

**American Law and Gospel: Evangelicals in the Age of Mass Incarceration**

by

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Theology  
in the Divinity School of Duke University

2018

ABSTRACT

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation charts the history of evangelical Christian influence in American criminal justice and prisons in the second half of the twentieth century. A work of cultural history that draws upon archival sources, newspapers and magazines, governmental records, and interviews, it explores the connection of the dramatic rise in imprisonment and the surge in evangelicalism's popularity during this period. Evangelicals outpaced nearly all other religious and social constituencies in their interest in crime and punishment. They led the way on all sides of political battles regarding criminal justice and incarceration: some pushed for "law and order," while others launched reform efforts. They built ministries to delinquents and inmates, revolutionizing prisons' religious culture. In sum, this dissertation's central argument is that crime and prison concern are central to evangelical entry into American public life, and that one cannot understand the creation, maintenance, or reform of modern American criminal justice without accounting for evangelicalism's impact. This dissertation makes two additional arguments about the precise relationship of evangelicalism to mass incarceration. First, evangelicals not only lobbied for policies and voted for politicians that helped build America's carceral state, they also helped make these changes appealing to other citizens. Unlike much of the previous work on twentieth-century evangelicalism (particularly their influence in politics), this dissertation frames the movement not in terms of backlash or culture warring, but consensus. Postwar evangelicals framed their own religious movement as reputable, racially moderate, and politically savvy, and they

helped to do the same for the cause of punishment, bolstering law enforcement's "neutral" quality, colorblind aspirations, and respectable status. Second, this dissertation argues for the political import of evangelical soul saving, often overlooked by scholars who characterize the movement's conversionism as individualistic or neglectful of issues of social change. I show how, though unapologetically spiritual in focus, evangelical concern with crime and punishment opened the eyes of some conservative Protestants to the needs of juvenile delinquents and prison inmates, leading them to solidarity with offenders and new forms of reform work.

*For Eliza*

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## **Acknowledgements**

Research for this project was funded in part by a dissertation fellowship from the Center for the Study of Philanthropy and Voluntarism at the Sanford School of Public Policy at Duke University. The Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives generously provided me travel and research funds through its Lynn E. May Study Grant. I am also grateful to the team at the Billy Graham Center Archives for their willingness to award me the Torrey M. Johnson, Sr. Scholarship for research and travel. In the early stages of my project I received a doctoral fellowship from the Louisville Institute, which offered both funding and access to a wonderful community of scholars.

## Introduction

“Get ready to see Jesus’ face...the chariot’s here to get you.”

Laying on his deathbed, Antonio James listened to these comforting words from a caring friend who had previously led him to Christ. Antonio calmly welcomed the words, whispering “Bless you” in reply. Yet immediately after the soothing friend spoke, he motioned with his hand to some technicians standing nearby. This was a sign that they could begin injecting poisonous chemicals into James’s arm, which had been strapped down to prevent resistance. These chemicals would sedate James, relax his muscles, and finally stop his heart, abruptly ending his earthly life even as they began his heavenly rest.

It was Burl Cain, the warden of the famed Louisiana State Penitentiary, better known as “Angola,” who had been James’s spiritual confidant at the end of his life. Cain was proud of this role. It was his opportunity for a second chance, he confessed to a crowd at Wheaton College, after he had failed to minister to another condemned prisoner. In this earlier case Cain had ignored the inmate’s fear, callously signaling the technicians to begin the injection process without an evangelistic word or an attempt to offer spiritual support. Cain admitted he was later horrified by what he did: “Not that we had executed him so much but because [I] didn’t use the opportunity to do the right thing.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Burl Cain (Edman Chapel, Wheaton College, 2005). Recording in author’s possession. A parallel account is found in chapter one of Dennis Shere, *Cain’s Redemption: A Story of Hope and Transformation in America’s Bloodiest Prison* (Chicago: Northfield Publishing, 2005).

Even before resigning his post in 2016 after allegations of suspicious real estate dealings came to light, Cain was a very controversial figure.<sup>2</sup> Journalists complained of secrecy shrouding Angola, and the ACLU sued him for improperly favoring Protestant expressions of faith in his capacity as a state official.<sup>3</sup> One Angola inmate wrote a popular memoir that criticized aspects of Cain's reign and decried his paternalism.<sup>4</sup> However, Cain has also been regularly praised by American Christians, and politicians from both parties have lauded his correctional approach. Democratic New Orleans mayor Mitch Landrieu (who regularly visited Angola) fêted Cain in *The Atlantic*: "The warden has some very progressive ideas. He knows that we're all about the quick fix—more guards, more prisons, more punishment. He knows that something is seriously messed-up in the way we do things."<sup>5</sup> Cain has also noted that his behavior towards death row inmates is apparently sympathetic enough to have gotten him in trouble with the families of murder victims: "They saw that I seem more interested in their loved one's killer than I do in the victim."<sup>6</sup> The gathered evangelical community at Wheaton was either unaware of any controversy that had followed Cain's work or simply did not care. Students offered him a standing ovation at the conclusion of his message, while the College's

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<sup>2</sup> "Warden Burl Cain to Step down, Adamantly Denies Allegations against Him," WGNO, December 10, 2015, <http://wgno.com/2015/12/10/warden-burl-cain-to-step-down-adamantly-denies-allegations-against-him/>.

<sup>3</sup> James Ridgeway, "God's Own Warden," *Mother Jones*, August 2011, <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2011/07/burl-cain-angola-prison>.

<sup>4</sup> Wilbert Rideau, *In the Place of Justice: A Story of Punishment and Deliverance* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010).

<sup>5</sup> Jeffrey Goldberg, "The End of the Line: Rehabilitation and Reform in Angola Penitentiary," *The Atlantic*, September 9, 2015, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/09/a-look-inside-angola-prison/404377/>.

<sup>6</sup> Shere, *Cain's Redemption*, 26.

Christian outreach office continued to send students on spring break mission trips to Angola.

This is not a dissertation about Burl Cain and the unique evangelistic disciplinary regime at Angola. Cain has been the focus of other works, and as a state warden who actually used his official position to preach the gospel to inmates he is largely exceptional.<sup>7</sup> Instead, it is about the history behind the deeper sentiments underlying his message and its reception. It is about a quintessentially American gospel and law amalgamation, the work of soul-saving witness and spiritual concern within the context of severe punishment, *all* of which characterized evangelical influence in prisons and criminal justice in the twentieth century. Indeed, this dissertation is just as much about the enthusiastic applause from the Wheaton students assembled to hear the grizzled, plainspoken warden preach as it is the conceptual framework that informed him. There was something in Cain's message about gospel and law that confirmed what the young evangelical vanguard at the "Harvard of Christian schools" knew to be true about their inherited faith, a conceptual affinity that united American evangelicals across generations, culture, theology, and region.

This dissertation charts the history of American evangelicalism in the era of mass incarceration, a period from approximately the end of World War II to the present (though with important roots in preceding decades). This was a time when arrest and

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<sup>7</sup> For one recent discussion of religion, race, and Angola see Stephanie Gaskill, "Moral Rehabilitation: Religion, Race, and Reform in America's Incarceration Capital" (Ph.D. diss., The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2017).

imprisonment rates rose exponentially, the result of new “law and order” currents in American culture, more aggressive policing, prosecution, and sentencing strategies, and the abandonment of rehabilitative penal practices for more retributive ones. The shift can be seen in comparison of imprisonment rates from 1972, when 161 U.S. residents were incarcerated per 100,000 population, to 2010, when 767 were incarcerated per 100,000. This resulted in a prison and jail population that now numbers as many as 2.23 million people, the highest incarceration rate in the world.<sup>8</sup> The growing number of African Americans behind bars has been even more dramatic. Black men today are imprisoned at a rate 6.5 times higher than white men, and since the late sixties are more likely to have been imprisoned than to have graduated from college with a 4-year degree.<sup>9</sup> All of this was occurring at the same time evangelical religion in America was surging in popularity and influence, though also with important roots in the preceding decades. My broad task then is to analyze how these two developments, the rise of both the “age of evangelicalism” and the carceral state, overlap and connect.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> National Research Council’s Committee on Causes and Consequences of High Rates of Incarceration, *The Growth of Incarceration in the United States: Exploring Causes and Consequences*, ed. Jeremy Travis, Bruce Western, and Steve Redburn (Washington, D.C: The National Academies Press, 2014), 33.

<sup>9</sup> James Forman, Jr., “Racial Critiques of Mass Incarceration: Beyond the New Jim Crow,” *New York University Law Review* 87, no. 1 (2012): 22; National Research Council’s Committee on Causes and Consequences of High Rates of Incarceration, *The Growth of Incarceration in the United States: Exploring Causes and Consequences*, 13.

<sup>10</sup> Steven P. Miller, *The Age of Evangelicalism: America’s Born-Again Years* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014). I will unpack various political and cultural influences in the rise of mass incarceration throughout the dissertation, but from the outset it is important to note some key texts that have been critical to my approach here in both detailing the effects of mass incarceration, its resonances with mainstream currents in American culture and politics, and its roots in the *longue durée* of twentieth-century history (and not simply from the 1970s on): Marie Gottschalk, *The Prison and the Gallows: The Politics of Mass Incarceration in America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); National Research Council’s Committee on Causes and Consequences of High Rates of Incarceration, *The Growth of Incarceration in the United States: Exploring Causes and Consequences*; Naomi Murakawa, *The First*

Crime and punishment mattered so much for evangelicals because their religious outlook meshed well with important aspects of America's penal culture. Simply put, there were historical reasons why Wheaton students applauded Cain so vigorously. For example, early postwar evangelicals saw religious value in emerging conceptions of crime, as when Billy Graham denounced American sin with reference to rising public concerns about juvenile delinquency. They channeled broader shifts in American religious culture into daily prison life, through evangelistic literature given to inmates and inspirational sermons preached by visiting prison missionaries in the 1970s. And their robust sense of God's forgiveness and grace led certain evangelicals to champion inmate restoration and prison reform programs in the 1980s and 90s. In some ways this compatibility was a return to form, as evangelicals ranked as America's original criminal justice pioneers in their antebellum penitentiary construction and reform. And like antebellum prison evangelical social engagement, this present consonance has an ironic legacy: evangelicals have simultaneously proven complicit in the American prison system's most grievous problems even as they have also been on the cutting edge of humanitarian engagement with modern prison life.

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*Civil Right: How Liberals Built Prison America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Elizabeth Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime: The Making of Mass Incarceration in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016); William J. Stuntz, *The Collapse of American Criminal Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011); James Forman, Jr., *Locking Up Our Own: Crime and Punishment in Black America* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2017); John Pfaff, *Locked In: The True Causes of Mass Incarceration—and How to Achieve Real Reform* (New York: Basic Books, 2017).

Though this dissertation charts the story of modern evangelical crime and prison concern through several chronological and interpretive lenses, it presents three broad arguments about the intersection of evangelicalism and mass incarceration. These arguments try to make sense of the confluence of sympathetic piety and punishment as seen in figures like Burl Cain, and the striking correspondence this seemingly paradoxical integration had with broader evangelical culture.

First, crime and punishment simply *mattered* for evangelicals in the latter half of the twentieth century and were central to their entry into American public life. Evangelicals were on the cutting edge of engagement with American criminal justice, prisons, and reform, outpacing nearly all other American religious and social constituencies in their interest, intensity, and influence. They used crime as a rhetorical frame, led the way on all sides of the political battles around mass incarceration, and were very active in shaping the religious culture of prisons themselves. One cannot understand the creation, maintenance, or reform of modern American prisons (or how someone like Burl Cain could have appeared on the scene) without understanding the impact of evangelicalism. Each facilitated the rise of the other.

Second, evangelicals not only lobbied for policies and voted for politicians that helped build America's carceral state, they also helped make these changes appealing to other citizens. Unlike much of the previous work on twentieth-century evangelicalism (particularly their influence in politics), this dissertation frames the movement not in terms of backlash or culture warring, but consensus. Postwar evangelicals increasingly framed their own religious movement as reputable, racially moderate, and politically



savvy, and they helped to do the same for the cause of punishment, bolstering law enforcement's "neutral" quality, colorblind aspirations, and respectable status.

Third, this dissertation argues for the political import of evangelical soul saving, often overlooked by scholars who characterize the movement's conversionism as individualistic or neglectful of issues of social change. I show how, though unapologetically spiritual in focus, evangelical concern with crime and punishment opened the eyes of some conservative Protestants to the needs of juvenile delinquents and prison inmates, leading them to solidarity with offenders and new forms of reform work.

## **Method**

This dissertation is a work of cultural history. It places at the forefront of its analysis "the viewpoint of the motives and meanings that individual and collective and historical agents from the past gave to whatever they were doing, and to the contexts in which they operated."<sup>11</sup> These motives and meanings were almost always politically and religiously charged, but not in ways best explained through legislative developments or traditional doctrinal formulations. In the vein of one important work of American religious cultural history, this dissertation therefore "comprehends a range of actions and beliefs far greater than those described in a catechism or occurring within sacred space."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Alessandro Arcangeli, *Cultural History: A Concise Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 16.

<sup>12</sup> David Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 18.

To put it another way, it attempts to interpret a range of actions and beliefs beyond those listed in the formal doctrinal standards of a prison ministry or the penal codes of a particular congressional bill.

However, each chapter incorporates a variety of tools in order to explain certain developments and to enliven the overall narrative. At some points the dissertation depends on a more straightforward political account, while elsewhere it follows the lead of recent histories of evangelical intellectual life. But taken as a whole, it is a historical attempt to make sense of the overlapping American evangelical and penal cultures.

My sources are primarily print media, both archival and published works. I have utilized archives such as the Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center and Wheaton College's Billy Graham Center, which contain several relevant collections that detail the inner workings of various evangelical prison ministry and criminal justice efforts. I also use published works, magazines, and newspapers available through the internet or library holdings, which showcase the public side of evangelical prison concern. These items include Christian magazine articles, prison ministry curricula, and discussions of evangelical prison work in national newspapers. I draw on films (like documentaries that evangelicals made about their prison concerns) and audio recordings of ministry events. I also cite interviews with evangelical prison ministers, criminal justice leaders, and reformers, some of which I conducted myself, others that are a part of oral history collections.

## Historiography

This dissertation builds on important currents in both the historiography of twentieth century evangelicalism and of criminal justice. Recent studies of varieties of evangelical influence in American politics and culture, such as works by Kate Bowler, Darren Dochuk, Steven Miller, David Swartz, John Turner, Grant Wacker, Daniel Williams, and Molly Worthen, are all important for framing various aspects of the “age of evangelicalism” in the second half of the twentieth century. This was the broader context, as Miller argues, for evangelical faith to develop as a “language, medium, and foil” in modern American life, a powerful reference point for those who championed it, opposed it, or fell somewhere in between.<sup>13</sup> However, while commentators on modern American crime and punishment have named a variety of contributing cultural and political factors in the rise of mass incarceration, they have rarely discussed the relevance of evangelicalism (or even religion more broadly) to history of the simultaneous rise of America’s carceral state.

More specifically, my work builds on the small number of recent works that *do* discuss modern evangelicalism and prisons. Some of these discussions have occurred in chapter or article form, and at a few points (such as with the work of Kendrick Oliver and Andrea Smith) I am deepening or contextualizing some of their insights.<sup>14</sup> Focusing on

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<sup>13</sup> Miller, *The Age of Evangelicalism*, 5.

<sup>14</sup> Kendrick Oliver, “‘Hi, Fellas. Come on in.’ Norman Carlson, the Federal Bureau of Prisons, and the Rise of Prison Fellowship,” *Journal of Church and State* 55, no. 4 (Autumn 2013): 740–57; Kendrick Oliver, “Attica, Watergate, and the Origin of Evangelical Prison Ministry, 1969-1975,” in *American Evangelicals and the 1960s*, ed. Axel R. Schäfer (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2013), 121–38; Andrea

the 1970s and 80s, Oliver and Smith point out that evangelicals were on *both* sides of debates about the rise of mass incarceration, that some advocated for more law and order while others challenged the growth of prisons. This dissertation confirms this thesis, but deepens it with an expanded timeline, greater attention to the wide variety of evangelical prison work and advocacy, and the inclusion of important historical details that their shorter pieces necessarily overlook. For example, I locate evangelical political debates about mass incarceration within the broader context of actual practices of evangelical ministries inside prisons, and I attend to the roots of evangelical crime and prison concern earlier in the twentieth century in order to note important changes over time.

This dissertation also interacts with arguments of book-length treatments of modern American evangelical prison work. Anthropologist Tanya Erzen’s recent book *God In Captivity* examines the variety of contemporary evangelical ministry work in prisons and, importantly, their reception by inmates themselves. My dissertation confirms her observation regarding the contemporary landscape that “conservative Protestants have the monopoly on prison ministry,” but attends to the longer history of how this happened.<sup>15</sup> As with Oliver and Smith, Winnifred Sullivan’s *Prison Religion* focuses primarily on the organization Prison Fellowship. She concludes from her study of an important court case that challenged the constitutionality of Prison Fellowship’s in-prison

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Smith, *Native Americans and the Christian Right : The Gendered Politics of Unlikely Alliances* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008).

<sup>15</sup> Tanya Erzen, *God in Captivity: The Rise of Faith-Based Prison Ministries in the Age of Mass Incarceration* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2017), 5.

programming that law and order politics and evangelical religion were “culturally congruent and mutually recognizable.”<sup>16</sup> Erzen puts the point even more strongly in some of her earlier work, arguing that evangelical prison work is best understood as another form of Christian Right backlash politics.<sup>17</sup> Erzen, Sullivan, and other scholars in the critical interpretive vein (such as Kevin Lewis O’Neill) have made important contributions to the direct links of evangelicalism with the creation and maintenance of mass incarceration, how evangelical ministries “work to legitimate the prison itself.”<sup>18</sup> My dissertation largely confirms the general thrust of Sullivan and Erzen’s arguments, but it complicates the picture with reference to both evangelicalism and mass incarceration’s “mainstream” quality. Here I am making a point analogous to that of scholars of evangelicalism who have questioned the “backlash” thesis, the idea that the evangelicals who gained cultural and political power in the latter half of the twentieth century on were simply reacting negatively to countercultural trends. For example, Axel Schäfer has shown how the Christian right actually drew upon these postwar trends, from New Left activist impulses to consumerist assumptions regarding personal choice. My dissertation follows Schäfer on this point: postwar evangelicals were not reactionaries who found their conservative theology in conflict with developments in modern life. Instead, they were products of their time, approaching the crime problem as religious

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<sup>16</sup> Winnifred Fallers Sullivan, *Prison Religion: Faith-Based Reform and the Constitution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 101.

<sup>17</sup> Tanya Erzen, “Testimonial Politics: The Christian Right’s Faith-Based Approach to Marriage and Imprisonment,” *American Quarterly* 59, no. 3 (September 1, 2007): 991–1015.

<sup>18</sup> Erzen, *God in Captivity*, 11; Kevin Lewis O’Neill, *Secure the Soul: Christian Piety and Gang Prevention in Guatemala* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015); Kevin Lewis O’Neill, “The Reckless Will: Prison Chaplaincy and the Problem of Mara Salvatrucha,” *Public Culture* 22, no. 1 (2010): 67–88.

liberals and conservatives had only a few decades before while further bolstering the anti-crime cause's mainstream appeal.<sup>19</sup>

This dissertation also focuses more than Sullivan and Erzen do on evangelicals' recognition of the troubling aspects of their movement's complementarity with punitive politics, and their innovative attempts at self-reform. In doing so, this dissertation rebuts crude sentiments found in some writing on prisons and conservative evangelicalism that are simply false, such as "[evangelical prison ministry leader Charles] Colson did not challenge the massive growth of US prisons."<sup>20</sup> This dissertation shows not only that certain evangelicals (like Colson) helped challenge the growth of prisons, but also that they counted conservative religious and political orientations as key resources. Indeed, it is striking how similar contemporary progressive Christian talk on mass incarceration sounds to conservative evangelical critiques of prison conditions from the 1980s; this reframes a common conception about the cultural arc of American Protestant social engagement, that liberals lead and conservatives follow.<sup>21</sup>

A word about definitions. This dissertation does not directly wade into the seemingly endless interpretive debates about the definition of evangelicalism, though I do

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<sup>19</sup> Axel R. Schafer, *Countercultural Conservatives: American Evangelicalism from the Postwar Revival to the New Christian Right* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011).

<sup>20</sup> Joe Lockard, "Prison Makes You Christian," *Souciant*, May 1, 2012, <http://souciant.com/2012/05/prison-makes-you-christian/>. See also criminologist Elicka Peterson Sparks' claims that "There is nothing compassionate about the Christian right's response to crime, and that response has resulted in incredibly high recidivism rates that perpetuate and amplify our crime rate" and "it is amazing how judgmental Christians can be when it comes to criminals." Sparks acknowledges that some Christians admirably engage in prison work, but contends that these are "Christians of a far more liberal stripe." Elicka Peterson Sparks, *The Devil You Know: The Surprising Link between Conservative Christianity and Crime* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2016), 15, 93-100.

<sup>21</sup> See for example, chapters one and two of David A. Hollinger, *After Cloven Tongues of Fire: Protestant Liberalism in Modern American History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013).

chart various commonalities and shifts in evangelical self-understanding over the course of the twentieth century regarding crime and prison concern (for example, the progression from Holiness social reform to fundamentalism to neo-evangelicalism to the Christian right). I find Douglas Sweeney's definition of evangelicalism as a "movement of orthodox Protestants with an eighteenth century twist" to be helpful starting point in showing what grounds evangelical identity over the course of my dissertation's chronological scope, and American history more broadly.<sup>22</sup> "Orthodox" here references evangelicals' regular concern with conserving what they saw as biblical Christian doctrine. In the twentieth century, evangelicals often framed such concerns as in terms of a battle against secularism and forms of liberal Christianity that they believed accommodated it. The "eighteenth century twist" phrase (a reference to the transatlantic series of revivals that came to be known as the "Great Awakening") indicates the recurring importance of conversion (sometimes in direct contrast to established church structures). Conversion, as I show in chapters two and four, was a key theological marker of postwar evangelicalism, one that had great social and political consequences for their engagement of issues related to crime and prison. The Christians who could be counted as evangelicals came from a wide array of Protestant traditions and denominations. Many downplayed denominational labels. As I show in chapter three, conservative Protestants' doubling down on orthodox and conversionist distinctives (sometimes with reference to crime and prison concern) put them at odds with liberals in their own denominations.

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<sup>22</sup> Douglas A. Sweeney, *The American Evangelical Story: A History of the Movement* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 24.

This development, along with the regular usage of descriptors like “Bible-believing,” helped to solidify “evangelical” as a standalone religious category by the mid-1970s.

When I use the term “evangelical” in this dissertation I am usually, though not always, referring to white conservative Protestants. Whether or not all conservative African-American Protestants should be counted as evangelicals is a matter of significant debate.<sup>23</sup> I do discuss black Christians (particularly in chapter three) who I believe should be counted as evangelicals, not only for their theological dispositions, but also for their clear connection to avowed evangelical figures, organizations, and causes. An obvious example is Howard O. Jones, a black minister who served on Billy Graham’s evangelistic team and wrote books for publishers like Moody Press. However, I also show how black evangelicals’ engagement with issues of crime and punishment sometimes deviated from their white counterparts or was justified with different rationale. This dissertation also discusses the ways race informed evangelicals’ conceptions of crime and punishment, as well as the manner in which they positioned racial reconciliation (sometimes problematically) as a goal of prison ministry work.

One final note regarding terminology. In the following chapters I regularly utilize the vocabulary of my subjects. Often this means deploying common phrases in evangelical parlance, like characterizing a religious conversion as someone being “led to Christ.” Other times it means using terms like “prisoners,” “criminals,” “offenders,” and “inmates.” I am highly aware of the scholarly and moral hazards here. People who have

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<sup>23</sup> For a helpful overview of the stakes of this debate, see Milton G. Sernett, “Black Religion and the Question of Evangelical Identity,” in *The Variety of American Evangelicalism*, ed. Donald W. Dayton and Robert K. Johnson (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1991), 135–47.



been arrested or incarcerated are people, and their humanity risks being minimized or erased by terms like these.<sup>24</sup> However, I have made the (difficult) decision to generally not use terms that are often posited as more humanizing referents, like “incarcerated persons.” I found that terms like these sometimes obscure the various ways that evangelicals, law enforcement officials, and incarcerated people themselves (all of whom used terms like “criminals”) spoke and thought about the world around them in their own time and place. For evangelicals in particular, “criminal” was indeed a word with negative connotations. But that was the point. Criminals, like all sinners (another negative term), were loved by Jesus and could choose to follow him. Whether or not that belief redeemed their use of the term is a decision I leave to the reader.

### **Chapter Outline**

Chapter one explores the history of religious interest in crime and punishment in the interwar period. Though most discussions of crime concern in the twentieth century focus on the “backlash” law and order politics of conservatives in the sixties and after, this chapter examines the broad religious influence on crime from an earlier generation. Here, a wide array of Protestants, Catholics, and Jews (liberal and conservative, black and white) expressed sharp concern about the downward spiral of their lawless land. Religious debates about crime paralleled the divides between modernism and

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<sup>24</sup> For one compelling entry into the debate around such terms, see “Inmate. Prisoner. Other. Discussed.,” The Marshall Project, April 3, 2015, <https://www.themarshallproject.org/2015/04/03/inmate-prisoner-other-discussed>.

fundamentalism, with liberals arguing for attention to criminals' social conditions and conservatives pushing for harsher punishment. This divide was crystallized in the public religious rhetoric around one famous courtroom drama: the 1924 "trial of the century" of Nathan Leopold, Jr. and Richard Loeb for murder. Whether regarding this trial or other crimes, these disagreements were significant, but there was common ground on two points: the beliefs that rising crime reflected growing secularity and that disciplinary state power was ultimately responsible for addressing the problem. Political leaders drew upon these shared sensibilities as they built national support for the expansion of tougher law enforcement efforts. This broad consensus meant future religious movements that wanted to exert widespread cultural influence would need to take crime seriously.

Chapter two pivots to one such movement: evangelicalism in the early postwar era. The postwar evangelical surge has often been narrated in terms of its members' self-understanding (that it possessed the *savoir-faire* of other cultural and intellectual movements) or its political engagement that helped spark the culture wars (on issues like prayer in schools, communism, or traditional family values). But crime was also a frequent reference point. It offered conceptual common ground with millions of other Americans and served as a cipher for a variety of other issues (from secularism to civil rights to parental responsibility). Most important, it allowed the new evangelical movement to chart a distinct path away from their fundamentalist forefathers and liberal Protestant rivals. Evangelical leaders in the early postwar era like Billy Graham and David Wilkerson used concerns about crime and delinquency to sharpen their messages about Christian conversion over and against the fundamentalist and liberal alternatives

hashed out in the interwar period. In sum, their crime-inflected conversionism gave them a way to reach America and appeared to provide a path between the punitive and progressive paradigms.

In charting this path, however, these leaders set the stage for later evangelical enmeshment with a new form of punitive politics in the sixties and early seventies. The story of this enmeshment is the subject of chapter three. As postwar evangelicals gained cultural cache, they became more comfortable moving away from strict conversionism as the solution to social ills, and with allying with the state. This move meant endorsement of one of the state's key functions: protection of the social order. Since public decorum seemed to evangelicals to be increasingly under threat in the mid-1960s and following, evangelicals moved to promote the state's just use of violent force and confinement. However, evangelicals did not see this as a recapitulation of fundamentalist backlash. Instead, they saw their ramped up support for the expansion of policing, the streamlining of sentencing procedures, and the lengthening of prison sentences as fully in the mainstream. They saw it as a reflection of mainstream American values and, crucially, a sign of racial equality and colorblindness.

Chapter four tells a story that parallels the previous chapter's account of evangelical influence in the rise of mass incarceration: the widespread escalation of evangelical prison ministry efforts. At mid-century, religion in American prisons was largely directed by state-funded chaplains who served as therapeutic coordinators of "religious diversity." Despite the presence of some Holiness-inspired evangelical prison ministry efforts in previous decades, evangelicals had largely ignored prisons as sites for

sustained ministry in the twentieth century. But beginning around the 1970s, evangelicals jumped into various types of prison ministry work: they founded ministries, produced vast quantities of spiritual literature for inmates, launched prison radio broadcasts, and led evangelistic crusades at prisons nationwide. In doing so, they dramatically changed the practice of religion in prisons. With attention to several key evangelical prison ministries and leaders, this chapter explore the stories of each ministry's founding with particular attention to their commonalities, the shared attributes that provide insight into why this widespread revival of prison ministry occurred. It connects these commonalities to important developments in the broader rise of the "age of evangelicalism" occurring from mid-century onward. It concludes with an examination of the tensions that evangelical prison ministers frequently were caught within as they emphasized evangelistic concern for inmates in the midst of broader "law and order" cultural currents and the uniqueness of the Christian gospel in the religiously diverse context of the prison.

The final chapter focuses on the conservative evangelical activism that arose in the eighties and early nineties in response to the oppressive realities of American criminal justice. This activism was pioneered by former inmate and prison minister Charles Colson, whose personal encounters with inmates led him to understand the problems inherent within the criminal justice system and the need for social change (often putting him at odds with other evangelicals who espoused "tough on crime" rhetoric and championed policies accordingly). The "compassionate conservative" activism of Colson and his allies was marked by failures and compromises, but gradually produced models for criminal justice reform that allowed for bipartisan responses to the evils of mass

incarceration. Colson's reform work was an attempt to mitigate the harshness of American criminal justice with appeals to the same evangelical concepts and constituencies that had contributed to the law and order regime.

The dissertation concludes with a brief word on the present state and potential future of evangelical crime and prison concerns. As evangelical luminaries exit the scene, they offer powerful reminders of the importance of these concerns to their public ministries. For example, upon his death in early 2018, Billy Graham was buried in a casket crafted by inmates at Burl Cain's Angola Prison. New leaders with evangelical connections and audiences are taking their place in contemporary American conversations about crime and prison. Some, like the popular lawyer and author Bryan Stevenson, make arguments that build on past evangelical emphases of justice, mercy, and the Christian duty to seek close proximity to prisoners. But they also chart new ground, placing concern about the oppression of people of color at the center of their activism and highlighting the racial injustices at the root of America's system of mass incarceration.

## Chapter 1: “Churchdom’s War on Crime”

On a cloudless May afternoon in a wealthy south side neighborhood of Chicago, fourteen-year-old Bobby Franks was kidnapped off the street near his home. Almost immediately after luring him into their car, the perpetrators killed Franks by beating him with the blunt end of a chisel and suffocating him with a rag. They dumped his body in a nearby forest preserve. The killers attempted to deceive Franks’s wealthy father into paying a ransom, but a passerby happened to discover the boy’s naked lifeless corpse when he spotted some feet protruding from of a drainage culvert. The crime seemed to many to be unsolvable, but investigators had a lead from a set of eyeglasses found lying near Franks’s body. After some sleuthing, they discovered that the glasses’ manufacturer sold this particular model through only one Chicago optician, whose prescription records showed that the glasses had been purchased by Nathan Leopold, Jr., a nineteen-year-old University of Chicago law student. Upon questioning by police, Leopold maintained the glasses had fallen out of his pocket a few days earlier during a birding expedition, and presented his friend and fellow student Richard Loeb as his alibi for the afternoon of Franks’s kidnapping. But after further police interrogation that highlighted inconsistencies between their accounts, a search of Leopold’s apartment that turned up suspicious items, and the matching of Leopold’s typewriter to the print on the ransom note, the duo’s story fell apart.

Leopold and Loeb soon confessed their guilt, and their trial that summer was primarily a forum for debating their punishment. The duo’s wealthy families enlisted the

famous attorney Clarence Darrow to lead their defense, hoping he could save them from the death penalty. Darrow's defense was made all the more difficult by the answers that Leopold and Loeb had given in interviews with investigators after their confession of guilt. In no need of money, they had committed the kidnapping and murder simply "for the thrill of it." Not only that, their literary encounter at the university with Friedrich Nietzsche's *Übermensch* had led them to believe that their intellectual superiority absolved them of any moral blame. Leopold had reportedly told investigators that he "did [the murder] as easily as he would stick a pin through the back of a beetle."<sup>1</sup> Darrow pursued a defense strategy that highlighted duo's mental instability, presenting the testimony of medical professionals who discussed the traumatic childhood backgrounds that made Leopold's and Loeb's violent actions and unapologetic statements possible. Though the prosecution presented their own psychiatric evidence that stressed moral culpability, the judge ruled in favor of the defense and sentenced both Leopold and Loeb to life in prison.

Because of the gruesomeness of the crime, the wealth of the families, salacious rumors surrounding Leopold and Loeb's homosexual relationship, and the pair's noxious justification of their actions, the court proceedings garnered an immense following on a national scale. Media played an important role not only in sensationalizing the case, but also in solving the mystery of Franks's death: the original connection between Franks's body (which originally appeared to be a drowning accident before he was identified) and

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Paula S. Fass, "Making and Remaking an Event: The Leopold and Loeb Case in American Culture," *The Journal of American History* 80, no. 3 (1993): 925.

the kidnapping, as well as Leopold and Loeb's possible connection to the case, was made by *Chicago Daily News's* reporters. They won a Pulitzer. Beyond investigating and reporting the lurid details of the case, media commentators also used the trial as a platform for debating topics like the moral well-being of American children and the merits of psychiatry, a science that appeared to be suspect after seemingly objective psychiatric professionals were deployed by *both* sides in the case.<sup>2</sup>

The Leopold and Loeb tribunal occurred one year before another famous courtroom drama, the 1925 "monkey trial" that transpired in the sweaty confines of a courthouse in Dayton, Tennessee. In this case, high school instructor John Scopes was found guilty of teaching evolution in violation of the state law. Other than the crimes, the two trials had a great deal in common. Both saw Darrow occupying the role of defense attorney, both had fervent courtroom speeches, both drew enormous amounts of public attention from press and public alike, and both inspired later retellings of the dramas on theater stages and movie screens. But more important, both trials were seen as a battle between the godless ideology of modernist elites against traditional values, referendums on the legitimacy of religious faith in an increasingly secular age. The cases crystallized the internal clashes of the time in American denominations between fundamentalists and modernists, over issues like evolution, the reliability of scripture, and the unique truth of

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<sup>2</sup> For an overview of the murder, the case, and the public's reaction see Simon Baatz, *For the Thrill of It: Leopold, Loeb, and the Murder That Shocked Jazz Age Chicago* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2009). For discussions of the case's representation in the media and connection to cultural currents of the day, as well as its later influence in American life, see Fass, "Making and Remaking an Event" and Edward J. Larson, "An American Tragedy: Retelling the Leopold-Loeb Story in Popular Culture," *The American Journal of Legal History* 50, no. 2 (2008): 119–56.



the Christian gospel. Though Billy Sunday just as well could have been referring to Scopes, the famous revivalist framed the Leopold and Loeb case in precisely these terms as he traveled through the Chicago area around the time of the trial. The murder that precipitated the trial could be “traced to the moral miasma which contaminates some of our ‘young intellectuals.’ It is now considered fashionable for higher education to scoff at God. The world is headed for Hades so fast no speed limit can stop it.”<sup>3</sup>

Pastors spoke to their own congregations about the Leopold and Loeb trial as well, and their sermons that discussed the case frequently appeared in national newspapers. Their reactions diverged sharply, with fault lines paralleling that of Scopes. Conservatives assailed the modernist intellectual culture that produced Leopold and Loeb and urged capital punishment. Liberals argued against application of the death penalty and pointed to the need for a more compassionate and “scientific” spiritual approach. But despite their strenuous disagreement, the shared concern of these warring camps of clergy symbolized the broader denotation of crime as a distinctly *religious* national issue. And it was this religious concern with crime, more than the question of evolution, that would ultimately have a deep impact on the landscape of American politics and culture.

Several recent studies have connected crime and religious concern in the twentieth century, but few make sustained reference to the era of Leopold and Loeb.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> “Hang the Slayers, Billy Sunday Says,” *Chicago Herald and Examiner*, June 5, 1924. Cited in Baatz, *For the Thrill of It*, 319. Similar reports on Sunday’s reaction appeared elsewhere, such as Harold Andrews, “Billy Sunday Says Gibbet Should Punish Boy Killers,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, June 5, 1924.

<sup>4</sup> One recent edited volume does discuss the relationship of the FBI to American religion. In it Kathryn Gin Lum and Lerone A. Martin sketch the late nineteenth century religious landscape that set the stage for the FBI’s later work, while Sylvester Johnson profiles the FBI’s surveillance of the Moorish Science Temple

Instead, scholars have typically identified conservative evangelicals in the Nixon and Reagan years as the pioneers of religious influence in twentieth century American criminal justice.<sup>5</sup> But before evangelicals became key religious authorities on issues of crime and punishment, they were preceded by a wide-ranging swath of Protestants, Catholics, and Jews (liberal and conservative, black and white) who were worried about the downward spiral of their lawless land and who framed their concerns as part of the battle against encroaching secularism. This chapter explores the influence of these earlier religious voices during the “war on crime,” not of the Nixon or Reagan years, but the inter-war period. In order to contextualize the shift this war indicated, the chapter begins by sketching the broad history of the relationship of religion to criminal justice in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It then moves to close analysis of the conservative and liberal inter-war rhetoric of religious, political, and law enforcement leaders that provided the cultural backdrop on issues of crime and punishment. This rhetoric could be found in newspapers, magazines, speeches, and journal articles, both religious and

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during the interwar period (discussed below). However, most of this volume attends to the post-World War II landscape, and is focused primarily on the Bureau’s national intelligence concerns regarding fears of militant subversion, communism, and terrorism, not “typical” criminal offenses like robbery or murder. Sylvester A. Johnson and Steven Weitzman, eds., *The FBI and Religion: Faith and National Security before and after 9/11* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017).

<sup>5</sup> See, for example Erzen, “Testimonial Politics.” Smith, *Native Americans and the Christian Right*, and Winnifred Fallers Sullivan, *Prison Religion: Faith-Based Reform and the Constitution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009). Though not specifically focused on criminal justice, Daniel Williams, Steven Miller, Darren Dochuk and others have also discussed how post-WWII evangelicals frequently appealed to law and order tropes to advance their political and cultural agenda. Daniel K. Williams, *God’s Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Steven P. Miller, *Billy Graham and the Rise of the Republican South* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009); Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2011).

secular. This shared rhetorical culture was powerful, as it not only made intelligible the dramatic changes in crime policy (often in response to heinous crimes like Leopold and Loeb's) but also reflected the religiously infused views of policymakers and law enforcement officials themselves.

### **Prisons, Revivalism, and Reform**

Before the nineteenth century, most Americans did not consider lawbreaking to be a significant social problem. Lawbreakers would be punished, but few people expected that crime could be curtailed by policing or ramped-up criminal codes, both of which were often negatively associated with the overweening power of the British monarchy.<sup>6</sup> When crimes did occur in the colonial era, official forms of punishment were typically *ad hoc* and limited to the local level. As there was no criminal justice infrastructure, prisons, or personnel (lay magistrates were largely responsible for ensuring justice), penalties were swift and low-cost. Fines, public humiliation (such as confinement to the stocks), banishment, and capital punishment found favor, all of which had deterrence of future crimes, swift retribution for the moral debts created, and quick restoration of public order as their primary aims.<sup>7</sup> The post-revolutionary and antebellum periods saw growing public concern with crime and violence, and reformers organized campaigns to combat the various forms of deviancy that threatened social cohesion in the new republic.

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<sup>6</sup> David J. Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic*, revised edition (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 2002), 3-15; Gottschalk, *The Prison and the Gallows*, 52-3.

<sup>7</sup> Adam J. Hirsch, *The Rise of the Penitentiary Prisons and Punishment in Early America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 4-7.

Penitentiaries were built with the aim of reformation of wayward offenders, a conscious movement away from the more haphazard, retributive, and localized forms of punishment that had characterized the response of previous generations.<sup>8</sup>

Religious justification helped provide punishment's underlying logic during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Capital punishment in puritan New England often bore an explicitly theological component, as ministers would lend their expertise in public executions by preaching sermons at the gallows for both the condemned and the public to hear. Besides lending legitimacy to the execution, these preachers would offer lessons to criminal and crowd alike about their common sinfulness, the wages of sin, and the law-keeping function of civil authority.<sup>9</sup> The post-revolutionary and antebellum reformers who pioneered the penitentiaries were primarily Christian leaders in the emerging Protestant "benevolent empire," and the various prison models reflected their different denominational sensibilities. Quakers developed their classic notion of humanity's "inner light" to create prisons that attempted to allow inmates to experience God's personal presence. This environment would not terrify but edify. They developed the image of the prison as a "garden" whose serene and ordered space would eliminate the distractions of the slums and initiate quiet reflection on past sins and their "future amendment." Calvinists built their prisons as "furnaces," spaces where immorality could be burnt away like chaff. Their low view of human nature as well as the practical difficulty of attaining the Quaker ideal in prison administration meant that Calvinist-led

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<sup>8</sup> Hirsch, 52; Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum*.

<sup>9</sup> Scott D. Seay, *Hanging Between Heaven and Earth: Capital Crime, Execution Preaching, and Theology in Early New England* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2009), 14.

prisons were harsh places. They also established the role of the prison chaplain, as a ministerial guide was needed to help inmates understand the reasons for their suffering and encourage a turn away from their depravity.<sup>10</sup>

Though penitentiaries served as a symbol of important shifts within penology, their public significance was checked by their lack of public support and governmental backing. They largely remained the projects of ambitious activists who often found their pioneering hopes for inmate rehabilitation frustrated by overcrowding, budget cuts, and absence of broader sympathy for their humanitarian motives.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, police forces throughout the rest of the nineteenth century remained decentralized, un-professionalized, and unreliable, reflecting a “persistent unease about the police and the role of the state in fighting crime.”<sup>12</sup>

As penitentiaries floundered in achieving their original humanitarian and religious aims, a generation of evangelists began work in prisons in the second half of the nineteenth century. They preached the gospel with the hope of reducing crime and reforming prisons, one soul at a time. The Salvation Army was the most significant such effort. An organization that originated in Britain in the mid-nineteenth century before taking root in the United States in the 1880s, Salvationists quickly became known for their work among the poor, building soup kitchens and shelters in America’s urban slums. They also had a significant presence in prisons and among former inmates.

William Booth, who co-founded the movement with his wife Catherine, regularly saw ex-

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<sup>10</sup> Graber, *The Furnace of Affliction*, 22, 36-7, 87.

<sup>11</sup> Graber, 103-34.

