marriage was allowed in California. When part of you has been told your wrong to hear society say there's nothing wrong with you is deeply personal." Ryan also testified to the California state assembly about ex-gay therapy specifically, leading to California being the first state to ban ex-gay therapy for youth. While he is proud to have been able to share his experiences in a platform that could create change for others in similar situations, there have also been costs of sharing his story so publically. Losing his family at such an early age caused significant emotional traumas, and repeating these experiences has taken their toll, but also have been rewarding. Ryan told me, "Testifying at the Prop. 8 hearings was probably more rewarding than I will ever know. I don't know many people who were able to nationally recount the most traumatic parts of their lives to hope to challenge a belief system that causes lots of damage."

Almost all of the people I met who had left homosexuality and talked positively about this process had done so as adults and had done so voluntarily. And ex-gays often defended the importance of being able to choose to make decisions about their own sexuality and identity. The possible negative costs of ex-gay therapy on youth were not discussed in any formal contexts, instead the testimonies of adults who have say they have successfully left homosexuality are widely circulated and used to justify the argument that homosexuality is indeed a choice, and people can leave it if they want to. I was told that Vice President of Focus on the Family always said that he loved the Love

Won Out Conference because he thought it was 'the heart of public policy at Focus." The conference introducing people to ex-gay therapy was seen as a redemptive and positive message, and countered the anti-gay policy directives of the organization by promising that change was possible, arguing that if you were a Christian you could overcome the identity of homosexuality. Clearly switching from one of these incommensurate identities to the other often comes with significant costs, and is a journey not everyone can make.

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[i] The term ex-gay is currently controversial and many people prefer to describing themselves as having "left homosexuality," instead of claiming the identity of "ex-gay."

[ii] Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgendered, Transexual, Intersex, Queer, Questioning, Two-Spirit

[iii] This term refers to people attempted to leave homosexuality and identified as ex-gay at some point, but who now have come out as lesbian, gay, or bi-sexual.

Conclusion: Ethics and Political Engagements

Making Room for God

In conclusion, I want to contrast my ethnographic fieldwork in evangelical Bible study groups in Colorado Springs with messages from religious right conferences to explore the contradictions within contemporary evangelicalism's embrace of free-market ideology. I began Chapter One with Star Parker, ex-welfare recipient and current Religious Right activist, pontificating at the Values Voter Summit on the need to choose between "God" and "government." I found throughout my research that ideologically, most evangelicals agree that we must make room for God by limiting government services. However, in practice I found pastors often framed the expansion of economic forces into all aspects of socio-cultural life that limit the space for God. And the latter is what pastors frequently fretted about. Through my research I came to see charismatic evangelicalism as providing a crucial moral architecture for neoliberal policies ideologically. A discourse about the threat of secular humanism spawned and spread a fear of government, encouraging the shrinking of government resources for the poor, while an ethics of personal relationships provided the replacement—in theory if not in practice— for the shrinking services once offered by the state. In this discourse "government" almost exclusively refers to the welfare state and economic regulation, while conservative Christians almost never criticize enormous swaths of government activity-particularly the punitive or military state.

At the Values Voters Summit in 2010, Rick Santorum celebrated "American freedoms" and articulated a dominant understanding of the role of family and government. Using racially coded language, Santorum stated:

> Go into the neighborhoods in America where there is a lack of virtue and what will you find? Two things. You will find no families, no mothers and fathers living together in marriage. And you will find government everywhere: police, social service agencies. Why? Because without faith, family, and virtue, government takes over.

Santorum's sentiments reflect a popular framing of poverty by white evangelicals, a view that correlates poverty with lack of patriarchal families and "traditional family values." Ignoring the extensive government support that allowed for the creation of racially segregated suburban communities (Coontz 1992; McGirr 2001), white evangelicals take the suburban middle-class family as the moral apotheosis of godly family life, and frame the family as central to solving most social and economic problems. Ironically, suburban pastors often blame suburban life, with all its economic pressures, as a significant threat to the family.