<sup>12</sup> Gottschalk, *The Prison and the Gallows*, 53-5.

prisoners converted under his preaching. Various organizations within the Salvation Army focused on prisoner needs, such as the “Prisoner’s Hope Brigade” and the “Brighter Day League.” Salvationists helped inmates with re-entry into society, ministered to families of the incarcerated, and distributed religious literature and Bibles in prisons. More generally, they attempted to develop friendships and empathy with those behind bars. Maud Booth (daughter-in-law of William and Catherine) wrote the following in a letter to one of her “boys” at Sing Sing prison: “I pray earnestly that [God] will give me the strength and grace to be to all of you that which I have promised to be – a friend in your hours of loneliness and need and a faithful representative to champion your cause with the outside world.”<sup>13</sup>

Other prison evangelists operated independently. This generation of prison evangelists largely arose from churches associated with the radical Holiness tradition, a movement of “come outers” who broke from mainline Methodism in the late nineteenth century because of their worries about the denomination’s increasing theological liberalism, wealth, and aspirations for social respectability. Elizabeth Wheaton had grown up in the Methodist church in antebellum Ohio but felt convicted by God of her own nominal faith and “high society” desires. Fleeing lukewarm faith and respectable social aspirations, she underwent “entire consecration” through the baptism of the Holy Spirit in 1883. Not long after, she felt called to prison work when she encountered three handcuffed inmates in a rail car. “My heart was moved with deep compassion for them,”

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<sup>13</sup> Norris Magnuson, *Salvation in the Slums: Evangelical Social Work, 1865-1920* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1977), 103-8; Maud Ballington Booth, *After Prison - What?* (New York: F. H. Revell Co., 1903), <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/45234/45234-h/45234-h.htm>.

she wrote later in her 1906 memoir *Prisons and Prayer*. Others on the train were “curiously inspecting them, as if they thought they had no tender feelings.” Wheaton felt moved to say something. She offered them her hand and said, “I am sorry for you, but God can help you in this hour of trial.” Promising to visit the men in prison, she did not know that this would be the first of many times she would attempt to bring inmates spiritual comfort. “But the burden of those in prison kept coming heavier upon me,” she wrote. “I told my friends I must go and preach the gospel to prisoners.”<sup>14</sup> For the next twenty-two years she would travel the country via railroad to preach in jails, prisons, and on death rows.<sup>15</sup>

Holiness prison ministers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries did not have the expansive institutional ambitions of the antebellum Protestant reformers who initiated penitentiary projects. But they were attuned both to the sad state of American prisons and how spiritual conversion could result in temporal transformation. For example, in her memoir Mother Wheaton commented on the racial wrongs of American criminal justice: “Judges often sentence men and women to years of hard labor in prison for the slightest offenses. An old colored man employed in a store took a box of cigars,

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<sup>14</sup> Chapter one of Elizabeth R. Wheaton, *Prisons and Prayer; Or A Labor of Love* (Chas. M. Kelley, 1906), <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/41720>. I have not cited page numbers for this text because the Gutenberg.org online reproduction I viewed does not include them. Other Holiness advocates framed their frustrations with high society and lukewarm Christianity with reference to their concern with prisoners and other social outcasts. “The average church,” Holiness evangelist L. L. Pickett noted in 1896, “vacates the field and moves uptown, but the Salvation Army and the Holiness People in general, hold their meetings on the streets, in vacant saloons, in prisons and penitentiaries, on the squares and commons, in the face of dangers and assaults, as well as in places of refinement and welcome.” William Kostlevy, *Holy Jumpers: Evangelicals and Radicals in Progressive Era America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 22.

<sup>15</sup> Susie C. Stanley, *Holy Boldness: Women Preachers' Autobiographies and the Sanctified Self* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2002), 150.

but regretting the act, returned them and confessed his wrong, and asked forgiveness. He was arrested and sentenced to twenty-five years in the stockade; one year for each cigar...” In another prison, Wheaton saw “one old colored man who was condemned to death. He was filthy and dirty and had nothing to lie on but a heap of straw... My heart ached to see him so shamefully abused.” She begged readers to recognize the humanity of even the most dangerous prisoners: “Even condemned men have rights and they should be respected...”<sup>16</sup>

These prison ministers occasionally aired even harsher critiques of American criminal justice. In 1907 the Pentecostal Era Company published Clarissa Olds Keeler’s *The Crime of Crimes or The Convict System Unmasked*.<sup>17</sup> Keeler, a co-publisher with her husband of a religious paper *The Banner of Love*, had originally presented part of this work at the National Convocation for Prayer in St. Louis in 1903, a large tent revival meeting (which Elizabeth Wheaton also attended).<sup>18</sup> Her text was an eviscerating exposé of convict leasing, a system by which southern states used black prisoners (often arrested for minor offenses or false charges) as forced labor. It was an opportunity to replace the labor pool lost in emancipation, elsewhere called “slavery by another name.”<sup>19</sup> Keeler clearly saw the problem in her own time. Laced with references to scripture and criminological statistics indicating the injustice of convict leasing, in her public

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<sup>16</sup> Chapter twelve, Wheaton, *Prisons and Prayer; Or A Labor of Love*.

<sup>17</sup> Clarissa Olds Keeler, *The Crime of Crimes, or, The Convict System Unmasked* (Washington, D.C: Pentecostal Era Company, 1907), <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/uiug.30112100027660>.

<sup>18</sup> S. B. Shaw, *Touching Incidents and Remarkable Answers to Prayer* (Lansing, MI: J. W. Hazelton, 1893), <https://books.google.com/books?id=ZQg3AAAAMAAJ&lpg>.

<sup>19</sup> Douglas A. Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name : The Re-Enslavement of Black People in America from the Civil War to World War II* (New York: Doubleday, 2008).



presentations and writing Keeler “call[ed] the attention of the Christian people to the present condition of convicts, most of whom are colored, and many of whom are guilty of but trifling offences and some of them none at all.”<sup>20</sup> Her work was sharp indictment of the powers and principalities of the age, a way to, as she wrote in a letter to W. E. B. Du Bois, “Expose it; expose it; agitate the matter” (Du Bois wrote her back to thank her for her “work for my people”).<sup>21</sup> As long as the South re-enslaved its black men and women in labor camps, Keeler argued in capitalized letters, “THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS JUSTICE IN THE UNITED STATES IN THE PUNISHMENT OF CRIME.”<sup>22</sup>

### **A New Religious Crime War**

The 1920s through the 1940s saw the beginning of an expanded vision and toughening attitude of national policy and public opinion on crime. The moral crusades of the Progressive Era helped assuage worry about state involvement in crime fighting, and law enforcement expanded to address criminalized vices like drunkenness and prostitution. Concerns about vice lessened by the end of the twenties but worry about crime in general remained, and for good reason. Between 1900 and 1925 the national

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<sup>20</sup> Chapter twelve, Elizabeth R. Wheaton, *Prisons and Prayer*. This quote comes from the paper delivered by Keeler in St. Louis, which Wheaton recorded in her book.

<sup>21</sup> Clarissa Olds Keeler to W. E. B. Du Bois, June 11, 1905, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, <http://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b003-i152>.

<sup>22</sup> Keeler, *The Crime of Crimes*, 3.

homicide rate grew by 50 percent, and in the first half of the 1920s violent crime rates doubled in several cities.<sup>23</sup>

Accompanying rising concern over these increases was a shift in the public expectations of law enforcement. Incarceration rates had failed to track with the growing crime spree (in Chicago, for instance, less than a quarter of murderers were convicted from 1875 to 1920).<sup>24</sup> After World War I, Americans began to expect more from their politicians, prosecutors, and policemen. President Calvin Coolidge began to deliver public appeals on the need for law observance in response. Though he was initially reluctant to do so, Coolidge formed a National Crime Commission to study the problem.<sup>25</sup> President Herbert Hoover launched the first real federal policy broadsides on crime.<sup>26</sup> Often new crime-fighting efforts undertaken during his administration were direct responses to particular offenses that had engendered widespread alarm. For example, the famous kidnapping and murder of Charles and Anne Lindbergh's young son in 1932 (one of several kidnappings of the children of wealthy families at the time) drew public outcry and led to the enacting of the Lindbergh Law by Congress, making kidnapping a federal

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<sup>23</sup> Gottschalk, *The Prison and the Gallows*, 59; Jeffrey S. Adler, "Less Crime, More Punishment: Violence, Race, and Criminal Justice in Early Twentieth-Century America," *The Journal of American History* 102, no. 1 (June 2015): 36.

<sup>24</sup> Jeffrey S. Adler, "'It Is His First Offense. We Might as Well Let Him Go': Homicide and Criminal Justice in Chicago, 1875-1920," *Journal of Social History* 40, no. 1 (Autumn 2006): 5.

<sup>25</sup> "Public Aid Asked in War on Crime," *New York Times*, November 20, 1925. By the thirties crime conferences appeared regularly under the sponsorship of various state, federal, and non-governmental organizations. "Coolidge Holds Anti-Crime Conference Unnecessary," *The Baltimore Sun*, April 13, 1927; "Crime Conference to Open Wednesday," *New York Times*, October 31, 1927; "Nation Called To Crime War By Cummings," *The Washington Post*, October 8, 1934; "Calls Crime Conference," *New York Times*, June 30, 1935. For criticisms of this first commission, see John H. Wigmore, "The National Crime Commission: What Will It Achieve?," *Journal of the American Institute of Criminal Law and Criminology* 16, no. 3 (November 1925): 312-15.

<sup>26</sup> James D. Calder, *The Origins and Development of Federal Crime Control Policy: Herbert Hoover's Initiatives* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993), 1-24.

offense. Though Hoover was initially reluctant to increase the government's law enforcement capacities at the expense of the rights of individual states, he eventually signed this law and others that formed the foundation for the immense enlargement of federal, state, and local crime-fighting efforts. Under Hoover, federal law enforcement began to be professionalized, and new governmental agencies were assembled to fight crime in its various forms, such as the Federal Bureau of Narcotics. President Franklin Roosevelt (who had previously served on Coolidge's National Crime Commission) went even further, increasing federal law enforcement powers by linking the fight against crime with the New Deal. Roosevelt entrusted attorney general Homer Cummings with this expansion. Cummings did not disappoint, enacting policy and justifying newly expanded law enforcement powers to the media. It was in this climate that a young J. Edgar Hoover transformed the Justice Department's small Bureau of Investigation into an innovative and bellicose beachhead against organized crime, a band of "G-Men" agents who battled (and sometimes killed) high profile gangsters such as John Dillinger, Bonnie and Clyde, and Baby Face Nelson.<sup>27</sup>

The result of these efforts was that from the twenties through the forties, crime began to be cast primarily as a *law enforcement* issue, not simply a problem to be addressed through social reform measures, whether by the penitentiaries themselves, via prison ministry reformers like those in the Salvation Army, or through changes in penal philosophy. In the years following World War I, criminals were increasingly portrayed as

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<sup>27</sup> Gottschalk, *The Prison and the Gallows*, 64-8.

cancerous outsiders to American society, not the natural result of its economic or racial dislocations.<sup>28</sup> Crime was also progressively understood as a problem with a universal geography, one that deserved *national* attention. Prohibition (which was enshrined in a constitutional amendment in 1920) foreshadowed this universalized approach to crime, and lawmakers, police, and prosecutors in county, state, and federal agencies began directing their attention to suspects beyond the immediate neighborhood level.<sup>29</sup> The results of these efforts can be seen in the dramatic rise in nationwide imprisonment rates. After a brief sharp rise in the 1880s, imprisonment rates grew only slightly from 1890 to the early 1920s, from 72 to 74 prisoners per 100,000. From 1923 to 1930, however, the rate jumped from 74 to 98 per 100,000, and the decade after that from 98 to 125, a 69% increase.<sup>30</sup>

At a 1934 anti-crime conference, President Roosevelt summarized the recent expansion and heightened intensity of American criminal justice. He began his remarks with reference to the necessity of increased governmental intervention in the nation's economy in order to address the poverty of the Great Depression. But simply clothing the naked and feeding the hungry was not enough. The New Deal needed guardians. With typical oratorical prowess, he argued:

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<sup>28</sup> Gottschalk, 74.

<sup>29</sup> Prohibition also helped lead to what William Stuntz called the "rise of modern politics of crime," where politicians could utilize law and order tropes for political gain, but then bear no responsibility if a war on crime fails or has unintended consequences. Stuntz, *The Collapse of American Criminal Justice*, 186.

<sup>30</sup> See page 30 (table 3-3) of Margaret Werner Cahalan, "Historical Corrections Statistics in the United States, 1850-1984" (U.S. Department of Justice, December 1986), <http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/hcsus5084.pdf>.

As a component part of the large objective we include our constant struggle to safeguard ourselves against the attacks of the lawless and criminal elements of our population. Relentlessly and without compromise the Department of Justice has moved forward in its major offensive against these forces. With increasing effectiveness, state and local agencies are directing their efforts toward the achievement of law enforcement; and with them, in more marked degree than ever before, the Federal Government has worked toward the common objective.

But Roosevelt also knew that expansion of the anti-crime cause needed strong cultural footing if policy changes were to gain any long-term traction. He went on:

Widespread increase in capacity to substitute order for disorder is the remedy. This can only come through expert service in marshaling the assets of home, school, church, community, and other social agencies, to work in common purpose with our law enforcement agencies...I ask you, therefore, to do all in your power to interpret the problem of crime to the people of this country...<sup>31</sup>

The American home and school could run parallel to law enforcement, creating a culture where the intensification of crime fighting was both intelligible and expected. Indeed, both these institutions were frequent reference points in public discussions about crime, particularly juvenile delinquency. In this way home and school were simply analogues of the federal government's increased entry into the nation's economy. The threat of a smack of the disciplinarian's ruler, whether on the mischievous mitts of youngsters or the invisible hand of the market, was essential for the nation's greater good.

But the import of religion – or, “church,” to use Roosevelt's term – to the crime problem was a different matter. Religion had already proved a capable tool in

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<sup>31</sup> Franklin Delano Roosevelt, “Address to the Attorney General's Crime Conference,” December 10, 1934, Franklin D. Roosevelt Master Speech File, box 20, number 756, Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library & Museum, [http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/\\_resources/images/msf/msf00777](http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/_resources/images/msf/msf00777).

“interpreting” crime for Americans in decades past, as evinced in the history of puritan executions and antebellum penitentiaries. And the present “church” boasted a slew of willing and able interpreters: the bishops, pastors, and rabbis who were willing to speak about issues of public concern from their pulpits and in their respective denominations. It was no surprise then that, during the twenties, thirties, and forties, religion was an ideal complement to crime’s expanded geography and newly sharpened diagnosis. This religious affinity maintained the past framing of crime and lawlessness in sacred terms while also extending the cultural roots of American law and order. Indeed, this framing was often literal: the very crime conference at which Roosevelt spoke (which had been organized by Attorney General Cummings) had begun with a “special inspiration service” at the Washington Cathedral and closed with an address on the final day by Methodist Bishop Francis J. McConnell.<sup>32</sup>

Rhetoric about crime around this time generally took two forms. The first was a punitive perspective, which painted crime in terms of moral decline and individual culpability, while arguing for a tough crackdown in response. The second form championed a progressive approach, pushing for the recognition of social factors in understanding the causes of crime, such as poverty or the negative influence of the entertainment industry. But though progressives recommended that part of the answer to crime was addressing these influences, they insisted on making *crime* (not poverty or

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<sup>32</sup> “Church Called To Join Fight On U.S. Crime,” *The Washington Post*, December 10, 1934; “Bishop Freeman Endorses War on Crime; Pledges Church Support at Capital Service,” *New York Times*, December 10, 1934; “The Program of the Attorney-General’s Conference on Crime,” *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* 25, no. 5 (1935): 793-4.

other social ills) the primary problem to be solved and therefore argued alongside conservatives for the strengthening of law enforcement capabilities. Each of these perspectives had roots in broader currents in American life. Both perspectives also had religious proponents and helped lead to the development of important changes in modern American criminal justice.

### **Preaching Punishment and “the sword of justice”**

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the most influential public religious concern about mass lawlessness lay in the worried responses of Christian businessmen to working class uprisings. Like the private “Pinkerton” police forces that enforced the compliance of workers, this concern about the “problem of the masses” was nevertheless limited in scope by its focus on labor issues. Many of the Christian businessmen trumpeting the need for police crackdowns in the Gilded Age also believed that, though violence could be a justified as a response to labor unrest, ultimately new religious institutions and strategies could pacify the masses through conversion. In Chicago, business magnates backed the urban evangelist Dwight L. Moody and funded his establishment of the city’s Bible Institute (later Moody Bible Institute) in the aftermath of the Haymarket bombing and riots.<sup>33</sup>

By contrast, the punitive anti-crime cause that took off after World War I was not limited to labor problems but framed lawlessness as a threat facing *all* Americans. This

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<sup>33</sup> See chapter two of Timothy Gloege, *Guaranteed Pure: The Moody Bible Institute, Business, and the Making of Modern Evangelicalism* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

fear was not entirely new, as preachers had discussed crime as a theological issue in the years after the Civil War. But, like Moody's brand of Christian work, these earlier sermons posited spiritual change as the only true solution and even pointed out the futility of police action. The inability of state redress of the crime issue was so apparent that late nineteenth and early twentieth-century premillennial dispensationalists frequently framed crime as a sign of the impending end times, an outgrowth of the lawless philosophy also undergirding anarchism, communism, and nihilism. From their viewpoint, mass lawlessness was an unavoidable development that could hasten the return of Christ, and therefore massive state response was as undesirable as it was unlikely.<sup>34</sup> By the 1920s, however, many ministers (including premillennial dispensationalists) would eschew peaceful pacification and pessimism alike for the state's use of violent force as the default, even righteous response to criminal acts.

Religion proved to be an ideal partner to this cause. The punitive approach generally saw crime as rooted in human sin, whether in the criminal act itself or in broader contempt for America's laws. Sin as an explanatory category was a powerful way to universalize wrongdoing, and preachers who needed convenient shorthand to illustrate total depravity began relying on crime as a generalizable example. This sin was seen in individualistic terms that imbued crime with, in the words of one Baptist newspaper,

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<sup>34</sup> George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, second edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 66. Some ministers linked labor concerns with their premillennialism. Regarding a mining strike in 1914, Arno Gaebelien said the "rioting and different acts of violence and lawlessness" of strikers "have to be expected and will increase as this age comes to its prophetic end." Matthew Avery Sutton, *American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014), 184.



“moral accountability.” Criminals like Leopold and Loeb make a clear choice to commit murder as a means of thrill-seeking, the piece argued. Though this act was a symptom of a spiritual disease afflicting the entire social order, “Such crime is always deliberate and willful.” If criminals were morally accountable as individuals, then the response was clear: punishment, and more of it.<sup>35</sup> Punishments for lawbreaking were increasingly seen by religious figures as being too lenient, and police efforts to stop crime as lamentably (but not inevitably) anemic. One New York Presbyterian pastor illustrated both of these dynamics in a sermon excoriating the citizenry and courts because of the “weak and sickly sentimentality” that prevented executions from going forward. “Some say [crime] is a phantasy, an idea of the subjective self, a disease,” the preacher thundered. “But the Church says it is sin, and that the Bible is right when it says: ‘The wages of sin is death.’”<sup>36</sup>

These advocates usually (though not always) came from the conservative side of the religious spectrum, with the most ardent rhetoric originating from fundamentalists and other Protestants worried about the encroachment of modernist belief in American life. In their minds, the fact that the affluent Leopold and Loeb had been enrolled at the University of Chicago (a bastion of liberal Protestantism), revered the atheist Nietzsche, and were defended by the agnostic Darrow was no accident. Indeed, this trial provided a convenient slippery slope-style argument for modernism’s inevitable end. Billy Sunday’s jeremiad about the case continued in this vein: “Precocious brains, salacious books,

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<sup>35</sup> “The Thrill Mania,” *Baptist and Reflector*, August 7, 1924, [http://media2.sbhla.org.s3.amazonaws.com/tbarchive/1924/TB\\_1924\\_08\\_07.pdf](http://media2.sbhla.org.s3.amazonaws.com/tbarchive/1924/TB_1924_08_07.pdf).

<sup>36</sup> “Pastor Points Way to Decrease Crime,” *New York Times*, September 21, 1925.

infidel minds – all helped to produce this murder.”<sup>37</sup> The southern Methodist bishop Warren A. Candler found the Leopold and Loeb trial more significant than that of Scopes, writing that the murder showed the futility of materialistic self-indulgence, the logical outcome of the evolutionary worldview that the University of Chicago propagated.<sup>38</sup> The preacher and fundamentalist leader John Roach Straton of New York’s Calvary Baptist Church (who two years earlier had mocked Harry Emerson Fosdick’s “Shall the Fundamentalists Win?” sermon with his own “Shall the Funnymonkeyists Win?”) was more direct: “[Leopold and Loeb] are simply Modernists who have let their Modernism go to the full and logical limit of utter unbelief in God and heartlessness toward man...”<sup>39</sup>

If modernism was the problem for these conservative Christian observers of the Leopold and Loeb trial, swift lethal justice was the answer. Chicago pastor Arthur Kaub lamented, “When notorious criminals are found guilty of atrocious crimes deserving the death penalty, a host of sympathetic people intercede for them, urging pardon or lesser sentence.” Instead, the Lutheran clergyman argued, “we must not shirk

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<sup>37</sup> Baatz, *For the Thrill of It*. Ernest B. Gordon linked the names Leopold and Loeb with liberal University of Chicago professors, lamenting the decline of the original Christian vision of the Baptist school. Ernest B. Gordon, *The Leaven of the Sadducees; or, Old and New Apostasies* (Chicago: The Bible Institute Colportage Association, 1926), 172.

<sup>38</sup> Mark K Bauman, “John T. Scopes, Leopold and Loeb, and Bishop Warren A. Candler,” *Methodist History* 16, no. 2 (January 1978): 99.

<sup>39</sup> “Leopold and Loeb Called Modernists,” *New York Times*, September 15, 1924. The connection of the duo to modernist ideology was apparently so clear that the case was referenced a year later in the Scopes trial, when defense lawyer William Jennings Bryan suggested that an evolutionary worldview was a motivating factor in the boys’ crime. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 213; William Jennings Bryan, “Closing Statement of William Jennings Bryan at the Trial of John Scopes,” in *Evangelicalism and Fundamentalism: A Documentary Reader*, ed. Barry Hankins (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 92. Paula Fass has speculated that pastors’ direct connection of Leopold and Loeb to modernism meant that the duo’s Jewish background was not stressed in the press nearly as much as it otherwise would have been. Fass, “Making and Remaking an Event”: 926.

responsibility... We must have the law upheld, justice meted out and proper punishment executed upon the evildoer.”<sup>40</sup> Upon hearing the verdict that Leopold and Loeb would receive prison sentences and not death, other pastors launched critiques of the “weaklings” on the bench who threatened to “undermine the philosophy on which our civilization is based” by allowing the two to “escape the sword of justice.”<sup>41</sup> Pastor Simon Peter Long offered a more humanitarian gloss that simultaneously reinforced the connection of law with gospel, telling the gathered faithful at Wicker Park Lutheran Church in Chicago that execution was the boys’ best eternal hope, as it would give them impetus to repent. As the headline of the *Chicago Daily Tribune* article featuring Long declared, the noose was the “only salvation” for the duo.<sup>42</sup>

In the years following the Leopold and Loeb trial, conservative Protestants continued their assault on crime as a broader symptom of modernist indulgence. Carl

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<sup>40</sup> “God Committed Death Penalty into Hands of State, Says Pastor,” *Chicago Herald and Examiner*, August 4, 1924. Cited in Baatz, *For the Thrill of It*, 319-20.

<sup>41</sup> W. B. Norton, “Many Pastors Give Views on Franks Verdict,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 15, 1924; “Ministers Attack Caverly For Franks Case Decision,” *The Washington Post*, September 15, 1924. Also, while Bishop Candler conceded that certain background factors might be in play, he said that the boys nonetheless retained free will and were morally culpable (therefore deserving death). Bauman, “John T. Scopes, Leopold and Loeb, and Bishop Warren A. Candler.”

<sup>42</sup> “Pastor Sees Noose as ‘Only Salvation’ of Loeb and Leopold,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 9, 1924. See also W. B. Norton, “Pastor Defends Penalty; Warns of Laxity,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 22, 1924. Earlier in his ministry Long offered a published defense of capital punishment in the midst of a devotional meditation on Christ’s last words from the cross. The thieves on the crosses beside Jesus deserved death in accordance with the demands of justice, and the penitent thief rightfully welcomed it as a “means of grace:” “No Christian, as far as I know, ever understood the blessing of capital punishment any better than he did...” Simon Peter Long, *The Wounded Word: A Brief Meditation on the Seven Sayings of Christ on the Cross* (Columbus, OH: The F. J. Heer Printing Co., 1908), [https://books.google.com/books?id=f6k\\_AAAAYAAJ&pg=PA1&dq#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=f6k_AAAAYAAJ&pg=PA1&dq#v=onepage&q&f=false), 34-5. For a more general fundamentalist defense of capital punishment (framing it as God’s safeguard of human rights), see “Chapter III: Capital Punishment and Human Rights” in J.E. Conant, *The Growing Menace of the “Social Gospel”* (Chicago: The Bible Institute Colportage Association, 1937), from Joel A. Carpenter, ed., *Fighting Fundamentalism: Polemical Thrusts of the 1930s and 1940s* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1988).

McIntire, one of the most influential fundamentalists of the twentieth century, made crime part of his first foray into public life in 1927. Though better known for his later assaults on communism and ecumenism, McIntire's very first public speech focused on crime (a topic he would return to in later years). "America is the greatest criminal nation on earth," he said. "Crime is an ever-flowing tide, engulfing our entire nation, claiming our freedom, crippling our democracy, never ebbing." After painting a chilling portrait of the murders and robberies befalling American cities and the corrupt courts that allowed offenders to go free, McIntire called on citizens to demand justice and meet the "army of one million criminals marching up and down our land tonight" with the same force that they might meet an invading army. His closing lines were commanding: "Will we permit law violence that will ultimately mean the undermining of our democratic system? No! We will rally to the fight in the name of democracy, in the name of humanity, in the name of the unborn children, in the name of God return the verdict of public opinion. 'Guilty, Guilty Criminal!' – and then our courts will pronounce the sentence, 'Criminal thou shalt not pass.'" This final phrase indicated some restraint on McIntire's part, as "not pass" was scribbled over the original typewritten wording that read "Criminal thou shalt die." But the underlying sentiment was still the same: God-fearing citizens must stand strong and take drastic measures against the chaotic menace of criminality.<sup>43</sup>

This speech was remarkably secular compared to McIntire's later preaching, focusing primarily on social change and civic involvement over evangelism and

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<sup>43</sup> Carl McIntire, "America Builds a City," January 11, 1927, Box 304, folder 10, Princeton Theological Seminary, The Carl [Charles Curtis, Jr.] McIntire Manuscript Collection. McIntire's manuscript contained some typos and other grammatical irregularities. Here I have chosen to quote his speech as it was written.

conversion. However, the spiritual significance of crime was apparently so compelling that McIntire soon abandoned his plans to pursue a career in law and enrolled in seminary. Defending America from her enemies within and without would become his ministerial vocation, and castigation of criminal activities was a perfect entry point into this work.<sup>44</sup>

In the Scopes trial, conservatives won the legal judgment but lost the sympathy of many Americans. With Leopold and Loeb's case, however, conservatives lost their death penalty appeals but nonetheless realized that their insistence on crime as a national issue of religious significance could have deep affinities with broader mainstream culture. The most obvious example was the presence of religious figures and rhetoric in law and order-styled crime conferences that proliferated in the late twenties and thirties. The 1933 National Anti-Crime Conference was one of the most prominent of such gatherings. Convened by the United States Flag Association in Washington, D.C., the conference was marketed as a response to the "present frightful crime situation." Though the U.S. Flag Association had been incorporated nine years earlier to help America's youth resist communism and other anti-American ideologies, the organization now focused its energies on the suppression of crime – "the gravest moral issue that the Nation has ever had to face." The Association, with representatives from governmental, civic, educational, and religious organizations, gathered "to formally mark the awakening of

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<sup>44</sup> According to historian Markku Ruotsila, "McIntire concluded that the best way for him to personally contribute to the defense of the American way of life was to become a minister." Markku Ruotsila, *Fighting Fundamentalist: Carl McIntire and the Politicization of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 20.

American people as regards crime.” The conference’s organizers were not shy in proclaiming the greatness of this particular awakening, contending that “The National Anti-Crime Conference will go down in history as one of the most important and far-reaching conferences in the annals of the Nation.”<sup>45</sup>

The organizers could be forgiven for their ambitious self-assessment. They had received a public endorsement from President Roosevelt (who, along with two previous presidents, served as the honorary chair of the Flag Association) and their organizing committee included prominent law enforcement officials, civic leaders, senators, and judges. As if to prove the lethal seriousness of crime and the need for an all-out assault against it, leaders from the U.S. armed services lent their voices and expertise to the campaign, with former secretary of war Patrick J. Hurley serving as the lead organizer.<sup>46</sup>

Conference speakers proposed a variety of practical responses to the crime problem. Some called for modernizing and sharpening law enforcement practices, like standardizing a universal process of fingerprinting and changing laws so as to permit police to frisk suspects without search warrants. Others decried broader cultural sympathy with criminals, brought upon by crime’s glamorization in newspaper accounts and popular movies.<sup>47</sup> Judge Marcus Kavanagh of Illinois called for a return to flogging of prisoners who had been convicted of serious crimes, a proposal that a conference

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<sup>45</sup> “Crime Must Go” (United States Flag Association, 1933), Pamphlet collection, New York Historical Society. I am grateful to Mariam Touba at the New York Historical Society for providing me with this document.

<sup>46</sup> “Crime Must Go.”

<sup>47</sup> Newman F. Baker, “Current Notes,” *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* 24, no. 5 (Winter 1934): 973.

committee had also recommended hours before.<sup>48</sup> Attorney General Cummings saw the conference as the perfect venue to announce the acquisition of a new, secure prison from the War Department, “for confinement of defiant and dangerous criminals.” Popularly known as Alcatraz, this prison served as the perfect encapsulation of the federal government’s new push for domestic security, a national beacon for law and order in the middle of San Francisco Bay.<sup>49</sup>

Religion was also part of the conference proceedings, an attempt to rectify what one speaker saw as “the apathy of preachers and church leaders” on crime.<sup>50</sup> Judge Kavanagh, a noted Catholic, argued in his conference address the answer to crime was fundamentally “return to the old-time reverence of Almighty God.”<sup>51</sup> In an address tellingly entitled “The Church and Crime,” the Jesuit priest, founder of Georgetown University’s School of Foreign Service, and anti-communist crusader Edmund A. Walsh diagnosed the crime problem in a similar manner, albeit with more sophistication. He told the story of modernizing America’s abandonment of spiritual motivations for secular expediency, and the impact of this shift: “Where the rights of God are ignored do you expect the rights of man to be respected?” Though he had elsewhere celebrated the judge and “courageous jury” that convicted Al Capone,<sup>52</sup> Walsh was not quite as retributively

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<sup>48</sup> “Criminal Aided By Tolerance,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 14, 1933.

<sup>49</sup> “Lone Island Picked to Imprison Worst of Our Criminals,” *New York Times*, October 13, 1933. David Ward and Gene Kassebaum, *Alcatraz: The Gangster Years* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2010), 49.

<sup>50</sup> “Backs Federal Aid in War on Crime,” *New York Times*, October 15, 1933.

<sup>51</sup> John A. Campbell, *A Biographical History, with Portraits, of Prominent Men of the Great West* (Western Biographical and Engraving Company, 1902), 218; “Criminal Aided By Tolerance.”

<sup>52</sup> “Priest Lauds Jury Convicting Capone,” *The Baltimore Sun*, October 19, 1931.

mindful as Kavanagh, decrying the idolatry of “Law” if it was executed without reference to divine guidance. But Walsh did point out how the rising tides of secularism obfuscated criminals’ proper recognition of the true justice of their punishment: “Without the higher motive, the lesser control will degenerate either into an exercise of brute force or a gamble of wits between the embittered criminal and the law, which he condemns as an arrogant exercise of unjustifiable tyranny.”<sup>53</sup> The problem with the rule of law was not that it was forceful, but that it increasingly lacked a transcendent reference point.

As the conference closed, a resolution offered by the Right Rev. J.E. Freeman, the Episcopal bishop of the diocese of Washington, was adopted. Freeman served along with Catholic and Jewish representatives on the Flag Association’s board of founders. He called on Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, and Greek Orthodox congregations to set aside two days in November for consideration of crime conditions and “awakening of the people to the imperative need of rededication to patriotic ideals and principles.” Indeed, the cause of crime was so tied to the mission of the church, Freeman argued, that “unless the church is aroused to a more militant attitude on these matters it will experience a great loss of interest in years to come. The church can hardly hope to survive unless it assumes its parts and responsibility in these campaigns.”<sup>54</sup> A few months after the conference, the Flag Association formed a Washington Church Committee composed of clergymen from the District of Columbia to, in the words of the *Washington Post*, “formulate a program for immediate unification of all religious forces in the fight on lawlessness...to make

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<sup>53</sup> Edmund A. Walsh, “The Church and Crime,” National Anti-Crime Conference, Washington, D.C, 1933, Patrick J. Hurley Collection, Box 55, Folder 12, University of Oklahoma Western History Collection.

<sup>54</sup> “Backs Federal Aid in War on Crime.”



churches a strong arm in the attack.”<sup>55</sup> As with any successful revival, awakened hearts needed unity, accountability, and a sense of mission if they were to persist in faithfulness.

Through the blessing of religious leaders at gatherings like this and the religious language utilized by other speakers, an American crime-fighting culture was being constructed in Washington. This culture helped sustain the expanding and toughening crime policy charge that Hoover, Roosevelt, Cummings, and others were leading. The story was a similar one on the local level, as religious leaders contributed to crime commissions and conferences in states and cities nationwide. For example, the president and secretary of the Moody Bible Institute joined the Chicago Crime Commission as members and trustees. As “pioneer of the crime commission movement in this country,” this body successfully pushed the city to eliminate unwarranted continuances and felony counts in criminal cases, published a list of “public enemies” (such as Al Capone), and helped obtain convictions of murder suspects who had been “unjustifiably exonerated.”<sup>56</sup> A similar Los Angeles commission garnered the support of the city’s Church Federation, which publicized its endorsement of proposed legislation to lower the criminal convictions threshold from a unanimous jury vote to a simple majority.<sup>57</sup>

White elites in America’s halls of power were not the only ones championing the sacred cause of law and order. African Americans had endured high crime rates in their own communities for generations, a result of limited economic opportunities and whites’

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<sup>55</sup> “Church Groups Mass Forces To Fight Crime,” *The Washington Post*, April 28, 1934.

<sup>56</sup> “Editorial Notes: Chicago Crime Commission,” *Moody Monthly*, April 1922; Virgil W. Peterson and Chicago Crime Commission, *Crime Commissions in the United States* (Chicago: Chicago Crime Commission, 1945), 1, 27-8.

<sup>57</sup> “Churches Back Drive on Crime,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 14, 1923.

ability to harass blacks with few legal consequences. The threat of lynching plagued black communities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Though perpetrators framed lynching as a legitimate response to black aggression, they were usually based on unsubstantiated allegations, comparatively minor crimes, or social miscues. Early anti-lynching campaigns, such as those led by Ida B. Wells in the 1890s, focused on boycotts, black self-defense, and the public rebuttals of racist claims about the inherent criminality of black people. But later black leaders soon began to critique lynchings with an eye toward the positive social possibilities of crime fighting, an America where whites followed laws or faced prosecution and where black crimes would be tried in an impartial court setting, rather than by racist mobs. For example, throughout the twenties, thirties, and forties the NAACP (founded in 1909) promoted the need for anti-lynching legislation and penalties for law enforcement officers who failed to investigate racist mob violence.<sup>58</sup>

Black ministers and churches were frequent anti-lynching advocates along these lines. In a public letter to *The Pittsburgh Courier*, one black minister argued that “To lynch a person does not favor the law, but every member of the mob adds ten fold to the crime they attempt to avenge instead of upholding the law, and thus become the greater violator.”<sup>59</sup> The Harlem pastor and civil rights leader Adam Clayton Powell Jr., who would later lead the famed Abyssinian Baptist Church and serve in U.S. Congress, characterized the lynching problem as one rooted in “disrespect for law

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<sup>58</sup> James Campbell, *Crime and Punishment in African American History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 119-124, 143.

<sup>59</sup> H. Teague, “Adds Protest To Vicious Wave Of Mob Violence,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, January 13, 1934. I have made minor corrections to smooth out typos in this text.

enforcement...Crooks, racketeers, bootleggers, kidnapers, and lynchers, abetted by politicians, are in the saddle, flaunting themselves in the face of decent society.”<sup>60</sup> Black leaders actually saw anti-lynching and anti-crime as complementary enough to criticize the National Anti-Crime Conference *not* for its inflated rhetoric, but for failing to consider lynching as a worthy issue in its proceedings.<sup>61</sup>

Black pastors occasionally championed law and order beyond the lynching issue, often mirroring the discussions of crime by white clergy. In a 1931 sermon one black Ohio minister lambasted the apparent effects that Clarence Darrow’s work on behalf of Leopold and Loeb was having in American life: “Darrow’s defense...[has] done more to animate and perpetuate the crime wave in America than any hundred cases combined...Such lawyers are largely responsible for the criminal conditions confronting the nation and for the apparent breaking down of all law and order.”<sup>62</sup> A coalition of black ministers from Chicago joined in 1935 to promote “churchdom’s war on crime,” addressing the police department’s indifference to corruption, prostitution, illegal liquor trade, gambling, theft, and juvenile delinquency in their south side neighborhoods.<sup>63</sup> These appeals reflected the tendency of more conservative black leaders to attack lawbreakers from their own communities even as they criticized lynching and other racially motivated crimes committed by whites. Though often evidence of the prejudices that black elites had against lower classes in their midst, it possibly reflected a pragmatic

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<sup>60</sup> “United States in Hell of a Mess, Says Rev. A. Clayton Powell,” *Afro-American*, December 16, 1933.

<sup>61</sup> “Group Meets to Fight Crime,” *The Chicago Defender*, October 7, 1933.

<sup>62</sup> “Darrow Is Negro’s Worst Enemy--Rev. Ross,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, August 1, 1931.

<sup>63</sup> “Churchdom Unrelenting In War On Community Crime,” *The Chicago Defender*, October 26, 1935; “Churchdom To Open War On Community Crime Wednesday,” *The Chicago Defender*, October 19, 1935.

consideration as well, as black leaders striving for broader respectability knew they had to echo the anti-crime sentiments that normally came from white leaders.<sup>64</sup> At a “War on Crime” gathering in Louisville, one black pastor denounced the killing of blacks. But, in the words of a journalist covering the event, “there were white folks present and Rev. Huglette had to show them that he hated all murderers – even those who kill white folks.” According to the journalist, Huglette even condemned recent efforts to give a black man convicted of the murder of a white man a life sentence instead of the death penalty. He said “he should burn until he was blue in the face,” a comment that led the journalist to note, “These were strong words coming from a preacher standing in his pulpit where weekly he no doubt recites ‘Thou shalt not kill...’”<sup>65</sup> Yet these were exactly the kind of sentiments to be expected of any preacher who wished to join America’s religious crime-fighting consensus, a reflection of similar exhortations by many white preachers at the time.

### **Highlighting “the social matrix”: Crime and Progressive Religion**

The alternative to the law and order approach was a progressive paradigm that would be championed by a broad coalition of liberal Protestants, Catholics, and Jews. Advocates of this perspective often critiqued the rhetoric of those advocating harsher punishment and expanded police presence. Some went on to work inside prisons with

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<sup>64</sup> Campbell, *Crime and Punishment in African American History*, 122.

<sup>65</sup> “Anti-Crime Meet Begins With Small Crowd; Homicides Hit,” *Atlanta Daily World*, September 2, 1940. See also Rev J. Raymond Henderson, “Anti Crime Effort Is Commendable, Pastor Says In Article,” *Atlanta Daily World*, September 7, 1936 and “Pastor Begins Blitzkrieg On Crime In City: Launch Program Today in Front Of Radcliffe,” *Atlanta Daily World*, August 23, 1941.

convicts themselves, bringing a new perspective to prison ministry through the cutting edge tools of modern social science. However, this progressive, “sociological” approach also helped fuel the broader war on crime in its own way, as it further defined the issue in religious terms and increased the state’s scope and influence in addressing lawbreaking.

The sociological approach to crime had its roots in Progressive Era discussions about the root causes of social ills. Activists and thinkers in this period challenged American “bootstraps” mythology (where poverty was little more than the result of laziness) by pointing to the *environmental* factors that led to poverty. Similarly, Progressive Era prison reformers problematized the assignment of clear-cut moral blame to criminals. Crime, these reformers and advocates of the “new penology” argued, was the result of any number of social, psychological, cultural, and economic factors, from poor sanitation to urban overcrowding to job loss to mental trauma. As the Quaker doctor and women’s prison reformer Eliza Mosher said about the female inmates in her care, “They are morally deformed these women! But how far are they responsible for their actions?...Tender spots, covered with rubbish tho’ they may be, are often to be found, but the response is lost amid the influences which surround them even here.”<sup>66</sup> Not unlike the humanitarian prison campaigners of the antebellum era, these reformers also emphasized the need to transform punitive punishment and ghastly prisons into therapeutic havens.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Estelle B. Freedman, *Their Sisters’ Keepers: Women’s Prison Reform in America, 1830-1930* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1981), 73

<sup>67</sup> Rebecca M. McLennan, *The Crisis of Imprisonment: Protest, Politics, and the Making of the American Penal State, 1776-1941* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 195. Also see David J. Rothman, *Conscience and Convenience: The Asylum and Its Alternatives in Progressive America*, second edition (New York: Aldine Transaction, 2002). For more on the connection of antebellum and Progressive Era

The religious parallel to the progressive environmental emphasis was the social gospel, with late nineteenth-century roots in both lay organizing efforts on behalf of the working class and leaders' published pleadings for Christians to address the "social crisis" of industrializing urban centers.<sup>68</sup> By the turn of the twentieth century, the overarching message of the social gospel, that a truly Christian response to issues of poverty and injustice necessitated the dismantling of the unjust economic structures (and not simply a spiritualized gospel, calls for individual responsibility, or nominal displays of charity), had achieved official recognition in many of the denominational and ecumenical bodies of American Protestantism.<sup>69</sup>

The temperance crusade was a major outgrowth of the social gospel coalition, one that helped initiate the expanded reach of law enforcement while also garnering support from more conservative Protestants.<sup>70</sup> But it also alienated Roman Catholics and Jews, many of whom saw Prohibition as little more than concealed Protestant bigotry against European immigrants of both faiths who had fewer qualms with alcohol use.<sup>71</sup> The anti-

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religious reform movements, see chapter fourteen of Timothy Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1957).

<sup>68</sup> Heath W. Carter, *Union Made: Working People and the Rise of Social Christianity in Chicago* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1907).

<sup>69</sup> Donald K. Gorrell, *The Age of Social Responsibility: The Social Gospel in the Progressive Era, 1900-1920* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1988), 2.

<sup>70</sup> On the importance of recognizing the alignment of progressive and conservative Protestants on temperance, see Barry Hankins, *Jesus and Gin: Evangelicalism, the Roaring Twenties and Today's Culture Wars* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 22-3, 30.

<sup>71</sup> For a discussion of liberal Protestant support of temperance and its anti-Catholic implications see chapter four of Elesha J. Coffman, *The Christian Century and the Rise of the Protestant Mainline* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013). For more on the hostile reactions toward Jews (particularly those involved

crime cause, though it had conceptual affinities with Prohibition, proved far more compelling to a broad religious audience. By the mid-twenties this cause had coalesced into a definable progressive movement, with criminologists and politicians joining with religious leaders to call on the nation to address broader social ills in order to combat crime. The *Christian Herald*, an ecumenical Protestant magazine, widened its strident anti-alcohol stance into a much broader 1925 campaign it called the Christian Conscience Crusade. The Crusade was a general call for American Christians to practice good citizenship and to pray for their country, but the *Herald* regularly framed it as a spiritual assault on crime and lawlessness. A variety of politicians voiced their support of the Crusade for its wide-ranging appeal beyond the temperance issue with its attention to crime. It was good, the governor of Vermont wrote in a letter to the *Herald*, that the Crusade was “not only about the Prohibition law enforcement but also about all law enforcement.” It meant, as later issues of the *Herald* showcased, that northern Catholic politicians like New York governor Al Smith (who opposed Prohibition) could support the Crusade and its broader campaign for national “reverence and obedience.”<sup>72</sup>

The Leopold and Loeb trial provided an opportunity for liberal religious leaders to contrast their perspective with that of law and order conservatives. Their key appeal was the impropriety of capital punishment. The Rev. Charles Francis Potter of the West Side

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in the alcohol trade) during Prohibition see Marni Davis, *Jews and Booze: Becoming American in the Age of Prohibition* (New York: NYU Press, 2012).

<sup>72</sup> Franklin S. Billings, “The Christian Conscience Crusade: ‘Law Enforcement or Chaos,’” *Christian Herald*, April 18, 1925; Alfred E. Smith, “The Christian Conscience Crusade: New York’s Governor Heartily Approves,” *Christian Herald*, April 25, 1925.