As I began ethnographic research in 2010, Colorado Springs—like cities across the United States—experienced a budget crisis that left the city government shrinking dramatically and visibly. Colorado Springs is governed by a rule that any tax increase must be passed by popular vote, and as the residents had rejected a recent vote to increase taxes, the city faced a budget shortfall of over $27 million. As a result, the city auctioned off their police helicopters; turned off one third of all streetlights while giving residents the option to privately "adopt a streetlight" for $100 a year; stopped trash pick-up in all area parks; and threatened to close community centers.[i] An AP story about Colorado Springs' experiment in limited government was widely re-printed nationally, prompting emails from friends from across the country about what was going on in my new temporary home. Strangely, the suburban churches I attended and evangelicals I spent time with were not talking much about the city's fiscal crisis, and the dramatically

shrinking local government received few comments. It wasn't that there was no evangelical response. A group of Christian homeless men I knew started volunteering to mow the medians along a central thoroughfare. A local megachurch started running one of the community centers. However the cuts were felt mainly in the southern part of the city, where there was significant poverty and where the community centers provided important resources. But in the northern part of the city, the suburban, middle-class stronghold where all of the local megachurches and the large evangelical organizations were located, the rapidly shrinking state elicited few comments. In these megachurches and para-church organizations, where almost everyone advocated for limited government, people neither fretted over the impacts of the dramatically shrinking state (as my distant friends and liberal neighbors downtown did), nor celebrated them (as Star Parker and her activist audience might), rather pastors worried about consumerism and the pressures put on families trying to live up to middle class norms.

During my research it became clear that some of the main tenants of the post-Fordist economy are seen as undermining the evangelical walk. As I discussed in Chapter One, pastors expressed concern about the personal isolation created in a suburban milieu dominated by private "back yards" instead of public "front porches"; they worried about families choosing to have both parents work to meet the economic pressures of suburban living; they waxed poetic on the dangers of having consumer choices dominate evangelicals' search for church. The most consistent area of critique for evangelical pastors however, in interviews and in sermons, is more elusive to define and involves what type of person an evangelical ought to be. It involves the education of what I call an *ideal evangelical subject,* which is often framed in opposition to "consumer Christians."

In this conclusion I will explore some of the contradictions that stem from the conservative evangelical embrace of free-market ideology.

What the ethical has to say about the political

Let me first begin with a discussion on how focusing on the ethical provides for an analysis of religious practice and its links to politics. I think it productive to explore ethics because it allows us to get at the ways that religious doctrine becomes embodied, lived, felt, and practiced in the day-to-day. By showing how ethical ideas and ideals—whether about gender and sexuality or historicity and embodied training—impact political beliefs and behaviors I have attempted to show how porous any line might be separating out political from ethical behavior.

The broader question this study asks is if this mobilization of intimate life through sanctification is producing a public sphere, a question that rethinks the possibilities and limitations of democratic debate and practice by showing the relationship between the intimate sphere and the public sphere and thus the politics of religious and ethical cultivation. The pro-family movement emerged at a time when significant changes around race, sexuality, and gender were radically rearticulating US political society and concepts of the nation. Given that race was a structuring device of modern states (Goldberg 2002) and nationalism (Balibar 1991), the question emerges: with the diminishment of outright claims to race in the post-Civil Rights era America, "*what material exemplars of unity now sustain the image of the nation?"* (Connolly 1999:24). By focusing on the role of the family in this contemporary religious mobilization, I ask how debates about the family function as privileged sites not only for struggles between religious and secular authorities, but also express broader anxieties about racial, gender,

and national change. I have sought to elucidate the role that religious ethical life can play in conceptions and contours of contemporary nationalism. Through exploring this mobilization as a possible commentary on broader national, racial, and gender changes, this study expands understandings of religious mobilizations as embedded in historical and social relationships shaping their formation. Given the proliferation of evangelical Christianity in North and South American (Burdick 1998; Martin 1990) and the changes in kinship practices that often attend conversion to evangelicalism (Cohen 1999), it is important to ask how the shaping of ethical life may also shape political possibilities, in historically specific ways.

In *Native Americans and the Religious Right* (Smith 2008) argues that right-wing politics are not a foregone conclusion for evangelicals. While the right has successfully mobilized white evangelicals for some time, Smith argues that other options are available for future directions. The stakes regarding the ways that ethical trainings shape political engagements are significant and in this conclusion I want to talk about two potential new ethical directions for US evangelicalism. While there is a dominant ethical paradigm amongst white evangelicals connected to conservative politics, there are also attempts to change certain aspects of this worldview and thus politics. One is a concerted effort by some evangelicals to expand evangelical concerns about "life" to include environmental concerns, an effort that has met significant opposition amongst Religious Right organizations. The other possible new ethical direction is a critique of consumer culture, a critique percolating within the suburban megachurch pastorate that has not reached the level yet of overt political critique.