Unitarian Church in New York City (and occasional theological sparring partner of John Roach Straton) noted that “the most vehement protestors against [the judge] giving life imprisonment, instead of death, have been Christian ministers,” owing to the fact that a literal reading of the Bible would naturally lead one to support capital punishment: “Orthodox religion opposes progress as usual.” Instead, he argued, “we are finding that exact justice cannot be secured unless a careful study of the mentality of the prisoner is made.”<sup>73</sup> The Rev. Dr. Edward Taber assailed the death penalty sentence of a different murder case before telling his Baltimore Baptist congregation that “In imposing life imprisonment upon Leopold and Loeb I think the judge exercised the right decision.” Yet, adopting the modernist mantle himself, Taber acknowledged his chief complaint regarding criminal justice at the time: it “is very unscientific.”<sup>74</sup> Few defendants could afford to draw upon such an array of psychiatric experts, as Leopold and Loeb had, and most other criminal cases unfortunately proceeded with little reference to the troubling backgrounds or stilted development of the accused.

As crime became a broader issue of public concern in the late twenties and early thirties, clergy increasingly echoed arguments made by advocates for the progressive position. For example, in a 1932 convention held at Columbia University by the Religious Education Association, more than 100 Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish educators (including representatives from Catholic law schools and the Federal Council

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<sup>73</sup> “Leopold and Loeb Called Modernists”; John Roach Straton and Charles Francis Potter, *Fundamentalist Versus Modernist: The Debates Between John Roach Straton and Charles Francis Potter*, ed. Joel A. Carpenter, *Fundamentalism in American Religion, 1880-1950* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1988).

<sup>74</sup> “Minister Protests Cohen Gang Penalty,” *The Baltimore Sun*, September 29, 1924.



of Churches [FCC]) gathered to consider the problem of crime and delinquency. The conclusion of the conference was that “maladjustment” of individuals to their social environment was crime’s root cause. Though there was argument among participants over the best way to address this fact, one participant reported, “We agreed that the behavior of a child is determined to a great degree by the locality – the social matrix. Moral conduct is a function of the situation and in order to do something for the individual, something must be done for the situation in which he lives.”<sup>75</sup> Crime’s true reference point was not found exclusively in an individual’s moral consciousness, but also in the living conditions that made unsavory choices more likely.

Criminological and legal specialists themselves invoked religious language and concepts to articulate the progressive position and pointed to non-interest in religion as an example of the worsening social conditions that led to lawlessness. Sanford Bates, president of the American Prison Association and future director of the U.S. Bureau of Prisons, wrote an article for *The Christian Register* (later reprinted in booklet form) entitled “Crime and Christianity: What can the Church Do about It?” Bates challenged the notions that the recent crime wave was the result of lenient judges, blundering policemen, or the lack of a punitive deterrent. Instead, he cited eight real causes of crime, including the country’s failure to assimilate “various racial strains” and unregulated possession of firearms, automobiles, and narcotics. But the final cause Bates cited was that “The church, having largely relieved the individual from the pressure of fear as to the

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<sup>75</sup> “Crime Cause Found In Maladjustment,” *New York Times*, May 6, 1932.

hereafter, has not yet replaced it with a religion of performance.” The church had lost its way on the crime issue because it had not stressed enough “the comprehensive moral and social program of education and social co-operation in order that the criminal motive may gradually be replaced by one of loyalty to the government and service to the community...” The correct response to the crime law from “any Christian government” should not be to “punish people into obedience,” for “only good will, education, tolerance, and the power of a good example can lift a community out of crime into a state of peace and good conduct.” Concluding with a word directed to “the Liberal Christian church,” Bates called for engagement with the truth of scientific learning and a revival of the belief that “By their works shall ye know them.” When the Christian church remembers the divine power of knowledge and deeds, “There will be no crime.”<sup>76</sup> Bates knew his audience well. His scientism, optimistic anthropology, and trust in the salvific power of Christian works crystallized key aspects of the broader modernist Christian project that sought to adapt religion to human culture.<sup>77</sup>

“The Liberal Christian church” soon found another capable ally in the pursuit of a crime-free nation in Charles Tuttle, United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York and a prominent Episcopal layman. Well-known for his battles against political corruption and mobsters since being appointed to his post by President Coolidge in 1927, Tuttle frequently called for “an organized study of the crime problem and of the

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<sup>76</sup> Sanford Bates, “Crime and Christianity: What Can the Church Do about It?,” *The Christian Register*, January 7, 1926.

<sup>77</sup> William R. Hutchison, *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976).

duties of the Church with regard thereto.”<sup>78</sup> Tuttle hoped that such an effort could be launched by the Federal Council of Churches, and less than one year later he served as “toastmaster” at the twenty-first annual dinner of the FCC. Speaking from a stage with religious luminaries like Bishop Francis J. McConnell and Harry Emerson Fosdick, Tuttle proposed to the crowd that the church had to address the “greatest problem facing America today, that of crime.” But the answer to this problem, Tuttle argued, comes “from within, and not by outside legislation,” through the church manifesting a “spirit of peace.”<sup>79</sup> Elsewhere he argued in a radio address as an interfaith representative that individuals were not the only ones culpable for criminal acts, but society as well: “crime is a problem for education and for the church as well as it is one for government.” To truly combat crime, the church needed to do its part to address the “spiritual illiteracy” and “blatant materialism” endemic to American society.<sup>80</sup> Tuttle later echoed these themes as a Protestant representative at a large prison convention in Baltimore.<sup>81</sup> The other speakers at the convention were a mix of religious, legal, law enforcement, and criminological professionals, including U.S. Attorney General William Mitchell, Sanford Bates, law school deans from Northwestern and Duke, Sing Sing Prison warden Lewis Lawes, and Rev. Christian Reisner of Broadway Temple Methodist Episcopal Church in New York. In his address, Tuttle criticized the inability of harsh American prisons to address crime: “the permanent solution of the crime problem does not lie in force and

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<sup>78</sup> “Asks Church Aid on Crime,” *New York Times*, September 29, 1929.

<sup>79</sup> “Tuttle Bids Church Aid Study of Crime,” *New York Times*, March 5, 1930.

<sup>80</sup> “Tuttle Urges Fight On Crime By Church,” *New York Times*, December 27, 1930.

<sup>81</sup> “Prison Convention Opens Today,” *The Baltimore Sun*, October 18, 1931; “Priest Lauds Jury Convicting Capone.”

punishment” but in tackling America’s spiritual deficit. Many of the conference’s speakers also fanned out to preach at over twenty Baltimore congregations in honor of “Prison Sunday.”<sup>82</sup> Baptist, Brethren, Presbyterian, and Methodist churches all hosted these guest preachers, guaranteeing that the connection of crime and religious concern would transcend more narrow denominational loyalties.<sup>83</sup>

The ministerial role that emerged as a direct result of this approach to the crime problem was that of the clinically trained, state-sponsored prison chaplain. The prison chaplain’s role was to highlight the “social matrix”, to bring the latest tools of psychological and social-scientific investigation to bear in their ministry, and to exhibit sensitivity to religious diversity. This was a significant break with past prison ministry and chaplaincy paradigms. Historian Stephanie Muravchik tells the story of an encounter in 1939 between enterprising pastor Stephen T. Wood (who regularly visited inmates at an Illinois prison) and Arnold Dunshee, a professional prison chaplain. Wood related his ministry experiences at the prison to Dunshee, in hope that he might be hired on at the facility full-time. He told of his time praying with inmates and his messages to them about Christian faith and scripture. His ultimate goal, the enterprising Wood said, was to

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<sup>82</sup> “Prison Convention Opens Today.” “Penologists Blame Society For Crime,” *New York Times*, October 19, 1931. A similar call could be seen in Supreme Court justice Edward R. Finch’s call for more vacation Bible schools to rectify the failure of American churches to address the “whirlwind of crime.” Finch spoke alongside former FCC president S. Parkes Cadman, who likewise called for more religious influence in society while criticizing the current spiritual status quo. “Cadman Arraigns Pulpit Leadership,” *New York Times*, May 22, 1934. Other examples of the religious influence in the progressive approach could be seen in the speeches of religious leaders at state crime conferences. At such a gathering in Wisconsin, The Very Rev. Msgr. M. F. McEvoy’s spoke of the positive effect of social services and the restriction of objectionable films and literature had in crime prevention in the archdiocese of Milwaukee. M.F. McEvoy, “Proceedings of the Third Wisconsin Crime Control Conference on the Prevention of Criminal Tendencies,” 1939, 98–100, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/wu.89097124549>.

<sup>83</sup> “27 Students of Crime Will Speak In City,” *The Baltimore Sun*, October 4, 1931.

“bring men to Christ.” The pastor’s ambitions were in keeping with the work of conservative Protestants who had been ministering in American prisons for years. But Dunshee was having none of it. Dunshee’s striking response, Muravchik writes, was to “declare the man utterly unfit to be a chaplain anywhere.” Wood had failed Dunshee’s informal test because he “was thinking and behaving exactly as Protestant ministers had long done.” By contrast, Dunshee noted later in a training brochure, he was looking for prison workers who would approach their work with a decidedly different professional bent: “first-hand knowledge of problems of physical health, mental hygiene, and penology,” acquired through “supervised clinical training.”<sup>84</sup>

As Dunshee’s requirements indicated, in the years around World War II growing numbers of penal and religious authorities began to see innovations in social scientific investigation and psychological treatment as key to prison chaplains’ religious mission and the prison’s rehabilitative goals. This kind of work required significant training. Chaplains were increasingly required not only to have graduated from seminary and receive denominational endorsement, but also complete units in Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE). CPE was a certification system rooted in several historical streams: growing interest in connecting psychology with religion (as seen in the work of thinkers like William James), John Dewey’s experiential philosophy of education, and the broader emergence of clinical and “case study” educational forms in legal and medical training.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Stephanie Muravchik, *American Protestantism in the Age of Psychology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 28-9.

<sup>85</sup> Charles E. Hall, *Head and Heart: The Story of the Clinical Pastoral Education Movement* (Decatur, GA: Journal of Pastoral Care Publications, 1991), 2-3.

Though it had disparate forms of practice in its early days, CPE eventually formalized into a form of ministry that emphasized patient-centered pastoral counseling through practices of presence, listening, and moral guidance.<sup>86</sup> It was, as Anton T. Boisen (later called the “father of clinical pastoral education”) put it, attention to “living human documents.”<sup>87</sup>

Students of Boisen innovated clinical training programs, and by 1932 had developed programs in mental hospitals, general hospitals, and a prison.<sup>88</sup> In the 1940s and 50s, two prison chaplaincy organizations based on CPE philosophy and training requirements formed, the American Correctional Chaplains Association and the American Protestant Correctional Chaplains Association.<sup>89</sup> This new paradigm was increasingly preferred by prison administrations because it was adaptable to the prison environment. Chaplains could be hired and evaluated by with reference to set professional standards and guilds, and their work was intelligible to the progressive correctional ideals that administrators saw as characteristic of modern penology. Prison administrators increasingly saw nineteenth-century evangelical penal projects as failures, but there was a sense of optimism that prisons could still be redeemed and crime could be

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<sup>86</sup> Susan E. Myers-Shirk, *Helping the Good Shepherd: Pastoral Counselors in a Psychotherapeutic Culture, 1925-1975* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).

<sup>87</sup> Hall, *Head and Heart*, 7-8.

<sup>88</sup> Hall, 15.

<sup>89</sup> Hall, 66-7.

reduced. Chaplains would be their key allies in mobilizing the tools of modern science, particularly with new empirical methods for classifying and treating deviancy.<sup>90</sup>

### **One Problem, One Solution**

The law and order and progressive perspectives diverged in their analysis of America's crime problem. But two beliefs they shared would prove far more influential in the grand scheme of the history of the relationship of religion to modern American criminal justice: the belief that rising crime reflected growing secularity and that disciplinary state power was ultimately responsible for addressing this problem.

The pastors who called Leopold and Loeb “modernists” were perhaps the more assertive exponents of secularism's connection to crime. But they were in good company, as indicated by the frequent references to the travails of irreligion by other anti-crime advocates. Rabbis who spoke out on crime generally leaned in direction of the progressive diagnosis, and were less worried than conservative Protestants about the rise of modernist tendencies in American intellectual life. But like so many of their Protestant and Catholic contemporaries they were no less willing to connect crime to rising secularity. In a 1926 Yom Kippur sermon, New York Rabbi Samuel Schulman assailed the conscious and unconscious forms of atheism in modern life, blaming the surge of lawlessness on the “inner contempt of law...that denial of any compelling authority to

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<sup>90</sup> Edgardo Rotman, “The Failure of Reform: United States, 1865-1965,” in *The Oxford History of the Prison: The Practice of Punishment in Western Society*, ed. Norval Morris and David J. Rothman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 169–98, especially 173-9. See also Andrew Skotnicki, *Religion and the Development of the American Penal System* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2000).

moral ideas.” Just blocks away, on the same day, Rabbi Rudolph Grossman noted how crime was not limited to the lower classes but was spread throughout modern society: “this lawless spirit does not confine itself to the illiterate and the depraved. It manifests itself in other forms, among the enlightened, the well-situated and socially respected.” It was truly an “epidemic,” a secular social contagion that showed no concern for class, color, or creed.<sup>91</sup>

At a time when acceptance of the religious “other” by the Protestant establishment was by no means a guarantee, the crime issue allowed Protestants, Catholics, and Jews to all seek state protection of what Will Herberg would later call the “common religion” of “the American way of life.”<sup>92</sup> The emergence of “tri-faith America” has been framed as a product of a pluralist vision that emerged in the thirties through common critique of international fascism and communism.<sup>93</sup> But the anti-crime cause helped provide *domestic* fuel for the manufacture of another “Judeo-Christian” consensus, in terms of shared rhetoric as well as organizational unity. “Why can’t we all stand together, no matter what our denomination or creed?” wondered Asa Keyes, the district attorney of Los Angeles, before a packed crowd of 5,300 people at Aimee Semple McPherson’s Angelus Temple, as part of an address entitled “The Part of the Church in Law Enforcement.” Police, prosecutors, and a wide spectrum of religious folk all had a common task, he argued: “We are all engaged in making this country of ours a better one

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<sup>91</sup> “Respect for Law Urged by Rabbis,” *New York Times*, September 18, 1926.

<sup>92</sup> Will Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology*. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1955).

<sup>93</sup> Kevin M. Schultz, *Tri-Faith America: How Catholics and Jews Held Postwar America to Its Protestant Promise* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).



in which to live.”<sup>94</sup> At a Catholic gathering in New York focused on youth crime, Cardinal Joseph Hayes welcomed Protestant and Jewish partners in the fight against delinquency: “You have given me an experience of encouragement, inspiration and consolation... This cannot be called a ‘Catholic conspiracy’ today, because we have you in the boat with us.” He later praised Protestant Judge William McAdoo’s address about youth’s need for religion, saying the Presbyterian jurist’s speech contained “the Catholic spirit.”<sup>95</sup> The same ecumenical disposition was on full display at another crime conference held in Albany, NY, where Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish ministers each led sessions on religious approaches to the harmful social environments that led to crime, and took turns opening the other conference sessions with prayers.<sup>96</sup>

State-sponsored chaplains were exemplifications of this ecumenical consciousness. Not only had they moved away from a conversion-centered paradigm, they also moved ministry to inmates away from association with particular religious traditions. Part of this was a response to new demands by inmates, as religious minorities such as Jehovah’s Witnesses and Muslims increasingly pushed for recognition in the years around World War II. Based on these demands and the ecumenical sensibilities of practitioners, chaplaincy developed into a *maintenance* role, a “ministry of presence” to

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<sup>94</sup> Asa Keyes, “The Part of the Church in Law Enforcement,” *Bridal Call*, July 1924. Two years later Keyes actually investigated McPherson in the aftermath of her mysterious disappearance and reappearance, with the suspicion that she may have faked her own kidnapping. See Matthew Avery Sutton, *Aimee Semple McPherson and the Resurrection of Christian America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009) and chapter six of Hankins, *Jesus and Gin*.

<sup>95</sup> “Cardinal Rallies All Faiths in Fight on Youthful Crime,” *New York Times*, March 7, 1927.

<sup>96</sup> *Proceedings of the Governor’s Conference on Crime, the Criminal and Society, September 30 to October 3, 1935* (Albany, 1936).

help prisoners avail themselves of the “free market in religion.”<sup>97</sup> Chaplains still came from particular religious backgrounds. But they did their best to operate as neutral spiritual leaders: they were to be addressed as “Chaplain,” not “Reverend,” “Rabbi,” or “Father.”<sup>98</sup> These perspectives and policies took some time to filter down into state prisons, but by mid-century it was clear they were having an effect in forming a new generation of prison workers. At a meeting sponsored by the American Correctional Association, the associate secretary of the Methodist church’s commission on chaplains (which oversaw 500 chaplains) noted to the gathering, “A narrow-minded Methodist can be of no earthly use to a Jew or a Catholic, or vice versa.”<sup>99</sup> A Congregational chaplain working in Illinois sounded similar notes: “You can’t approach an inmate from any denomination. There are no particular Catholic burglars, Baptist arsonists or Protestant murderers. You approach the whole thing on the basis that the guy has a problem and we are here to help.”<sup>100</sup>

Liberals and conservatives within religious traditions also found common cause in framing crime as a religious issue. Though they would have disagreed on any number of other doctrinal points, they could both assent to the proposition that, in the words of the

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<sup>97</sup> Winnifred Fallers Sullivan, *A Ministry of Presence: Chaplaincy, Spiritual Care, and the Law* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014), 78, 150.

<sup>98</sup> By contrast, Britain maintained their explicitly Christian (Anglican) framing of prison spaces and leadership. For more on the differences of modern American prisons with those in Great Britain, see James A. Beckford and Sophie Gilliat, *Religion in Prison: “Equal Rites” in a Multi-Faith Society* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 177-84; Rotman, “The Failure of Reform: United States, 1865-1965,” 192.

<sup>99</sup> Lillian McLaughlin, “U. S. Prison Chaplains: ‘I’m Not Much Good For A Day Or Two After an Execution,’” *Des Moines Tribune*, October 1, 1955.

<sup>100</sup> Ande Yakstis, “Prison Inmates Often Forgotten By Everyone Except the Chaplains,” *Alton Evening Telegraph* [Alton, IL], December 19, 1964.

conservative *Moody Monthly*, “causing this wave of crime there is a wave of anti-theism.”<sup>101</sup> Or as the more liberal Tuttle put it, crime was “a symptom of widespread paganism” found in a “purely acquisitive and secular” society.<sup>102</sup> Even Clarence Darrow (not known for religious convictions) concurred with the prevailing Christian opinion during the Leopold and Loeb trial that Nietzschean secularism was to blame for his client’s moral blindness. “Is any blame attached because somebody took Nietzsche's philosophy seriously and fashioned his life upon it?” he pleaded fervently. “It is hardly fair to hang a 19-year-old boy for the philosophy that was taught him at the university.”<sup>103</sup>

The religious valence of crime was recognized by the new class of penal experts who contributed to the emerging field of criminology. This recognition was surprising given the discipline’s self-consciously secular origins. Over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, various theorists had increasingly approached the problem of crime with the tools of evolutionary biology, economics, phrenology, and psychiatry. A common thread among these approaches was a social-scientific disposition that sought answers to deviancy beyond simplistic explanations of human greed or selfishness (much less theological definitions like “sin”).<sup>104</sup> But in the twenties and thirties journals in the

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<sup>101</sup> David S. Kennedy, “A Survey of the Present Crisis,” *Moody Monthly*, October 1921.

<sup>102</sup> “Penologists Blame Society For Crime.”

<sup>103</sup> Clarence Darrow, *Attorney for the Damned: Clarence Darrow in the Courtroom*, ed. Arthur Weinberg (University of Chicago Press, 2012), 76.

<sup>104</sup> Nicole Rafter, “Origins of Criminology,” in *What Is Criminology?*, ed. Mary Bosworth and Carolyn Hoyle (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 143–54. As Peter Hutchings notes, “The change was from a notion of crime which had been derived from the ecclesiastical courts and was defined by the religious concept of a guilty mind – *mens rea* – to a statistically and biologically derived notion of a genetically inherent, atavistic quality found in the natural, born criminal. Crime was now seen as a product of nature, not mind, and this was to open the way to a differential treatment of criminals, as much as it encouraged the idea that there was a distinct “criminal class” of undeterrable, irreformable delinquents.”

field (first christened “criminology” in the 1890s) nevertheless regularly debated the relevancy of religion to crime. Some authors argued for recognition of religion’s role in reducing crime. Since currently “crime pays so well” given that criminals typically escape punishment and maintain respectability, a lasting, more transcendent deterrent is needed: “There can be but one great deterrent and that is the power of religion.”<sup>105</sup> Other pieces questioned the helpful connection of religion to crime, using statistical analysis to show how church affiliation did not prevent crime,<sup>106</sup> or critiqued the theological rationale for retributive definitions of punishment.<sup>107</sup> Either way, religion was recognized as a worthy topic of debate for understanding common responses to crime, even if some criminologists ultimately discounted its significance. Whether crime was truly “Our Crown of Thorns,” as the title of a 1932 piece in the *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* put it, the fact that many Americans believed that “Democracy is being crucified on the cross of crime” meant that the famously secular criminological profession was cognizant of religion’s import for their area of study.<sup>108</sup>

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Peter J. Hutchings, *The Criminal Spectre in Law, Literature and Aesthetics* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 184.

<sup>105</sup> Max Huhner, “Crime Does Pay,” *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* 30, no. 4 (1939): 497.

<sup>106</sup> John R. Miner, “Do the Churches Prevent Crime?,” *The American Journal of Police Science* 2, no. 6 (1931): 468–72; Nathaniel Cantor, “The Causes of Crime,” *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* 23, no. 6 (1933): 1029–34.

<sup>107</sup> Ledger Wood, “Responsibility and Punishment,” *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* 28, no. 5 (1938): 630–40.

<sup>108</sup> Courtland Nixon, “Crime Is Our Crown of Thorns,” *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* 23, no. 2 (1932): 276–79. This is an example of Hutchings’s observation that “the formation of the criminal subject is deeply involved in the formation of secular subjectivity in the nineteenth century which involves the recasting of religious doctrines of sin and guilt in the form appropriate to a contractual, secularly based state where religion has been displaced by law, but where law is strongly marked by religion.” Hutchings,

The frequent presence of clergy at anti-crime gatherings, pastors' willingness to preach on crime in their church and synagogue services, and the frequent discussion of faith in criminological journals guaranteed that the issue would be framed as a religious one. Pastors saw the blessing of the anti-crime cause with their prayers and presence as a civic obligation. As the spokesman of sixty ministers of Nashville, TN preached in a sermon entitled "Christian Citizenship," "We have represented from our pulpits the Community Chest, the Red Cross, the March of Dimes; we feel the time has come for us to speak for the protection of our wives and children and businesses against crime and lawlessness."<sup>109</sup> Christian pastors linked the gospel and governmental obedience even more closely. One African-American pastor in Atlanta encouraged the church to evangelize not only the lost souls who "never attend church" but also those who "oppose law and order,"<sup>110</sup> while the head of the FCC urged readers of the *Christian Herald* to

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*The Criminal Spectre in Law, Literature and Aesthetics*. 2. For another take on how nineteenth century developments in criminal treatment evince something far more complex than a simple secularization narrative ("a religion born of secular modernity"), see John Lardas Modern, "Ghosts of Sing Sing, or the Metaphysics of Secularism," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 75, no. 3 (September 2007): 615–50.

<sup>109</sup> Peterson and Chicago Crime Commission, *Crime Commissions in the United States*. I have made minor corrections to typos in this original text.

<sup>110</sup> L.A. Rutledge, "Pastor Preachers Vigorously Against Crime in Sermon," *Atlanta Daily World*, September 9, 1936. The *Moody Monthly* made a similar stand, concluding a generalized explanation of "Christian Principles in Politics" by telling young Christians interested in politics that they should not only to vote and share the gospel, but do so with the goal of "help[ing] defeat lawlessness and crime." John C. Page, "Young People's Society Topics: Christian Principles in Politics," *Moody Monthly*, October 1920.

push the demands of the law even as they preached the gospel: “remember Sinai, as well as Calvary!”<sup>111</sup>

Though these civic-minded conservative and liberal religious leaders may have disagreed about how crime should be diagnosed and treated, they shared assumptions and policy proposals that evinced practical overlap where it really mattered: the bolstering of the disciplinary, law enforcement power of the state. The law and order side’s contribution here is rather clear-cut (one thinks of Judge Kavanagh’s whipping proposal, the clergy calls for Leopold and Loeb’s execution, or the demand for sterilization of criminals by a pastor at a western crime conference<sup>112</sup>). But despite the progressive approach’s contrasting diagnosis, its effects were in keeping with the aims of advocates for a tougher and expanded state response. The first effect was rhetorical. Even when Charles Tuttle was denouncing the national tendency to “seek salvation in the passage of laws and deal with sins by statutes,” he was still calling criminals a “Black Army, the host of darkness, who through stratagem, perfidy or force have placed on American soil a hostile war-machine more formidable in size and efficiency than any that before the World War ever invaded a civilized country.”<sup>113</sup> The liberal *Christian Century*, though avowedly pacifist during the thirties and forties in terms of American engagement with

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<sup>111</sup> This was not a theological reference to the Torah. It was a direct attempt to rouse “militant public opinion” in the fight against organized crime: “Every preacher, priest and rabbi, and every one of their flocks should start a crusade of his or her own against lawlessness.” S. Parkes Cadman, “Our National Shame: A Searching Discussion of the Crime Problem,” *Christian Herald*, May 29, 1926.

<sup>112</sup> Rev. Jesse H. Baird warned delegates that “if crime continues to increase at its present rate... a dictatorship will be the only means whereby even a semblance of law and order may be preserved.” He then proposed the sterilization of criminals as a possible solution to the crime problem. Associated Press, “Must End Crime Wave Or Have Dictatorship,” *Spokane Daily Chronicle*, March 22, 1935.

<sup>113</sup> Charles H. Tuttle, “Responsibility of the Bar and the Public in Suppressing Crime,” *New York State Bar Association Bulletin* 7, no. 1 (1935): 10–17.

Nazism,<sup>114</sup> nonetheless argued for an expanded federal criminal code and nationwide campaign against crime: “social diseases which recognize no state lines... shall be treated as national problems. No ‘recovery’ is more important than a recovery of law-enforcement.”<sup>115</sup> Other Protestant leaders with well-known humanitarian or pacifist leanings, such as social gospel advocate Charles Sheldon, made similar appeals.<sup>116</sup> With statements like these, liberals consistently framed crime as an issue of national concern that necessitated “war.” This not only matched the rhetoric of more punitive voices, but also engendered the same public expectations that *crime* itself (and not simply poverty or lack of education) was a distinct issue to be dealt with.

The expanded national scope of the crime war, the disconnection of criminal justice from other social reform measures, and the blessing of religious civic concern all coalesced at a Federal Council of Churches anniversary celebration in December of 1933. This time, however, Tuttle, McConnell, and even Fosdick were outshone by the enormous celebrity that the FCC had secured as the keynote speaker: President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. The president congratulated the representatives of the twenty-five denominations present at the event and congratulated the FCC on twenty-five years of

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<sup>114</sup> See chapter five of Coffman, *The Christian Century and the Rise of the Protestant Mainline*.

<sup>115</sup> “Crime as a National Problem,” *Christian Century*, August 13, 1933; “Concurrent Jurisdiction Over Major Crimes,” *Christian Century*, August 23, 1933.

<sup>116</sup> Sheldon, a social gospel advocate and author of the bestselling novel *In His Steps*, pushed for gentler forms of law enforcement (what he termed “missionary policing”) that would attempt to avoid the use of force as they safeguarded neighborhoods. A year later he put the issue in more dire terms: Christians everywhere should partner with the state in order to “abolish crime and establish law and order and decency.” Charles Sheldon, “Missionary Police,” *Christian Herald*, August 1, 1925; Charles Sheldon, “How Much Crime?,” *Christian Herald*, July 10, 1926. Similarly, S. Parkes Cadman, an ecumenist, racial justice advocate, and president of the Federal Council of Churches, warned that widespread “lust for plunder and murder” would have to be “exterminated by a fearless application of equal and speedy justice.” S. Parkes Cadman, “The New Freedom,” *Christian Herald*, June 6, 1925.

faithful service. More work needed to be done, but “your churches and the other churches – Gentile and Jew – recognize and stand ready to lead in a new war of peace – the war for social justice.” This new war, in which government and churches were allied, entailed seeking out economic justice, advocating for fair wages and “social planning...wholly in accord with the social teachings of Christianity.” The war also entailed meting out justice the violent oppressors who practice “lynch law.” But, Roosevelt continued, “a thinking America goes further. It seeks a government of its own that will be sufficiently strong to protect the prisoner and at the same time to crystallize public opinion so clear that government of all kinds will be compelled to practice a more certain justice. The judicial function of government is the protection of the individual and of the community through quick and certain justice. That function in many places has fallen into a sad state of disrepair. It must be a part of our program to reestablish it.” Though he had briefly mentioned the needs of prisoners, the overriding message was clear: a prosperous and fair America was an American safe from crime.<sup>117</sup>

It was not a stretch to imagine the punitive effects of rhetoric like this, even as it came from exponents of a more balanced approach to crime; a war cannot be fought without an army, and “quick and certain” victory was unlikely if its soldiers remained ill equipped. The following month Roosevelt demanded legislative adoption of Attorney General Cummings’s Twelve Point Crime Program (which expanded federal jurisdiction on crimes like bank robbery and extortion), and lawmakers responded by adding more

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<sup>117</sup> Franklin Delano Roosevelt, “Address to Federal Council of Churches of Christ,” December 6, 1933, Master Speech File, box 16, number 669, Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library & Museum, [http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/\\_resources/images/msf/msf00689](http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/_resources/images/msf/msf00689).



provisions to the federal criminal code than all previous congresses.<sup>118</sup> Christian progressives also directly pushed for the expansion and toughening of criminal justice policy even as they pointed to the need for broader social improvement. Though he called the lawyers and the public to recognize the roots of crime in “maladjustment,” Tuttle’s “black army” reference became a key reference point in his calls for the modernization of police forces, streamlining of prosecution efforts, and centralization of states’ law enforcement efforts in departments of justice.<sup>119</sup> He directed these policy recommendations to the legal professionals of the American Bar Association, and the organization responded positively, making them part of their public platform.<sup>120</sup> Tuttle himself was also a proponent of a law to send drug dealers to prison for life after a second conviction.<sup>121</sup> Discussing the failure of trial judges to swiftly deal with perjurers in their courtrooms, Tuttle himself criticized the “feeble and fumbling system of justice that abdicates its powers through lack of confidence in itself...The present judicial truce with perjury is having consequences disastrous alike to justice, to public morality and to the nation. The crisis calls for action in accordance with the military slogan: ‘Treat ’em

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<sup>118</sup> Athan G. Theoharis, ed., *The FBI: A Comprehensive Reference Guide* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 1999), 14, 175.

<sup>119</sup> Charles H. Tuttle, “Society’s Responsibility for Crime,” *American Bar Association Journal* 20, no. 10 (1934): 631–35. This seemingly paradoxical combination of progressive diagnosis and sharpened anti-crime response mirrored that of Herbert Hoover, who also emphasized progressive, scientific analysis of social problems while at the same time modernizing and expanding the reach of law enforcement. Gottschalk, *The Prison and the Gallows*, 61-2.

<sup>120</sup> Philip Kinsley, “Leaders of Bar Map Campaign Against Crime,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 30, 1934; “Bar Adopts Plan to Combat Crime,” *The Baltimore Sun*, August 30, 1934; “Bar Rallies to Rout ‘Black Army’ of Crime,” *The Washington Post*, August 30, 1934.

<sup>121</sup> John Lodge, “Why 2,000,000 Americans Are Dope Fiends,” *Popular Science*, June 1930.

rough.”<sup>122</sup> Confident, streamlined, and expanded criminal justice was the only way to win a war with such high stakes.

Other Christians paired punitive appeals with calls for recognition of poverty and other social ills that plagued their neighborhoods. A group of forty Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish clergy in Brooklyn devised an anti-crime plan that included the expansion of child welfare and religious education programs alongside enlarged policing facilities and the restriction of parole. They sent the recommendations to every state legislator. In the words of the *New York Times* reporter covering the event, this “put the clergy on record behind a definite program of attack on crime.”<sup>123</sup> A group of black pastors and civic leaders in Baltimore called for better street lighting, more attractive church programs, and similar community initiatives while also acknowledging the need for stricter weapons laws and increased policing.<sup>124</sup> Similarly, when the National Council of Churches (formerly the FCC) passed a resolution on gambling, it repeatedly reminded churches,

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<sup>122</sup> Tuttle gave these comments on perjury a religious gloss. He argued that the root cause of rampant perjury was the loss of the sense of sacredness of the oath one takes before trial, which is “designed to direct the thought of the witness to his ultimate accountability to the State and to the Author of all Truth.” Perjury not only disrupts the justice system, but also threatens society: “Much lying in court betokens even more lying in private affairs; and both betoken the absence of moral conviction. An interpretation of life which is purely material is anti-social in its implications.” Besides strengthening penalties for perjury, Tuttle argued that the church should build respect for truth: “Religion, and the church... should have an irreconcilable quarrel with false swearing... The invocation of the Holy Name for the purpose of counterfeiting truth with a lie, is blasphemy. Charles H. Tuttle, “Perjury: A Crime or a Privilege,” *The Century Magazine*, November 1927.

<sup>123</sup> “Clerics Back Move to Halt Criminals,” *New York Times*, April 20, 1926.

<sup>124</sup> George C. Dorsch, “Negro Leaders Map Program Against Crime,” *The Baltimore Sun*, January 30, 1953. A similar dynamic, where calls for community improvement and law and order were combined, is seen in “‘Thou Shall Not Kill’ Mass Meet In Chattanooga Attracts Throng,” *Atlanta Daily World*, March 1, 1941. See also “Colored Pastor Would Stop Crime,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, August 2, 1897; “Lack of Education Causes Crime Wave, Says Negro Pastor,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, September 19, 1921; “Pastor Scores Low Wages And Bad Conditions,” *New Journal and Guide* [Norfolk, VA], March 28, 1936; and “Must Find Remedy For Crime Conditions Rev. Fortune Tells Douglas Day Crowd,” *New Journal and Guide* [Norfolk, VA], March 4, 1939.

educational institutions, and the press of their responsibility regarding the problem (“The social malady of gambling will not be remedied by criminal prosecutions alone”).

Nevertheless, it also “urge[d] officers of government – federal, state and local – to search out and prosecute the lawbreakers” and lawmakers to “adopt such new measures as may be required to provide more adequate bases for prosecution of those who engage in such corrupting practices. The churches should support public servants who courageously participate in such efforts.”<sup>125</sup> Gambling’s poisonous allure could be addressed through broader moral reform outside of the justice system, but cutting off the venomous head of this vice through arrest and prosecution was ultimately the only true solution.

White Christians sometimes mobilized crime’s danger to African Americans in their humanitarian appeals. In 1941 a FCC executive committee passed a resolution in response to high murder rates in black communities. The resolution encouraged the police and public to see these crimes as part of the tragedy of the “unfavorable conditions” that necessitated social action on housing, education, and “character development,” but only after noting that these neighborhoods still needed to see an upsurge in policing.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> “Concerning Gambling and Public Morals,” *The Deseret News*, May 25, 1951. The NCC was founded in 1950 as a replacement and organizational expansion of the FCC. James F. Findlay, *Church People in the Struggle: The National Council of Churches and the Black Freedom Movement, 1950-1970* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 5-6.

<sup>126</sup> “Crime Conditions Declared A Challenge To Christians,” *Atlanta Daily World*, December 4, 1941. Earlier anti-lynching statements by the FCC contained some language about betterment of environmental conditions, but also were driven by stronger anti-crime rhetoric: “this upsurge of barbarity challenges the forces of law and order to stop this crime of crimes. Our country is showing a determination to banish kidnapers and gangsters. Let us demand an equal fervor in seeking out lynchers.” “Churches Are Responsible For Conditions Behind Lynching?!: General Secretary Federal Council of Churches Makes Startling Allegations,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, November 4, 1933.

Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) resolutions from 1900 to 1940 reflected a similar sensibility. At this time, the SBC, which had emerged in 1845 as a result of the sectional split among American Baptists over slavery, was largely conservative. But the SBC it did count a wide range of theological and political outliers among its members, from aggressive fundamentalists like J. Frank Norris to progressives in the denomination's social gospel-styled Social Service Commission. Many in the SBC were segregationists, though there were some outspoken dissenters and critics of racial inequality.<sup>127</sup> The wide array of voices meant any cause that the SBC promoted would have to pass muster for the whole of the denomination and its diverse constituencies.

Crime was one such cause. From 1906 to 1941 the denomination passed several resolutions on matters of crime and law enforcement. The earliest resolution critiqued the "weak and imperfect" state of the law, which ultimately was to blame for the surge of lynchings. It condemned both lynchers and "with equal emphasis, and in many cases with much greater emphasis...the horrible crimes which cause the lynchings." It quoted Theodore Roosevelt, with anticipatory tones, that "some substantial improvement shall be made in the direction of securing greater expedition and greater certainty in the administration of justice, especially in the administration of criminal justice."<sup>128</sup> As the national crime war began in earnest in the 1920s, resolutions spoke in increasingly critical terms of lynching and "mob violence" while also urging commitment to the

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<sup>127</sup> David Stricklin, *A Genealogy of Dissent: Southern Baptist Protest in the Twentieth Century* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1999).

<sup>128</sup> George Hillyer et al., "Hillyer Resolutions" (Chattanooga, TN, 1906), <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/688/hillyer-resolutions>.

“orderly” and “impartial” administration of criminal justice in order to protect the “sanctity of human life.” By 1939, resolutions noted the substantial decline in lynching (or dropped the issue altogether) while simultaneously urging attention to the problem of crime more generally, the “4,600,000 criminals” causing \$15 billion of damage yearly. The SBC’s answer was renewed support of government officials leading the crime war in their “abiding determination to put forth every possible effort for the creation and maintenance of law and order.”<sup>129</sup> What had begun as an anti-lynching effort had evolved into an anti-crime effort. Streamlined, well-funded, and tougher law enforcement had tackled the problem of lynching, and now could be directed toward other criminal ills for securing the social order.

Tasked with caring for the growing number of prisoners, prison chaplains held a key role in the religiously rooted state crime control effort. Liberally minded prison ministry could be compassionate and directed toward inmate betterment, but only if it could exist as an extension of the disciplinary arm of the state itself. If someone wanted to join in this ministry work, they would have to play by the state’s rules. One mainline

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<sup>129</sup> Southern Baptist Convention, “Recommendation On Law And Order” (Richmond, VA, 1907), <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/665/recommendation-on-law-and-order>; Southern Baptist Convention, “Resolution On Law And Order” (Jacksonville, FL, 1911), <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/666/resolution-on-law-and-order>; Southern Baptist Convention, “Social Service Commission Recommendation On Law And Order” (Memphis, TN, 1929), <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/667/social-service-commission-recommendation-on-law-and-order-adopted>; Southern Baptist Convention, “Resolution On Lynching On Mob Violence” (St. Louis, MO, 1936), <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/692/resolution-on-lynching-on-mob-violence>; Southern Baptist Convention, “Resolution On Lynching And Mob Violence” (New Orleans, LA, 1937), <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/693/resolution-on-lynching-and-mob-violence>; Southern Baptist Convention, “Resolution Concerning Crime And Law Enforcement” (Oklahoma City, OK, 1939), <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/669/resolution-concerning-crime-and-law-enforcement>; Southern Baptist Convention, “Resolution Concerning Race Relations” (Birmingham, AL, 1941), <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/881/resolution-concerning-race-relations>.

Protestant ministry to prisons, hospitals, and children's homes in Louisville, KY exemplified this approach. George Stoll, chairman of the Louisville Council of Churches authored the ministry's promotional booklet, tellingly titled "The Layman Helps the Warden." On the very first page, the booklet listed the ministry's single guiding rule: "There is to be no unfavorable public criticism of the management of the institutions which we study and seek to help." The rest of the booklet continued in this vein, along with stress upon the goal of inmate rehabilitation. Besides the "religious counseling and services" the ministry realized through the hiring of a "clinically-trained chaplain," they also pushed for "a balanced diet of appetizing food," support for the inmate newspaper, and inmate education. The *Christian Century* hailed the ministry for providing "constructive channels" like these. More importantly, however, the ministry was praised for focusing on inmates and avoiding criticism of the prison itself. *Time* and the *Associated Press* noted approvingly that "The committee avoids public crusades or reform waves" and the "traditional 'view with alarm' attitude." Illustrating the complementary nature of this brand of ministry with the work of the modern prison itself, the Kentucky State Reformatory warden happily reported that "They do not make destructive criticism or try to run the prison. On the whole, these men are the civilian eyes, ears, and mouthpiece of this institution."<sup>130</sup> Becoming a part of the prison's surveillance measures did not mean that there was a lack of passion or deep concern for criminals or prison inmates by religious leaders. In particular, prison chaplains regularly

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<sup>130</sup> George Stoll, "The Layman Helps the Warden" (Paul's Workshop Incorporated, 1947), Collection 138-2, box 1, folder 19, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives.

spoke of a deep spiritual call to compassionate work.<sup>131</sup> But their very position as state employees prevented them from turning compassion for inmates into substantial critique of the criminal justice system itself. Too much critique, and one would lose their job (and with it, access to inmates altogether).

The utilization of a consensus history interpretive model to show the common contributions of a wide range of historical actors to the development of American mass incarceration is a recent historiographical development, yet one that has made important contributions to understanding the roots of modern American criminal justice.<sup>132</sup> Whether locating the foundation of mass incarceration in the immediate postwar era or in later Great Society social programs, these consensus accounts point to the limits of the “backlash” thesis, the notion that America’s high incarceration rates arose from Goldwater’s sixties, Nixon’s seventies, and Reagan’s eighties as Republicans utilized racially coded law and order appeals to construct a “new Jim Crow.”<sup>133</sup> Instead, as the provocative subtitle of Naomi Murakawa’s book puts it, “liberals built prison America” through well-intentioned efforts to address lynchings or crime problems in poor inner city neighborhoods. Liberals proposed the creation of a criminal justice system that emphasized professionalization and codification, and named safety and security as

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<sup>131</sup> Lillian McLaughlin, “U. S. Prison Chaplains: ‘I’m Not Much Good For A Day Or Two After an Execution.’”

<sup>132</sup> On the perils and prospects of consensus history as practiced by famous exponents Richard Hofstadter, Louis Hartz, and others, see Leo P. Ribuffo, “What Is Still Living in ‘consensus’ History and Pluralist Social Theory,” *American Studies International* 38, no. 1 (February 2000): 42–60; Derek H. Davis, “God and the Pursuit of America’s Self-Understanding: Toward a Synthesis of American Historiography,” *Journal of Church and State* 46, no. 3 (Summer 2004): 461–78.

<sup>133</sup> Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: New Press, 2010).

essential American rights in the postwar era. Though backlash-driven Republican appeals were significant in their own right in the creation of modern American criminal justice, liberals were always there along the way, laying “the scaffolding beneath our explanations for the rise of mass incarceration.”<sup>134</sup> This new interpretive lens helps make sense of the seeming conceptual incongruity between the sociological and punitive religious perspectives. Though they may have disagreed at times on the proper response to crime, they all agreed that it was truly a *war*, and one worth *fighting*. And if the scaffolding of mass incarceration was erected in the postwar era, the materials for construction were being provided by the diverse crime fighting coalition of the twenties, thirties, and forties.

Because this coalition received the blessing and support of a panoply of religious leaders, and because the cause was so often framed explicitly as a struggle against secularism, this first “war on crime” was a religious war. The crimes in question may not always have been as horrific or famous as Leopold and Loeb’s, but religious and law enforcement leaders would be no less willing to frame the issue in similar terms. Indeed, the connection of religion to crime-fighting at this time has been difficult for scholars to perceive, perhaps because, in the words of Attorney General Cummings in 1935, “the

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<sup>134</sup> Murakawa, *The First Civil Right*, 3, 10-11, and 40-42. See also Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime* and Forman, Jr., *Locking Up Our Own: Crime and Punishment in Black America*.



role of religion in crime prevention seems such an obvious one that it is taken for granted...”<sup>135</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Today, some rhetoric and proposals of the religious crime-fighting cause can seem overblown or even cruel. But though there was no hard statistical evidence for a nationwide crime wave after the mid-thirties, advocates for the crusade felt they had compelling rationale. Violent crime had indeed been a very real menace up to that point, with the murder rate peaking in 1933.<sup>136</sup> African American communities were particularly threatened by violence (often racially-motivated), as the strong interest of black Christians in joining the anti-crime cause suggests. In defining and attacking crime in the way that they did, policymakers and clergy felt they were simply being sensitive to the needs of the people in their charge. Even though Clarence Darrow denounced the death penalty and attempted to drum up public sympathy for Leopold and Loeb, he knew that the safety of the community demanded that his clients receive long prison stints to keep them from harming others. For better or worse, this same sensibility of the need for public safety was applied to crimes far less serious than the murder of Bobby Franks.

This consensus, while broad, nevertheless had dissenters. For instance, criminologist Thorsten Sellin argued for recognition of the racially disparate effects of

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<sup>135</sup> Homer Cummings, “Organized Religion and Crime Prevention” (Williamstown Institute of Human Relations, Williamstown, MA, 1935), <https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/ag/legacy/2011/09/16/08-29-1935.pdf>.

<sup>136</sup> Theoharis, *The FBI*, 175. Justice Research and Statistics Association, “United States Murder Rate, 1900-1998,” Historical Data, accessed July 4, 2016, <http://www.jrsa.org/projects/Historical.pdf>.

the allegedly neutral criminal justice system in the 1930s. Though “The blind goddess of justice is assume to weigh all men in her scales, regardless of their color nationality, economic status, or religion...ideals are difficult to live up to.” Pointing to disparities in sentencing from statistics he gathered in 1931, Sellin showed that black people received far harsher treatment in this system. He argued that the justice system could not help but be enveloped in racial bias, given that the judiciary was composed almost entirely of old stock whites. “Equality before the law,” he wrote, “is a social fiction.”<sup>137</sup> Sellin perceived the problem in his own day, and intuited the long-term racialization that would be further exacerbated in future decades.

There were also some religious voices missing from this interwar crime consensus. Most obviously, black Muslims emerged as a key *target* of law enforcement at this time. Adherents of groups like the Moorish Science Temple underwent FBI surveillance and harassment soon after the religious movement’s official launch in the mid-1920s. At the urging of J. Edgar Hoover, the FBI painted the group as subversive and a threat to the social order, despite the fact that investigations regularly showed no public danger.<sup>138</sup> This story repeated itself with the Nation of Islam in the 1940s and after. If Protestants, Catholics, and Jews were able to find common ground as faithful citizens

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<sup>137</sup> Thorsten Sellin, “Race Prejudice in the Administration of Justice,” *American Journal of Sociology* 41, no. 2 (September 1935): 212–17.

<sup>138</sup> As Sylvester Johnson has written, “The Islamic, Asiatic nature of the diaspora that Moorish Americans signified was inevitably in conflict with the imperatives of racial Whiteness. Under these conditions, Moorish Americans were asserting an ethnic heritage that conflicted sharply with the symbolic and material realities of the United States as a racial state.” Sylvester A. Johnson, “The FBI and the Moorish Science Temple of America, 1926–1960,” in *FBI and Religion: Faith and National Security before and after 9/11*, ed. Sylvester A. Johnson and Steven Weitzman (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017), 55–66.

concerned about crime, Americans who claimed alternative allegiances and religious profiles could not only be marginalized, but targeted.

Also regularly missing were radical Holiness Christians, prison ministers and activists who had engaged matters of crime and punishment a generation earlier. Because they urged Christian conversion *and* pushed for social transformation, early Holiness evangelicals transcended the fundamentalist/modernist divides of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They did not fit well on either side; fundamentalists lacked a comparable social consciousness (increasingly a result of their premillennial outlook), while liberals neglected soul-saving. This was part of a larger “great reversal” that characterized conservative Protestantism. Under the influence of fundamentalism, many conservative Protestants had largely abandoned the social reform efforts that had characterized much of their work in the nineteenth century, including prison work and reform. By the 1920s, these Protestants abdicated the cause of social concern in favor of evangelism or more direct crusades for moral reform, like Prohibition.<sup>139</sup>

The crime war of the 1920s-40s helped to further sever conservative Protestantism from its social conscience. Holiness-inspired prison evangelists went unheralded in the crime debates of the 1920s-40s, as punitive fundamentalists and environmentally-focused progressives framed the public conversation. As sympathizers with criminals who nonetheless argued for their spiritual transformation, the work of the Salvation Army did not easily fit within this conversation that raged in newspapers and at

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<sup>139</sup> Though popularized by Donald Moberg’s book of the same name, the term “great reversal” originally was coined by historian Timothy Smith. David O. Moberg, *The Great Reversal: Evangelism versus Social Concern* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1972).

crime conferences. Another problem was that, after World War I, Salvationists were understood by the public less as a proselytizing religious movement, and more as a secular philanthropic organization.<sup>140</sup> At one 1935 New York crime conference, the commissioner of the state parole board reminded those present that the Salvation Army actually had shown the most practical interest in helping criminals compared to other groups, despite being left off the conference's religious program.<sup>141</sup> The unique combination of a deep sense of sympathy for lawbreakers, a willingness to question the justice of American systems of punishment, and a missionary (as opposed to a therapeutic) zeal had characterized the work of Holiness women like Maud Booth, Elizabeth Wheaton, and Clarissa Olds Keeler a few decades before. But it was now a minority report.

In both its broad consensus, the crime crusade was analogous to the religious influence in the twentieth-century campaign against communism in both its rhetoric and policy strategies, as politicians and law enforcement also sought alliances with clergy and religious groups. But it would follow the pattern of the religious dimensions of the pre-WWII Red Scare and later Cold War in another sense: though anti-crime and anti-communism enjoyed broad religious support early on, one particular group of Christians made both causes their own as they ascended in numerical and cultural influence in the

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<sup>140</sup> For more on this transformation within the Salvation Army, see chapter five of Diane H. Winston, *Red-Hot and Righteous: The Urban Religion of the Salvation Army* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

<sup>141</sup> "There seems to be the difficulty of having it nicely aired in a conference and then of not doing the practical work," the commissioner noted. By contrast, the Salvation Army "are the only religious institution that I know that takes any interest in [criminals]." *Proceedings of the Governor's Conference on Crime, the Criminal and Society, September 30 to October 3, 1935*, 1101-4.

postwar era.<sup>142</sup> These Christians were the “new” evangelicals. Like communism, the crime issue would become a wedge issue that distinguished conservative Protestants of various stripes from the more liberal mainline, who increasingly championed civil rights and Great Society social uplift *without* referencing the crime issue as they had in earlier years. This divergence reflected a broader “restructuring of American religion” from the postwar era onward. As the scope of governmental power remained permanently enlarged in the generations after its explosive increase during the New Deal and WWII, religious denominations found their cultural cache diminished. They were forced to restructure by aligning with the variety of new special interest groups vying to influence the direction of state power, and largely broke along liberal and conservative political lines to that effect.<sup>143</sup> The crime war of the twenties, thirties, and forties foreshadowed this emerging divide even as it showcased one of the final examples of religious unanimity around the expansion of the state’s reach. By contrast, in the following decades African American and liberal Protestants, Catholics, and Jews made arguments for state influence in securing civil rights and economic welfare, while evangelicals championed the law enforcement function of the state to address what they saw as the social disorder of student demonstrations, inner city riots, and drug use.

As evangelicals began to exert more influence in American public life in the postwar era and after, they helped further the idea of crime as a sacred national issue by

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<sup>142</sup> As Daniel K. Williams has noted, anti-communism was the issue that set stage for later evangelical alliances with the U.S. government, like the Moral Majority. Daniel K. Williams, *God’s Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right*, reprint edition (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 18.

<sup>143</sup> Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

*continuing* to define it in religious terms. They did so by sermonizing about crime's ongoing threat to the order of American society and Christian civilization, by engineering new evangelistic efforts to as a form of crime prevention, and eventually by backing political leaders who championed the law and order cause (or critiquing those who did not). These efforts had far-reaching effects in the development of American criminal justice into a system of mass incarceration, one made all the more impossible to deconstruct because of law and order's hallowed cultural cache. But evangelicals from the sixties on were only working with the tools that they had been given, the legacy of the sacred crime crusade of an earlier generation.

## Chapter 2: “Jesus Christ is the only control”

Just before the tall, handsome but largely unknown evangelist Billy Graham stepped onto the stage inside a Los Angeles revival tent in 1949, he received a warning. One of the most cunning criminals of the day was in the audience, the anxious revival committee informed Graham. “We don’t know why he’s here. He may be here to be against you, or he may be here out of curiosity. We don’t know why he’s here.” The committee’s worries initially proved to be justified. As Graham preached, an overeager usher approached the feared criminal – named Jim Vaus – and asked him if he wanted to respond to the invitation. “If you speak to me again,” the surprise guest responded, “I’ll take my fist and knock you down.”<sup>1</sup>

But a few minutes later, something changed. As Graham continued his sermon on the need for repentance, tears began to well up in Vaus’ eyes. He said to himself, “I’m through, I realize that my only hope of salvation rests in Jesus Christ.” As a visible sign of his decision for Christ, Vaus tore up a plane ticket that had been stuffed in his pocket, a ticket that would have taken him to an eastern city where he could ply his illicit wiretapping trade for another criminal syndicate. “There is destroyed the last link between myself and the underworld and crime,” he declared. “For years I’ve drifted away from Christ to serve politics, politicians, criminals and crime...I heard and I am now

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<sup>1</sup> David Frost, *Billy Graham: Candid Conversations with a Public Man* (David C. Cook, 2014), 22-3. Graham related a similar version of this story in a sermon at his 1957 Madison Square Garden crusade. Billy Graham, “Spiritual Blindness,” August 30, 1957, Collection 285, box 11, folder 9, Billy Graham Center Archives.

convinced that my salvation rests with the Lord.” As if further to prove his newfound faith, Vaus later went voluntarily before the Los Angeles County Grand Jury and told them he would be willing to serve a prison sentence for perjury.<sup>2</sup>

Graham’s remarkable accomplishment in winning Vaus to Christian faith was such a powerful story because it seemed to be such a bombshell. But the contrast played up by the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA), news reports of Vaus’s conversion, and by Vaus himself (all symbolized by the puzzlement of the Los Angeles revival committee – “We don’t know why he’s here”) should have been the real surprise, given the content of Graham’s preaching at the time. On his very first night preaching in the Los Angeles revival, Graham described *why* the city needed spiritual renewal in terms that indicated that a man like Vaus was the *expected* kind of convert: “We see a crime wave in this country that is unchecked, he thundered. “Crime in Los Angeles is out of hand... We need revival! 800% increase in crime in the last ten years!”<sup>3</sup>

This chapter is an attempt to spell out the historical significance of this moment, where an enterprising preacher on the cusp of fame identified crime as an important public concern, and a criminal responded with a life-changing decision for Christ. As in the Los Angeles revival, Graham’s ministry in the following decades and the various forms of evangelicalism he represented were marked by concern about crime and

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<sup>2</sup> “Evangelist Converts Vaus, Sound Engineer in Vice Probe,” *Los Angeles Examiner*, November 8, 1949, Collection 360, scrapbook 5, Billy Graham Center Archives; Cutler B. Whitwell, “The Great Awakening in Los Angeles,” *The Sunday School Times*, December 7, 1949. Vaus eventually connected Graham with his boss, the famous Los Angeles mobster Mickey Cohen, and the evangelist and gangster met for conversation and Coca-Cola soon after. Frost, *Billy Graham*, 24.

<sup>3</sup> Billy Graham, *Why a Revival?* (Los Angeles, CA, 1949), Tape 5702, Billy Graham Center Archives.



lawlessness. This chapter argues that crime was a key issue for American evangelicals seeking cultural influence in the early postwar era (from roughly 1945 to 1965), and they moved to address it by emphasizing personal conversion, not punishment. As leaders like Graham, the new convert Jim Vaus, and the Pentecostal preacher David Wilkerson stepped into the public eye and into new forms of ministry, their focus on the conversion of criminals avoided a punitive approach. But the way they spoke about crime planted the seeds for later evangelical enmeshment with law and order politics from the mid-1960s on.

Graham's 1949 Los Angeles revival has been understood as his stepping-out party, the beginning of his tenure as "America's pastor."<sup>4</sup> More broadly this was, in the eyes of observers then and now, one sign that a "new evangelicalism" had arrived on the American scene. This movement consisted of white conservative Protestants who were willing to shirk fundamentalist isolationism and engage American culture, politics, and media anew. Institutions and scholarly figures often associated with this movement included the National Association of Evangelicals, Fuller Theological Seminary, and theologian Carl F. H. Henry.<sup>5</sup> This chapter focuses on the more popular side of the movement, the sermons, films, and easy-reading paperbacks indicative of

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<sup>4</sup>Grant Wacker, *America's Pastor: Billy Graham and the Shaping of a Nation* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014), 12.

<sup>5</sup> For example, see George M. Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987); Molly Worthen, *Apostles of Reason: The Crisis of Authority in American Evangelicalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 24-35.

evangelicalism's status as a "folk" religion.<sup>6</sup> This focus is necessary, given how important crime and delinquency were in debates about American mass culture more broadly at this time.<sup>7</sup>

The inclusion of the plainspoken preacher Graham in the new evangelical category, even as he interfaced with its more highbrow forms, is uncontroversial. More explanation is needed regarding the assumption that a Pentecostal like David Wilkerson could be considered a part of this movement as well. As Molly Worthen has shown, participating in this mid-century movement's theological conversations "required fluency in the Reformed tongue" and debates raged in the early days of the National Association of Evangelicals as to whether or not Pentecostals should be included in the emerging coalition.<sup>8</sup> Many Pentecostals eventually came to identify with the new evangelical cause through mutual concerns about America's destiny and fears about Catholicism, modernism, and communism.<sup>9</sup> But just as important was the shared concern of the need for personal Christian conversion within the context of cultural engagement. Long considered one of the hallmark qualities of evangelicalism, conversionism as a descriptive category is complicated by shifting contexts and differing evangelical views

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<sup>6</sup> On evangelicalism as an American folk tradition, see Randall Balmer, *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory: A Journey into the Evangelical Subculture in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 229-240.

<sup>7</sup> James Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage: America's Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent in the 1950s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 4-5.

<sup>8</sup> Worthen, *Apostles of Reason*, 36-7, 84.

<sup>9</sup> The Assemblies of God, for example, affiliated with the National Association of Evangelicals in 1943 with these concerns in mind. Edith Blumhofer, *Restoring the Faith: The Assemblies of God, Pentecostalism, and American Culture* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 180-190.

on its mechanics and ends.<sup>10</sup> In the early postwar era, however, broader worries about crime and delinquency provided a common frame for evangelicals to narrate the need for conversion. This inflection of conversionism served as a conceptual bridge between various conservative Protestant groups and to mainstream American culture more broadly, laying the foundation for evangelical influence in the “born again” seventies and after.<sup>11</sup>

The interest of evangelicals like Graham in lawlessness signaled important developments. Evangelicals defined crime and lawlessness in terms of their direct connection to, or equality with, *sin*. This was in keeping with the earlier history of American evangelical work with criminals in prisons. But now their primary focus was on youth crime. The implication of these developments was that juvenile delinquency was primarily an issue of salvation, not social conditions. Though this understanding of the delinquency problem was not as holistic as it could have been, it also meant that the ideal result of criminal encounter with the gospel was salvation, not punishment. This provides nuance to the common connection of conservative evangelicalism with “law and order”-styled politics, the push for punitive responses to crime that had characterized the 1920s-40s and became increasingly common in the mid-1960s and after.<sup>12</sup> Though many

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<sup>10</sup> On conversionism as a “special mark” of evangelicalism that, as one nineteenth-century London Baptist minister argued, “was far above, and of greater importance than, any denominational differences of whatever kind,” see David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History From the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 16-29.

<sup>11</sup> On the transition of “born again” movement from subculture to mainstream in the “seventies evangelical moment,” see chapter one of Miller, *The Age of Evangelicalism*.

<sup>12</sup> For a helpful discussion of the emergence of “law and order” as a link between evangelicals and conservative politicians in the 1960s, see chapter four of Williams, *God’s Own Party*.

new evangelicals (including Graham) would embrace the law and order mantle later on, their early ministries indicated a different frame of reference for how crime should be understood and criminals should be treated.

This form of evangelical crime concern in the 1950s and early 60s had two general manifestations. The first, as seen in Graham's reference in his 1949 crusade, was rhetorical. Crime provided a useful tool for sharpening broader evangelical messages about sin and salvation. The second was institutional. The converted Jim Vaus was among a coterie of evangelicals at this time who built ministries around the goal of reaching criminals and delinquents. These ministries built on iterations of evangelical work among criminals from generations past, but also charted new territory in terms of public engagement.

This chapter examines postwar evangelical crime concern in four parts. First, it discusses Graham's outreach on issues of crime and delinquency in his early public ministry. Graham was not the only minister who made crime concern a topic of his evangelistic outreach. However, he was the most popular voice and he exemplified an important point regarding crime concern: for evangelicals in the early postwar era, the ideal outcome for criminals was their *conversion*, not conviction. Evangelicals like Graham spoke about lawlessness in dire terms, but they believed the best way forward was for criminals to be embraced by the nail-scarred hands of Jesus, not the long arm of the law. The second section introduces a more localized form of evangelical ministry that exemplified and intensified concern with criminals: evangelical ministry to gangs in America's urban slums. This work was significant in its own right, but it became a

markedly public form of evangelical outreach as its practitioners used their platforms to speak to the nation through popular media. The third section focuses on this public outreach, seen most prominently in David Wilkerson's bestselling account of gang ministry in New York City, *The Cross and the Switchblade*. The final section summarizes the legacy of evangelical crime concern in the early postwar era, the distinctive markers of movement that set the stage for altered evangelical concern with crime and criminals.

### **Youth for Christ, Billy Graham, and the Conversion of Criminals**

Graham was the most prominent face of evangelical crime concern in the early postwar era. Youth for Christ, the site of his first national ministry work, made juvenile delinquency a signature issue in the mid-to-late 1940s. Graham continued the crime crusade as he launched his own ministry soon after, speaking to matters of juvenile delinquency and lawlessness more generally as he preached the gospel worldwide. He touched a nerve. Americans shared this general concern with crime, and media sustained coverage of Graham in large part because they saw the evangelist's relevance to this public issue. Crucially, in this first decade of his ministry he defined crime in overtly spiritual terms, stressing the Christian conversion of criminals. Crime was a challenging social problem, but changing the hearts of lawbreakers could solve it.

Graham began his national ministry as an evangelist with Youth For Christ (YFC). This ministry coalesced in the early forties as a form of evangelistic outreach to American's teens, achieving broad popularity in the mid-forties as a result of its radio

outreach and giant rallies that attracted thousands.<sup>13</sup> One estimate put weekly attendance at YFC rallies at one million people by the end of the decade. YFC was a sign that American evangelicals were “coming in from the cold,” abandoning fundamentalist seclusion and achieving mainstream cultural success through clever forms of media outreach and by capitalizing on the patriotic civic religious ferment left over from World War II.<sup>14</sup> The organization promised to form a legion of youth devoted to both the gospel and to a godly, democratic America’s unique place in the modern world, over and against godless communism.<sup>15</sup>

Another issue also prompted YFC’s rise: juvenile delinquency. Americans had been concerned about crime for years, but teenage crime was widely reported to have risen dramatically in the immediate aftermath of the war and captured the country’s attention.<sup>16</sup> YFC’s rallies, Joel Carpenter has noted, “enjoyed their greatest expansion during 1943–1946, the years when juvenile delinquency emerged as a national

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<sup>13</sup> Bruce L. Shelley, “The Rise of Evangelical Youth Movements,” *Fides et Historia* 18, no. 1 (January 1986): 48-9.

<sup>14</sup> Joel A. Carpenter, “Youth for Christ and the New Evangelicals,” in *Reckoning with the Past: Historical Essays on American Evangelicalism from the Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals*, ed. D.G. Hart (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995), 354-8. “Coming in from the cold” is Carpenter’s reference to Richard John Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square: Religion and Democracy in America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), 356.

<sup>15</sup> Eileen Luhr argues that, in addition to the militantly anti-communist rhetoric present in YFC’s publications and sermons, the organization also helped build worldwide mission networks that pushed for a “global imaginary” of international cooperation and integration in pursuit of democracy. In YFC, she argues, “young evangelicals recast themselves as carriers of modernization, not just civilization.” Eileen Luhr, “Cold War Teeninitiative: American Evangelical Youth and the Developing World in the Early Cold War,” *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 8, no. 2 (Spring 2015): 298.

<sup>16</sup> To what extent youth crime rates actually rose during the postwar era was a matter of debate and definition. For example, rates of “status crimes” (acts defined as criminal because of age, like underage drinking) rose in many cities in the postwar years, but this may have reflected more willingness on the part of law enforcement to press charges for such violations. Rising or not, the severity of youth crime was regularly exaggerated. Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage*, 66-71.

problem.”<sup>17</sup> In early ministry planning sessions and marketing materials, YFC leaders regularly discussed the import of the organization’s work regarding delinquency. In 1944 Chicagoland director Torrey Johnson and advisory council member Bob Cook characterized regional YFC meetings as geared toward the “salvation of the thousands who are tagged with the dreadful word, ‘delinquency.’”<sup>18</sup> In his opening address to the second annual YFC convention, Johnson (now the ministry’s president) and field representative Cliff Barrows told stories of how YFC had succeeded in combating delinquency in their crusades, including one young armed robber who “at seven o’clock was a potential criminal, at nine o’clock was kneeling at the foot of the cross and receiving Jesus Christ as his personal savior.”<sup>19</sup> Later YFC promotional materials were emblazoned with horrific headlines and stories of teenage crimes, and proposed the ministry’s High School Bible Club program as “an answer” to the “hellish nightmare of delinquency.” Bible club attendees “aren’t going around trying to kill anybody!” They are too busy winning their pals and buddies to Jesus Christ.”<sup>20</sup> YFC leaders like Billy Graham made the case to business and educational leaders that their evangelism to teenagers was an essential part of the shared national struggle against delinquency.<sup>21</sup> A college president reportedly told one YFC employee, “There is a terrific crime wave and

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<sup>17</sup>Joel A. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 168.

<sup>18</sup> Torrey Johnson and Robert Cook, *Reaching Youth for Christ* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1944), 34.

<sup>19</sup> See “Minutes of the Second Annual Convention of Youth For Christ International, Inc.,” July 22, 1946, pp. 6-7, 44-45, Collection 48, box 13, folder 37, Billy Graham Center Archives.

<sup>20</sup> Youth For Christ International, “What’s The Answer?,” n.d., Collection 20, box 72, folder 22, Billy Graham Center Archives; Bob Cook, “Youth for Christ International, Inc.,” n.d., Collection 20, box 72, folder 22, Billy Graham Center Archives.

<sup>21</sup>Carpenter, “Youth for Christ and the New Evangelicals,” 363–64.

fact of delinquency. But you fellows in Youth For Christ are helping us in our churches by sticking to the one essential of getting them saved by proclaiming a positive message, and letting us indoctrinate them after you turn them over to us.”<sup>22</sup> Governmental and law enforcement authorities agreed. State governors praised YFC’s meetings as “tremendous forces” in the fight against youth crime, while the chief of police in Charlotte, North Carolina (who also agreed to serve as director of the city’s rally) said that “Youth for Christ is doing more than anything else I know to stop juvenile delinquency.”<sup>23</sup>

Though they had the endorsement of police and governmental leaders, YFC wanted to fight delinquency not through law enforcement action but by leading teens to Christ, either by preventing them from engaging in troublemaking in the first place or by rescuing active ne’er-do-wells from the clutches of sin. Johnson and Cook described this approach in an early promotional book. Though a “prominent social worker” had told them that “There is nothing that we can do about a delinquent until after the case is brought into court,” Johnson and Cook contended that “There are a multitude of things that can be done... Thank God, ‘the gospel of Christ... is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth.’”<sup>24</sup> This paralleled conversionist proposals to the problem of delinquency from other youth-centered Christian organizations emerging at the time. For

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<sup>22</sup>“Minutes of the Second Annual Convention of Youth For Christ International, Inc.”

<sup>23</sup>Carpenter, “Youth for Christ and the New Evangelicals,” 365–66. See also “Revolt in the American High School,” n.d., Collection 20, box 72, folder 24, Billy Graham Center Archives. and Joseph N. Bell, “God’s Teenage Commandos,” *Coronet*, November 1957, Collection 20, box 72, folder 24, Billy Graham Center Archives.

<sup>24</sup> Johnson and Cook, *Reaching Youth for Christ*, 20.



example, Jim Rayburn, the founder of Young Life, regularly spoke about delinquency in similar terms: “The Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is the only solution.”<sup>25</sup>

This solution was, as Graham put it in his 1947 book *Calling Youth to Christ*, a “spiritual call to arms...American cannot organize her way out, nor buy her way out. She must *pray* her way out.”<sup>26</sup> In the same volume, Graham told a modified story of the biblical figure Barabbas to prove the depths of God’s grace. In the biblical account, Barabbas was the murderous criminal who was released without penalty by Pontius Pilate in the place of Jesus, who would go on to be crucified. Graham embellished the story by describing a fictionalized version of the conversation Barabbas might have had with the jailer upon being released. He wrote:

“Barabbas, have you heard the Good News?” It was the warden's voice, jubilant and strong. “What Good News?” retorted the condemned man in a bitter tone. “All I know is that this is the day of my execution, and that you have come to lead me out to be crucified for my crimes.” And he shrank farther back against the cold, wet wall. “Ah! but you don't know,” replied the warden in the same triumphant tone. “Listen, Barabbas: Somebody died for you!”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> “Teen-Agers on the Rampage,” *Christian Life*, February 1954. See also “Evangelist Speaks in School; Board Plans Investigation to Determine Constitutionality,” *St. Louis Star-Times*, December 4, 1943; “Bible Called Only Delinquency Cure,” *The Minneapolis Star*, May 7, 1946. On the influence of 1940s youth-centric evangelistic efforts concerned with delinquency like Bill Bright and Campus Crusade for Christ, as well as Bright’s own insistence that his ministry reduced crime, see John G. Turner, *Bill Bright and Campus Crusade for Christ: The Renewal of Evangelicalism in Postwar America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 23, 169.

<sup>26</sup> Graham here was not specifically addressing crime (instead gesturing toward the general philosophy undergirding the approach of YFC and his preaching), but the topic was clearly on his mind. Just a few pages earlier in the same chapter he referenced statistics showing rising crime (“800% increase in crime during the last forty years,” he wrote, a point he would later echo in his 1949 Los Angeles crusade) and quoted a warning of J. Edgar Hoover regarding increased youth lawlessness. Billy Graham, *Calling Youth to Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1947), 20, 29. See also Jon Pahl, *Youth Ministry in Modern America: 1930 to the Present* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000), 59.

<sup>27</sup> According to Graham, this story originally came from Canadian pastor and evangelist Oswald J. Smith. Billy Graham, *Calling Youth to Christ*, 113-114.

Graham used this story to drive home his gospel presentation, but it also served as a theological gloss that relativized the punishment of lawbreakers (just as the story relativized the injustice that most readers of the original passion narrative might have sensed in the exchange of the sinless Jesus for Barabbas). Sermons like this led one observer writing in 1945 to note that the evangelism of YFC did “more to discourage juvenile delinquency than all the curfews, threats and even punishments could accomplish.”<sup>28</sup>

One 1949 article from the YFC magazine described an idealized result of this spiritual strategy. A fifteen-year-old “skid row hoodlum” prone to knife fights attended a YFC rally, went forward at the invitation, and was counseled in a private prayer room by a Christian businessman. “When I left the room . . .,” he recounted, “I knew Christ in a way that has completely changed [my life].” The teen left his life of crime and eventually became a president of a YFC chapter and Sunday school teacher.<sup>29</sup> Streamlined stories like this, of escape from crime (and the punishment that could accompany it) were compelling fare to evangelicals who shared YFC’s outlook. To some critics they could be frustrating. One journalist from the liberal *Christian Century* covered a huge YFC rally in Chicago, and voiced his displeasure at the spectacle before him. The revivalists, he argued, oversimplified Christianity with “milky abstractions.” YFC speakers never clearly defined the salvation they spoke of, and never made reference to Christianity’s ethical demands. This threatened to veer into antinomian cheap grace. “Repentance is not

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<sup>28</sup> Luhr, “Cold War Teeninitiative,” 300.

<sup>29</sup> Lloyd G. Hamill, “God Works in San Francisco,” *Youth For Christ*, September 1949. Cited in Pahl, *Youth Ministry in Modern America*, 63.

mentioned,” he argued. “Religion is purely a matter of perpendicular relationships, so restitution for wrongs done is not referred to.”<sup>30</sup> Though this critic may have been overstating the lack of a call to repentance from sin (a call Graham and other evangelical preachers frequently made elsewhere) or their concern with ethics, in noting the absence of a call to temporal “restitution” he was correctly zeroing in on an important implication of this movement’s spiritualized focus.

The *Century*’s reporter had not been impressed by YFC, but that was of little consequence when the most powerful newspaperman in the country was: William Randolph Hearst, owner of numerous media outlets nationwide. Part of the reason YFC became so popular was because of its appeal to the media magnate, who ordered his newspapers to cover the organization continually. He justified this decision with reference to concern about juvenile crime. “If we make the movement popular in one or two churches,” he told his editors, “it will probably be adopted by all the churches in some form or other and it will be one of the most valuable influences in overcoming juvenile delinquency.”<sup>31</sup> Delinquency was a problem that YFC could help solve, and Hearst was willing to evangelize for the evangelists to accomplish this task (and selling a few papers along the way would not hurt).

YFC gave Graham an opportunity to exploit the national stage, but it was not until the evangelist held his own series of revivals in Los Angeles in 1949 that he began to emerge as a bona fide celebrity. Whether or not he literally gave the famous direct order

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<sup>30</sup> Harold Fey, “What about ‘Youth for Christ’?,” *Christian Century*, June 20, 1945.

<sup>31</sup> William Randolph Hearst, June 10, 1945, Collection 285, box 29, folder 2, Billy Graham Center Archives.

to his staff to “puff Graham” is a matter of debate, but Hearst almost certainly guided his papers to push Graham into the national spotlight.<sup>32</sup> Again, concern about crime was key. Hearst characterized the 1949 Los Angeles revival as “Restoring and strengthening the spiritual communion with God which is the essence of civilized freedom and law.” This was a crusade against the paganism and materialism that informs “Crime, vice and graft, all the ways in which men and women torment themselves and each other to injure the welfare of their community.”<sup>33</sup>

The revival setting as a site of evangelical crime concern was significant. Graham was not heading up a crime commission or making specific political pronouncements on issues of delinquency. Instead, it came through his gospel presentation, the evangelistic message he propounded with great consistency in preaching and print. This message was simple: all people were sinners, separated from God by virtue of their selfishness and immorality. Most people had a sense of this sin, often through feelings of emptiness or purposelessness. Nothing could save people from their sin except Jesus, who desired a personal relationship with everyone. This personal relationship commenced through an individual making a decision for Christ, laying down their sin and asking Jesus into their heart.

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<sup>32</sup> As Elesha Coffman has put it in her assessment of the evidence of this claim, “Exactly how, and to whom, Hearst expressed his desire to see favorable Graham coverage has not been verified.” But as Grant Wacker notes, “Hearst likely said *something*,” as his papers led the way in coverage of the revival. Elesha Coffman, “‘You Cannot Fool the Electronic Eye’: Billy Graham and Media,” in *Billy Graham: American Pilgrim*, ed. Andrew Finstuen, Anne Blue Wills, and Grant Wacker (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 197, 212n1; Wacker, *America’s Pastor*, 74-5.

<sup>33</sup> Hearst editorial wire service, “New Tide of Faith,” November 4, 1949, Collection 360, scrapbook 5, Billy Graham Center Archives.

Graham did not invent this evangelistic form so much as he perfected its presentation. He was particularly skilled at connecting this gospel to the anxieties of middle America, putting broader social trends in personal terms that everyday listeners could understand and relate to. For example, Graham connected the global threat of communism to the more narrow worries of crusade attendees around their personal sins, linking the disorder of the world to the chaos of individuals' moral lives.<sup>34</sup> Graham estimated later that he mentioned communism in his preaching more than any other topic (other than the gospel message itself).<sup>35</sup> But crime and lawlessness were also regular homiletical themes. Juvenile delinquency was "so serious," Graham warned reporters, "that it almost equals Communism in the problems we face today."<sup>36</sup> And like communism, crime helped to explain and frame other forms of sin. "Lawlessness has become the spirit of our age," he wrote in a *Washington Post* feature promoting his 1957 Madison Square Garden crusade, before listing multiple ways people were rebelling through sexual immorality and divorce, as well as crime and delinquency.<sup>37</sup> Lawlessness here was an existential gloss, a way to characterize the widespread lack of respect for divine and human authority.

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<sup>34</sup> Andrew S. Finstuen, *Original Sin and Everyday Protestants: The Theology of Reinhold Niebuhr, Billy Graham, and Paul Tillich in an Age of Anxiety* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 130.

<sup>35</sup> Wacker, *America's Pastor*, 231.

<sup>36</sup> Associated Press, "Evangelist Back Home Warns of Delinquency," *Battle Creek Enquirer* [Battle Creek, MI], November 30, 1955. Elsewhere he frequently named delinquency as a "major social problem." Associated Press, "Billy Graham Cites Crime as Top Problem," *Pensacola News Journal* [Pensacola, FL], August 5, 1955; Associated Press, "Billy Graham Hits At Delinquency During Crusade," *Kingsport Times* [Kingsport, TN], September 3, 1954.

<sup>37</sup> Billy Graham, "What's Wrong with American Morals," *The Washington Post*, May 12, 1957.

Graham expanded on this sentiment in his sermons at this New York crusade. On the first night, Graham characterized crime and delinquency as part of America's spiritual ailment that could only be solved through faith in Christ.<sup>38</sup> On the second night, in a sermon entitled "What's Wrong with New York," he developed this idea with a message based on Matthew 9:12, "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." The symptoms of sickness he referred to were apparent in the "murders, rapes, and robberies" that cities like New York face constantly. "Nearly a million crimes were committed here last year." But then he pivoted to generalizing this lawless condition for his audience in terms of the evangelical gospel presentation: "What's wrong with the human race that allows crime, social injustices, racial prejudice? It seems we can't control it. We are sick with a moral disease the Bible calls sin."<sup>39</sup> The answer to this universal human problem was the healing balm of salvation, the work of the Great Physician who could restore souls and, through that, end the social scourge of crime.

The rest of Graham's sermons during his sixteen-week Madison Square Garden residency were filled with references to crime. Though he had mentioned the issue before in his preaching career (like in the Los Angeles revival), he now devoted sustained attention to it. Graham preached more than 90 sermons at the Garden, and brought crime up in some way in nearly 30 of them. Often it was only a passing allusion, like mentioning crime as part of the broader national crisis of sin facing America that

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<sup>38</sup> "Text of Billy Graham's Sermon Opening His Crusade in Madison Square Garden," *New York Times*, May 16, 1957.

<sup>39</sup> Harold Hutchings, "Sins Curb Our Fight On Crime, Says Graham," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 17, 1957.

necessitated the nation's spiritual revival. Other times it was a major theme, such as when Graham preached a sermon entitled "Samson – God's Delinquent." He began this message with a catalog of the problems of juvenile delinquency: "Newspapers are filled with stories of teen-age violence and crime...41 percent of all arrests for serious crime in New York were under 21 last year." He then turned to the example of the Old Testament figure Samson to diagnose this situation. Samson had significant social advantages – strength, good looks, caring parents – but he still found his way into trouble. Likewise, Graham argued, today's youth are not primarily led to commit crimes because of environmental factors, like poverty or trashy TV. Instead, the "cause of all causes" is sin, the all-encompassing category that signified a conscious turn to the ways of the flesh. Sin bound Samson to a life of blindness and boredom. Similarly, Graham lamented, "When I see the wayward lawless youth walking the streets of this city, I can picture them a few years hence: ill-clad, sin-marked, Bowery bums, living out of the garbage cans and embalming their weary bodies with alcohol." The concluding moment of decision was less an altar call and more of an exhortation to the gathered crowd to exercise their God-given wills to stay out of crime.<sup>40</sup>

Graham delivered this sermon twice during the Madison Square crusade, once on June 6 and once on August 11. The second time it appeared it was a part of "Teen Week," an intentional outreach to New York City's youth. Teen Week utilized tried-and-true youth outreach techniques, like enlisting celebrity athletes to serve as platform guests.

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<sup>40</sup> Billy Graham, "God's Delinquent," June 6, 1957, Collection 265, box 17, folder 30, Billy Graham Center Archives.

But it was also an attempt at spiritual crime control. Teen Week was initiated as a reaction to a rash of highly publicized crimes in the city that summer. Graham led the week off with a press conference featuring converted youth, as one account put it, “with doubtful backgrounds.” His preaching dwelled on the terrible criminal consequences of sin (“boredom, mischief, gang wars”) and positive benefits of parental discipline and corporal punishment. The results of Teen Week were 2,000 youngsters newly dedicated to Christ, a pair of pistols that converted gang members had handed in, and a host of newspaper headlines that trumpeted the disciplinary possibilities of the crusade: “Graham Raps Parents for Teen Evils” . . . “Young People Need Control, Graham Says” . . . “Teeners Coddled, Bored, Need Dedication to Christ” . . . “Graham Urges Teen Gangs for Christ.”<sup>41</sup> The story was similar during a New York visit a few years later when Graham traveled to East Harlem to meet with teenage gang members. At the behest of Jim Vaus, who now ministered to Harlem’s youth, Graham shared the gospel to gangs like the Untouchables, the Turbans, and the Dragons. “Jesus Christ is the only control,” he preached. “He alone can help you live a clean life.” He also pointed out that Christ was “no sissy,” that he could have been the “world’s greatest athlete.” The *New York Times* reported that the message motivated 20 of the 70 gathered teens to accept Christ,

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<sup>41</sup> See chapter sixteen of Curtis Mitchell, *God in the Garden: The Story of the Billy Graham New York Crusade* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1957). The pistols are on display at the Billy Graham Library. “God in the Garden,” The Billy Graham Library, June 22, 2012, <http://billygrahamlibrary.org/god-in-the-garden/>.



and that one gang leader (known as “Flamingo”) pledged his gang members would go to church the following day, “or else.”<sup>42</sup>

During the 1950s Graham frequently played up crime’s immense danger to the American way of life. But he was remarkably consistent in defining the truly Christian response to the issue as spiritual heart change, not harsher law enforcement. This demonstrated a marked departure from many of the conservative Protestants who, in the 1920s-40s, had urged tough responses to criminal acts. Graham was not naïve, nor was he pacifistic; he still believed in the need for policing, incarceration, and especially the tough love of parental discipline. But ultimately these measures were insufficient. In a 1956 sermon on crime on his “Hour of Decision” radio program, Graham asked rhetorically “Do we need more laws, heavier sentences, streamlined administration? No! All of these are surface remedies that don’t get to the root of the problem.”<sup>43</sup> Just three weeks after the conclusion of the 1957 New York crusade, in another radio sermon entitled “God, Crime, and the Devil,” Graham argued that by focusing on law enforcement alone “we are treating symptoms of crime, not the source.” “Out of the heart of man is where the problem is...we must recognize who the author of crime is: the devil.” Graham then spoke of a career criminal who had been converted at the Madison Square Garden crusade. “Nothing seemed to work, everything went wrong,” Graham reported the man saying in a letter. “Then I came to Madison Square Garden. I came five nights in a row. One night I walked down the aisle with tears streaming down my face.

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<sup>42</sup> George Dugan, “Graham Tells Off Gangs in Harlem,” *New York Times*, October 9, 1960.

<sup>43</sup> Billy Graham, *God and Crime* (Hour of Decision Radio Program, 1956), Collection 191, tape 328f, Billy Graham Center Archives.

My whole life is different now. I cannot describe the peace and joy. I have a new power to resist temptation. Next Sunday I am joining a church. I am convinced that I have found a totally new way of life, but like you said, Christ had to change my nature before I could change my way of living.” *Conversion* was the ideal outcome for the criminal, not prison.<sup>44</sup>

To be sure, Graham had high practical hopes for this conversionist strategy in terms of crime reduction. In 1951 Graham voiced his support for a Crime Prevention Week campaign in Los Angeles. Along with local churches and police, he pushed church attendance as a potential solution to the crime problem.<sup>45</sup> During a month-long 1953 crusade in St. Louis, newspapers reported that Graham hoped to reduce crime and corruption 25 to 50 percent in the city through his ministry.<sup>46</sup> Occasionally Graham even slipped into voicing support for tougher governmental efforts, such as when he told an audience gathered on the steps of the capitol building in Washington, D.C. that “We must continue to expose crime and irregularities in Government...and enact strong legislation to deal with them,”<sup>47</sup> or when he noted at a Washington luncheon that Senator Estes Kefauver’s investigating committee on organized crime had played a role in the “moral rebirth” of America.<sup>48</sup> But both of these moments were outliers, and may have had more to do with Graham’s audience than anything else. Flanked by politicians in both settings,

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<sup>44</sup> Billy Graham, *God, Crime, and the Devil* (Hour of Decision Radio Program, 1957), Collection 191, tape 402g, Billy Graham Center Archives.

<sup>45</sup> “Church Leaders Pledge Aid in Drive on Crime,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 17, 1951.

<sup>46</sup> Associated Press, “Bill Graham Attacks Crime In St. Louis,” *Dixon Evening Telegraph*, April 21, 1953.

<sup>47</sup> Robert W. Ruth, “Crowd Hears Billy Graham Preach From Capitol Steps,” *The Baltimore Sun*, February 4, 1952.

<sup>48</sup> “Kefauver Probes Aided Moral Rebirth, Graham Says,” *The Tennessean*, February 7, 1954.

Graham knew he had to voice optimism in the moral potential of the law if he was to curry any favor with Washington's legislative rank and file.

By contrast, Graham was far more focused on the spiritual matters at stake when speaking to "regular" people. In his "My Answer" syndicated newspaper advice column, he was asked the following question: "A terrible crime was committed in our community recently – a tiny girl was brutally violated and killed. How can there be sufficient punishment for this brute?" Graham responded not by blasting the perpetrator or dwelling on the need for ramped up punishments, but by gesturing toward the deed's sinful qualities that all human beings shared: "I have only horror and disgust for such a crime, but the tragic thing is that all of us are sinners and need God's redeeming grace in Christ... When we think of the terrible sins such as you speak of, we should examine our own hearts and say, 'But for the grace of God that could have been me.'" Ever the evangelist, Graham then pivoted to a printed altar call, pointing out that *all* sinners who reject God face punishment and that *everyone* (not just brutish criminals) needed to repent and turn to Christ.<sup>49</sup> Graham's avoidance of naming harsh penalties and his universalizing of the sin problem, even in the face of a deeply troubling crime, indicated a concern that transcended punitive retribution. As with his apocryphal Barabbas story, the spiritual focus verged on insensitivity to the demands of human justice. But, Graham might have responded, that was the whole point: God's ways are not our ways.

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<sup>49</sup> Billy Graham, "My Answer," *The Courier-Journal* [Louisville, KY], August 19, 1956.

This mode of evangelical crime concern and outreach was crystallized in *Wiretapper*, a 1955 movie produced by World Wide Pictures, the film arm of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. *Wiretapper* was a dramatized retelling of Jim Vaus's criminal past and Christian conversion. Evincing the evangelical willingness to build off crime as an issue of public fascination, various posters for the film marketed it as a crime drama. Intrigued audiences may have been disappointed to find that the film actually contained little action or suspense (even lacking Vaus's threat to a crusade usher). But it was nevertheless, as *Time* magazine called it, "a potent evangelistic tool."<sup>50</sup>

The film began with Vaus in prison for a crime he committed while serving in the military. After his release he travels home to Los Angeles, marries his sweetheart, and gradually gets caught up in the illegal activities of a local syndicate. An electronics wizard, Vaus helps the gangsters with their various wiretapping needs and builds a machine that allows them to cheat on horseracing bets (observers later noted how the precise details of this plot actually were possibly mimicked by the acclaimed Paul Newman and Robert Redford heist film from 1973, *The Sting*).<sup>51</sup> Vaus eventually finds his marriage and conscience strained by this work, especially after visiting a local Graham crusade (like many World Wide films, a Graham sermon was the climax of the movie). Vaus gives his heart to the Lord, telling his wife after the crusade that "Something happened to me tonight in that tent. For the first time in my life I'm willing to face the music, to play it straight. It's a wonderful clean feeling." What is strikingly

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<sup>50</sup> Will Vaus, *My Father Was a Gangster: The Jim Vaus Story* (Washington, D.C.: Believe Books, 2007), 101.