The Meaning of "Life" in the Age of Biocide

While evangelicals dream of an ever-promised apocalypse freeing the saved to a distant heaven, contemporary capitalism is quickly ravaging the earth at destructive and unprecedented rates. A "biocide" is defined as any agent, generally a pesticide, that is destructive of life, but the term has also been used to refer generally to the state of environmental destruction occurring today. Some argue that the earth is currently experiencing the sixth great mass extinction, with three-quarters of all living species endangered or threatened (Barnosky, et al. 2011; Gibbons 2011). Evidence suggests that "humans are now causing the sixth mass extinction through co-opting resources, fragmenting habitats, introducing non-native species, spreading pathogens, killing species directly, and changing global climate." This human-inspired environmental destruction is significant as, "evolution of new species typically takes at least hundreds of thousands of years, and recovery from mass extinction episodes probably occurs on timescales encompassing millions of years," meaning "recovery of biodiversity will not occur on any timeframe meaningful to people" (Barnosky, et al. 2011). Importantly, this mass extinction is not yet a forgone conclusion, and concerted human effort can still reverse some of the ecological damage currently underway.

Unfortunately, the "pro-life" movement that has effectively and consistently lobbied for limiting access to abortion in the United States limited their definition of "life" to the human fetus; and, even then, understand the perceived threats to human fetuses as limited to legalized abortion. For conservative senators and representatives, there is an inverse relationship between how highly they rank with Christian right groups—such as the Eagle Forum, Family Resource Council, and the Christian Coalition—and their rankings with the League of Conservation Voters (Scherer 2004).

This represents a significant minority of congress, with huge sway over environmental legislation.

Some evangelicals are actively working to change this trend. The Evangelical Environmental Network (EEN) was founded by a group of evangelicals in 1993 to mobilize Christians around protecting the environment. Since 2010 the group has launched a visible, and controversial, campaing against mercury pollution associated with coal-burning power plants. Mercury poisoning is one of the most significant environmental threats to the human fetus, affecting almost a million fetuses a year. In 2011 EEN paid for a series of television ads to run in key states targeting senators and asking them to vote to reduce mercury pollution and protect life. The controversial aspect of the EEN campaign is that they frame reducing mercury pollution as a "pro-life" issue. Religious right leaders disagree.

The Cornwall Alliance, a conservative Christian think-tank that lobbies against the environmental movement, published a statement condemning the EEN's use of the term pro-life for their environmental work. The statement, "Protecting the Unborn and the Pro-Life Movement from a Misleading Environmentalist Tactic," is signed by over a dozen of the most prominent Religious Right leaders, whose organizations are credited as representing over 16-million Americans. The statement outlines why mercury pollution cannot be understood as a pro-life issue.

> Two fundamental principles distinguish truly pro-life issues … from environmental issues. First …, truly pro-life issues are issues of actual life and death, while environmental issues tend to be matters of health. Second, truly pro-life issues address actual intent to kill innocent people… while environmental issues do not.

There is thus significant opposition to evangelicals expanding the definition of what constitutes a pro-life stance.

The Cornwall Alliance is prominently organizing evangelicals against environmental protection work. They created the "Evangelical Declaration on Global Warming," signed by around five hundred prominent evangelicals, which argues that global warming is part of a natural climate cycle and that attempting to curtail global warming will only hurt the poor. The declaration states:

> We believe Earth and its ecosystems—created by God's intelligent design and infinite power and sustained by His faithful providence —are robust, resilient, self-regulating, and self-correcting, admirably suited for human flourishing, and displaying His glory. Earth's climate system is no exception. Recent global warming is one of many natural cycles of warming and cooling in geologic history.

The Cornwall Alliance has also published a 12-part DVD series featuring prominent evangelical leaders called "Resisting the Green Dragon: A Biblical Response to One of the Greatest Deceptions of our Day." The video series critiques the environmental movement as containing anti-Christian bias and proposing an alternate understanding of creation.