<sup>51</sup> Vaus, 53.

absent from the film's narrative, however, is the work of law enforcement. As a result of his conversion Vaus abandons his former mob ties and never faces any legal penalty for his wiretapping. Though he spoke about being saved from his former murderous mobster connections, Vaus could have just as easily been talking about avoiding arrest and conviction in one of his statements near the end of the film (a line Vaus regularly repeated in interviews): "The man in the tent tonight showed me a verse in the Bible from the book of Proverbs: when a man's ways please the Lord he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him."<sup>52</sup> Though the "real" Jim Vaus had to make restitution for his crimes, the idealized Vaus of cinema encountered a Savior who set the prisoner free from eternal perdition *and* civil punishment. *Wiretapper* exemplified the new evangelical strategy in terms of its medium and message. The evangelical gospel had relevance to the crime problem, and it could be communicated through the most modern of means: first in national newsprint, and now, in Hollywood-style cinema.

This culturally engaged crime messaging reached a fever pitch in 1958, with Graham's widely-covered visit to San Quentin prison during his San Francisco crusade. Associated Press reports showed striking photos of Graham preaching to thousands of inmates, while *Time* magazine and several national newspapers noted hundreds of decisions made for Christ at the prison (the *Chicago Tribune* listed 623 conversions, while the *New York Times* counted 627). Excerpts of Graham's sermon, printed in some media accounts, stressed the depths of God's grace: "Regardless of how black your

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<sup>52</sup> Dick Ross, *Wiretapper* (World Wide Pictures, 1955).

crimes, God will forgive you...Christ stepped forward and said ‘I’ll serve that sentence.’”<sup>53</sup> Though Graham may have taken for granted the fact that those in his audience were already serving literal prison sentences, the message he preached did not dwell on the inmates’ crimes except to say that they were forgiven by God.

With Billy Graham as its emblematic media-savvy figure, the evangelical approach to spiritual crime concern gained broader cultural traction. Graham’s message was a unique blend of parts of the previous generation’s crime consensus. Like both liberals and fundamentalists, he believed that crime was a critical issue of public concern, one that demanded a response from religious leaders like himself. Following the public pronouncements of liberal religious authorities, he recognized that criminals were people deserving of care and concern, even if he rejected their social gospel-styled approach that focused on the environmental drivers of criminality. Like fundamentalists, Graham believed that the proper form of this solution was the individual criminal’s spiritual salvation, even as he avoided their punitive rhetoric. This represented the broader triangulation of social concern and spiritual focus that new evangelicals had begun to articulate and would be increasingly associated with in the following years. In terms of crime, delinquency, and prison, Graham signaled a desire of postwar evangelicals to wrestle with these issues, and that this struggle could be framed as one of spirit, not flesh and blood.

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<sup>53</sup> “4,000 Cons Hear Graham at Quentin,” *Daily Independent Journal* [San Rafael, CA], May 16, 1958; Lawrence DaViess, “Graham Drawing Crowds on Coast,” *New York Times*, May 18, 1958; “Billy Graham Ends Rally in San Francisco,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 16, 1958; “Billy in San Quentin,” *Time*, May 26, 1958.

## **Ministry to Juvenile Delinquents**

While Graham led the way in crystallizing the public conceptual terms of evangelical understandings of crime, others were putting this faith into more concrete action. Building off rising concerns with youth crime, evangelicals in the 1950s and early 60s embraced direct ministry to juvenile delinquents, particularly those from urban areas. Though Youth for Christ had trumpeted the delinquency cause from its inception in the mid-1940s, the ministry did not make intentional efforts to reach delinquents specifically until the early fifties. As they moved away from crusade-driven evangelism, YFC leader Bob Cook argued that the ministry needed to do more to tailor its work to those youth from the “seamy side of town.” YFC named this initiative the Youth Guidance Program, hired a full-time director, and started local outreach ministries to delinquents in Oakland, Los Angeles, and Victoria, British Columbia.<sup>54</sup> YFC was one of a number of youth-centered evangelical ministries that were increasingly conscious of the need to reach urban juvenile delinquents with the gospel. This section explores two other such efforts, the ministries of David Wilkerson and of Jim Vaus among gangs in New York. Though their ministries started small, both represented more intensified and intimate version of the simultaneous evangelical concern with crime and sympathy with criminals.

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<sup>54</sup> Shelley, “The Rise of Evangelical Youth Movements,” 51-2. The key program here was Lifeline (later known as Youth Guidance), advertised as “a practical program that gets to the heart of the delinquency problem.” See “Revolt in the American High School” and Wendy Collins’ Lifeline report in “Youth For Christ International Board of Directors Meeting Minutes,” April 28, 1959, Collection 20, box 72, folder 6, Billy Graham Center Archives.

Shortly after Graham's 1957 Madison Square Garden crusade, another preacher made his way to New York City with grand ambitions. David Wilkerson, a slim twenty-six year old Assemblies of God minister from a rural Pennsylvania mountain town, had seen an article in *LIFE* magazine that described a grisly murder that had rocked the city in the summer of 1957.<sup>55</sup> According to the article, several gang members from upper Manhattan had been accused of killing Michael Farmer, a fifteen-year-old with polio. Though a gruesome crime, the alleged killers were themselves boys, caught up in the violent gang wars that had plagued the city over the past few years. As he read the article, Wilkerson found his stomach churning with disgust at the crime. But then a thought popped in his mind: "Go to New York City and help those boys." He initially resisted the idea. The country preacher knew nothing of the big city, and his growing ministry in Philipsburg, PA had enough demands of its own. But Wilkerson's conscience was afflicted until he yielded to the directive of the still, small voice in his heart. The following day he brought the magazine to his church's Wednesday night service. Instead of preaching his regular sermon, Wilkerson showed the article to the congregation and told them to "Take a good look at the faces of these boys." At his request, the church took up an offering of 75 dollars, enough to cover a car trip to New York and back. Wilkerson's wife Gwen was still skeptical. "You really feel this is the Holy Spirit leading

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<sup>55</sup> "Mass Murder Trial of a Teen-Age Gang," *LIFE*, February 24, 1958.



you?” she asked him. When her husband responded affirmatively, she finally relented: “Well, be sure to take some good warm socks.”<sup>56</sup>

On a mission from God, Wilkerson and his church’s youth director drove through the night to New York City. But the enterprising evangelist would soon find his ambitions thwarted. Wilkerson entered the courtroom where the boys were being tried and stepped over the guardrail to tell them of God’s love. “Judge Davidson, Your Honor,” he said, “Respect me as a minister of the Gospel and let me have one moment, please.” The judge, in no mood for theatrics, ordered Wilkerson from the court. Trial reporters, eager for a story, ate up the scene and the next day Wilkerson found an unflattering photo of himself in the *New York Daily News*. The boys’ defense attorney later reported that Wilkerson contacted him about meeting the boys and that, though he was sympathetic to the pastor’s interest in “saving the boys’ souls,” his own concern was “saving their lives” – helping them avoid the death penalty.<sup>57</sup>

Though his initial foray as an evangelist to New York’s delinquents had failed, Wilkerson was not deterred. He returned to the city regularly to minister to gang members. He started with street preaching in dangerous areas like the Fort Greene and Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhoods in Brooklyn, gaining respect early on from street

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<sup>56</sup> David Wilkerson, John Sherrill, and Elizabeth Sherrill, *The Cross and the Switchblade* (New York: Bernard Geis Associates, 1963), 3-13. Wilkerson has told this story countless times over his career. For another early account that focuses on the Wilkerson’s trial experience (and the inspirational lessons therein), see W. Clement Stone, “How You Can Get The Good Things Of Life,” *Chicago Sunday Tribune Magazine*, March 17, 1963.

<sup>57</sup> Jack Roth, “Girl Testifies She Hid Knives For Two in Gang After Killing,” *New York Times*, March 1, 1958. Local New York schools also rejected Wilkerson after he asked for permission to speak with the boys there. His pointed explanation was featured in United Press’s syndicated “Quotable Quotes”: “I called the superintendent...But they told me they didn’t need God in the schools.” United Press International, “Quotable Quotes From World News,” *The Kane Republican* [Kane, PA], March 1, 1958.

gangs because of his own run-in with the law at the Farmer trial. According to Wilkerson, gang members told him, “You’re all right. You’re one of us...when we saw two cops dragging you out of the courthouse, that means the cops don’t like you. And they don’t like us. So you’re one of us.”<sup>58</sup> He soon moved on to distributing evangelistic tracts and held rallies at a Manhattan boxing arena, where he bused in curious gang members to hear his evangelistic preaching.<sup>59</sup> In 1959 his New York ministry reached a turning point. Wilkerson began to see the need to go beyond more impersonal forms of evangelism and the occasional mission trip. Real ministry would require relocation, so the following year he permanently decamped for the city and set up a brick-and-mortar location in Brooklyn. Besides garnering support from numerous area churches and local businessmen, the ministry, now officially dubbed “Teen-Age Evangelism” (and later called Teen Challenge) became officially linked with the Prison Division of the Assemblies of God’s Home Missions Department.<sup>60</sup> Teen Challenge centers soon sprung up in other regions of the country, beginning with a Chicago office in 1961. The ministry initially focused its efforts on outreach to violent street gangs. Teen Challenge would later expand to include work with drug addicts. By 1969, as heroin usage rates continued to surge and broader fears about gangs had begun to subside, they made drug rehabilitation their primary

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<sup>58</sup> W. Clement Stone, “How You Can Get The Good Things Of Life,” 21.

<sup>59</sup> David Batty and Ethan Campbell, *Teen Challenge: 50 Years of Miracles* (Teen Challenge, Inc., 2008), 11-12, 17.

<sup>60</sup> See chapters 12-13 of Wilkerson, Sherrill, and Sherrill, *The Cross and the Switchblade*, 1963; David Wilkerson, “Counterattack for Christ,” *The Pentecostal Evangel*, October 30, 1960.

concern.<sup>61</sup> But the early focus of the ministry was the same concern that motivated Wilkerson to travel to New York and interrupt the Farmer trial: concern about the spiritual welfare of delinquent youth caught up in lives of crime.

Wilkerson was not the only evangelical outsider who had moved to New York on mission. After spending a few years on the speaker circuit after his conversion at Graham's 1949 Los Angeles revival and leading a short-lived missionary radio ministry, Jim Vaus moved to New York City in 1958 to work with gangs and troubled youth. Vaus had first begun to think about the possibilities of ministry to delinquents during a prison visit with Oregon secretary of state (and outspoken evangelical) Mark Hatfield. Not long after, a sixteen-year-old inmate at Eastern State Penitentiary in Pennsylvania confronted Vaus during an evangelistic visit: "Mr. Vaus, it was a good talk you gave today. But it would have been better if you had reached us before we got here." Haunted by the inmate's words, Vaus (in a story strikingly similar to that of Wilkerson) finally answered God's call to reach New York's delinquents as he paged through a *LIFE* magazine exposé on the city's gang violence.<sup>62</sup> He would eventually found Youth Development, Inc., headquartered in Harlem.

Wilkerson and Vaus brought their own backgrounds and personalities to bear in their New York ministries. For Wilkerson, a fiery Pentecostal who believed that delinquency and drug use were literally "Satan's fiendish plan to drag today's youth into

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<sup>61</sup> Bill Eppridge and James Mills, "Drug Addicts, Part 2," *LIFE*, March 6, 1965; Batty and Campbell, *Teen Challenge: 50 Years of Miracles*, 20-1.

<sup>62</sup> Vaus, *My Father Was a Gangster*, 145-7. "Interview with Jim Vaus by Bob Crossley: Session 1," April 11, 1967, Collection 693, box 2, folder 7, Billy Graham Center Archives, 4-5, 11.

the pit of hell,”<sup>63</sup> his chosen method was a brash willingness to confront unbelievers (and anyone who might stand in his way) with the gospel. This approach got him kicked out of the Farmer trial courtroom, but it served him well in his outreach with gangs, who appreciated his willingness to walk their streets, enter their dens, and engage in heated conversation about the state of their souls. Vaus was more measured. He drew on his electronics background, cleverly using his novel collection of stereos and lightning coils in public demonstrations to pique the interest of Harlem’s youth before sharing his testimony.<sup>64</sup> He later built a youth center in East Harlem, where teens could gather for electronics training (for boys), beauty parlor appointments (for girls), a drink at a soda fountain (donated by Billy Graham), and spiritual instruction.<sup>65</sup>

Early on in their ministry efforts, both Wilkerson and Vaus intentionally sought the conversion of major players in New York’s youth gangs. During a street evangelism session in Brooklyn not long after the Farmer trial, Wilkerson attracted a large crowd by having a friend blow “Onward Christian Soldiers” loudly on a trumpet. After then preaching a sermon on John 3:16, Wilkerson asked to meet leaders of two local gangs, the Chaplains and the Mau Maus. As he spoke privately with the leaders about faith in Christ, some began to weep. “You’re coming through, Preacher,” said the chief of the Chaplains, a boy nicknamed “Buckboard.” Others were not convinced. Nicky Cruz, vice president of the Mau Maus, told Wilkerson to “Keep away from me, Preacher, you’re not

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<sup>63</sup> David Wilkerson, “Counterattack for Christ.”

<sup>64</sup> “Interview with Jim Vaus by Bob Crossley: Session 1,” 12. Vaus had become famous for his electric evangelism before his work in Harlem. For example, see “Wiretapper in the Pulpit,” *LIFE*, June 6, 1955.

<sup>65</sup> “Two-Man Attack on Harlem’s Asphalt Jungle,” *Ebony*, June 1961.

going to make me cry.” But after a few more attempts, Wilkerson successfully persuaded Cruz and Israel Narvaez, the Mau Mau president, not only to come to Christ but to also join him in ministry. They acknowledged their spiritual transformation by handing over their weapons to Wilkerson. “I gave Brother Davy a bayonet and he gave me a Bible,” Cruz remarked to one curious reporter. Wilkerson began to take Cruz and Narvaez with him on the road for evangelistic crusades as living testimonies of God’s work in Brooklyn. Jim Vaus’s very first Harlem convert was Eddie Suarez, a member of Harlem’s Dragon gang. Suarez began attending electronics classes at YDI, and eventually approached Vaus to talk about problems he had been having with the gang. Vaus took Suarez under his wing, telling him about his own faith in Christ and, like Wilkerson, taking him along on speaking engagements outside of the city.<sup>66</sup>

As with Graham, the emphasis of urban evangelists like Vaus and Wilkerson was on Christian transformation of lawbreakers, not bringing them to justice. This did not mean that these evangelists did not care about crime or violence, but they viewed the spiritualized gospel as the primary answer to the lawbreaking. The convert Cruz was aware that his newfound life of faith had not only liberated him from a life of crime, but also from the threat of punitive criminal justice. After seeing two dozen other gang members he recognized being sent to the reformatory, Cruz noted, “I was pretty lucky, I

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<sup>66</sup> Dave Pamer, “2 Teen ‘Hoods’ Trade Weapons for Bible,” *Star-Gazette* [Elmira, NY], August 1, 1958; David Wilkerson, “Too Strange to Be Coincidence, Part II,” *Guideposts Magazine*, December 1961; Hiley H. Ward, “Little Nicky Finds God: Former Teen-Gang Terror Now Is Fighting the Devil,” *Detroit Free Press*, February 25, 1963; “Interview with Jim Vaus by Bob Crossley: Session 2,” April 26, 1967, Collection 693, box 2, folder 7, Billy Graham Center Archives, 18-22.

guess. I had a Bible, and they were chained.”<sup>67</sup> Vaus also sought to keep youth out of prison, regularly urging law enforcement and court officials to allow youth offenders to receive parole instead of jail time. Regarding case of a youth named Richard Morales who had been arrested for possessing drugs, Vaus pleaded with a court officer for to keep the boy out of jail, noting his progress in YDI’s electronics course and faithful church attendance as hopeful signs: “I do not believe that he would benefit by placement in an institution or any similar controlled environment, but would be best served by a probationary sentence and the skillful guidance of a probation officer.”<sup>68</sup>

Neither Vaus nor Wilkerson forswore discipline as a virtue for delinquents, nor did they villainize law enforcement. Vaus in particular regularly spoke of the combination of “love and discipline” as the solution to teenage crime and regularly partnered with local police (some of whom praised YDI for its crime-reducing capabilities, calling it the “Miracle of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Precinct”).<sup>69</sup> But this discipline was rarely penal in character, and the police who worked with Vaus typically spoke of their regard for his ministry’s ability to keep teens *out* of prison. Yet a tension between law and gospel could still be felt. Wilkerson wrestled with the problem of wanting to bring delinquents to freedom in Christ but also realizing that many of them had committed serious crimes. This was a “moral problem,” he wrote. “It is not a simple question to

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<sup>67</sup> Dave Pamer, “2 Teen ‘Hoods’ Trade Weapons for Bible.”

<sup>68</sup> Jim Vaus to Samuel Rettinger, May 13, 1959, Collection 693, box 1, folder 1, Billy Graham Center Archives.

<sup>69</sup> “Two-Man Attack on Harlem’s Asphalt Jungle,” 32; Vaus, *My Father Was a Gangster*, 159; Lieutenant Louis Cottell, “‘Miracle’ of the 23rd Precinct,” n.d., Collection 693, box 2, folder 3, Billy Graham Center Archives.

answer...If a boy confesses to the police too early and is put in jail, isn't there the risk of losing him? On the other hand, he has offended society's law and it will also hold him back spiritually if he harbors guilt. I have come to feel that there is no answer that will cover all cases." Wilkerson told the story of Pedro, a convert who frequented the Brooklyn Teen Challenge Center and who felt wracked with guilt for his past crimes. He begged Wilkerson to let him confess to the police to free his conscience. Wilkerson urged him to wait, for "Pedro was so new to his changed life that jail sentence would almost surely set him back...But he would have none of it." Pedro went on to confess a stabbing and two robberies to the police. But the police could not find anyone to press charges, and Pedro was freed into Wilkerson's custody.<sup>70</sup> The story, as Wilkerson narrated it, had a near-miraculous arc. The hoped-for conclusion of Pedro's salvation story was the redemption of his soul and the freedom of his conscience, not the incarceration of his body or the balance of the scales of justice.

This approach sometimes cut against the grain of broader public opinion. An example from Vaus' ministry is illustrative. In 1963 some of the boys who had been attending Vaus's YDI events were arrested by the police for a brutal attack on a social worker, Lou Marsh, who eventually died from his injuries. Because of his familiarity with the neighborhood youth gangs, Vaus was called to the police station to help question the suspects. Vaus asked the police if he could enter the holding room by himself to talk to boys in private. There he heard their side of the story: Marsh had confronted them,

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<sup>70</sup> Wilkerson, Sherrill, and Sherrill, *The Cross and the Switchblade*, 1963, 155-7.

which started an argument. But, the boys told Vaus, they had not tried to hurt Marsh during the confrontation; he had fallen down *on his own* and smashed his head on the pavement.<sup>71</sup> By contrast, the press reported that the boys had brutally assaulted Marsh, that two boys “held his arms while the other two beat him senseless” (this account went nationwide through United Press International syndication, as well as through a report on Marsh in the *Christian Century*).<sup>72</sup> *The Saturday Evening Post* reported that broader public reactions to the death were calls for “these vicious kids,” “animals,” and “hoods” to be given “a taste of jail.”<sup>73</sup> Most famously, the folk singer Pete Ochs composed a song about Marsh soon after news of the case emerged. The lyrics of “The Ballad of Lou Marsh” read “The city is a jungle/ When the law is out of sight/ And death lurks in El Barrio/ With the orphans of the night... With patience and with reason/ He tried to save their lives/ But they broke his peaceful body/ With their fists and feet and knives.” The more well-known singer Pete Seeger would record a modified version of the song a year later.<sup>74</sup> A radical who would later write anti-Vietnam songs, Ochs had no affinity for law

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<sup>71</sup> See pages 1-18 of “Interview with Jim Vaus by Bob Crossley: Session 4,” May 22, 1967, Collection 693, box 2, folder 8, Billy Graham Center Archives.

<sup>72</sup> Louis Cassels, “‘Greater Love Hath No Man Than This...’: Lou Marsh Gave His Life To Help N. Y. Youth Gang,” *New Journal and Guide* [Norfolk, VA], February 16, 1963; Dean Peerman, “Death Down a Dark Street,” *Christian Century*, February 6, 1963.

<sup>73</sup> The *Post* did not actually agree with these assessments, calling the public hysteria “nonsense.” Gertrude Samuels, “Death of a Youth Worker,” *Saturday Evening Post*, April 6, 1963. In his eulogy of Marsh, William Stringfellow noted that one neighborhood newspaper editorialized in the days after the killing that the proper response was increased policing and harsher law enforcement tactics. Stringfellow criticized this response even as he concurred with the standard news account of the event, that gang members “ambushed Lou and beat him savagely.” William Stringfellow, *My People Is the Enemy: An Autobiographical Polemic* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2005), 143-44.

<sup>74</sup> Phil Ochs, *The Ballad of Lou Marsh*, vol. Broadside, no. 21, 1963. See also “Lou Marsh,” *Shadows That Shine* (blog), accessed April 21, 2017, <https://philochsthing.wordpress.com/tag/phil-ochs-lou-marsh/>.



enforcement. But he still played up the quality of the gang members as lawless barbarians.

Vaus saw things differently. Believing the boys' story that they were not responsible for Marsh's death, he drew out somewhere between seven and eight thousand dollars from YDI's coffers to pay for their defense lawyers. This put the ministry in the red for the year, but Vaus believed that without paid counsel the boys would likely be convicted of murder and receive harsh sentences. The attorneys Vaus hired found out that Marsh had a history of seizures and that they were prone to occur under stress. They called doctors as witnesses who testified that a seizure during a heated argument with the boys likely caused Marsh to go rigid, fall straight back, and fracture his head on the pavement. This was almost certainly the cause of his death, the defense argued, for there were no other bruises or signs of injury on Marsh's body. Vaus himself was present every day in court, along with other YDI staff, in support of the boys. He even was subpoenaed by the prosecution, who attempted to discredit him by referencing his criminal past. The boys ultimately were convicted, but for un-premeditated manslaughter (not murder). Instead of receiving long or life sentences, they were paroled into Vaus's care. He took responsibility of keeping track of the boys, helping them find jobs or schooling.<sup>75</sup>

This sympathy for New York's youth, sometimes at great personal cost or in opposition to prevailing popular opinion, characterized the ministries of both Vaus and Wilkerson. Instead of untrustworthy, violent bandits to be feared, these urban evangelists

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<sup>75</sup> "Interview with Jim Vaus by Bob Crossley: Session 4." For newspaper coverage of the verdict, see "Four Youths Found Guilty In Slaying of Youth Worker," *New York Times*, February 20, 1964.

saw juvenile delinquents fundamentally as children of God. Teenage gang members responded in kind. Wilkerson would regularly claim how much gang members appreciated his work, but outside news reports often came to the same conclusion. Early in his ministry one reporter told of a humorous moment when a roving group from the Mau Mau gang approached Wilkerson to help him with a flat tire. An attendant at a nearby gas station spotted the gang and ordered Wilkerson to leave. A Mau Mau retorted, “We’ll burn your place down. He’s our preacher.” While the frightened attendant locked himself in the rest room, the gang changed the tire themselves.<sup>76</sup> Many of New York’s teens respected Wilkerson and Vaus for their efforts (even if they perhaps saw the Pennsylvania street preacher and west coast electronics wizard as a bit odd). For those who converted to Christianity under their influence, there was a profound sense of devotion, and eventually, partnership. One former drug addict and dealer named Benny Torrez described his own entrance into the Teen Challenge treatment program initially as an act of desperation. After having been in prison and floating from one rehab center to the next, Torrez sought out the ministry and eventually encountered Wilkerson at one of the neighborhood evangelistic rallies. “I don’t remember what he preached, but what he did, did something for my soul,” Torrez said. “He showed me that my problem was sin and that I had sin in my heart, and the only way I can overcome that drug addiction was by going to the altar and asking God to forgive me of my sins...If I accept him as my Savior, then I would be forgiven and my drug addiction would be taken from me

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<sup>76</sup> Dave Palmeter, ““We’re Mau Maus; He’s Our Preacher,”” *Star-Gazette* [Elmira, NY], July 30, 1958.

completely...that night, the Holy Spirit lifted me up.” Beginning that night, Torrez’s life started anew. He moved to Teen Challenge’s “farm” (a treatment center in rural Pennsylvania), got sober, and after a few months returned back to the city to serve as a counselor for other addicts.<sup>77</sup> This was Wilkerson’s plan in motion: the spiritual healing of New York’s criminal outcasts, who would in turn go out to save others.

### **The Cross, Switchblade, and Evangelical Public Impact**

Apart from the people who benefitted from their ministries, Vaus and Wilkerson initially had a small reach. Their ministries started modestly and their budgets were shoestring.<sup>78</sup> Also, as missionaries to troubled youth, their basic methods were hardly cutting edge (particularly Wilkerson, who regularly embraced the mantle of the thundering street preacher). But as the sixties wore on, the methods and aims of these evangelists became more widely known and appreciated, and ultimately would exert influence among evangelicals and in American culture more broadly.

Not long after Wilkerson arrived in New York, he began attracting attention from media outlets. He staged photo ops with gang members for local newspapers, re-enacting the scenes where he gave Nicky Cruz a Bible in exchange for his weapons.<sup>79</sup> Pentecostal publications began to cover his ministry and gave space to Wilkerson to describe his

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<sup>77</sup> “Appendix III: Excerpts from the ‘Testimony’ of a Former Drug Addict: Benny Torrez,” in Russell Melvin Spangler, “A Rhetorical Study of the Preaching of Pastor David Wilkerson” (Ph.D. diss., Michigan State University, 1969), 257-262.

<sup>78</sup> Peppered throughout Wilkerson’s early writings, for example, are constant references to repeated struggles to make ends meet (and the miraculous ways God provided for his ministry, often just in the nick of time). See chapter eighteen of Wilkerson, Sherrill, and Sherrill, *The Cross and the Switchblade*, 1963.

<sup>79</sup> Dave Pamer, “2 Teen ‘Hoods’ Trade Weapons for Bible.”

work and offer his opinions on topics related to delinquency.<sup>80</sup> In late 1961 *Guideposts* magazine published a two-part story on Wilkerson. Founded in 1944 by *Power of Positive Thinking* author and popular Manhattan pastor Norman Vincent Peale, *Guideposts* was a non-denominational publication known for feel-good inspirational stories, not doctrinal rigor. It was also had one the largest circulations of any national publication.<sup>81</sup> Peale's wife Ruth had pushed two of the magazine's writers, John and Elizabeth Sherrill, to cover Wilkerson when she heard about his work from a dinner guest. The Sherrills interviewed Wilkerson and began looking into his influence in Brooklyn, and the result was a feature spread across two issues, the first multi-part series the magazine had ever run.<sup>82</sup> The story was a sensation, drawing letters from readers all over the nation who were fascinated by the gritty stories of Wilkerson's work in the slums. Sensing an opportunity, the Sherrills took Wilkerson to meet with a prominent New York publisher Bernard Geis, who eventually agreed to publish an expanded version of Wilkerson's story as a book.<sup>83</sup>

This book, *The Cross and the Switchblade*, was published in May of 1963 and became one of the bestselling religious books of the sixties and seventies. Geis heavily

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<sup>80</sup> David Wilkerson, "Rock and Roll - The Devil's Heartbeat," *The Pentecostal Evangel*, July 12, 1959; David Wilkerson, "Counterattack for Christ"; David Wilkerson, "Teen Challenge: What God Is Doing at the Teen-Age Evangelism Center in New York City," *The Pentecostal Evangel*, December 31, 1961.

<sup>81</sup> Randall Balmer, "Peale, Norman Vincent," *The Encyclopedia of Evangelicalism* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2004).

<sup>82</sup> John L. Sherrill, "Too Strange to Be Coincidence, Part I," *Guideposts Magazine*, November 1961; David Wilkerson, "Too Strange to Be Coincidence, Part II."

<sup>83</sup> See chapter six of Gary Wilkerson and R. S. B. Sawyer, *David Wilkerson: The Cross, the Switchblade, and the Man Who Believed* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014).

promoted it in national media outlets.<sup>84</sup> Advance sales were strong, with *Publisher's Weekly* reporting that Geis had already ordered a second printing before the book was even released.<sup>85</sup> Part of the book's early success was owed to the fact that W. Clement Stone, a wealthy insurance magnate, positive thinking advocate, and Wilkerson booster, purchased 100,000 copies to be distributed for free by Teen Challenge. Stone's purchase saw that every Assemblies of God pastor in the country received a copy.<sup>86</sup> The book went through numerous printings (seven by the end of the first year) and would go on to sell eleven million copies within the first ten years of publication.<sup>87</sup> The book built off what made the initial *Guideposts* story so successful: Wilkerson's country preacher sensibilities, miraculous stories of God's provision, and most of all, gritty accounts of New York gang life. It was, as an ad marketing the book in the *Chicago Tribune* put it, "The inspiring story of a small-town pentecostal preacher who worked true miracles with the gangleaders, molls, and 'incurable' narcotics addicts of New York City's toughest slums."<sup>88</sup> The book's focus on violence, drugs, and illicit sex highlighted the radical nature of God's grace, but it also likely made the story appealing to a broader (in many cases, non-Christian) audience. It was no accident that the book was promoted by Geis,

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<sup>84</sup> *Chicago Tribune Magazine of Books*, June 2, 1963, sec. 9; "Book Reviews," *Religious Education* 58, no. 4 (July 1, 1963): 395–408; *The Washington Post*, June 20, 1963.

<sup>85</sup> "Tips: Previews, Promotions, Sales," *Publisher's Weekly*, April 22, 1963.

<sup>86</sup> Batty and Campbell, *Teen Challenge: 50 Years of Miracles*, 35.

<sup>87</sup> "Sales Notes," *Publisher's Weekly*, October 19, 1964; "Christian Recovery Center - History," *Teen Challenge USA* (blog), accessed June 10, 2017, <https://www.teenchallengeusa.com/about/history>; David R. Wilkerson, John Sherrill, and Elizabeth Sherrill, *Beyond the Cross and the Switchblade* (New York: Pillar Books, 1976), 8.

<sup>88</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, June 2, 1963, sec. 9.

who the same year published *Sex and the Single Girl*, Helen Gurley Brown's controversial bestseller that encouraged women to seek sex outside of marriage.<sup>89</sup>

Besides providing a thrilling narrative, *The Cross and the Switchblade* cemented Wilkerson's influence and ministry methods in American public life. Before publication of the book Wilkerson's work had been largely limited to discussions in religious periodicals (other than the embarrassing incident at the Farmer trial). Now he was featured in national news outlets, a product of Geis's publicity machine. As Geis's publicity head later opined, "[Geis] made authors into celebrities and celebrities into authors."<sup>90</sup> Wilkerson would give more credit to God than Geis, but the celebrity effect was the same either way. He went on a promotion tour of his book around the time of its release, including appearances on Art Linkletter's CBS show "House Party" and Jack Barry's interview program.<sup>91</sup> The *Los Angeles Times* cited Wilkerson as an "expert" in a story on teenage drug addiction and featured the city's new Teen Challenge's center.<sup>92</sup> *Good Housekeeping* magazine reprinted several condensed chapters from the book in its July 1963 issue, with the front page headline "How 'Faith in Action' Saved Kids in Trouble." Over sixteen pages, with photos of Nicky Cruz and Brooklyn's hardscrabble streets juxtaposed against a recipe for angel food cake and ads for lingerie and garden hoses, Wilkerson told the "inspiring true story of a small-town preacher who reached the

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<sup>89</sup> Robert L. Kirsch, "'Sex and Single Girl' Falls Short of Its Promising Title," *Los Angeles Times*, July 6, 1962; "Helen's Book Was a Shock to Her Mother," *Los Angeles Times*, June 24, 1962; Jennifer Scanlon, "Sensationalist Literature or Expert Advice?," *Feminist Media Studies* 9, no. 1 (March 1, 2009): 1–15.

<sup>90</sup> Riva D. Atlas, "Bernard Geis, Celebrity Publisher, Dies at 91," *New York Times*, January 10, 2001.

<sup>91</sup> "Media," *Publisher's Weekly*, August 5, 1963.

<sup>92</sup> Mary Ann Callan, "L.A. Teen-Age Gangs Feed U.S. Dope Rings," *Los Angeles Times*, July 21, 1963.

despairing slum children of a big city with the message of God's love."<sup>93</sup> The venue did not domesticate Wilkerson's juicy descriptions of gang life or secularize his Pentecostal fervor (indeed it closed with the repeated refrain, "The Holy Spirit is in charge here"). Instead, it signaled that this was a message that every American household needed to hear. The piece was so popular that the magazine distributed reprints for civic and religious groups.<sup>94</sup>

*The Cross and the Switchblade* symbolized American evangelicals' arrival into a broader culture that was growing obsessed with juvenile delinquency. Delinquency had become a consumable pop product, from musicals like *West Side Story*, to dramatic films like *Blackboard Jungle* and *Rebel Without A Cause*, to novels like *The Outsiders*. Wilkerson himself capitalized on this market, producing books on delinquency and drugs at a breakneck pace throughout the rest of the sixties.<sup>95</sup> As interest in delinquency surged in the media, ministers like Vaus and Wilkerson became seen as evangelical authorities on any number of issues relating to crime. Though he had not abused or sold drugs during his own criminal past, Vaus wrote two books for the evangelical press Zondervan on drug abuse and juvenile crime.<sup>96</sup> He continued his national speaking tours, was featured in publications like *Reader's Digest* and *Ebony*, and was interviewed on national television

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<sup>93</sup> David Wilkerson, John Sherrill, and Elizabeth Sherrill, "The Cross and the Switchblade," *Good Housekeeping*, July 1963.

<sup>94</sup> "Media."

<sup>95</sup> For example, see David Wilkerson and Leonard Ravenhill, *Twelve Angels from Hell* (Westwood, NJ: F.H. Revell Co., 1965); David Wilkerson and Phyllis Murphy, *The Little People* (Westwood, NJ: F.H. Revell Co., 1966); David Wilkerson and Phyllis Murphy, *Parents on Trial: Why Kids Go Wrong or Right* (Westwood, NJ: F.H. Revell Co., 1966); David Wilkerson, *Hey, Preach--You're Comin' Through!* (Westwood, NJ: F.H. Revell Co., 1968).

<sup>96</sup> Jim Vaus, *Teenage Rampage* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1956); Jim Vaus, *The Inside Story of Narcotics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1953).

by Merv Griffin, Barbara Walters, and Mike Douglas about his work and general topics like “success, power and crime.”<sup>97</sup> Vaus’s YDI began attracting significant attention from big-time donors, such as executives at U.S. Steel, Chase Manhattan Bank, and former President Dwight D. Eisenhower.<sup>98</sup> Politicians such as Michigan governor George Romney and Oregon governor Mark Hatfield (who had worked with Vaus in the past) visited YDI. Hatfield later paid two more visits and was so impressed that he pushed to have similar programs opened in his home state.<sup>99</sup>

Eventually *The Cross and the Switchblade* was adapted into a feature film, starring actor, singer, and avowed Christian conservative Pat Boone in the role of Wilkerson, and Erik Estrada (of later *CHiPS* fame) as Nicky Cruz. It joined a growing list of films that focused on crime and Christian conversion, a genre that Vaus’ *Wiretapper* had helped to jumpstart. *The Cross and the Switchblade* film was probably the genre’s most successful entry, likely owing to Boone’s star power and its association with the book. Fictional evangelical films also emerged, movies that paralleled Vaus and Wilkerson’s stories in their sensationalizing of crime and messages of grace and forgiveness for teen ruffians. In the 1966 film *To Forgive a Thief*, Roy Rogers, Jr. (son of the famous Western star) played a rebellious delinquent named Dusty who finds himself

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<sup>97</sup> Robert P. Crossley, “The Two Lives of Jim Vaus,” *Reader’s Digest*, July 1961, Collection 693, box 2, folder 3, Billy Graham Center Archives; “Two-Man Attack on Harlem’s Asphalt Jungle”; “Merv: 8:00 PM,” *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, August 11, 1972; “TV Magazine,” *Cincinnati Enquirer*, July 10, 1966; Vaus, *My Father Was a Gangster*, xix.

<sup>98</sup> Jim Weaver, “Former Gangster Ham Operator Is Saved By Graham,” *Cincinnati Enquirer*, March 5, 1972.

<sup>99</sup> Ed Townsend and Glen Spey, “Romney Whirlwinds Youth Camp in Sullivan,” *Times Herald-Record* [Middletown, NY], September 18, 1967, Collection 693, box 2, folder 2, Billy Graham Center Archives; Les Rodney, “Ex-Aide to Gangsters Speaking Here,” *Independent Press-Telegram* [Long Beach, CA], November 21, 1965.



in constant trouble with the law. He is adopted by a kind family, who attempt to introduce him to positive influences in the form of a surfer preacher named Mike. The family and surfer preacher both share the gospel with Dusty, though he continually resists their evangelistic efforts, believing that “nobody forgives a thief” and that he is headed for hell. Eventually he runs away from home. Mike catches up to him and, pointing to a cross statue in a nearby graveyard, tells Dusty about how Jesus loved and forgave the thieves crucified next to him. As the film closes, Dusty asks Jesus to forgive him and Mike tells the gathered family that this was precisely why Christ died: “to forgive a thief.” And this forgiveness implicitly meant criminal justice could be circumvented; like *Wiretapper*, the film began with Dusty in prison but ends with him free. A kindly old judge in the film puts a gloss on this narrative arc, telling Dusty’s family, “The courts often hesitate about getting the boys mixed up in religion, but people like yourselves have proven that you have something the boys really need.”<sup>100</sup> What was really needed was a message of forgiveness, outside the law. This was the message Graham, Vaus, and Wilkerson had helped to pioneer and popularize, now part of the parlance of American evangelical culture.

### **Crime Concern and Culture-Making**

Beneath the surface of the message of forgiveness outside the law, there were three other conceptual contributions evangelicals like Graham, Vaus, and Wilkerson

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<sup>100</sup> Mel White, *To Forgive a Thief* (Cathedral Films, 1966), film 209, collection 307, Billy Graham Center Archives.

made to the framing of crime: apologetic formulation, an individualistic anthropology, and the construction of powerful icons of sinfulness. Each signified developments that would persist in evangelicals' understandings of criminality, their ministry to criminals, and their broader influence in American culture.

The first contribution was that, by seeking to reach criminals with the message of God's love, evangelicals were also acting as missionaries to American culture more broadly. The lives of criminals *mattered* and should be taken seriously by an increasingly dismissive society, but so should the Christian gospel itself. In redeeming criminals, evangelicals could redeem old time religion. Reaching teens with the gospel, according to Wilkerson, meant helping them understand three things: God loves them, God loves the world, and God loves the world through them.<sup>101</sup> This idea was simple and certainly a claim many Christians had preached countless times before in various forms throughout history. It would remain powerful, as evangelical ministry among gangs, juvenile delinquents, and, most important, prisoners would grow all the more popular for the rest of the twentieth century. But this theological message was also an apologetic stratagem for reaching the nation at the particular cultural moment that the immediate postwar era represented. Through ministry to criminals, the gospel evinced staying power in a rapidly modernizing world.

The image of hardened criminals being reached when all other methods had failed was a kind of proof of the power of the gospel itself. Time and time again, Graham,

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<sup>101</sup> "Young Pastor Trying to Hook Hoods on God," *Springfield (Mo.) Leader-Press*, October 29, 1963, David R. Wilkerson Personal Papers, Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center.

Vaus, and especially Wilkerson made the claim that their methods were not only faithful, but *effective*. Teen Challenge, according to Wilkerson, was proven to be the most capable weapon in the fight against illegal drug addiction. This was because drug addiction at its core, as Wilkerson told the *New York Times*, a “spiritual problem that can be solved only by the power of God.”<sup>102</sup> And, Wilkerson and co-ministers argued, the data bore this truth out, pointing to success rates ranging from 60 to 70 percent.<sup>103</sup> These success rates (which in later years were claimed to be as high as 86%) were also widely questioned by outsiders,<sup>104</sup> but Teen Challenge’s interest in quantifying the ministry’s effectiveness indicated a deep concern with the gospel’s viability. This concern was regularly framed in terms of the empirical truthfulness of the gospel itself. Frank Reynolds, one of Wilkerson’s associates and a Teen Challenge leader, narrated his own work with the ministry as a search to answer the question, as the title of his biography put it, *Is There a God?* The former atheist decided that, given the radical testimonies of gang members who experienced salvation, the answer was “YES! Not only is there a real, living God, but He has revealed Himself and proven Himself by confirming His Word in real miracles throughout my life!”<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> “Narcotics Addicts Find a Cure Through Religion,” *New York Times*, 1964. See also Dorothy Townsend, “A Religious Approach to Dope Addiction,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 9, 1965.

<sup>103</sup> Various success rate claims appear throughout Teen Challenge’s promotional literature and in news reports about the ministry. For an early example, see John G. Anderson, “Hawaii Drug Center Thrives,” *Honolulu Star-Advertiser*, June 23, 1973. For a broader scholarly discussion of studies about Teen Challenge’s effectiveness, see Charles L. Glenn, “Interlude: Teen Challenge,” in *The Ambiguous Embrace: Government and Faith-Based Schools and Social Agencies* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 62–73.

<sup>104</sup> See for example Laurie Goodstein, “Church-Based Projects Lack Data on Results,” *The New York Times*, April 24, 2001.

<sup>105</sup> Frank Reynolds, *Is There A God?* (Lenexa, KS: 3CrossPublishing, 2006), 10-11.

Apologetic concerns have always been a part of Christian discourse, but their presence was particularly justifiable in the 1960s. God appeared on the outs in a world where the power and prestige of “big science” was on the rise, where godless communism was taking hold, where growing awareness of the Holocaust scandalized notions of theodicy, and where a 1966 cover of *Time* magazine was asking provocatively whether or not God was dead.<sup>106</sup> But, according to evangelicals, God was still alive in America’s prisons, slums, and drug dens. After all, criminals, delinquents, and druggies had found him. This reality, as the title of the *Guideposts* piece that brought Wilkerson into the public spotlight declared, was “Too Strange to Be a Coincidence.”<sup>107</sup>

For insiders and outsiders alike, it was a compelling argument. The situating of the evangelical message of grace within crime-ridden environs of urban slums showed outsiders that the old time gospel should be taken seriously as an important resource for addressing the America’s modern crisis of crime, and indirectly, the theological crises of modernity. A *Washington Post* reviewer of *The Cross and the Switchblade* remarked that Holy Spirit baptism and speaking in tongues “might seem an odd way to change the heart of a dope addict or a tough gang leader. Yet, on second thought, the Rev. Wilkerson may be making a profound observation about what it takes to reach and release people whose experiences have been generally traumatic.” Indeed, researchers and social workers could learn from Wilkerson’s attention to the emotions of delinquents. Wilkerson’s work, as the

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<sup>106</sup> For an account of the perceived threat of “big science,” see Benjamin E. Zeller, *Prophets and Prottons: New Religious Movements and Science in Late Twentieth-Century America* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 5. “Is God Dead?” *Time*, April 8, 1966.

<sup>107</sup> John L. Sherrill, “Too Strange to Be Coincidence, Part I”; David Wilkerson, “Too Strange to Be Coincidence, Part II.”

title of the review put it, “rings true.”<sup>108</sup> In a *Women’s Day* article, a student at the liberal Harvard Divinity School wrote of his admiration for the work of Wilkerson, who “has shown even in the most improbable cases that teen-agers can find religion relevant to their lives,” from “narcotics addicts, gang fighters, young prostitutes, as well as affluent comfortable teen-agers.”<sup>109</sup> Framing the issue in terms of probability was a reference to the hopeless status of delinquents’ lives, but it also indicated the power embedded within the evangelical methods for persuading others of the need for personal conversion.

This praise did not go unnoticed by evangelicals. *The Pentecostal Evangel* reprinted excerpts of a positive assessment of Teen Challenge that had appeared in the Jesuit weekly *America*. Kilian McDonnell, the original piece’s author, had praised Teen Challenge’s success rate and its theological outlook: “There is a Pentecostal jargon, but there is also real substance to the message that is preached... Teen Challenge is effective because it preaches the whole of the Biblical message as the Pentecostals see it.” Like most other evangelicals of the day, Pentecostal readers of the *Evangel* would have been skeptical of Catholics’ claims to orthodoxy. But if Catholic journalists (called “scientists” by the *Evangel*) were handing out compliments, Pentecostals were happy to take them. The *Evangel* reprinted McDonnell’s most glowing praise verbatim: “The preaching at Teen Challenge and in other Pentecostal churches is a reminder that Christian secularity without a consciousness of sin and judgment will degenerate into the vaporizing of a

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<sup>108</sup> Thelma L. Snell, “Bad Kids’ Analyses Ring True,” *The Washington Post*, August 4, 1963.

<sup>109</sup> Leland Wilkinson, “Is the Church Reaching Teen-Agers?,” *Woman’s Day*, August 1967.

bloodless humanism. The Pentecostal instinct is essentially correct.”<sup>110</sup> An outsider’s validation of Teen Challenge, over and against secularity no less, was a valuable validation of the Pentecostal message.

A second contribution was the diagnosis of crime in the terms of an individualistic anthropology. This flowed both from the way evangelicals framed their message about the Christian gospel: individuals were the primary agents of God’s salvation, not social structures or institutions. This message had theological roots but also drew from classic populist American self-understandings.<sup>111</sup> Famously individualistic themselves, Americans were used to hearing messages that focused on personal choice and self-driven possibility. For evangelicals considering crime, the individualistic argument went like this: criminals had made conscious choices that put them in their horrible circumstances, and they would have to make a conscious choice to leave. God, in His grace, would welcome prodigals home (and perhaps even run to meet them halfway), but those who chose to sin would in turn have to make the first choice. “Salvation doesn’t really count until you truly repent!” Wilkerson preached in one sermon. “Repentance can never be anything but your very own act. God will use forces to draw us but will never coerce our wills...Repentance begins with a revelation and an admission of personal guilt. You cannot blame parents or environment or use any pathetic excuses of psychiatrists.

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<sup>110</sup> “Roman Catholic Leader Praises Work of Teen Challenge,” *The Pentecostal Evangel*, March 16, 1969.

<sup>111</sup> Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

You must feel the guilt – admit you are in darkness and that you are condemned and unable to save yourself.”<sup>112</sup>

Graham made this approach famous. The climax of his crusades was a moment of *decision*, where individuals asked Jesus into their hearts and walked down the arena aisles to meet with counselors one-on-one. The sociopolitical ethic that complemented this evangelistic approach was what historian Stephen Miller has called “evangelical universalism,” where the individual soul was seen as “the primary theological and political unit in society.” This approach “prioritized relational over legislative solutions.”<sup>113</sup> As Graham argued in one op-ed, “Society is made up of individuals. So long as you have a man in society who hates and lies and steals and is deceitful, you have the possibility of racial intolerance...Our great problem today is not social...Our problem is man himself. We’ve got to change man.”<sup>114</sup> Or as Graham put it in a 1957 radio sermon on crime, “We are treating symptoms in this country and very rarely do we check crime at its source. Society is made up of individuals who have all sinned against God and his glory...the world cannot be changed until individuals are changed.”<sup>115</sup> The answer to the crime problem then was for sinners to ask God to transform their personal nature.

For Vaus, this emphasis had complicated autobiographical resonances that indicated both the individualistic ideal and its potential limits. Vaus’s public persona depended on a narrative of dramatic heart change, beginning with his response to

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<sup>112</sup> “The Story of Teen Challenge New York” (Teen Challenge, 1967), 9/2/7, Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center, 26.

<sup>113</sup> Miller, *Billy Graham and the Rise of the Republican South*, 44.

<sup>114</sup> Miller, 47-8.

<sup>115</sup> Billy Graham, *God, Crime, and the Devil*.

Graham's sermon at the 1949 revival. "Behind the headlines was the terrible conflict of a man's soul," his early book *Why I Quit Syndicated Crime* declared. "The answer to what makes a preacher's son become a member of a gangster's mob lies within the heart of every man."<sup>116</sup> A focus on the individual's heart was a helpful gloss for explaining his own journey and likely connected to the audiences who read his work and heard him speak. But Vaus faced challenges as he moved from crusade-style evangelism and writing in the early and mid-1950s to actual ministry in Harlem in the late 50s and early 60s. When he preached or wrote to broader audiences, Vaus could streamline and simplify; the gospel was the answer, whatever the problem. In Harlem, however, things could be a bit more complicated. The more time Vaus spent among at-risk youth in the city, the more he realized that their educational, social, and economic needs needed to be addressed alongside their individual spiritual problems. As his son noted years later, work in Harlem with YDI changed his father. It made him less judgmental, and made him want to care for physical needs, not just spiritual concerns. However, by this point, the frame of the argument was already in place, and the giant crusades and bestselling books of Graham and Wilkerson (who, in 1967, left New York City to focus on crusade evangelism<sup>117</sup>) guaranteed this would be the message that most would hear. Indeed, Vaus's ministry would soon be subsumed by Teen Challenge, which continued to focus

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<sup>116</sup> Jim Vaus, *Why I Quit Syndicated Crime* (Los Angeles: Scripture Outlet, Inc., 1951), 17. Vaus's son Will has noted that this book was actually composed by a ghostwriter, though it is largely accurate. Vaus, *My Father Was a Gangster*, 91.

<sup>117</sup> Spangler, "A Rhetorical Study of the Preaching of Pastor David Wilkerson." 37.



on the necessity of repentance and the priority of heart change as it expanded across the country and around the world.<sup>118</sup>

Implicit in this idealized vision was a new understanding for *how* social engagement on crime should occur. “Delinquency Ends Where Christ Begins” read the tagline of an ad promoting Vaus’ ministry in the magazine *United Evangelical Action*.<sup>119</sup> Simple enough, but the effect (frequently hammered home by evangelicals concerned about crime) was a blistering critique of progressive-style social welfare’s potential to help criminals. Unlike many of the social service programs in New York, the evangelical ministries of Vaus and Wilkerson were funded by private individuals, churches, and foundations, not taxes.<sup>120</sup> They were particularly indebted to the generosity of Christian businessmen, a group who often voiced their disdain for socialistic wealth distribution or governmental intervention in the economy in the name of social welfare.<sup>121</sup> In one interview, George Champion, the board chairman of Chase Manhattan Bank (and chair of Graham’s 1957 New York crusade), hailed America’s system of free enterprise and urged reduction in governmental domestic spending before pointing to his “favorite charity,” Jim Vaus’s YDI.<sup>122</sup> Likewise, Wilkerson spoke constantly that Teen Challenge had a methodology different from any governmental approach to delinquency and addiction.

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<sup>118</sup> Vaus, *My Father Was a Gangster*, 198.

<sup>119</sup> “Serving Jesus Christ at Hell Gate Station,” *United Evangelical Action*, April 1967.

<sup>120</sup> According to one newspaper report, YDI was the only agency in East Harlem that “neither seeks nor accepts government aid.” Ed Townsend and Glen Spey, “Romney Whirlwinds Youth Camp in Sullivan.”

<sup>121</sup> For a broader history of this movement, see Kevin Michael Kruse, *One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America* (New York: Basic Books, 2015).

<sup>122</sup> “Lessons of Leadership: Preaching What You Practice,” *Nation’s Business*, March 1967; Wacker, *America’s Pastor*, 116.

“To bring the teen-agers back to a reality we don’t take them down the dark alleys of psychotherapy,” Wilkerson boasted. “Our social workers are completely untrained in methods of psychology and related fields, and that’s the way I want them to be.”<sup>123</sup>

Supporters of the ministry agreed. Walter Hoving, the chairman of Tiffany & Co. in New York, wrote that he supported Teen Challenge because of the failure of non-Christian attempts to solve America’s drug problem: “only a fraction of a percentage of the addicts have been helped by governmental efforts or by private efforts that approach him by using treatments which appeal to his will power alone to overcome his addiction.” Instead, he argued, “an addict must find something stronger than himself, something outside of himself that can help him overcome his craving for narcotics. [Teen Challenge’s] method of invoking a complete change in the individual by calling upon the power of God through the Holy Spirit to help him, in my judgment, is the only way.”<sup>124</sup>

The final contribution was the construction of new icons of sinfulness, powerful foils to the Christian gospel. The most obvious was crime itself. A paradoxical dynamic was emerging: even as Graham, Wilkerson, Vaus, and other postwar evangelists pushed spiritual solutions over penal ones, they nonetheless were making crime and criminals all the more menacing. The ability to narrate the glorious riches of God’s forgiveness and grace was only made possible *after* the depravity of the criminal life had been explicated. Vaus’s testimony, in person, in print, or on film, was dependent on a robust description of gangster life and tactics. The film *Wiretapper* was, according to one movie poster

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<sup>123</sup> “Young Pastor Trying to Hook Hoods on God.”

<sup>124</sup> This letter, addressed to Wilkerson, was reprinted in Teen Challenge promotional materials. “The Story of Teen Challenge New York,” 2.

advertising the movie, “The inside story of how THE GANGSTERS THE GAMBLERS and THE BOOKIES stay one step ahead of the law!”<sup>125</sup> The “inside story” motif was clearly meant to entertain and draw audiences in, but there was a repeated emphasis in Vaus’ public testimony on how threatening gangsters were to America. Wilkerson’s broader appeal also depended upon his ability to play up the horrors and dangers of city gangs. Readers likely felt assured by the religious dimension of his memoir’s narrative, but what really demanded attention was the stark juxtaposition of cross with *switchblade*. Sometimes his gritty focus and warnings about gang activity were overstated enough so as to draw public skepticism. One newspaper challenged Wilkerson’s claim during a revival in Elmira, NY that the small upstate town was a new hotbed of gang activity (Wilkerson claimed eight gangs total). The police, the report claimed, had no knowledge of this underworld. Instead, they said that Wilkerson was mistaking normal groups of young people for organized criminals, making a miscreant mountain out of a molehill.<sup>126</sup>

Evangelicals typically pointed to American cities, a second iconic foil, as backdrops for rampant crime. To hear Graham, Vaus, or Wilkerson talk about cities was to hear stories of dark dens of delinquency, drugs, racketeering, and prostitution. The effect was that while they were naming the “inner city” as a new evangelical mission field, they were also playing up its essentially sinful and disorderly connotations.

Featured as an expert on delinquency in a 1963 issue of the *Los Angeles Times*, Wilkerson rattled off several frightening statistics about the dangerous state of urban

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<sup>125</sup> “3f978 WIRETAPPER 1sh ’56 Jim Vaus, inside Story of Gangsters, Gamblers, and Bookies!,” accessed June 9, 2017, <http://www.emovieposter.com/agallery/archiveitem/662110.html>.

<sup>126</sup> “Gangs in Elmira? Police Know of None,” *Star-Gazette* [Elmira, NY], August 22, 1958.

America: “I can tell you some 10 to 15 block areas here, where 75% of the teenagers are on drugs...the public has no idea of the extent of this problem or the growth of gangs, mainly with the terrifying purpose of keeping up this habit.” A public solution to urban strife, Wilkerson argued, would be something like a “domestic Peace Corps” that would draw 50,000 young people out of the cities and into forests and camps. “Urban living, for kids,” Wilkerson argued, “is unnatural. I think a city boy ought to know how to milk a cow.”<sup>127</sup> Vaus and his ministry supporters typically spoke in more measured tones, but would have largely concurred. In the early sixties YDI purchased a tract of land to build a youth camp in Glen Spey, New York.<sup>128</sup> Rural youth camps would be a regular feature of the ministry for the rest of the decade, and the goal was clear: get kids out of the city and into pastoral (and therefore orderly) environs.

One YDI fundraising brochure indicated the philosophy hovering in the background as it described the problems the organization was trying to tackle. Set against a large photo of a scowling black teen boy on a graffiti-scrawled city street, the brochure read, “Almost 200,000 people live in squalor, deprivation and perpetual hopelessness in a one square mile area of East Harlem in New York...Most of them are Puerto Rican or Negro. The majority have never lived outside the ghetto, never seen a normal middle class home or the grass and trees of an American suburb. Most have never known traditional family life. They are untouched by the influence of Christianity. Their plight is

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<sup>127</sup> Callan, “L.A. Teen-Age Gangs Feed U.S. Dope Rings.” See also Ward Cannel, “Farm to Help Save Gang Boys,” *The News Journal* [Wilmington, DE], November 20, 1962.

<sup>128</sup> Vaus, *My Father Was a Gangster*, 171ff.

typical of youngsters in the ghettos of every major American city.”<sup>129</sup> With statements like this Wilkerson and Vaus were narrating the situation as they saw it, referencing some of the very real challenges that the people living in Brooklyn and Harlem faced (even as they ignored the long history of Christian presence and church work, particularly by African-Americans, in these neighborhoods). But it was not a stretch to imagine how the reception of their ideas would lead other white evangelicals (their primary supporters) to the conclusion that that there was something intrinsically un-Christian about inner city existence, even as it provided a space for the evangelical message to take root anew. This was the beginning of a repeated dynamic that would characterize evangelical urban concern in the second half of the twentieth century. “Cities were stages,” anthropologist Omri Elisha has argued, “literally and figuratively – from which the Christian gospel of sin and redemption can be proclaimed to national and global audiences...both the Devil’s playground and a key battleground in their struggles for cultural hegemony...Much like the many foreign and remote locations of the world that typically inspire missionary fantasies, the inner city was represented as an unfamiliar and intimidating space of otherness, except that it was ‘in our own backyard.’”<sup>130</sup> This sense of ambiguity about the urban environment would be a driving factor in leading missionaries into the city even as many of their white evangelical brethren, who often had strong ties to cities in the first half of the twentieth century, were increasingly leaving to reside in the suburbs.

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<sup>129</sup> Youth Development, Inc., “Crossroads Center,” n.d., Collection 693, box 1, folder 4, Billy Graham Center Archives.

<sup>130</sup> Omri Elisha, “Taking the (Inner) City for God: Ambiguities of Urban Social Engagement among Conservative White Evangelicals,” in *The Fundamentalist City? : Religiosity and the Remaking of Urban Space*, ed. Nezar AlSayyad and Mejgan Massoumi (New York: Routledge, 2011): 235-7.

Evangelicals' growing sense of the "wicked and guilty city" would draw a select number of the faithful into urban engagement even as it led most others to relocate their homes and churches to new environs.<sup>131</sup>

A third icon was drug use. Jim Vaus's book *The Inside Story of Narcotics*, published by the evangelical press Zondervan, was full of startling evidence about the increasing dangers of drugs to America. Though Vaus had never used or sold drugs himself, the publisher's preface noted that "with his extensive background of experience in the under-world, [Vaus] is the ideal man to write an informative book of this kind." From the opening chapter ("Dope Takes Over the Headlines"), the book explored the sensational evidence of the dangers of drugs: statistics showing rising use (especially among teens), the horrors of addiction, and the unscrupulous dealings of sellers. The book indicated that the only answer to the drug problem was the transformative experience of conversion to Jesus Christ, but most of the book's 88 pages were devoted simply to the exploring the depths of drugs' dangers.<sup>132</sup> A reader may or may not have put down Vaus' book convinced of the ineffectiveness of secular treatment programs and the power of the gospel for overcoming addiction, but there was little doubt that they would have been compelled to assent to the book's arguments about the numerous hazards of drug use.

Wilkerson regularly repeated the same themes throughout his early public ministry, decrying the effects of hard drugs like heroin but also gateway substances like

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<sup>131</sup> Darren Dochuk, "'Praying for a Wicked City': Congregation, Community, and the Suburbanization of Fundamentalism," *Religion and American Culture* 13, no. 2 (Summer 2003): 180, 184-5.

<sup>132</sup> Vaus, *The Inside Story of Narcotics*.

marijuana and glue sniffing, all in graphic detail. The answer for this “hopeless situation” (which, Wilkerson theorized, owed in no small part to the Communist Chinese drug industry) was neither jails, hospitals, nor rehab clinics: “[these] agencies cannot accept this fact because the carnal mind cannot receive the things of the Spirit.” Instead, “the cure is Christ.”<sup>133</sup> Wilkerson’s concerns with drugs would alter Teen Challenge’s ministerial focus (from gangs to drugs) and exemplified the broader anti-drug ideology of evangelicals from this point on. If the cure was Christ, then drugs were a theological problem, one that went beyond simple consideration of bodily harm. As a writer in one evangelical magazine put it in a 1966 piece entitled “The Gospel According to LSD,” “Our interest here is not in the chemical or psychological effects of the psychedelics... We wish to focus on the repeated claim that LSD offers a prime avenue to ultimate religious reality... LSD offers the deceptive possibility of bypassing the Cross while achieving harmony within and without.”<sup>134</sup> Claims like this indicated how evangelical concerns about drugs were not simply about prudery, or even bodily health; truth was at stake. Evangelicals were already becoming a people concerned with naming and defending what they saw as the objective nature of reality (and with it, theology and ethics). As they maintained this concern through the rest of the twentieth century, their worries about drugs would also remain.

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<sup>133</sup> David Wilkerson, “One Million New Teen-Age Drug Addicts,” *The Pentecostal Evangel*, December 24, 1961.

<sup>134</sup> John Warwick Montgomery, “The Gospel According to LSD,” *Christianity Today*, July 8, 1966.

## Conclusion

The combined effect of these concepts was that evangelicals, as they were entering the public sphere, were setting the terms of a broader debate for how crime in postwar America should be understood and addressed. Crime was a national phenomenon (concentrated in cities, yet threatening to spill over into suburbs and small towns) and its effects were tragic and rampant. And yet, a solution was possible. The solution was the spiritual balm of gospel of Jesus Christ for the criminal's wounded soul.

What was often conspicuously missing, and sometimes rejected outright, was an evangelical confidence that tougher criminal justice could solve the crime problem. This fact cuts against the common characterization of postwar evangelicals as passionate advocates for more law and order, harsher punishment for crimes, and the death penalty. As discussed in the previous chapter, there were indeed fundamentalists around this time who framed their understanding of crime in these terms. Harsh punishment (even death) was the demand of God's justice, as the fundamentalist icon Carl McIntire argued. But just as the postwar evangelical movement was consciously moving away from the likes of McIntire (usually framing its critique as a rejection of fundamentalists' "uneasy" cultural isolationism<sup>135</sup>), they were also indicating that the strong confidence in harsh punishment was not the best way forward. More important, they believed, it was simply unfaithful. Their message was that every criminal could be washed in the blood of Jesus, the one who bore the punishment for humanity's sins. Evangelicals felt questions of

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<sup>135</sup> Carl F. H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1947).



maintaining the social order or deterring crime through the threat of prison were important, and those doing the work of law enforcement should be respected. But these issues were secondary when there was a gospel to be preached, one that could redeem criminals and non-criminals, who were far more alike in their common fallen state than different.

In the same way, these evangelicals were also rejecting the typical liberal answer to crime, pioneered by the progressives (also discussed in chapter one) who saw variables like economics, education, psychology as the best metrics for understanding and addressing crime. Evangelicals believed this “social matrix,” as liberal religious representatives had called the necessary framing of the crime problem, removed human moral culpability and with it a profound sense of God’s grace. This paralleled evangelical frustration with progressive ideology on any number of other issues. For example, progressives pointed to structural reasons for poverty while conservatives (evangelicals typically among them) pointed to the need to recover a sense of personal responsibility. But because it inherently dealt with questions of moral blame, the crime issue crystalized and intensified the debate.

American evangelicals in the early postwar era were both in the world but also not of it. They drew upon the broad crime concern consensus of the 1920s-40s in their mutual concern with crime as a defining social issue facing the nation. Lawlessness was truly, as Graham had opined in 1957, “the spirit of our age.” But *spirit* here meant more than common concern. It also referenced a numinous reality that transcended temporal solutions, both penal and progressive. Oregon governor Mark Hatfield summed up this

point in 1959 in his comments to the United Press about the work of Vaus and YDI: “I didn’t believe it until I spent an afternoon on foot in an area where hundreds of policemen and millions of dollars are spent on crime. The transformation is in the very atmosphere... Tax funds and night sticks are not the answer. Love and discipline may be and they cannot be purchased at any price.”<sup>136</sup> Ultimately the secular state, in its progressive (tax funds) or punitive (night sticks) forms, did not have the answer to the problem.

The common scholarly and popular interpretations of evangelicalism that label the movement as synonymous with “tough on crime” conservatism should be revised. But they should not be abandoned. At the end of the 1960s a massive change in the evangelical approach to the crime issue was indeed on the horizon. This was the religious law and order movement that observers have often referenced. More will be said later about how this movement developed, but for now it is enough to note the need to historicize evangelicals’ punitive exploits in criminal justice: it was not always this way, and it was not a forgone conclusion that evangelicals would travel this path.

However, there were certainly seeds planted by the evangelicals who preached to criminals and ministered to gangs that helped set the stage for evangelical law and order. These seeds were the “icons of sinfulness”: crime itself, the disorderly inner city, and drugs. Each would serve as targets for a later generation of evangelicals who were equally concerned with lawlessness, but who utilized a sharper set of tools to address the

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<sup>136</sup> Dick Humphrey (United Press International), “Former Grants Pass Rancher Helps With Juvenile Problems,” *Medford Mail Tribune* [Medford, OR], September 18, 1959.

problem. This full story is the subject of the next chapter, but consider Wilkerson's own rhetoric as an emblematic example. Though he had proclaimed Christ as the spiritual solution for addiction (over and against secular treatment programs and imprisonment), Wilkerson also grew to see drugs as a *social* problem that threatened to move beyond the inner city into the suburbs.<sup>137</sup> And social dangers required social solutions, which is why Wilkerson increasingly spoke of the need to criminalize drug usage later in the 1960s, even as he maintained that progressive-style measures were insufficient. "I consider marijuana the most dangerous drug used today," he wrote in one feature article entitled "Should Marijuana Be Legalized." "90 percent of all drug addicts we have ever treated began with marijuana and then graduated to something harder." Besides urging youth to avoid weed, he also taught them how to recognize it and, importantly, report those smoking it to the police. "If you think this is asking too much, just ask yourself: 'How would I like it if that stick of pot was offered to my younger brother or sister?'"<sup>138</sup> The push to recognize the necessity of legal prohibition and law enforcement, and the castigation of other social efforts to reduce drug addiction, made Wilkerson's ministry an ideal partner for a later generation of conservative politicians. By the 1980s, Nancy Reagan would visit Teen Challenge centers as part of her broader anti-drug push and President Ronald Reagan would declare, "I speak from more than 20 years of knowledge

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<sup>137</sup> Wilkerson was quoted to this effect in a *Good Housekeeping* exposé on drug use by suburban teenagers from "decent homes": "In some suburbs, juvenile addiction has reached the epidemic stage, and nationwide the situation is growing worse." David Lester, "My Son Was a Drug Addict," *Good Housekeeping*, January 1965, 114.

<sup>138</sup> David Wilkerson, "Should Marijuana Be Legalized," *The Pentecostal Evangel: International Edition*, February 1968.

of the organization when I tell you that the Teen Challenge program works. It's effective - - it's literally changing the lives of young Americans from every walk of life. The government can't do it alone no matter how hard it tries."<sup>139</sup> Despite a lack of confidence in governmental solutions and state control, Reagan would nonetheless exert a great deal of effort in fighting drugs with expanded law enforcement, tougher prison sentences, and the rhetoric of an all-out “war on drugs.” Wilkerson’s vision and ministry was a complementary partner.

Even as they planted seeds that would lead to a more punitive approach to crime, the evangelicals profiled in this chapter also helped to birth another movement: evangelical ministry in America’s expanding prison system. In the latter half of the twentieth century evangelical work inside American prisons would grow immensely, as ministries were founded, evangelistic literature printed, and volunteers recruited. Most observers place the beginning of evangelical prison ministry in the mid-1970s, as figures like Charles Colson took interest in reaching inmates for Christ. But as this chapter has described, evangelicals were concerned with criminals long before. Later prison ministers like Colson were innovators in their own right (as chapter four will discuss), but as they framed their gospel message as an antidote to crime and sometimes an alternative to harsh punishment they were drawing on important precedents from an earlier generation.

Besides revising typical understandings of how evangelicals related to crime, this chapter nuances another common understanding of evangelical social concern. Crime

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<sup>139</sup> Emily Dufton, “The War on Drugs: What’s God Got to Do With Fighting Addiction?,” *The Atlantic*, March 27, 2012, <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2012/03/the-war-on-drugs-whats-god-got-to-do-with-fighting-addiction/254318/>.

concern was an ideal ministerial context for the voicing of what has been called the “personal influence strategy.”<sup>140</sup> Simply put, this strategy understands positive social change as happening through individual conversion; if enough people become Christians and adopt Christian moral norms, then society will change for the better and racism, oppression, greed, and violence will cease.<sup>141</sup> In conversations on poverty, race, and other issues, white evangelicals have endured critique for the individualistic perspective this strategy entails. Implicit here is a lack of recognition of any systemic evils or top-down solutions (hence the argument proffered by many white evangelicals that segregation was not a problem best solved by government involvement but by changing the hearts of racists). The personal influence view was present among evangelicals on a variety of other social issues, particularly among criminals and delinquents: convert criminals and they won’t commit crimes any longer. Criticism about the efficacy and appropriateness of this formula emerged along the lines one might expect: this strategy blinded evangelicals to the systemic realities at play in criminal justice, such as the massive racial disparities in the prosecution of criminal justice, or the close connection of poverty rates to that of crime. This strategy also equated crime with sin, a questionable theological formulation and implicit defense of potentially troubling aspects of American legal norms. The personal influence strategy also put a Protestant gloss on American criminal justice

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<sup>140</sup> Christian Smith, quoted in Brian Steensland and Philip Goff, *The New Evangelical Social Engagement* (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2013), 11. See also Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 118.

<sup>141</sup> Curtis J. Evans, “A Politics of Conversion: Billy Graham’s Political and Social Vision,” in *Billy Graham: American Pilgrim*, ed. Andrew Finstuen, Anne Blue Wills, and Grant Wacker (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 147.

practices (which alienated other religious groups or inmates who did not wish to convert).<sup>142</sup>

This lack of consciousness of systemic social ills was evident in Wilkerson's journey to New York for the first time. Drawn to the city by the Michael Farmer trial, Wilkerson wanted to "go to New York City and help those boys" by preaching the gospel to them. But what Wilkerson missed was the broader context of the Farmer killing itself, the ways that racial segregation had made the crime itself possible and framed public opinion around the trial. The killing was not a random murder, but the result of long-simmering racial tensions between African American and Hispanic minorities and the surrounding Irish, Jewish, and Greek neighborhoods. The black and Hispanic group of boys who killed Farmer had identified him as part of a rival Irish gang that had recently chased them from a local swimming pool. Angry over this informal practice of segregation, the gang attacked Farmer when he unwittingly wandered into a park where they were congregating. The dispute over the pool was emblematic of the deep racial tensions that marked mid-century New York, despite the efforts of city politicians and media to portray the city as an example of racial tolerance.<sup>143</sup> As someone who saw the Farmer crime in totally spiritual terms, Wilkerson missed this broader racialized context. As someone who continued to frame delinquency and drugs in spiritual terms, he would

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<sup>142</sup> Erzen, "Testimonial Politics." 996; chapter three of Sullivan, *Prison Religion: Faith-Based Reform and the Constitution*.

<sup>143</sup> Robert W. Snyder, "A Useless and Terrible Death: The Michael Farmer Case, 'Hidden Violence,' and New York in the Fifties," *Journal of Urban History* 36, no. 2 (February 2010): 226–50.

continue to underplay or even ignore the power of other causal factors, whether racism, poverty, or mental health issues.

Nevertheless, the personal influence strategy had power as a method of evangelical engagement with criminals. For one, it allowed for *personal* encounters and relationships with a population otherwise reduced to faceless statistics in the bureaucratic apparatus of state power, both progressive and punitive. Evangelical personal influence may have been flawed as a strategy for ridding America of crime or the systemic social realities that cause it, but it was a tangible way for criminals to be re-humanized in a society that was prone to forget them. This was the positive side of Wilkerson's New York mission. When recounting his unheeding entrance into the Farmer trial to meet with the suspected murderers, Wilkerson later noted how the prevailing opinion of those in the courtroom was not only that the boys were guilty, but that they deserved death. "They ought to get the chair, all of them," said the man sitting next to Wilkerson. "That's the way to handle them. Can't be too careful. God, I hate those boys!" Wilkerson, without missing a beat, retorted, "God seems to be the only one who doesn't."<sup>144</sup> Not long after, when Wilkerson was first visiting with some other gang members, he confessed the same conviction. "I don't know why God brought me to this town," Wilkerson told a gang member named Willie. "But let me tell you one thing. *He* is on your side. That I can promise you."<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Wilkerson, Sherrill, and Sherrill, *The Cross and the Switchblade*, 1963, 18-19.

<sup>145</sup> Wilkerson, Sherrill, and Sherrill, 29.

The fact that Wilkerson often ignored systemic or therapeutic analyses of crime in favor of a personal response indicated how evangelicals concerned about crime had their blind spots. This blindness was problematic on its own, and it would have even more tragic consequences in later years as the gears of the machine of mass incarceration began to turn. But this same personal response, though limited, was a genuine effort to try to make sense of and offer a compassionate response to instances of human depravity and brokenness. Evangelicals like Graham, Vaus, and Wilkerson were certain that God was on *their* side, a belief that may have verged on overconfidence. But they also believed God was on the side of criminals. For those who wanted forgiveness, this could be a blessed assurance.



### Chapter 3: Evangelical Law and Order

Henry Schwarzschild needed help. The head of the Capital Punishment Project of the American Civil Liberties Union, Schwarzschild was a key leader in the battle against the death penalty in America, and he was trying to find partners to join his cause. The stakes were high. The death penalty had long been the subject of fierce debate in American life before the Supreme Court had struck it down as “cruel and unusual punishment” and for its racially discriminatory application in 1972’s *Furman v. Georgia*. Now a recent case, 1976’s *Gregg v. Georgia*, had reinstated executions provided they met certain conditions. Schwarzschild intuited that the debate about capital punishment had sacred currency in America, as advocates and opponents regularly quoted scriptures and appealed to religious teachings to justify their various positions about the taking of human life by the state. To help mobilize support for the anti-death penalty cause, he began inviting various religious groups to join the National Coalition Against the Death Penalty, an organization founded to rally public opinion against the new ruling. Based on the positions of numerous American Christian denominations (and a few Jewish groups), Schwarzschild had reason to be optimistic. The policy arms of the United Methodist Church, United Church of Christ, United Presbyterian Church, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Quakers, Unitarian Universalists, American Baptists, Reformed Church in America, American Jewish Committee, Protestant Episcopal Church, Lutheran Church in America, National Council of Churches, and various Catholic groups all had passed resolutions condemning capital punishment. Their reasons included the fallibility

of human justice, the disproportionate number of poor people and African Americans on death row, and, for the Christian denominations, the peace witness of Jesus Christ. This was a massive consensus, and Schwarzschild had already persuaded several of these religious groups to join his newly founded National Coalition Against the Death Penalty.<sup>1</sup>

Now he had hope that another ally could be added to the fold: the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), an organization founded in 1942 as a conservative alternative to the liberal Federal Council of Churches. The NAE was the closest thing to an organizational representative that American evangelicals had in 1976, the year Schwarzschild wrote Floyd Robertson, the NAE's Secretary of Public Affairs. He inquired about the possibility of the organization making a formal pronouncement against capital punishment and affiliating with the cause that so many other religious denominations had joined.<sup>2</sup> The reply he received from Robertson was cordial in tone, and Robertson did not embarrass Schwarzschild for incorrectly addressing him as "Mr. Robinson." But it was nonetheless a firm no: "we cannot agree that your objective is either in the best interest of our society of justice or the criminals which you seek to help." Robertson then took several paragraphs to spell out the rationale, quoting first from a recent NAE resolution that argued "from a biblical perspective" that the elimination of capital punishment devalued human life and therefore that it should be

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<sup>1</sup> National Inter-Religious Task Force on Criminal Justice, Work Group on the Death Penalty, "What the Religious Community Has to Say on Capital Punishment," n.d., National Association of Evangelicals records, box 39, "capital punishment" folder, Wheaton College Archives and Special Collections; Henry Schwarzschild to Floyd Robinson, September 1, 1976, National Association of Evangelicals records, box 38, "capital punishment" folder, Wheaton College Archives and Special Collections.

<sup>2</sup> Henry Schwarzschild to Floyd Robinson, September 1, 1976.

retained for premeditated capital crimes. He then cited a recent editorial from the official NAE magazine. With reference to penal substitution atonement theory, he contended that “God does not forgive sin without appropriate penalties.” Just as Jesus had to pay the “supreme penalty” so that humanity’s sins could be forgiven, governments must seek “just retribution” for all violations. Indeed, capital punishment was actually in the best interests of the criminal: “nothing could be more important for the criminal than to seriously consider and prepare for his impending death...a man is much more apt to think seriously if he knows he’s going to die next Tuesday than if he merely expects to die sometime in the future.”<sup>3</sup>

Schwarzschild’s reply was biting: “I thank you for your letter...for taking the trouble to write so extensive a rationale for the passionate avowal for the National Association of Evangelicals of the social and spiritual usefulness of legal killing.” He charged the NAE with utilizing categories “entirely extraneous to a literal and faithful adherence to sacred Scripture,” including a distorted equation of sin and crime. The idea that conversion could be encouraged by setting an execution date particularly incensed Schwarzschild. He closed with a burning reference to his own Jewish religious heritage: that such horrific ideas existed within the Christian tradition made him all the more grateful to God for preserving the existence of Jews. What frustrated Schwarzschild was that the NAE’s argument was framed “entirely in terms of civil justice and social effect” (not scriptural injunction, as Robertson had claimed), and the good news of the Christian

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<sup>3</sup> Floyd Robertson to Henry Schwarzschild, September 11, 1976, National Association of Evangelicals records, box 38, “capital punishment” folder, Wheaton College Archives and Special Collections.

gospel here was enmeshed with the human taking of life. It was “truly appalling,” in Schwarzschild’s estimation, that one could believe it desirable and possible to “terrorize and kill others into a love of God.” In order to showcase what he believed was an illuminating exchange, one that showed the foolhardy logic of the pro-death penalty camp, Schwarzschild sent the series of letters to the liberal Protestant magazine *Christianity and Crisis*, which published them a few months later. It was not clear if Robertson approved of the publication of his personal correspondence, but either way he was given no opportunity to offer a printed rejoinder to Schwarzschild’s critiques.<sup>4</sup>

This exchange was emblematic of broader trends in the postwar evangelical approach to matters of crime, law, and justice, which coalesced in the 1960s and formalized in the 1970s. The first shift was indicated in Schwarzschild’s puzzlement: was the NAE not representative of a gospel (*evangel*, literally, “good news”) of God’s grace and forgiveness? Schwarzschild was frustrated that evangelicals equated crime with sin, but this was not the core issue, for the equivalence in years past had pushed evangelicals to preach a message of God’s forgiveness to delinquents and criminals. This evangelical gospel had so often been framed as purely one of spiritual renewal, with the penalty for sin satisfied by Jesus’s salvific death. The real question now was what harsher criminal penalties have to do with that of divine justice. Increasingly from the mid-1960s on, the

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<sup>4</sup> Floyd Robertson and Henry Schwarzschild, “Capital Punishment: An Exchange,” *Christianity and Crisis* 37, no. 2 (February 21, 1977): 30–32. Schwarzschild paid a visit to Robertson’s office two years later, where they continued their debate. Robertson later wrote “Henry” to tell him how he appreciated their exchanges, even as he enclosed press clippings about a recent murder that appeared to justify the pro-death penalty position. Floyd Robertson to Henry Schwarzschild, August 29, 1978, National Association of Evangelicals records, box 38, “capital punishment” folder, Wheaton College Archives and Special Collections.

evangelical answer was *everything*. More law and order, not the spiritual redemption of criminals, became the primary evangelical answer to lawlessness.

Schwarzschild's framing of the denominational landscape indicated the second trend. A number of religious denominations (many with deep historical roots in American public life) had trumpeted the need to abolish capital punishment, yet here was an upstart organization pushing the opposite position. But it was the relatively new NAE that was tracking not only with the prevailing legal opinion but also broader popular sentiment: Americans at this time were largely supportive of capital punishment, with a 1977 Harris Survey reporting 67% of Americans in favor, up from 59% in 1973 and 47% in 1965.<sup>5</sup> Schwarzschild thought his publication of the letters in *Christianity and Crisis* would serve as an exposé of sorts on what he saw as the twisted logic of the evangelical position. What he perhaps did not consider was that more Americans would have sympathized with Robertson's conclusions rather than his own. Robertson, as the policy head of an organization attempting to increase evangelical influence in American public life, could not have asked for better free advertising.

This chapter examines both of these points, the evolution of evangelicals' ideas on criminal justice in a more punitive direction and the ways that evangelicals capitalized on crime and punishment to boost their public and political presence. Postwar evangelicals helped make crime something to fear even as fear of crime helped make postwar evangelicalism. To be sure, they were not inventing the problem: crime rates

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<sup>5</sup> John P. Adams and Carol J. Ross, "Letter from Board of Church and Society of The United Methodist Church," January 10, 1978, National Association of Evangelicals records, box 39, "capital punishment" folder, Wheaton College Archives and Special Collections.

began rising steadily in the early 1960s. But it was not clear how America would respond. Evangelicals at this time helped to name crime as a particular kind of threat and made a punitive response desirable. And their evolution and capitalization on crime would have serious consequences in terms of the growth and influence of both America's carceral state and of evangelicalism itself. Coterminous with the rise of evangelicals' various forays into public life throughout the 1950s-70s was the beginning of the rise of America's system of mass incarceration, the wide array of policing strategies, prosecutorial practices, and sentencing policies that would make the United States the worldwide leader in imprisonment. American mass incarceration has been explained with reference to various political, economic, cultural, and racial interpretations, from "the new Jim Crow" to "lockdown America" to "the prison industrial complex," to name only a few.<sup>6</sup> This chapter attempts to introduce the history of postwar evangelicalism as another significant interpretive tool in this history. Evangelicals were instrumental in cultivating support for politicians and policies that led to prison growth. But they did this by linking their movement's cultural and political aspirations to increasingly mainstream concerns about public safety and social disorder. Crucially, this anti-crime consciousness sharpened as evangelicals grew more moderate on other public issues, like civil rights. The linkage of postwar evangelicalism and law and order is therefore best understood less as a story of total backlash and more as one of consolidation, the shoring up of broad alliances and the framing of the issue in terms of consensus.

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<sup>6</sup> Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*; Christian Parenti, *Lockdown America: Police and Prisons in the Age of Crisis* (New York: Verso, 2008); Julie Sudbury, ed., *Global Lockdown: Race, Gender, and the Prison-Industrial Complex* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

This chapter proceeds in six thematic (and loosely chronological) sections, each of which highlights a unique development in evangelical crime concern from the late 1950s to the mid 1970s. The first section sketches key components of the foundation of evangelical law and order: the internalization of messages on crime concern by anxious evangelicals and the development of law and order's moderate, "neutral" quality. The second examines the coalescing of intellectual and theological justifications for tougher criminal justice within the pages of *Christianity Today*, a publication designed to increase evangelicals' respectability and influence. The third investigates evangelicals' full pivot to law and order consciousness through broader debates about Supreme Court cases, urban unrest, and mainline Protestant denominational culture wars. The fourth examines the concrete political results on the federal level: the well-intentioned efforts of evangelical legislators in the development of tougher crime policy and the key role evangelicals played in the election of Richard Nixon. The fifth section explores the complicated backdrop of race and the place of African American Christian voices in relationship to evangelical law and order politics. The chapter closes with a brief case study of how this evangelical influence trickled down to the state level, in Ronald Reagan's California.

## Going Public

The image of criminals coming to Christ was a powerful one, but the focus on spiritual, individual conversion had its limits if evangelicals were going to exert influence in American political life. Billy Graham, Jim Vaus, and David Wilkerson had framed law enforcement as an inadequate attack on the “symptoms” of the sin problem, but the reception of their message and important shifts in evangelical political consciousness helped boost evangelicalism’s affinity with temporal law and order.

Evangelists like Graham, Vaus, and Wilkerson spoke into a religious culture that was obsessed with sin, what one historian has called the defining feature of postwar Protestant theology. Three of the most influential Protestants of the era, Graham, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Paul Tillich, all shared the conviction that human original sin was *the* problem to be solved in modern America. Through Graham’s evangelicalism, Niebuhr’s neo-orthodoxy, and Tillich’s liberalism, this common doctrinal emphasis was enthusiastically received by an anxious American public. Though the postwar era was marked by positive thinking and “Leave-It-to-Beaver” optimism, it was also an “age of anxiety,” a culture of existential struggle that emerged in the hearts of Americans concerned with nuclear threats, racism, and economic uncertainty.<sup>7</sup>

Anxiety about crime was no different. And the effects of the age of anxiety could be seen through leading evangelicals’ functional priority of sin over gospel in their discussion of the crime issue. Though he had prescribed the healing balm of individual

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<sup>7</sup> Finstuen, *Original Sin and Everyday Protestants*.



salvation as a response to crime, Graham's frontloading of his sermons with horrifying anecdotes and dramatic statistics about the crime crisis guaranteed that at least part of their homiletic effect would be to play into broader anxiety about lawlessness. For the lone penitent lawbreaker who heard these sermons (like the wiretapper Jim Vaus), God's pardon was indeed good news. But for the masses of non-lawbreakers who heard his sermons, the effect was different. Most of the attendees of Graham crusades were *not* criminals (or even non-Christians<sup>8</sup>), and though the gospel of forgiveness for crimes was less relevant, the overarching concern about America's lawless streets was not.

The seeds of these evangelists' crime-inflected messages, the "icons of sinfulness" like crime, urban disorder, and drug use that they regularly referenced, did not fall on rocky soil. Their devotees expected and appreciated this kind of message, and they grew to see the gospel's crime-reducing potential in an anxious age. Newspaperman and crusade volunteer Morgan Blake wrote about the expectations for Graham's 1950 Atlanta events in precisely these terms. "What are the people praying for?" Blake asked, before turning to a short list of spiritual expectations of the crusade, like the glorification of God and Christian boldness. The piece then pointed to more temporal goals of the people's prayers. The first concern was international, "the godless communists in the world, pledged to the destruction of the Christian faith and civilization." But the bulk of the piece focused on the domestic concern of "the far-flung criminal underworld in this land...the wealthy criminal syndicates gaining dominance in so many cities through

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<sup>8</sup> Wacker, *America's Pastor*, 263-6.

bribery and corruption of the police and other public officials.” Prostitution, gambling, racketeering – “this criminal underworld is even more menacing at present to the preservation of law and order and our democratic form of government than the Communists.” It was for these concerns that so many were praying for Graham’s revivals, that those “on the threshold of criminal lives will be checked in the nick of time and get a solid foundation for leading constructive and happy lives.”<sup>9</sup>

The appeal of Graham’s anti-crime message was potent enough to lead Roy Lundquist, a retired Sears analyst living in Wheaton, IL, to conduct his own study of Graham crusades’ effect on urban crime rates. Using FBI statistics, Lundquist examined the shifts in crime rates from 1961-1965 in several American cities before and after Graham crusades. He calculated that many of the cities experienced favorable reductions in crime rates directly following a crusade. Persuaded that this was evidence of the crusades’ power, he offered his brightly colored charts to the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. There is no evidence that the BGEA ever utilized the research, though BGEA employee Paul Kindschi wrote Lundquist to thank him “for the excellent work you are doing.” The BGEA’s unwillingness to publicize the research may have been owing to Lundquist’s status as a lay researcher, or the fact that post-crusade crime rates actually went *up* in a few cities. Nevertheless, Lundquist’s project evinced how crime’s

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<sup>9</sup> Blake Morgan, “There Are Plenty of Useful Themes for Prayer As Atlanta Prepares for the Graham Revival,” *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, October 15, 1950.

place in Graham's gospel equation had filtered down into the anxious popular imagination.<sup>10</sup>

A second development that reframed the evangelical conception of crime was the movement's gradual acceptance of the power of civil authority for promoting social holiness, specifically racial equality. The context for this development was the civil rights struggle of the fifties and sixties. A product of the rural south, Billy Graham saw nothing wrong with racial segregation in his early life and ministry. However, in 1953, after a few years of waffling on the issue, he began to reconsider this view and soon desegregated his crusades. He increasingly spoke about racism as a sin in magazine articles, welcomed African Americans to his crusade planning team, rebuffed ardently racist White Citizen's Councils who blasted his integrated events, and invited Martin Luther King, Jr. to offer a prayer at the 1957 Madison Square Garden crusade. But Graham was no radical. He downplayed the importance of secular protest or civil rights laws in favor of spiritual solutions. As he wrote in *Life* magazine in 1956, "The Christian layman must speak out against the social ills of our times, but he must be careful to speak with the voice of the biblical prophets and apostles and not in the spirit of secular and socializing views."<sup>11</sup> The best way to change society was for sinners to come to Christ. More than legislation, Jim Crow needed prayer and conversion.<sup>12</sup>

This belief dovetailed with his proclamations at the time concerning solutions to the crime problem. Gradually Graham began to acknowledge the need for civil rights

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<sup>10</sup> "Papers of Roy Lundquist," n.d., Collection 2, folders 1-15, Billy Graham Center Archives.