At the Values Voters Summit in 2009, Dr. Calvin Beisner, national spokesman of the Cornwall Alliance, led a break-out session on "Global Warming Hysteria: The New Face of the Pro-Death Agenda." In this session, attended by about 25 people, we learned that an increase in carbon in the atmosphere is actually excellent for plant growth, so will be a boon to farmers. The problem then is not climate change, but the people who are working to fight it. Dr. Beisner framed the anti-global warming movement as being part of a "culture of death" because some parts of this movement are also affiliated with

population control. His talk framed an interest in curbing climate change as a pernicious, anti-human effort that Hitler would have been proud of.

The efforts of the Cornwall Alliance, along with a popular conception of the End Times as dismissing any responsibility to take care of the planet, have led to a general lack of awareness and concern from evangelicals around diminishing environmental destruction. A national PEW poll in 2009 found that white evangelicals were the largest demographic group to doubt that global warming was even occurring. Only 34% of white evangelicals credited global warming as occurring due to human activity, while 31% denied that solid evidence shows the earth is warming (Center 2009).

During my research I also frequently heard references similar to this by Pastor Steve, the main pastor of one of the largest churches in Colorado Springs: "who would show more compassion for an animal. It is crazy that today we have laws protecting the horned owl, but we don't have any protection for the unborn baby!" At a monthly Chapel session held at Focus on the Family's headquarters, a motivational speaker against drugs joked: "Some things aren't right! Ever noticed that most people who support animal rights are for abortion? Hug an owl and flush a human!" Frequently, environmental concerns were framed in opposition to abortion, as though Christians had to choose one political position or the other.

Yet, Christian ethics do not have to be counter to environmental ethics. For instance, Ellen Davis, professor of practical theology, writes in *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible* (2009) that the Old Testament can be read as a text about the care of the land. For Davis, the focus on care of the land in the Old Testament can provide a model of care of the land in the current moment. And as I

discussed in Chapter 4, some evangelical pastors are beginning to focus on environmental ethics in their preaching as well, connecting to similar themes of environmental ethics in the Bible. Pastor Glenn Packiam said the following at a Sunday evening service,

> We've been lulled into not caring about the earth; we think we'll be airlifted out of here. But that is not how the early Christians understood this. Early Christians were put in jail because they said they were a threat to the system. Is there anything about your life that is a threat to systems of oppression? I don't care about marches; it's about doing now what we know the Messiah will do then- that's why we are helping the oppressed.

The stakes are high, and there is much opposition to change within evangelicalism around environmental concerns. Tracing how ethical concerns are limited and can be expanded is an important step to understanding how to begin to address our impending environmental crisis.

Consumer Culture and Christian Identity

One final possible new ethical direction in evangelical Christianity is against consumer culture. While conservative Christian political discourse frames certain forms of government action as an encroaching threat to Christian practice, suburban pastors and church leaders talk about a different threat to their flocks: the dominance of market values over all aspects of Christian life. In the suburban enclaves where evangelical megachurches find their base, Christian practice and the free reign of the market do not fit together seamlessly in practice. During fieldwork in Colorado Springs pastors repeatedly labeled rampant consumerism, suburban isolation, and the pursuit of middle-class perfectionism as barriers to their congregants' ability to practice their faith. However, this awareness and worry about economic forces rarely rises to the level of political critique in evangelical communities.

Every Friday night, a wing of Colorado Springs' North End Church swells with

nearly a thousand young adults who gather to praise Jesus and "practice fellowship," or socializing with fellow Christians. Amidst the endless supplies of free coffee and tea, the exuberant in-house Christian rock band, and kids lining the halls and overflowing the rows of chairs, leaders of the young adult ministry (called the Element) focus on teaching Biblical lessons and making Jesus a real part of the lives of the youth. When the Element started in 1999 the leaders thought that meeting on a Friday night seemed like a bad idea, but they went ahead with the time slot and started with around 30 kids attending each week. Now, consistently each Friday night kids come from various local high schools and churches, from the Air Force Academy, from all the local colleges, from their parents' homes and their own apartments, to worship the Lord a thousand youth strong. The sermons at these Friday night worship sessions were actually much longer than the usual Sunday morning sermons that typically lasted under a half an hour.