<sup>11</sup> Billy Graham, "Billy Graham Makes Plea For An End to Intolerance," *LIFE*, October 1, 1956.

<sup>12</sup> See chapter two of Miller, *Billy Graham and the Rise of the Republican South*.

legislation (though not as a replacement for spiritual renewal). This development was as pragmatic as it was principled. The tide was turning in broader American culture in terms of sympathy for southern African Americans' plight, and court decisions like 1954's *Brown v. Board of Education* had made integration the legal default for the nation's schools and public spaces. By 1958, Graham was arguing that segregationists needed to abide by this new law of the land (though he was not totally consistent on this point until the 1960s). But this was a different kind of argument from that offered by civil rights leaders like King. It was a more moderated appeal, a "politics of decency" that decried racism *and* zealous protests for social justice.<sup>13</sup> In terms of Graham's relationship to the crime issue, the effect of this approach would be decisive.

The launching point of Graham's politics of decency was the late fifties, when he appeared in southern locales that had been rocked by racial upheaval. In 1958 he visited Clinton, TN, where segregationists had bombed the local public school in response to the *Brown* integration order. Graham's sermon to the gathered, racially mixed crowd sounded familiar pietistic notes: "[Christians] must not allow integration or segregation to become our gospel...love and understanding cannot be forced by bayonets... "We must respect the law, but keep in mind that it is powerless to change the human heart."<sup>14</sup> One year later he sounded similar tones in Little Rock, AR, where, according to the BGEA, 50,000 people met "not as integrationists or segregationists, but as Christians." "If people

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<sup>13</sup> See chapter three of Miller, *Billy Graham and the Rise of the Republican South* and chapter three of Wacker, *America's Pastor*.

<sup>14</sup> Wacker, *America's Pastor*, 120-6; Miller, *Billy Graham and the Rise of the Republican South*, 56.

lived like Christ and believed in him,” he preached, in his only sermonic reference to the city’s racial tensions, “there would be no problem in Little Rock.”<sup>15</sup>

Graham’s approach seemingly evinced focus on a spiritual solution to racial tensions, over against reliance on policy solutions or identification with a particular political stance on civil rights. But the local newspapers reporting on Graham’s work in Clinton and Little Rock pointed to an altogether different effect: “Evangelist Calls for Love, Law and Order” read one headline, while one paper’s political cartoonist linked Graham’s crusade with the statement “Triumph of Law and Order.” For a revival campaign that seemingly placed so little confidence in worldly political causes or legal authority, the “law and order” gloss was striking. It referenced the fact that Graham’s rallies had proceeded without social disruption and were characterized by, as historian Steven Miller has put it, “obedience to constitutional authority, but not support for any specific reform of protest agenda.”<sup>16</sup> This marked Graham’s first sustained association with the concept of “law and order,” a phrase that would mark anti-crime concern for years to come.

At the time, the term seemed most applicable to the white segregationists who were violently resisting *Brown*, as Graham argued that they needed to “obey the law” and allow for the integration of public spaces. Indeed, this had been precisely how other pro-integration clergy had adopted the “law and order” mantle around the same time in the wake of violence against blacks. For example, Nashville’s Protestant, Catholic, and

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<sup>15</sup> “Faubus In Integrated Audience Hears Plea To Believe In Christ,” *Atlanta Daily World*, September 15, 1959.

<sup>16</sup> Miller, *Billy Graham and the Rise of the Republican South*, 59.

Jewish clergy joined together to condemn the bombing of a newly integrated grammar school. The Nashville ministers' association stated it was "shocked at the contempt for law and order evidenced in the bombing. This wanton destruction of public property is a threat to all order and decency."<sup>17</sup> Similarly, Atlanta clergy organized a "Law and Order Weekend" to coincide with the desegregation of four area high schools. One Methodist church bulletin contended "It is God's will that our great city be a model in law observance and Christian conduct. If we follow His will, then our city and our people will show to the world how great changes can be made in a Christian and democratic way."<sup>18</sup> But as the legal successes of the civil rights movement mounted, the call for law and order turned into a critique of demonstrations and protests for equality, particularly the civil disobedience strategies that King and other activists utilized to great effect to push for racial justice beyond *Brown*. The fact that the Clinton and Little Rock crusades were integrated was seen as a win over segregationists *and* a challenge to black protestors, increasingly deemed disruptive by white moderates like Graham.<sup>19</sup> The effect of civil rights gains was that the law was now seen as morally neutral, colorblind, and the guarantor of security for all people. This was good news for a society where the law had, for so long, obviously *not* been neutral or colorblind. But it had unintended long-term effects in terms of criminal justice issues beyond white violence against blacks.

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<sup>17</sup> Religion News Service, "Nashville Clergy Condemn Acts of Violence," *Biblical Recorder*, September 21, 1957.

<sup>18</sup> "600 Atlanta Churches Pray For Orderly Desegregation," *The Atlanta Constitution*, August 28, 1961; "Law And Order Sabbath," *Atlanta Daily World*, August 27, 1961.

<sup>19</sup> Miller, *Billy Graham and the Rise of the Republican South*, 59.

Though Graham would trumpet the need for individual salvation for the rest of his ministry throughout the twentieth century, from this point on he evinced a sense that law and order, the quelling of social disruption and lawlessness, could somehow be linked with the evangelical gospel. He was not the only Christian voice proclaiming crime concern in the immediate postwar era but, as one of the most admired and popular people in America, he was making this particular approach mainstream.<sup>20</sup> He had staked out bipartisan, “moderate” terrain with his neutral law and order appeals. The stage was set for other evangelicals to take up this cause and deepen its intellectual roots and political applications.

### **Law, Order, and the Evangelical Mind**

Around the same time that Graham began shifting the cause of law and order beyond individual conversion, another iconic American was making a complementary appeal. J. Edgar Hoover had been making much of the crime issue for years after his installation as director of the Bureau of Investigation (the forerunner to the FBI) in 1924. In the late fifties he found a new forum in which to sound his warnings. In 1958 he penned an op-ed about American lawlessness, focusing on the problem of youth crime, “a most potent danger to law and order.” But this was no standard newspaper piece. Hoover wrote these words in an article for the new evangelical publication *Christianity Today* (CT), and the tone of the piece evinced deep familiarity with the religious concerns of his

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<sup>20</sup> Wacker, *America's Pastor*, 21-22.

audience: “In this year of 1958, when the world is so rent by divisive forces, America stands in great need of spiritual guidance...Ministers of America are truly on the front lines of the battle for freedom. On their shoulders, in large measure, depends the future of our nation.”<sup>21</sup> *CT*'s head editor Carl F. H. Henry was thrilled to have secured Hoover's literary contribution, placing the piece at the very front of the issue. He also followed it with his own addendum. There he noted the law enforcement leader's influence and reprinted other remarks Hoover had given on violent films' negative influences on youth and the inability of liberalism to combat lawlessness and communism. Hoover's presence in the pages of *CT*, a bookish publication at the time, represented evangelicals' growing intellectual affinity for the law and order cause.

The Hoover piece and its accompanying comments from Henry were all standard *CT* fare, as they evinced a desire for cultural influence, interest in contemporary issues, and skepticism of liberal solutions. The magazine had been launched in 1956 with precisely these goals in mind. Taking its cues from the ideals undergirding neo-evangelicalism, *CT* articulated its statement of purpose in its founding issue by pointing to its foils: “Theological Liberalism has failed to meet the moral and spiritual needs of the people...*Christianity Today* is confident that the answer to the theological confusion existing in the world is found in Christ and the Scriptures” and “*Christianity Today* will apply the biblical revelation to the contemporary social crisis...this, Fundamentalism has

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<sup>21</sup> J. Edgar Hoover, “The Challenge of the Future,” *Christianity Today*, May 26, 1958.



often failed to do.”<sup>22</sup> Positioning itself between these two extremes, editors at *CT* understood their mission as bringing traditional Christian faith to bear on the complex issues of public life, ignoring neither what they deemed was the timeless message of the gospel nor the call for Christians to enter and transform society. Or, in the words of Billy Graham (who provided the original vision for the magazine and served as a contributing editor) decades later, *CT* was to be a publication “similar to the *Christian Century*, one that would give theological respectability to evangelicals.”<sup>23</sup>

Though discussing the crime question was only one of the ways that the neo-evangelicals at *CT* brought Protestant orthodoxy to bear on modern social questions, America’s lead law enforcement official was probably the most famous writer (other than Graham) to grace the pages of the magazine in its early years, writing fifteen pieces from the magazine’s inception to the early 1970s (in addition to being cited in many more).<sup>24</sup> *CT* editor (and Billy Graham’s father-in-law) L. Nelson Bell reported to oilman J. Howard Pew, the magazine’s lead booster, that the Hoover association had resulted in “a tremendous amount of publicity.” Newspapers across the country had reprinted Hoover’s pieces (including one Italian magazine that requested use of the entire series) and, Bell proudly noted, “in each case *Christianity Today* has been given credit.”<sup>25</sup> Many of

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<sup>22</sup> “Why Christianity Today?,” *Christianity Today*, October 15, 1956.

<sup>23</sup> “In the Beginning: Billy Graham Recounts the Origins of Christianity Today,” *Christianity Today*, July 17, 1981. Cited in Mark G. Toulouse, “Christianity Today and American Public Life : A Case Study,” *Journal of Church and State* 35, no. 2 (March 1, 1993): 241–84.

<sup>24</sup> Michael S. Weaver, “The Bitter Enemy of Religion: J. Edgar Hoover and Anti-Communist Rhetoric in Christianity Today (1956-1971),” April 26, 2011, paper in author’s possession.

<sup>25</sup> L. Nelson Bell to J. Howard Pew, February 8, 1961, Collection 8, box 1, folder 58, Billy Graham Center Archives.

Hoover's articles were about the dangers of communism, but he usually found ways to tie problems of lawlessness to the broader Red Scare and its related "subversive forces," all of which were products of an increasingly godless society: "materialism has fathered both crime and communism."<sup>26</sup> For Hoover, the collapse of America's religious foundations through atheistic communist influence had resulted in the loss of a national moral compass, which explained the turn to lawlessness. "A world without moral disciplines," he explained, in a 1962 *CT* op-ed, "must degenerate into a world without legal disciplines... We are witnessing this degeneration on a national scale as atheistic materialism expresses itself in lawless terrorism on city streets and rural byways."<sup>27</sup>

Other authors writing for *CT* in its early years also talked about the threat of crime. Some pieces were simply pointed laments with tough punitive prescriptions. In 1958 L. Nelson Bell editorialized about youth lawlessness and proposed faith in Christ as the only true solution, while also blaming licentious media, bad parenting, and the "forgotten art" of "a good sound thrashing".<sup>28</sup> A year later the magazine devoted an entire issue to juvenile delinquency. Compared to Bell, most authors in this issue adopted a moderate tone. For example, one sociology professor argued less for harsher punishment than for "basic revaluation of our main values," while a district court judge pointed to the

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<sup>26</sup> J. Edgar Hoover, "Communist Menace: Red Goals and Christian Ideals," *Christianity Today*, October 10, 1960; J. Edgar Hoover, "What Does the Future Hold?," *Christianity Today*, June 19, 1961.

<sup>27</sup> J. Edgar Hoover, "Spiritual Priorities: Guidelines for a Civilization in Peril," *Christianity Today*, June 22, 1962.

<sup>28</sup> Bell elaborated, noting that "In a day when the only switches in the average American home are those that turn on or off the current in an electric gadget, it would be wise to procure some that grow on trees and are to be had for the cutting." L. Nelson Bell, "A Layman and His Faith: Delinquency - There Is a Cause," *Christianity Today*, February 3, 1958.

corrupting influence of alcohol. But they were all united in their fear about the threat of youth crime to the nation and their skepticism of progressive social programs in solving this problem. Most important, they all assented to the same ultimate solution: America would survive this assault only through renewed commitment to Christ. “Delinquency prevention begins in the hearts and minds of fathers and mothers before their children are born,” argued one author, a New York City juvenile delinquency expert. “It begins the day parents dedicate their lives to Christ...it is the only answer.”<sup>29</sup> Though less strident than Hoover’s jeremiads, this edition of *CT* evinced the same general approach: identify crime as a relevant social issue, dismiss typical liberal approaches to the problem, and name faith in Christ as the ultimate solution.

At times, *CT*’s regular proposal of Christian conversion as the answer to every social issue appeared trite, such as when the magazine argued in the midst of civil rights protests that “What the Negro needs now is not more laws – indispensable as these may be – but more room in the white man’s heart.”<sup>30</sup> But a particular kind of theological apparatus was developing underneath the way *CT* talked about crime, one that would distinguish the publication from other Christians who also pointed to Christ as the “only answer” but showed less interest in bolstering the law enforcement capacities of the state.

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<sup>29</sup> Pitirim A. Sorokin, “Demoralization of Youth: Open Germs and Hidden Viruses,” *Christianity Today*, July 6, 1959 and Russell Fornwalt, “For They Have Sown the Wind,” *Christianity Today*, July 6, 1959. Other articles from the issue included Emma Fall Schofield, “Will Alcohol Destroy Our Youth?,” *Christianity Today*, July 6, 1959; Talbot Ellis, “A Judge Speaks,” *Christianity Today*, July 6, 1959; J. Marcellus Kik, “Combating Juvenile Delinquency,” *Christianity Today*, July 6, 1959; “The Delinquent Church,” *Christianity Today*, July 6, 1959.

<sup>30</sup> “Evers’ Murder Signals Eventual Burial of Segregation,” *Christianity Today*, July 5, 1963. Cited in Toulouse, “Christianity Today and American Public Life”: 255

In the lead editorial for one 1958 issue, the magazine's editors contended that the answer to the "flagrant sin erupting all about us" (which included union leader Jimmy Hoffa's misdeeds, obscene literature, Sabbath secularization, and juvenile delinquency, "our major social problem") was not only "earnest prayers of God's people and the proclamation of Jesus Christ and him crucified," but "the preaching of the Law... The preaching of the Gospel, defined in the narrow sense of the Atonement alone, is not sufficient." The law had functioned as Martin Luther's "schoolmaster," leading him to see the depths of his own sin. Now it could serve a similar purpose of conviction if it were to be "woven into the crown of thorns and pressed into the brow of the nation." It was not clear to what extent the editors would have distinguished between the jurisdictions of "Law" in the traditional theological sense and the "law" of America's municipal, state, and federal codes (indeed, the piece began by capitalizing the term but switched to lowercase about halfway through). But by frontloading the piece with reference to Hoffa, obscenity concerns, disregard of the Sabbath, and youth delinquency (all subjects of legal debate in American public life) *and* by modifying the standard "in Christ alone" prescription, the connection was clear enough: God's redemption of America was dependent upon some kind of temporal triumph over lawlessness.<sup>31</sup>

One year later, another lead editorial on juvenile delinquency cast the shift in theological terms that had political resonances. The root of the problem, the piece argued, was an "antinomianism" that had seeped into evangelical Christian culture. Literally

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<sup>31</sup> "Law and Reformation," *Christianity Today*, October 27, 1958.

meaning “anti-law,” antinomianism was a term that held important resonances in Christian history. Most famously, the Boston rabble-rouser Anne Hutchinson had borne the label in the 1630s after she publically accused New England’s puritan clergy of preaching a covenant of works rather than grace in their insistence on righteous living. The clergy believed her challenges and inward-looking spirituality to be a threat to the social cohesion provided by state and church. They therefore exiled Hutchinson to Rhode Island.<sup>32</sup> Though they did not hold the same authority to chasten borderline heretics, *CT* nonetheless desired to stake a claim against the modern day Hutchinsons, the liberal social reformers and uncultivated leaders of youth rally “singspirations” who had failed to call church and culture to full moral account.<sup>33</sup> As they surveyed their lawless land, *CT*’s editors grew more willing to modify, if not dismiss altogether, the notion that more laws were useless.

In publishing commentary like this, editor Carl Henry, a highly educated theologian, would not have seen *CT* as veering into works-righteousness territory. After all, he still believed that the law (whether civil or Mosaic) was fundamentally temporal and that lasting salvation was found only Christ (Romans 8:3). Elsewhere in his academic lectures and writings, Henry unpacked the political theology that made sense of the law-first focus in *CT*. God ordained government in order to preserve justice in a fallen world, he argued, so as to protect human beings’ God-given rights. Keepers of the civil law were therefore to be praised. “The Christian movement therefore has a vital stake not only in

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<sup>32</sup> Francis J. Bremer, *The Puritan Experiment: New England Society from Bradford to Edwards* (Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, 1995), 67-70.

<sup>33</sup> “The Delinquent Church.”

justice and law, but also in the legal profession as such,” he told a gathered audience at Fuller Theological Seminary. “To encourage keen young Christians to pursue law as a profession and to serve ultimately as judges is no less important than encouraging them to enter the ministry or fields of medicine and science.” A Baptist with strong Reformed leanings, Henry hailed Calvinism in particular, for it “has produced not only great theologians but great jurists.” If the Christian church was to remain fully engaged in modern society, it would need to cultivate “professional interest in jurisprudence.”<sup>34</sup> Henry even argued that the successful propagation of the gospel could even be said to depend upon the state’s maintenance of the law. While the state had a divinely ordained role in restraining evil, Henry was far less optimistic about its ability to promote good. Progressive social programming had failed in this regard, as it downplayed justice at the same time it “benevolently bent toward people’s socio-economic wants.” The state should focus on what was *due* to wrongdoers rather than trying to create a “utopia.” Though the church was to be concerned with promoting love and compassion, a Christian understanding of political life was marked not by benevolence but a concern for the restraint of evil.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Carl F. H. Henry, *Aspects of Christian Social Ethics*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 92-4. Henry’s published work here was originally a set of lectures delivered at Fuller Theological Seminary in 1963. These views paralleled many of *CT*’s editorials (which though not always carrying Henry’s name, certainly bore his ideological stamp and were likely written by him). See for example, “The State in Welfare Work,” *Christianity Today*, January 18, 1960.

<sup>35</sup> Henry, *Aspects of Christian Social Ethics*, 96, 166. Nicholas Wolterstorff delivered a critique of Henry a few years later in a Christian legal journal, whose position he deemed as representative of the “law and order” view: “It is not *social justice* but *regulative justice* that he is thinking of.” Nicholas Wolterstorff, “Contemporary Christian Views of the State: Some Major Issues,” *The Christian Lawyer* 5, no. 1 (Spring 1975): 16-17.

Not all evangelical thinkers affirmed Henry's views, and at times *CT* itself reflected the various tensions present in public debate around criminal justice issues, particularly the theological grounding of the law and order perspective and the proper understanding of punishment. However, the magazine eventually made it clear where it stood, and what direction they wanted the neo-evangelical movement to go. In January of 1959 the magazine printed a summary of a dispute between Oxford literary don C.S. Lewis and criminologist Norval Morris on crime and punishment. This debate (that had originally occurred in an Australian law journal) saw Lewis arguing against the "Humanitarian theory" that "removes from Punishment the concept of Dessert." Morris defended the standard progressive line, that therapeutic intervention was a proper task of criminal justice. *CT* did not come down one way or the other in this particular case, though the chronicler of the debate praised the thoughtful "public disputation...conducted in the best academic tradition."<sup>36</sup> Later that year the magazine published a hearty defense of capital punishment by Presbyterian leader Jacob J. Vellenga. Letters poured in, most of them contesting Vellenga's argument and arguing against the death penalty. Sensing that they needed to give voice to such a vociferous perspective, *CT*'s editors agreed that they should run the two best dissents, one from the Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder, the other from ethicist Charles S. Milligan, a professor at the Methodist Iliff School of Theology. However, Carl Henry did not want to give these dissenters the last word. He wrote his former philosophy professor and *CT* contributing editor Gordon

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<sup>36</sup> Stuart Barton Babbage, "Review of Current Religious Thought," *Christianity Today*, January 19, 1959.

Clark, telling him “I feel like we must give some expression to another side, and then meet it effectively.” He asked Clark to write a “companion piece,” one that would “take hold of the arguments in the essays, indicate where they lead, and come at the issue of capital punishment in greater depth.” Given the weight of the topic, Henry was reluctant to charge just anyone with such a challenging task. But, he told his former teacher, “I can’t get away from the impression that you’re the man.”<sup>37</sup>

The result was an entire edition of the magazine focused on the issue of the death penalty. Both Yoder and Milligan stressed the biblical case against capital punishment. “These observations are not humanistic theories or vague utopian philosophies,” Yoder argued. “They are realities to which God’s Word speaks.” However, tempering Yoder and Milligan’s critique was Clark’s addendum, which argued that that “the opponents of capital punishment offer no theory of civil government, they seriously misinterpret the Bible, and they are in conflict with principles of Christian ethics.” Indeed, Clark surmised, “In the present depraved condition of the United States, we might even wisely execute adulterers and pornographers.” Clark’s formal association with *CT* did not indicate that his was the magazine’s *official* position on the topic. But Henry’s work behind-the-scenes and a note in the issue indicating that Clark would serve as a kind of arbiter on whether Yoder and Milligan’s pieces properly appealed to the Bible indicated that Clark’s was the perspective he wanted to frame as the last word. An editorial (with no author listed but likely written by Henry or Bell) near the end of the same issue drove

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<sup>37</sup> Carl Henry to Gordon H. Clark, November 26, 1959, Collection 8, box 15, folder 12, Billy Graham Center Archives.



this point home. This piece argued not with reference to biblical or theological justifications but by citing the arguments of legal authorities Roscoe G. Sappenfield and Judge Marcus Kavanaugh. The piece noted the death penalty's effect in deterring crimes, but argued that capital punishment's propriety was ultimately found in the retributive requirements of justice. Like those who reject eternal punishment of sinners, "modern social conscience suffers from an undervaluation of the righteousness of God and of the wickedness of wrongdoing." Violation of the law, whether divine or human, demanded a punitive response.<sup>38</sup>

Henry's hailing of keepers of the civil law and the parallel editorial maneuvering of *CT* sprung from a distinctly Reformed mode of the neo-evangelical intellectual consciousness. It was no accident that Henry praised the Calvinist tradition of jurisprudence (John Calvin himself had originally been trained as a lawyer) or that the perspectives like that of the Anabaptist Yoder emerged as a minority report to Vellenga and Clark (both of whom were Presbyterians). In the sixteenth century Calvin had distinguished his own thinking on church and state with modifications to Martin Luther's strict separation between God's "two kingdoms" of temporal law and spiritual gospel. Calvin developed a "third" use of the law, one that was more optimistic about the possibility of spiritual benefits that the law could grant to Christians. The state and church were not the same entities in Calvin's Geneva, but this did not mean that police

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<sup>38</sup> Jacob J. Vellenga, "Is Capital Punishment Wrong?," *Christianity Today*, October 12, 1959; John Howard Yoder, Charles S. Milligan, and Gordon H. Clark, "Capital Punishment and the Bible," *Christianity Today*, February 1, 1960; "The Modern Debate on the Death Penalty," *Christianity Today*, February 1, 1960.

could not force citizens to adhere to a particular religious confession.<sup>39</sup> In drawing heavily upon Calvin's political theology, *CT* helped insure that the neo-evangelical intellectual movement would have a particular affinity with Reformed theology. Outsiders like Yoder (as well as those from Wesleyan and Nazarene traditions) shared many of the same general interests and sought to include themselves in this emerging movement. At times *CT*'s editors were happy to have them on board, though they generally tried to fill editorial roles with "Reformed or Presbyterian" types. "I agree with you that, insofar as possible, we must follow a strictly Calvinistic policy," wrote L. Nelson Bell to Gordon Clark. "However, this must be subordinated to some extent in the hope of reaching as many Methodists and Lutherans as possible."<sup>40</sup> Outsiders like Yoder could chip in occasionally on the crime issue, but the visions of pacifist Anabaptism or Wesleyan social holiness (which generally included proactive governmental interventions on behalf of the poor, not simply state defense) was more difficult to channel into a full-fledged political engagement strategy in terms of the coercive and violent functions of the state. Though the magazine continued to advocate for an interdenominational brand of evangelicalism, Reformed thinking and application largely won the day for the foreseeable future on the crime issue. "Non-Reformed evangelicals," as historian Molly

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<sup>39</sup> For a summary of Calvin's views compared to Luther and later to Karl Barth (a Reformed theologian who nonetheless developed a very different understanding of church and state than Calvin, and a figure Henry and other neo-evangelicals regularly critiqued) see Jesse Couenhoven, "Law and Gospel, or the Law of the Gospel? Karl Barth's Political Theology Compared with Luther and Calvin," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 30, no. 2 (2002): 181–205.

<sup>40</sup> Worthen, *Apostles of Reason*, 65-66.

Worthen noted, “had no choice but to adapt...The credo of the *Christianity Today* crowd was becoming evangelicalism’s public theology.”<sup>41</sup>

As the leading journalistic organ for the “new evangelicalism,” *CT*’s frequent editorials on crime and criminal justice in the late fifties formalized culturally savvy conservative Protestants’ concern with the issue and indicated a new path. If popular evangelists like Graham and Wilkerson had pushed evangelicalism’s concern with crime into mainstream American popular culture with their sermons and books, *CT* was providing the intellectual backbone with its theological glosses on punishment and its prominent endorsement of law enforcement authorities like Hoover. *CT* was also proving that evangelicals could go beyond simple conversion as the primary frame through which to understand the crime problem.

A famous case that captured the nation’s attention exemplified this development. Caryl Chessman had been sentenced to death for a series of brutal kidnappings and sexual assaults in 1948. In time, however, many Americans warmed to the prospect that Chessman had reformed and should not be executed (or, at the very least, had been subjected to illegal police interrogation by force). This was a bipartisan cause, with unlikely bedfellows like Eleanor Roosevelt, William F. Buckley, Marlon Brando, and the editors at the *Christian Century* all arguing that Chessman should live.<sup>42</sup> Joining this

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<sup>41</sup> Worthen, 84-6.

<sup>42</sup> Chuck McFadden, *Trailblazer: A Biography of Jerry Brown* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2013), 30-1; Christopher S. Kudlac, *Public Executions: The Death Penalty and the Media* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2007); 30-1. “Let Caryl Chessman Live,” *The Christian Century*, April 27, 1960.

eclectic group begging for mercy was none other than Billy Graham.<sup>43</sup> But the editors of *CT* broke from their founder on the matter, lamenting the repeated deferments of Chessman's death by California governor Edmund G. "Pat" Brown and the calls of Christians for clemency. Indeed, the magazine pointed to this case as evidence that Roman Catholics might be unfit for the presidency, given that the Vatican had voiced criticism of capital punishment and Gov. Brown was a noted Catholic and considering a presidential run. By contrast, *CT*'s editors argued that "Biblical precept of retributive justice" demanded putting sentimentality aside. They got their wish. Chessman was executed in California's gas chamber, despite the fact that a stay of execution was ordered (coming in just minutes late because a clerk had dialed the wrong number).<sup>44</sup> Not long after the execution, *CT*'s editors wrote that the broader debate about Chessman's execution summed up the "post-Christian age of belief. The lesson, they argued, was "that these United States can no longer afford the luxury of protracted criminal justice."<sup>45</sup> Again, they would get their wish. As evangelical Christianity moved to exert further influence in public life in the sixties, a foundation was laid for important changes in how the nation understood crime and moved to address it with forceful policy.

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<sup>43</sup> McFadden, *Trailblazer*.

<sup>44</sup> Kudlac, *Public Executions*, 31.

<sup>45</sup> "Governor Brown Compounds the Caryl Chessman Tragedy," *Christianity Today*, March 14, 1960; "The Real Lesson of the Chessman Case," *Christianity Today*, May 23, 1960.

## Countering Revolution

*CT*'s breaking with Graham's plea for Chessman's clemency indicated that there was tension in the evangelical ranks about the prospects of punitive politics. But as the 1960s wore on, most evangelicals (including Graham) would resolve the tension by fully associating with the law and order cause. The broader context of the evangelical consolidation around the crime issue in favor of a harsher response was the broader cultural and political milieu of the early and mid-1960s. Here, evangelical Christians were thriving numerically, but also embattled.<sup>46</sup> The civil rights struggle, the sexual revolution, the counterculture, and Great Society social programs all were causes of concern for many evangelical Christian laity and leaders, who tended to have conservative social and political views. However, these challenges also galvanized evangelicals, leading them to organize politically and opening up opportunities to form alliances with other concerned Americans. This was just as true for issues around crime and punishment as it was concerns about sex, drugs, and rock 'n roll. Evangelical leaders and laity gradually formalized a new crime consciousness over the course of three catalyzing disputes over the course of the 1960s: debates about the verdicts of Earl Warren's Supreme Court, response to riots that enveloped American cities, and the fracturing of Protestant denominations.

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<sup>46</sup> Christian Smith, *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998). Smith argues in his sociological treatment of American evangelicalism that the forces of secular modernity, while a source of constant frustration for evangelicals, also strengthen their faith and engagement with the world.

The civil rights cause scored victories beyond *Brown* with the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. But though racial equality was cautiously welcomed by most mainstream evangelical leaders, the demonstrations and civil disobedience that had made legislative accomplishments possible received their scrutiny. Even as it praised their motives, *CT* lamented the “Basic Sinfulness of the ‘Freedom Riders’ Riots,” equating civil rights demonstrators’ tactics with “mob pressures” that exhibit “a distrust of democracy.”<sup>47</sup> Editorials in other evangelical publications made similar claims, assailing the demonstration of “hundreds of yelling children” as “a violation of human rights” and praising the “restraint exercised by many of the police who were charged with enforcing law and order...in the face of mob demonstrations.”<sup>48</sup> Encouraged by increasing the association of his gospel with the moderate qualities of “law and order,” Billy Graham joined with J. Edgar Hoover, a frequent critic of civil rights protests, to express concerns about “subversives” in the movement.<sup>49</sup> Though he had integrated his crusades and was sympathetic with certain civil rights goals, Graham avoided demonstrations like the 1963 March on Washington. Indeed, a few days after Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered his “I Have a Dream” speech, Graham preached to a gathered crowd at his crusade in Los Angeles that “The racial problem in America is getting worse and dangerous, and will not be settled in the streets.” He also critiqued clergy “who have made the race issue their gospel” as well as those who would argue that

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<sup>47</sup> “The Basic Sinfulness of the ‘Freedom Riders’ Riots,” *Christianity Today*, June 5, 1961; “The Love of Freedom and Judicial Determination,” *Christianity Today*, July 17, 1961.

<sup>48</sup> L. Nelson Bell, “A Plea for Communication and an Examination of Long-Held Opinions,” *United Evangelical Action*, August 1963.

<sup>49</sup> Miller, *Billy Graham and the Rise of the Republican South*, 94.

juvenile delinquency is a result of poverty. He also noted, “There are almost enough people here tonight to have a march on Washington. And if they keep throwing the Bible out of the schools, we might do just that.”<sup>50</sup>

The “they” Graham referred to was the institution that white evangelicals were increasingly seeing as a threat to orderly Christian civilization, one far greater than segregation: the United States Supreme Court. After its ruling in *Engel v. Vitale* in 1962 (which struck down state-sponsored prayer in public schools) and *Abington School District v. Schempp* in 1963 (which declared school-sponsored required Bible reading as unconstitutional), evangelicals worried that the court, under the leadership of Chief Justice Earl Warren, was leading the nation down the road to secularism. Though many evangelicals had avoided the religious coalition supporting the civil rights movement because it seemed too “political” or “worldly,” debates about the Warren court drew evangelicals into the American political fray, many for the first time.<sup>51</sup>

Besides perceived assaults on school prayer and Bible reading, also problematic for evangelicals was the Warren court’s expansion of the rights of suspected and convicted criminals around the same time. Most famously, *Miranda v. Arizona* (1966) protected criminal suspects from self-incrimination by requiring police to notify arrestees

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<sup>50</sup> “The Crowded Coliseum,” *Christianity Today*, September 27, 1963. See also “Graham Raps High Court,” *Washington Post*, August 30, 1963.

<sup>51</sup> Christopher Hickman has noted how these issues drew official responses from groups like the National Association of Evangelicals, who drew up a 1963 resolution that named the court’s decisions on prayer and Bible reading as harmful secular forces that threatened the public expression of religion more broadly. Through efforts like these, “Evangelical Protestant organizations increasingly discovered a heightened interest in politics, in no small part because of the Warren Court.” Christopher Alan Hickman, “The Most Dangerous Branch: The Supreme Court and Its Critics in the Warren Court Era” (Ph.D. diss., The George Washington University, 2010), 172-77.

that they had the right to remain silent, the right to know that any statement they made could be used against them, and that they had the right to have an attorney present during police questioning.<sup>52</sup> One *CT* editorial bemoaned criminals' release through decisions like these. "A confessed rapist walks out of a Washington jail on a technicality," the piece lamented, likely a reference to the recent *Mallory v. United States* ruling. In this case the court unanimously ruled that Andrew Mallory's confession of rape after a seven-hour interrogation by federal officers violated the rights of the accused, since Mallory had not been informed of his rights to counsel or silence, and because officers did not officially arraign Mallory until *after* he confessed.<sup>53</sup> The decision, in *CT*'s estimation, was nothing more than "legal hocus-pocus," and it was hampering police efforts and endangering public safety. The piece also assailed a Supreme Court ruling that restricted federal wiretapping (*Benanti v. United States*), contending that it "is denying to our scientific age one of the useful methods of crime detection." Echoing common conservative critiques of the court's civil rights rulings, the piece contended that these rulings were "based on social concepts rather than law...[the Supreme Court] should not be a debating ground where the personal opinions of its members compete with the law." It concluded with a call to readers to "an aroused public opinion...If this requires action then let us have it."<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> "Miranda v. Arizona," Oyez, accessed January 26, 2017, <https://www.oyez.org/cases/1965/759>.

<sup>53</sup> "Mallory v. United States," Oyez, accessed January 26, 2017, <https://www.oyez.org/cases/1956/521>.

<sup>54</sup> "Technicality A Vicious Device for Outwitting the Law," *Christianity Today*, January 6, 1958. Evangelical criticisms of the Warren Court's decisions on criminal procedure continued into the late sixties. For example, see "We Must Stop," *United Evangelical Action*, June 1967; "The Warren Court Era," *Christianity Today*, July 19, 1968.



For the National Association of Evangelicals, “action” on these troubling Supreme Court rulings meant educating church leaders on the crime issue and introducing them to the rough and tumble of American political life. The NAE began hosting seminars in Washington, D.C. in the 1960s, making good on the neo-evangelical call to Christian civic engagement. These seminars, dubbed “Christian Responsibility in Public Affairs” and later called the “Washington Leadership Briefing,” allowed evangelical pastors and laypeople to meet with congressional leaders, tour government buildings, and hear briefings from political movers and shakers.<sup>55</sup> Crime concern was a feature of these seminars, with law enforcement officials offering their perspective to attendees through talks like “Law Enforcement and the Role of Churches in Preventing Crime.” At the 1966 meeting the Supreme Court was targeted more directly. Attendees heard from the Washington police chief about how the rulings like *Mallory* had hamstrung police efforts and ennobled criminals. Illinois Republican congressman John B. Anderson suggested to the gathering that the answer might lie in a constitutional amendment, which could have, “a therapeutic affect on the U.S. Supreme Court.”<sup>56</sup> In engaging crime and the court at gatherings like this, evangelicals had their finger on the pulse of the nation. As one scholar has put it, “no issue seemed to animate as much [national] discussion as the Court and the problem of crime.”<sup>57</sup> The explicitly religious

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<sup>55</sup> “Washington Seminar Folder,” n.d., National Association of Evangelicals records, collection 113, box 62, folder 12, Billy Graham Center Archives.

<sup>56</sup> Clyde W. Taylor, “A Washington Seminar for Pastors and Laymen,” *United Evangelical Action*, December 1963; Clyde W. Taylor, “Capital Commentary: Law Enforcement,” *United Evangelical Action*, March 1966.

<sup>57</sup> Hickman, “The Most Dangerous Branch,” 263.

questions of prayer and Bible reading in public schools might not have garnered evangelicals much favor with the rest of the country, but the crime issue afforded them a great deal of common ground.

The effects of this national consciousness motivated both of the major presidential candidates of the 1964 election, Republican Barry Goldwater and Democrat Lyndon Johnson, to trumpet the crime issue. However, it was still an open question as to what form a federal response to crime would take. It was also not yet completely clear how evangelicals would align. Goldwater made more overt “law and order” appeals in his campaign, often framing these concerns as a critique of the “lawless” civil rights movement. Johnson talked about crime in more measured tones, linking the issue to social uplift more generally. He criticized Goldwater along these lines: “There is something mighty wrong when a candidate for the highest office bemoans violence in the streets but votes against the war on poverty.”<sup>58</sup> Johnson ultimately won the 1964 election in a landslide, a testament to his broader appeal a national electorate that was suspicious of the hardline conservatism of Goldwater.<sup>59</sup> Though many evangelicals (particularly in the South and Sunbelt) had supported Goldwater, Billy Graham remained in Johnson’s camp due to their personal friendship (though Goldwater’s limited national appeal may

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<sup>58</sup> Murakawa, *The First Civil Right*, 76.

<sup>59</sup> Goldwater was unapologetic about adopting this mantle, famously declaring in his nomination acceptance speech that “Extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice, and moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue.” Johnson supporters utilized slogans like this to great effect during the campaign, who linked the sentiment to Goldwater’s untrustworthy, “radical” positions (like his lack of support for the civil rights movement). Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt*, 251.

have been a factor as well).<sup>60</sup> Nevertheless, Johnson knew his administration had a mandate on crime, and he made the issue a key part of his Great Society policy campaign.

In July 1965, via executive order, Johnson established the Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice, known as the Katzenbach Commission (after its chair, attorney general Nicholas Katzenbach). The commission's makeup was middle-of-the-road, even "bland," as one commentator called it, a bipartisan mix of leaders from politics, business, and law enforcement.<sup>61</sup> One member was former Minnesota judge and governor Luther Youngdahl. A centrist Republican and devout Lutheran who regularly spoke about his faith at Graham crusades and Youth For Christ events, Youngdahl exemplified a moderated evangelical approach to the crime issue.<sup>62</sup> Though he had made his early career out of pursuing gambling, bootlegging, and prostitution rackets in Minnesota (declaring to a Senate subcommittee on crime that "I want everything stopped that is a violation of the law, no matter who sponsors it"), Youngdahl eventually became well-known for his liberal civil liberties rulings.<sup>63</sup> By the mid-1960s Youngdahl's public stance on crime issues was characterized by a balanced tone. Crime could be reduced, not through harsher punishment, but by "exterminating its roots – the roots of slums, overcrowded schools, denial of job opportunities because of race and color of skin." Convicted criminals should be punished, but they should generally be pushed toward

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<sup>60</sup> Wacker, *America's Pastor*, 210-11. For more on Goldwater's southern and sunbelt appeal, see chapter 9 of Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt*.

<sup>61</sup> Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime*, 81.

<sup>62</sup> Robert Esbjornson, *A Christian in Politics, Luther W. Youngdahl; a Story of a Christian's Faith at Work in a Modern World* (Minneapolis: T. S. Denison, 1955).

<sup>63</sup> "Outspoken Judge: Luther Wallace Youngdahl," *New York Times*, June 16, 1961.

alternatives to incarceration, like probation and halfway houses.<sup>64</sup> The Katzenbach Commission's recommendations were in line with Youngdahl's approach and the broadly liberal mantle that characterized the Johnson administration: "Widespread crime implies a widespread failure by society as a whole." To solve this failure, work was needed "to eliminate slums and ghettos, to improve education, to provide jobs."<sup>65</sup>

Youngdahl's presence on Johnson's crime commission was not enough, however, to placate evangelicals who understood the roots of crime differently. After some initial measured praise of Johnson for including crime in part of his broader Great Society campaign against social ills, *CT* criticized the commission for recommending liberalization of certain laws and its ignorance of the agency of individuals in favor of "external controls." The problems owing to a "lack of a more significant respect for moral standards" might have been mitigated, *CT* argued, if the commission had clergy representation.<sup>66</sup> Indeed, one member of the commission itself seemed to agree. In an addendum issued alongside the commission's findings, the Pennsylvania Democratic attorney (and devout Roman Catholic) Genevieve Blatt lamented the lack of reference to "man's alienation from his God" as "a crime-inducing factor." In America's war against crime, "religion is a real weapon. In my personal opinion, it is the best weapon. And it

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<sup>64</sup> Alfred E. Clark, "Youngdahl Urges More Probation," *New York Times*, June 1, 1963; "Judge Youngdahl Urges Improved Detention Systems: Minister Sees Need For Prayer Solution," *The Washington Post*, May 16, 1966.

<sup>65</sup> Murakawa, *The First Civil Right*, 82. Importantly, Elizabeth Hinton notes how the commission persisted in framing many of the problems related to crime in terms of the "tangle of pathology" that, in J. Edgar Hoover's opinion, particularly afflicted black families. The commission drew primarily on the opinions of law enforcement officials like Hoover, not those of the residents of areas most affected by crime. Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime*, 83-4.