The focus at the Element is similar to the larger church it sits within, and is directed at instilling a particular relational ethics in its members and much of the focus is on shaping the gender roles and dating habits of the attendees. Developing an abundance of proper relationships is perhaps the most important aspect of one's walk with Jesus (to use evangelical parlance) and is a central component of evangelical subjectivity. The broader culture the youth lived within was frequently criticized as a negative influence, and a significant focus of the Element is providing an alternative cultural landscape for the youth.

One sermon focused specifically on consumerism. Pastor Andrew, the head young adult pastor of the ministry began a sermon with a dialogue with himself, complaining that: "I'm not happy right now with my wife!" He responds, "Well maybe I'm not

supposed to be happy!" (His wife's perspective was not mentioned.) He went on to say that the purpose of marriage is not to make us happy, but to make us better followers of Jesus. He then read from a children's Bible story that, "Every story whispers Jesus' name. Jesus rose from the grave. He lives! So everything is different: our lives, our futures, everything is different!" Instead of focusing on our own happiness, a selfish pursuit, we need to focus on Jesus, and who Jesus wants us to be, which is a particular type of subject. People already adapted to this subjectivity would know he means that each Christian must see themselves as a member of God's family, and should see everything as belonging to God. Because of Jesus, "everything is different." This means that every action, thought, and hope is God's, and that how one spends one's time and money are a matter for God. Marriage is an important part of this process, one whose point is not happiness but "holiness" as a popular Christian book claims.[ii]

Pastor Andrew continued with a story from Colossians:

> So Paul is battling for the imagination, the Christian imagination. Now, if you're not intending to let your imagination be shaped by God then its being shaped by culture!...
> What are some of these things shaping our imagination? Every American sees five to twelve thousand corporate images a day. We are constantly bombarded with messages to buy something. Maybe if it is not the Roman Empire that's shaping our imagination today [as it was in Jesus' time] it's the economic empire, of being a consumer. Being a consumer is all about being served. Consumer culture shapes us to think that life is about us. That happiness comes from accumulation.

Pastor Andrew thus frames a central concern at the heart of evangelical practice: consumerism is based on an opposing model of subjectivity to evangelicalism. Consumerism values things that connote status and the enjoyment of material relationships, but even more importantly, it privileges the self as the center of one's universe, it prioritizes selfish and self-focused happiness. Where is their space for God in

this identity? When so many evangelical messages are directed at re-orienting the self to be porous, filled with God, oriented towards relationships with one's spouse, friends, Bible study members? Consumerism instead calls on the self to be filled with and defined by things. While not all pastoral messages this clearly cautioned against consumerism, this was a common theme. For, the project of ethical cultivation in evangelicalism, as I argue elsewhere, is based on coaching a specific subjectivity based on relationality, one in direct opposition to the consumer subject.

Despite the contradictions between consumer culture and evangelical aspirations, and despite a clear political critique of government, I rarely heard evangelicals suggest political changes for challenging the dominance of market forces. Instead of a political critique of economic dominance, suburban evangelicals find the salve for the alienating trends of late-capitalist suburban life within evangelicalism itself, in an ecstatic relationship with Jesus. Pastor Bobbie summarized this salve for insecurity, economic and otherwise, in a sermon one morning. Speaking to the 4,000 congregants gathering at his large evangelical church in Colorado Springs he implored: "Now I know a lot of you feel like stray dogs, but you belong to Him! He has put a seal on your forehead, legally in heaven He has adopted you. Did you know that you're His greatest desire? That the God who had everything wanted you!" When economic insecurity or alienation are too much for the filial bonds of one's earthly relationships to salve, the godly family is invoked reminding evangelicals of their own precious belonging, despite the vicissitudes of living in late capitalism. This godly family, and the gendered relational hierarchy that serves as its symbolic foundation, has been mobilized to shape specific political interventions for several decades. There are several emerging potential new political directions that can be

cultivated from evangelical ethics—some latent and some explicit—and younger evangelicals seem poised to create their own new ethical worlds.

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[i] This program has since been cancelled, and the street lights have been turned back on due to increases in tax revenue secured by the city because of the economic recovery.

[iii] See Gary Thomas, *Sacred Marriage: What If God Designed Marriage to Make Us Holy More Than to Make Us Happy*. Zondervan Press, Michigan: 2000.

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