<sup>66</sup> "Crime and Christianity," *Christianity Today*, March 26, 1965; "The War On Crime," *Christianity Today*, April 14, 1967; "The Criminal Code: Reform or Retreat," *Christianity Today*, May 26, 1967.

should be used.” Evangelicals happily trumpeted Blatt’s minority report, a remarkable development considering their lingering suspicion of Catholics’ place in American public life. Indeed, on the same page that *United Evangelical Action* listed an ad for a Pennsylvania “soul-winning mission” to Roman Catholics (who were “lost without love, trapped by traditions, paralyzed by popery...”), the magazine dedicated a column to reprinting the Catholic Blatt’s critique. One Indiana Evangelical United Brethren church devoted its regular newspaper space to praising her analysis, albeit with more of a “born again” emphasis. And a New York lawyer who had previously bewailed the apparent victory of secularism in *Engel v. Vitale* contended that Blatt offered “the true key to knowledge of crime.”<sup>67</sup>

The fact that Graham did not endorse Goldwater and that the evangelical Youngdahl could find a place on Johnson’s crime commission indicated that broader evangelical alignment with punitive politics was not a forgone conclusion. But everything changed in the mid to late 1960s, as large urban uprisings enveloped parts of several American cities. The most famous riot occurred in the African-American Los Angeles neighborhood of Watts, where racial tension had been simmering for years and accusations of police brutality were common. Large-scale unrest broke out in August 1965 after a white police officer stopped a black man for drunk driving. Black residents of the neighborhood began vandalizing white-owned businesses and harassing police,

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<sup>67</sup> “Crime Commission Member Says Report Omitted Place of Religion,” *United Evangelical Action*, April 1967; Christian Crusaders Class of the Evangelical United Brethren Church of Waterloo, “From The Study: Notes and Quotes,” *The Waterloo Press*, November 21, 1968; Edward F.L. Bruen and Saul C. Downes, “Case of the Regents Prayer, The,” *New York Bar Bulletin* 19 (1961-1962): 23–27; Edward F.L. Bruen, “Which Response to Crime’s Challenge: Parley or Fight,” *New York State Bar Journal* 40 (1968): 281–84.

with more than 35,000 residents eventually joining the fray. Los Angeles police and National Guard soldiers mobilized to quell the violence. The aftermath of the uprising was the destruction of entire city blocks, 3,000 arrests, and 34 dead.<sup>68</sup>

While civil rights advocates named the riots as the logical conclusion of the racism and impoverished conditions that black people in America faced, conservative voices used the riots to double down on the need for a swift, harsh governmental response. These alignments were not unexpected in theory, but what was beginning to change was how so many more Americans were beginning to gravitate to the punitive side.<sup>69</sup> Among them was Billy Graham, who over the course of the riots became the chief religious exponent and symbolic reference to this end. He named communists, “leftist,” influence, and civil rights demonstrations as the culprits for the unrest.<sup>70</sup> “We need salvation from lawlessness,” he preached on August 15, 1965 in Montreat, NC (the Watts riots did not subside until the next day). “There is an organized attempt in America to down-grade the policeman... There is a breakdown of law... Our city streets have been turned into jungles of terror, mugging, rape, and death.” He then immediately pivoted to the civil rights movement. America has made a valiant effort to solve its racial problems, he argued, but in the case of racial justice “laws and legislation are not enough.” Thus far, this was largely familiar messaging. But then, a shift: “Congress should immediately drop

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<sup>68</sup> Murakawa, *The First Civil Right*, 77-8; Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime*, 63-4.

<sup>69</sup> Michael W. Flamm, *Law and Order: Street Crime, Civil Unrest, and the Crisis of Liberalism in the 1960s* (Columbia University Press, 2007).

<sup>70</sup> Bill Henry, “By the Way: Capital Nervous About L.A. Riots,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 17, 1965; “Leaders At Odds Over L. A. Riot,” *The Chicago Defender*, August 21, 1965; “Curfew Lifted in Los Angeles,” *New York Times*, August 18, 1965.

all other legislation and devise new laws to deal with riots and violence such as we have witnessed in Los Angeles.”<sup>71</sup> The evangelist who had previously proclaimed personal conversion as the ideal response to crime had himself had a change of heart: laws were indeed necessary in order to address the widespread disorder that was rampant on America’s streets. “In this dangerous situation we need tough new laws,” he preached, “as well as a great spiritual awakening in America.” Graham’s push for laws to address social disorder immediately had an impact. His comments to this effect were cited by others who blasted the civil rights movement’s alleged influence in the riots and who wanted to see more tough justice. The *Chicago Tribune* saw it fit to put Graham’s image on a column making this claim, though the evangelist was only quoted briefly in the piece.<sup>72</sup>

The BGEA organized an intensive evangelistic campaign in Watts (to “hold out spiritual direction to the people of Watts in solving their difficulties”), but Graham’s choice of surveying the neighborhood via helicopter while clothed in a bulletproof vest was in keeping with his growing belief that the welfare of flesh and blood was at stake, not simply spiritual forces.<sup>73</sup> He was in good company, as the immediate and long-term governmental response to situations like Watts also stressed militarized security. 16,000

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<sup>71</sup> Billy Graham, “Saved or Lost?,” August 15, 1965, Collection 265, box 28, folder 8, Billy Graham Center Archives. In the archived copy of this sermon many of the parts having to do with rioting and crime are crossed out. Graham likely used the Montreat sermon as a basis for a Houston crusade sermon that he preached several weeks later. The Houston sermon manuscript followed the Montreat version except in the crossed-out sections of the original version. Billy Graham, “Saved or Lost?” (Houston, TX, November 24, 1965). See also “Get Tough Policy Urged by Graham,” *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, August 15, 1965.

<sup>72</sup> “Riots Are Subsidized as Well as Organized: Barron’s Weekly,” *Chicago Tribune*, August 6, 1967.

<sup>73</sup> “3-Day Crusade by Graham Group to End in Watts,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 4, 1965; Miller, *Billy Graham and the Rise of the Republican South*, 128.

federal troops were marshaled to the neighborhood, arriving in helicopters and tanks. After the smoke cleared in Watts and other areas affected by riots, a strong law enforcement presence remained, with ramped-up practices of surveillance and policing. The Watts response presaged the aggressive mode of policing that would characterize America's crime war in future decades.<sup>74</sup>

Riots like those in Watts also moved the Johnson administration to re-define its understanding of the sources of black criminality. Whereas Martin Luther King, Jr. and civil rights activists saw the riots as proceeding primarily from generations of racism and poverty, other observers argued that urban crime was the result of the breakdown of the black family unit. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, an aide to Johnson, had written a report in March of 1965 entitled "The Negro Family: The Case for National Action" that made such a claim.<sup>75</sup> Absentee fathers and overbearing mothers in black families were to blame for the criminal chaos enveloping black communities. In the wake of Watts, Moynihan's report became the go-to reference point for national politicians and press attempting to contextualize the violence.<sup>76</sup>

While Moynihan's analysis was important in shaping elites' understandings of urban crime unrest, evangelicals were diffusing a complementary perspective into broader American culture. Though crime was equated with sin and individuals were ultimately culpable for their choices, lawbreaking still had complex causes. For evangelicals, these causes were primarily to be found in the breakdown of families, the

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<sup>74</sup> Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime*, 73.

<sup>75</sup> Murakawa, *The First Civil Right*, 77.

<sup>76</sup> Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime*, 75.



effects of licentious media, and the broader absence of Christian influence in American life. Waxing on the problem of juvenile delinquency, a military academy chaplain posed a question to *CT* readers: “Can the immorality of the teen-ager be divorced from the moral climate in which he or she is raised?” No, he argued. “Teen-agers live not in a vacuum but in a context. They adapt to and adopt the dominant patterns of the nurturing society at the level of their ability and interest. No child is an entity, ‘an island entire of itself.’” The “threefold guilt” for juvenile delinquency therefore lay in the deficiencies of the American home, school, and church; mothers and fathers have abdicated their parental responsibilities, schools have settled for “mediocrity in instruction,” and churches have positioned themselves as little more than social agencies with “no direct and relevant summons to an eternal service.”<sup>77</sup> This was evangelicals’ version of the progressive philosophy, that social ills could be attributed to diverse contributing factors beyond individual choice, *but* that these social ills were precisely linked to the loss of conservative religious and philosophical virtues. It reflected a different emphasis than the standard liberal explanations of poverty and racism as the decisive factors in driving crime. This vision would later push evangelicals into political engagement on other issues relating to “family values,” but here it was still linked directly to crime and delinquency concerns. Driving these issues’ connection home, the NAE lamented that Johnson had ignored their request to “provide help and encouragement to those fighting obscenity”

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<sup>77</sup> Allen F. Bray III, “Try Them with Truth,” *Christianity Today*, April 24, 1964.

while also pointing out that the president's 1965 address to congress on crime lacked any reference to illicit literature.<sup>78</sup>

This was not to say that Johnson had not tried to mobilize religious appeals or constituencies in service of his progressive-styled attack on urban unrest. However, *who* he chose to appeal to evinced a misunderstanding of who was increasingly driving the public conversation on crime in American politics and Christianity. On July 27, 1967 Johnson proclaimed a "National Day of Prayer and Reconciliation" in response to riots. "We dedicate ourselves once more to the rule of law, in whose absence anarchy is loosed and tragedy is born," the statement read. "We pray to Almighty God, the Author of our liberty, for hearts free from hate, so that our Nation can be free from bitterness."<sup>79</sup> In his accompanying comments Johnson distinguished between the work of civil rights protesters and that of rioters: "the looting, arson, plunder and pillage which have occurred are not part of a civil rights protest."<sup>80</sup> Johnson also made similar appeals directly to Christian leaders. In a March 1968 meeting with Baptist leaders in the White House Rose Garden (organized by the Southern Baptist Convention's Christian Life Commission), Johnson argued that the answer to social problems like crime was a renewed sense communal responsibility. However, he noted, in an apparent nod to the frequent "heart change" refrain among evangelicals in the Southern Baptist Convention and elsewhere,

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<sup>78</sup> Clyde W. Taylor, "War on Obscenity?," *United Evangelical Action*, June 1965.

<sup>79</sup> "Lyndon B. Johnson: Proclamation 3796—National Day of Prayer and Reconciliation," accessed January 13, 2017, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=106036>.

<sup>80</sup> W. Barry Garrett, "LBJ Calls for Prayer and Action For Justice," *Baptist Press*, July 28, 1967. I am grateful to Taffey Hall and the staff of the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives for their assistance with my SBC research. They have helpfully made issues of *Baptist Press* available online: [http://www.sbhla.org/bp\\_archive](http://www.sbhla.org/bp_archive).

legislation could only do so much: “the roots of public policy must lie in private morality.”<sup>81</sup>

Johnson’s coordination with Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) leadership reflected a broader complementarity on the crime issue among leaders of Protestant denominations and liberal politicians. Though the SBC’s Bible belt-centered history connoted the preaching of a traditional old time gospel, those who controlled many of the denomination’s seminaries and agencies took moderate stances on a number of issues, like abortion.<sup>82</sup> A day after Johnson met with SBC leaders, Johnson’s attorney general Ramsey Clark spoke to the conference, calling for more church involvement in crime prevention and support for law enforcement, but also in criminal rehabilitation. During Q&A, the audience applauded Clark when he stated his opposition to the death penalty.<sup>83</sup> Foy Valentine, head of the Christian Life Commission (CLC), had previously made similar moderated statements. Though he admitted that black radicals probably had a role in triggering urban riots, he argued that the true cause of urban unrest was the tragic state of poor, segregated African-American neighborhoods.<sup>84</sup> Valentine and other SBC agency heads elsewhere made overt pro-civil rights appeals and urged their fellow Baptists to consider the riots as rooted in economic and racial injustice.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> “LBJ Appeals to Nation For Change In Hearts,” *Baptist Press*, March 27, 1968.

<sup>82</sup> Barry Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon: Southern Baptist Conservative and American Culture* (University of Alabama Press, 2002), 175.

<sup>83</sup> “American People Need Desire For Justice,” *Baptist Press*, March 28, 1968.

<sup>84</sup> Jim Newton, “Carmichael, Race Oppression Blamed for Nashville Rioting,” *Baptist Press*, April 20, 1967.

<sup>85</sup> “Positive Actions in Race Relations Urged By Baptists,” *Baptist Press*, January 10, 1968.

In making statements like these that generally tracked with Johnson's understanding of the relationship of crime and rioting to systemic social problems, SBC leaders reflected the approach of their counterparts at more liberal Protestant organizations and denominations. These leaders had successfully mobilized on civil rights over the past decade-and-a-half, defining the issue of racial justice, as the president of the United Church of Christ put it to delegates at the General Synod meeting of 1963, as "the over-riding moral issue" of the time.<sup>86</sup> The influence of mainline organizations like the National Council of Churches reached the height of influence on this issue in 1963-4, as it mobilized laity in letter writing campaigns on behalf of support of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. When faced with questions around crises of urban law and order at their denominational meetings in the late sixties, mainline leaders spoke in tones sympathetic to the plight of African Americans. The Rt. Rev. Ned Cole, Jr. told an Episcopal mission conference that "Blacks feel that they have not been helped by the law...I'm not in favor of burning, but this is the only way they can call attention to their lot."<sup>87</sup> A few months later the Episcopal bishops of the United States unanimously adopted a position paper that stated that "law and order" must never be separated from "justice" and "the necessity for a more just society."<sup>88</sup> Black pastor Harold L. Hunt preached at a United Church of Christ synod in Cincinnati that "You will not have law and order until there is

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<sup>86</sup> James F. Findlay, *Church People in the Struggle: The National Council of Churches and the Black Freedom Movement, 1950-1970* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 4.

<sup>87</sup> "Unity of Mission Conference Draws 143 Participants to Chicago," *Episcopal News Service*, June 5, 1968, [http://www.episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/ENS/ENSpress\\_release.pl?pr\\_number=66-19](http://www.episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/ENS/ENSpress_release.pl?pr_number=66-19).

<sup>88</sup> Weldon Wallace, "Bishops Warn Against 'Law And Order' Cloak," *The Baltimore Sun*, October 25, 1968; Diane Stepp, "Law and Order and Justice Urged by Episcopal Bishops," *The Atlanta Constitution*, October 25, 1968.

justice.” The riots in black neighborhoods, he argued, are better understood as rebellions: “These people were rebelling against a system that is insensitive to their needs.”<sup>89</sup>

Mainline leaders had a loud voice with which to shepherd their churches on law and order matters, but many in their flocks were wary. Part of this was a result of past successes. The mainline movement lost steam after their initial work in lobbying for civil rights, as later efforts were hindered by a lack of concrete legislative objectives in the struggle for racial justice. Similarly, moderate and liberal Protestant leaders also lost social capital because of shifting tides of public opinion around issues of law and order in the grassroots of their own denominations.<sup>90</sup> Not long after SBC leaders applauded Ramsey Clark’s anti-death penalty stand, the national SBC newspaper reported that the majority of the denomination’s local pastors were pro-death penalty (10% higher than the American public more broadly).<sup>91</sup> SBC pastors and Sunday school teachers were also reported to be overwhelmingly in favor of conservative Supreme Court justices, primarily because of law and order concerns.<sup>92</sup> While the CLC consistently pointed to the enmeshment of crime issues *with* racial and economic injustice, polling showed that crime as a *singular* issue was a top concern of Southern Baptist laypeople (notably

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<sup>89</sup> James L. Adams, “Race and Riots Engage United Church,” *Christianity Today*, July 21, 1967.

<sup>90</sup> Findlay, *Church People in the Struggle*, 1993, 64-5.

<sup>91</sup> “Church Leaders Take ‘Hardline’ Position on Death Penalty,” *Baptist Press*, July 10, 1969.

<sup>92</sup> Martin B. Bradley, “Baptist VIEWpoll Report: Baptist Leaders Prefer Appointment of ‘Conservatives’ To High Court,” *Baptist Press*, July 23, 1969.

separate from race, which was also in the top three, along with war), and that most people surveyed knew little about the work or stances of the CLC.<sup>93</sup>

Among Presbyterians, conservatives pointed to the divergence among denominational leaders and laity on crime issues as symptomatic of the theological divide over doctrinal issues regarding evangelization and scripture. *The Presbyterian Journal* (originally founded by L. Nelson Bell as *The Southern Presbyterian Journal* to be a counterpoint to the liberalizing Presbyterian Church in the United States, or PCUS) lamented that national church organizations were trying to promote “forgiveness” and leniency to criminals, and state legislatures were to be commended for their more hardline stance on crime.<sup>94</sup> *The Concerned Presbyterian*, a conservative paper also created over worry about the liberal direction of the denomination, justified the need for its own existence by pointing to the anti-capital punishment and pro-civil disobedience appeals from Presbyterian leadership, as well as their lack of clear consciousness of the need for law and order. The paper argued that liberalized crime approaches were not only immoral, but were evidence of the detachment of church leaders from the pulse of the faithful and the American public at large. One 1968 piece pointed to recent Gallup polling that showed that the majority of Americans believed religion’s impact to be waning and that one of the top four reasons was “growing crime, immorality and

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<sup>93</sup> Floyd Craig, “Survey Lists Race, War, Crime As Top Baptist Moral Issues,” *Baptist Press*, December 5, 1969.

<sup>94</sup> “Punishment Study Is Killed By Legislature,” *The Presbyterian Journal*, July 10, 1963. For more background on the theological and political divides within American Presbyterianism, see Kenneth Taylor, “The Spirituality of the Church: Segregation, The Presbyterian Journal, and the Origins of the Presbyterian Church in America, 1942-1973,” *Reformed Perspectives Magazine*, August 19, 2007, [http://thirdmill.org/newfiles/ken\\_taylor/ken\\_taylor.church.spirituality.html](http://thirdmill.org/newfiles/ken_taylor/ken_taylor.church.spirituality.html).

violence.” The implication was clear: “most of the major denominations must bear their full share of responsibility for the growing crime, immorality and violence which is so prevalent in America today. Church leaders have encouraged crime by condoning the violation of laws...they have encouraged violence by taking the position that violence is necessary when other means fail.”<sup>95</sup>

The fabric holding many Protestant denominations together was beginning to tear. This tear would eventually produce a split in Presbyterianism (with conservatives moving to found the Presbyterian Church in America in 1973-4), a conservative resurgence in the Southern Baptist Convention (where conservatives took over the denomination’s executive offices, boards, and seminaries), and a broader exodus of many conservative laity from other denominations (like Methodism) that did not formally fracture but nonetheless lost members to evangelical congregations. While moderate leaders of the SBC often argued into the 1970s that their denomination was distinct from the emerging evangelical coalition, they missed how their conservative brethren were increasingly attaching themselves to neo-evangelicalism’s associated cultural, theological, and political markers (and eventually, the term “evangelical” itself).<sup>96</sup> Protestant denominational splits at this time have often been narrated as theological disputes like

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<sup>95</sup> “The 1966 General Assembly!,” *The Concerned Presbyterian*, June 1966; “Religion’s Impact Waning,” *The Concerned Presbyterian*, September 1968; “The 1969 Mobile General Assembly,” *The Concerned Presbyterian*, July 1969.

<sup>96</sup> Foy Valentine famously remarked in 1976 that “Southern Baptists are not evangelicals. That’s a Yankee word.” Barry Hankins has chronicled how, from the late 1970s on, Valentine’s suspicions were exchanged by SBC conservatives who, despite never officially aligning with the NAE, “were more than happy to lock arms with certain evangelicals as both groups felt that they had a chance to shape profoundly American culture.” Barry Hankins, “Southern Baptists and Northern Evangelicals: Cultural Factors and the Nature of Religious Alliances,” *Religion and American Culture* 7, no. 2 (Summer 1997): 271–98.

inerrancy, or divides over standard “culture war” issues like feminism, abortion, or homosexuality. But debates about crime were also a key factor, one that contributed to the alienation of liberal leadership from more conservative laity.

The burgeoning neo-evangelical movement capitalized on these intense rifts over crime, law, and civil rights. In a speech on church-state relations at a 1963 NAE conference, prominent editor and educator James DeForest Murch assailed “liberal educators in church-related colleges and denominational staff executives” who were falling prey to an over-sentimentalized view of the nation’s law and courts. These liberals, Murch argued, were pushing for the “subtle and dangerous” doctrine of “the spirit of the law,” which cut against the immutable principles of justice as found in the Constitution and the Ten Commandments.<sup>97</sup> In an editorial titled “What Do Churches Really Think About Capital Punishment?”, *CT* characterized anti-death penalty statements from Protestant denominations not only as unbiblical, but also “not fairly reflecting the views...of American Christians.”<sup>98</sup> In reporting on Harold Hunt’s sympathetic comments concerning riots at the Cincinnati UCC synod, *CT* made sure to remind readers that Ohio’s recent “racial disturbance” had led to \$1 million in property being destroyed and 200 arrests.<sup>99</sup> L. Nelson Bell devoted his regular *CT* column to blasting church denominations that offer “support of individuals and movements that are challenging constitutional procedures and encouraging a spirit of rebellion and anarchy.

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<sup>97</sup> James DeForest Murch, “The Protestant Position Today,” 1963, National Association of Evangelicals records, collection 113, box 53, folder 1, Wheaton College Archives and Special Collections.

<sup>98</sup> “What Do Churches Really Think About Capital Punishment?,” *Christianity Today*, July 18, 1960.

<sup>99</sup> James L. Adams, “Race and Riots Engage United Church.”



Some churchmen now say openly that there must be revolution, even bloodshed, before there can be a new social order.” Civil disobedience created the riotous conditions ravaging America, and yet this “moral cancer” of lawlessness garnered “the approval of most of the major denominations.” He begged future denominational meetings to “take stock of what has been loosed upon the land” and to consider the fact that “our most distinguished jurists and law-makers have deplored the actions of various church courts in condoning civil disobedience.”<sup>100</sup> These critiques were an appeal to populism (leaders were “not fairly reflecting the views”), but also to respectability (seen in the nod to “distinguished” experts). The latter move was especially important. As mainline denominations fractured, the neo-evangelical movement was framing itself as a respectable religious option that stood over and against liberal Protestant leaders. They not only believed in traditional Christian truth, but they also took seriously the expert opinion of those who made and enforced the law. There was, in more ways than one, a new sheriff in town.

As if to drive the contrast between liberal Protestantism and the emerging evangelical movement home, the NAE released its own crime resolutions in 1966 and 1968 that linked crime with other dangerous forces threatening to envelop the nation. “The Christian community recognizes that law and order are essential principles in the divine economy,” the 1966 resolution stated. The NAE named crime as a “revolutionary” force, tying it to other evangelical political bugaboos, such as civil rights and Vietnam

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<sup>100</sup> L. Nelson Bell, “A Layman And His Faith: Civil Disobedience,” *Christianity Today*, April 26, 1968.

protestors, and contending that there was “no more ominous sign of crisis” in the country than the fact that “law and order are breaking down on a national scale.” The answer was closed legal loopholes and the promotion of “strong and effective law enforcement.” Though the 1968 statement made a very brief nod to the need for offender rehabilitation, gone were the days when the sinful yet sympathetic stories of individual criminals (like Jim Vaus) were highlighted. The sympathetic figures now were the police, who “often stood helplessly by while acts of vandalism and looting took place before their eyes.” Officers faced inconsiderate courts and indiscriminate charges of police brutality, the 1968 statement contended, before targeting the “civil and religious leaders who have shown themselves seemingly more concerned for the criminal than the victim of his crimes.” Presumably the NAE meant the likes of liberal Protestants and the Warren court, but they description could have easily referenced their very evangelical brethren like Vaus, Wilkerson, or even Graham, who ministered to criminals in such a way only a decade earlier.

Another shift this resolution indicated was how the NAE saw crime as a means through which to solidify evangelicals’ status as America’s civil religious authorities. The 1966 statement was analogous to standard neo-evangelical concerns with liberalism and fundamentalism. Like the liberal theology that had damaged faithful biblical witness, the “un-American mood which has invaded our society...demonstrates itself as godless, revolutionary and disloyal to the government.” Like fundamentalists, in the case of “loyal Americans” the problem was not their beliefs but their ineffective application: “For too long loyal Americans have sat back and watched with dismay the erosion and

disintegration of many of our divinely-bestowed freedoms...we have remained undemonstrative, thereby confusing Christian self-control with indifference...because of our silence and lack of involvement we have deprived the new generation of a vision and cause to live for.”<sup>101</sup> The NAE’s official statement signaled that the cultural architecture for a new religious consensus on crime was in place. Now, there was work to be done.

### **Lockdown**

Whether evangelicals were correct in their particular diagnosis of the godlessness and indifference that plagued American society, they were right about one thing: the growing crime rate. Street crime was rising dramatically, the rate quadrupling between 1959 and 1971. Between 1963 and 1974, murder rates doubled and robbery rates tripled.<sup>102</sup> Though they may have overstated its importance, missed how crime was linked to other social issues, or codified unrest in racialized terms, evangelicals were right in their understanding that America’s streets were growing more and more dangerous. Other Americans sensed the danger as well, which opened the door for these conservative-yet-engaged Protestants to make their mark on American society by leading on the issue. Combined with the divergence between laity and leadership in Protestant denominations over the issue, the crime issue was making the term *evangelical* politically intelligible, a

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<sup>101</sup> Policy Resolutions Adopted by the National Association of Evangelicals, 1956-1967, “H. Law and Order,” 1966, National Association of Evangelicals records, Box 175, folder 19, Wheaton College Archives and Special Collections; National Association of Evangelicals, “Resolutions Adopted in 1968: Law and Order,” 1968, Collection 584, box 36, folder 6, Billy Graham Center Archives.

<sup>102</sup> James Forman, Jr., “Racial Critiques of Mass Incarceration: Beyond the New Jim Crow,” 114-115. Forman rebuts critiques leveled by Michelle Alexander and others that FBI crime reporting methods were controversial and not trustworthy.

marker of conservative Protestant concern at the grassroots that could be fashioned into a powerful new political tool to fortify America's systems of punishment.

No one recognized the potential of the emerging evangelical bloc better than the 1968 Republican candidate for president, Richard Nixon, who made "law and order" rhetoric a key part of his campaign and outreach to conservative Protestant voters. Though Goldwater's overt law and order appeals had alienated many voters in 1964, the effects of urban rioting and a rising crime rate broadened this appeal. Nearing the end of his term (and deciding not to run again), Johnson saw the writing on the wall: if crime legislation was to receive any of his influence, he would have to work with a congress that was increasingly sensitive to the nerves that Nixon had touched. In 1967 Johnson had proposed the Safe Streets Act, which provided funding for law enforcement professionalization and modernization as well as crime prevention through social services. This was legislation in the mold of the 1965 Katzenbach Commission on which Luther Youngdahl had served, which had recommended more funding for police even as it argued that "Warring on poverty, inadequate housing and unemployment, is warring on crime."<sup>103</sup> But in the months after its proposal, the Safe Streets Act evolved into something altogether different. Republicans and southern Democrats dropped the bill's focus on social programs (such as rehabilitation efforts for juvenile delinquents) in favor of bolstering law enforcement's power and reach through state block grants. Foreshadowing the emerging southern coalition that would galvanize Republican control

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<sup>103</sup> Murakawa, *The First Civil Right*, 82, 85.

of the south and propel Nixon to victory, southern Democrats broke with their party's opposition to amendments that downplayed poverty concerns in favor of tough justice.

A key voice in pushing the revamp of the Safe Streets Act was Representative John B. Anderson of Illinois, a congressman who had previously spoken at NAE gatherings on crime and in 1964 had been named the organization's "Layman of the Year."<sup>104</sup> Anderson wore his evangelical pedigree on his sleeve. As a young boy he had accepted Christ at a revival tent meeting. He practiced law in his hometown of Rockford, IL before eventually winning elections as state's attorney and congressional representative in the U.S. House. His early career in congress established him as a diehard conservative in his voting record, and he made a name for himself in 1961 when he proposed a constitutional amendment that recognized America's status under "the authority and law of Jesus Christ" and empowered congress to "provide a suitable oath or affirmation for citizens whose religious scruples prevent them from giving unqualified allegiance to the constitution, as herein amended." The amendment was controversial for its clear violation of the separation of church and state, and died in committee. Not long after the amendment fiasco, Anderson began to temper his hardline conservatism, most noticeably in the area of civil rights. On April 9, 1968 (just days after Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination, which sparked riots nationwide) Anderson cast the tiebreaking vote in the House Rules Committee to allow consideration of a bill that prohibited racial discrimination in housing. With the riots, King's death, and a growing recognition of

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<sup>104</sup> "Congressman Cited as 'Layman of Year,'" April 8, 1964, National Association of Evangelicals records, collection 113, box 53, folder 3, Billy Graham Center Archives.

America's tragic legacy of racial discrimination all weighing upon his conscience, Anderson broke with his fellow GOP lawmakers (who argued that the bill violated property rights) and his constituents (whose letters to his office indicated enormous opposition to the bill). His vote in support of the bill led civil rights leaders to hail him as a hero, and Anderson later called it "the great turning point in my life."<sup>105</sup>

Anderson's conversion on civil rights was not unlike that of other evangelical public figures at the time, such as Billy Graham, who recognized the suffering of African Americans and the shifting tides of public opinion. But if the changes of heart on civil rights were analogous, so was the doubling down on crime fighting. This was hinted at in Anderson's passionate speech in support of the housing bill, where he simultaneously blasted perpetrators of the riots that had erupted in the aftermath of King's assassination: "In voting for this bill I seek to reward and encourage the millions of decent, hard-working, loyal, Black Americans who do not riot and burn. I seek to give them the hope that the dream of owning a home in the suburbs or a decent apartment in the city will not be denied the man who was born black...I do not condone the rioting. Rather, I say, punish the violators of our laws. Let all men, black and white, understand that the religion of liberty is based on a reverence and respect for the law."<sup>106</sup> Racial and criminal justice were linked.

Two months later Anderson got his chance to prove his commitment to legislative defense of the "religion of liberty" when he became a key voice in the punitive

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<sup>105</sup> Jim Mason, *No Holding Back: The 1980 John B. Anderson Presidential Campaign* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2011), 8-20.

<sup>106</sup> Mason, 19.

modifications to Johnson's Safe Streets Act. As debate between House and Senate leadership took place over which version of this bill should move forward (the Senate's bill had added provisions to make government wiretapping easier, to restrict hand gun sales, and to weaken Supreme Court rulings regarding criminal confessions), Anderson urged his colleagues to accept the Senate version, and quickly. Public pressure was mounting on House members to do something about the crime issue, and Anderson argued that any deliberation on the bill in negotiations between the congressional bodies would water the bill down or even kill it. Anderson rebutted Democratic Rep. Emanuel Celler's critiques that the Senate bill "tosses away fundamental rights of the accused" and was heightening tension between Congress and the Supreme Court: "The confrontation will be between the American people and the Congress if we fail to pass a strong bill...The public will rise up in disgust if we don't pass this bill." Anderson was persuasive, and liberals broke with Celler to oppose further deliberation.<sup>107</sup>

The next obstacle was Johnson's veto threat. Anderson telegraphed the White House to press Johnson to help "decent Americans who so fervently cry for protection from the criminal predators who would turn America completely into a lawless jungle." Johnson was not enthusiastic about certain provisions in the bill (like those regarding wiretapping), but relented because it contained "more good than bad." The "good" was the large federal law enforcement grant to states, \$100 million in 1969 and \$300 million the year after. Though Johnson had originally wanted more federal oversight of the

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<sup>107</sup> Aldo Beckman, "Anti-Crime Bill May Face Long Delay," *Chicago Tribune*, June 2, 1968; Aldo Beckman, "House Clears Way For Stiff Crime Bill," *Chicago Tribune*, June 6, 1968; Frank Eleazer, "House Clears Way For Anti-Crime Bill," *The Atlanta Constitution*, June 6, 1968.

grants, congressional states' rights advocates had pressed the block grant approach, which allowed the money to be spent as states saw fit. "I sign the bill because it responds to one of the most urgent problems in America today," the president remarked, "the problem of fighting crime in the local neighborhood and on the city street."<sup>108</sup>

If they had considered the impact of Johnson's support more carefully, evangelicals might have had less of a negative reaction to the direction of the Democratic administration in terms of crime control, and more willing to consider Johnson's vice president Hubert Humphrey's bid against Nixon. But evangelicals' negative perception of the Great Society's economic programs and Johnson's seeming light touch in terms of criminal justice (despite his willingness to sign the Safe Streets Act) was enough to drive them to Nixon's side. Though Billy Graham's 1956 Hour of Decision sermon had offered a strong "No!" to "more laws, heavier sentences, streamlined administration," Graham disparaged Johnson's approach to crime in radio sermons leading up to the 1968 election. Congress had tried to give police more authority to catch criminals in crime-wracked Washington, D.C., Graham noted, but Johnson had vetoed the bill. Months later he noted the nation's loss of law and order and the fact that today "law means less than at any time in American history. Our crime is the greatest in the world...we need new tough laws against subversive elements and those harming police...Supreme Court decisions have disregarded the right of the people to be secure." Quoting J. Edgar Hoover, Graham said "the people will stomach no more, the choice is ours...With the election year coming up,

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<sup>108</sup> Aldo Beckman, "LBJ Urged to Sign, Veto Anti-Crime Bill," *Chicago Tribune*, June 8, 1968; "Crime-Control Bill," *Los Angeles Times*, June 9, 1968; Max Frankel, "President Signs Broad Crime Bill, With Objections," *New York Times*, June 20, 1968.



American people want law, order, and security.”<sup>109</sup> Graham’ setup for Nixon, the self-proclaimed “law and order candidate,” could not have been more perfect. Nixon had privately told Graham in 1966 that “I could not agree more with your comments with regard to the current wave of lawlessness which is sweeping the country.” By 1968 Nixon had enlisted Graham in his campaign as, in Stephen Miller’s words, a “public and private cheerleader,” and the evangelist’s alliance with the candidate (despite no formal endorsement) helped deliver southern, white, and formerly Democratic voters as part of the California Republican candidate’s “southern strategy.” Graham’s Bible belt *bona fides* did not hurt, but the law and order issue was crucial to a region still smoldering from the civil rights struggle.<sup>110</sup>

After Nixon’s defeat of Humphrey, Graham was a continual source of support for the new president and his policies. As in the campaign, the crime issue was key. Though he did not mention any other political issues, Billy Graham began his prayer at Nixon’s inauguration by naming the consequences of an “increasingly materialistic and permissive and society” that ignores God’s law: “We have sown to the wind and are now reaping a whirlwind of crime, division, and rebellion.”<sup>111</sup> The outgoing Johnson grimaced

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<sup>109</sup> Billy Graham, *A Nation Rocked by Crime* (Hour of Decision Radio Program, 1966), Collection 191, tape 880b, Billy Graham Center Archives; Billy Graham, *Rioting, Looting, and Crime* (Hour of Decision Radio Program, 1967), Collection 191, tape 916, Billy Graham Center Archives.

<sup>110</sup> Miller, *Billy Graham and the Rise of the Republican South*, 130-4.

<sup>111</sup> Billy Graham, “1969 Inaugural Prayer,” n.d., Clipping File, January 1969 folder, Billy Graham Center Archives, <http://www2.wheaton.edu/bgc/archives/inaugural05.htm>.

at Graham's words, a bodily sign of the division between the two administrations that the evangelical preacher was highlighting through reference to the crime issue.<sup>112</sup>

Though many of the actual programmatic details of Nixon's crime war mimicked Johnson's, the policy effect of Nixon's victory was that crime concern became philosophically detached from national anti-poverty efforts. Nixon's attorney general summarized this change when he remarked that the Department of Justice "is an institution for law enforcement – not social improvement."<sup>113</sup> The result was that Nixon focused federal efforts not on crime prevention but punishment: the administration moved to increase prison sentences for crimes and led a drive to build new prisons. Under the influence of scholars like James Q. Wilson, Nixon's prison administrator dispensed with the ideal of rehabilitation as the function of prisons, replacing it with deterrence and retribution.<sup>114</sup>

While most evangelicals were likely not intimately familiar with all the details of Nixon's crime war, their influence had helped make it possible. They had been instrumental in making crime an issue of national concern, defining the terms of the debate, and in delivering support to the Republican candidate Nixon. Though the new president had been accused of race-baiting in his courting the electorate on the crime issue, many evangelicals believed that crime-fighting was a moral issue that transcended race. For them, criminal justice was part and parcel of the flourishing of American society.

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<sup>112</sup> Kruse, *One Nation under God*, 246.

<sup>113</sup> Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime*, 140.

<sup>114</sup> Hinton, 138-166.

A 1970 book by John Anderson, published by the evangelical press Zondervan, bore out this point. Published just two years after his housing and crime bill efforts, Anderson wrote of his own Christian faith with reference to American politics. He narrated his own recognition of problems of racial injustice in America.<sup>115</sup> He lambasted overspending on military and pushed for more investment in poverty stricken inner cities even as he argued that Republican ideals of fiscal restraint and decentralization of governmental power were key to America's well-being.<sup>116</sup> Anderson argued that the GOP needed to be inclusive, rejecting the pull of "sectional interest and prejudice." "Our challenge," he noted, "is to make the Republican Party safe for diversity." Similarly, evangelicals "should remove the blinders of indifference and use [their] peripheral vision to see the need for Christian influence in solving our social and political problems... Christians, who are bidden to be the salt of the earth, have an inescapable responsibility to assert their influence in this area of human affairs."<sup>117</sup> He was confident in a bright future with Nixon at the helm, who he repeatedly implied was a positive result of these impulses.

Anderson dedicated an entire chapter in his book to "Crime, Violence, and the Law." He pushed back against the charge that Nixonian "law and order" was racially coded: "the man who had been robbed, the woman who had been assaulted, the family whose home had been burglarized – these people were hardly being racist when they

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<sup>115</sup> John B. Anderson, *Between Two Worlds: A Congressman's Choice* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1970), 1-10.

<sup>116</sup> Anderson, 46-57.

<sup>117</sup> Anderson, 58-60.

cited their experiences as proof that there had been a breakdown of law and order.” Crime had civic significance, in that it threatened to “turn our citizens into fearful strangers suspicious of each other, and make of our nation the very kind of closed and repressive society which our Founding Fathers were so determined to prevent.” Though he referenced the need for tackling social contributions to crime like poverty, racial discrimination, and the media’s glorification of violence, Anderson praised Nixon’s conception of the problem as a “war” and the fact that the otherwise fiscally conservative president had requested a doubling of federal aid to local law enforcement, to \$1.3 billion. Anderson concluded with a spiritual exhortation. “We have not seen the end of crime and violence, for we live in times marked by conflict, turbulence, and fear. But with God’s help, and with faith in the principles that have brought us safely through other storms, the rising tides of crime and violence can be checked and the religion of liberty prevail.”<sup>118</sup>

Anderson believed that crime could be defeated “with God’s help.” One thing was clear: the federal government, while powerful, could only do so much. Federal prisons only amounted for a small percentage of carceral facilities nationwide, and the success of initiatives like the Safe Streets Act depended upon individual states’ use of block grants for law enforcement. States and municipalities had a great deal of power to exert in the making of their crime policy and in determining the priorities of their police. As the effects of the religious law and order crusade filtered down into states, cities, and

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<sup>118</sup> Anderson, 122-3.

suburbs, evangelicals began to start pushing crime concern on local levels in ways that would have profound effects in creating American mass incarceration over the long term. In order for this localized effort to succeed though, as Anderson put it, the cause needed to be made safe for racial diversity.

### **Race, Crime, and Colorblind Justice**

Skin color has long been the complex backdrop to American concerns about crime, especially during Jim Crow. Over the course of the 1960s the specter of crime became further defined in racialized terms even in the midst of civil rights gains, in part because of the assumptions already pervading white culture regarding the presumed inherent criminality of black men, as well as rising crime rates and riots in majority-black neighborhoods. White evangelicals themselves bought into both of these frames of reference. But as indicated in the work of John Anderson, this was a complicated story; many white evangelicals believed that the cause of racial justice *demand*ed they take the problem of crime in black neighborhoods seriously. In some cases, they projected this belief onto inner city neighborhoods, but often they were actually joining with certain black Christian leaders who were making the similar arguments for crime control. And even when black evangelicals managed to voice their concerns about the racial problems of law and order, whites found that these concerns could be pushed aside or, in some cases, channeled in punitive directions under the “colorblind” label.

At a 1970 gathering known as Urbana, thousands of young evangelicals from across the nation gathered to re-energize their faith and mobilize for mission to the world.

Though previous years of Urbana had largely featured white speakers and worship leaders, this year was different. Attendees were met by the soul-styled sounds of Soul Liberation, an Afro-coifed band that wore African-styled outfits and peppered their lyrics with Black Power-styled slogans.<sup>119</sup> Then, Tom Skinner took the stage. A former Harlem gang member, Skinner had converted to Christianity as a teen and began his own evangelistic ministry soon after. He became known as “Harlem’s Billy Graham” for his similar revivalist emphases in the early 1960s.<sup>120</sup> But as he spoke at Urbana, Skinner adopted the mantle of prophet, not pastor. Skinner began his Urbana message with a genealogy of race and religion in America, exploring the troubling history of slavery and segregation and the toleration or endorsement of Christians of these injustices. During slavery and segregation, he preached, “the evangelical, Bible-believing, fundamental, orthodox, conservative church in this country was strangely silent.” When Christians have evangelized black people, it was usually done with the goal of social control: “We will preach the gospel to those folks so they won’t riot...so that we can keep the lid on the garbage pail.” He then pivoted to the other side of this gospel of pacification, the swaths of evangelicals who have “joined the hoot and cry for ‘law and order.’” What they actually mean by law and order, Skinner declared, is “all the order for us and all the law for them...the police in the black community become nothing more than the occupational force present in the black community for the purpose of maintaining the interests of white society.” Instead of focusing on the corrupt politicians or slum lords who ravage black

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<sup>119</sup> David R. Swartz, *Moral Minority: The Evangelical Left in an Age of Conservatism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 34-5.

<sup>120</sup> “Harlem’s ‘Billy Graham’ Preaching in Revival,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, January 16, 1965.

neighborhoods, evangelicals support the policies that lock up poor black teenagers. This matter went beyond political preference, for it was fundamentally an issue that was keeping black people from believing in Christ: “There is no possible way you can talk about preaching the gospel if you do not want to deal with the issues that bind people.”<sup>121</sup>

Like an Old Testament prophet, Skinner spoke uncomfortable words that challenged the religious mainstream. Though he had been hailed by Billy Graham for his leadership on racial and social issues, Skinner publically challenged Graham’s understanding of race in America even as he noted how the white evangelist had good intentions. The problem, Skinner argued, was Graham’s recent framing of American law enforcement as a divine instrument of God’s will. “From my background in Harlem I grew up not trusting policemen,” Skinner maintained. “They never came to my rescue when I needed them...you can imagine its effect on the black community at large.”<sup>122</sup> But also like the same Hebrew prophets, Skinner’s words often went unheeded in their time. He had been a popular speaker in white evangelical circles for much of the 1960s, appearing at classic evangelical venues like Wheaton College and Chicago’s Moody Church to preach his unique blend of Bible-driven theological conservatism that nevertheless called into question the white Republican Jesus of mainstream American Christian culture.<sup>123</sup> Not long after, however, Skinner fell out of favor. Like many on the

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<sup>121</sup> Tom Skinner, “The U.S. Racial Crisis and World Evangelism,” Urbana, accessed June 28, 2017, <https://urbana.org/message/us-racial-crisis-and-world-evangelism>; Swartz, *Moral Minority*, 34-5.

<sup>122</sup> “Black Clergy Ask Understanding,” *Sacramento Observer*, September 25, 1969.

<sup>123</sup> “Ex-Gang Leader Turns To Christ,” *The Chicago Defender*, November 4, 1967; Tom Skinner, *Tom Skinner Speaks at Wheaton: A Series of Four Messages* (Brooklyn, NY: Tom Skinner Associates, 1969);

evangelical left, he was too theologically conservative for movements like the New Left or black nationalists (whom he often disparaged) but also too politically radical for mainstream evangelicals.<sup>124</sup> By the early seventies his radio program had been dropped by the Moody Bible Institute and Clyde Taylor, director of the NAE, had told the *New York Times* that “we feel he’s a little too pepped” on race issues.<sup>125</sup> When Skinner endorsed George McGovern in his 1972 presidential bid against Nixon and appeared with him in campaign event at Wheaton, he and the hopeful candidate (who would go on to lose the election by a landslide) were met with boos. Skinner’s divorce from his wife soon after did not help matters, giving white evangelical leaders the pretense they needed to distance him formally from their organizations.<sup>126</sup>

With Skinner’s eclipse, conservative-to-moderate white evangelicals conscious of the race problem in American needed a new partner more in line with their approach, one who could speak tough words about crime and punishment but avoid the racial connotations. They found it in black Baptist pastor E. V. Hill. Born in Texas in 1933, Hill had a hardscrabble early life before advancing in civil rights and black political causes in the 1950s. In 1961 he took a job at Mount Zion Missionary Baptist in South Central Los Angeles. Though he had supported the civil rights movement and had denounced Nixon

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Edward Gilbreath, *Reconciliation Blues: A Black Evangelical’s Inside View of White Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 56-72.

<sup>124</sup> This is frequent tension throughout the history of the evangelical left. See Swartz, *Moral Minority*.

<sup>125</sup> “Controversial Black Preacher Putting Stress on Social Issues,” *The New York Times*, September 2, 1973.

<sup>126</sup> Randall Balmer, “Skinner, Thomas ‘Tom,’” *Encyclopedia of Evangelicalism* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2004).



in 1962 (then a California gubernatorial candidate) for disrespectfully addressing him as “Sonny” during a rally, he soon began voicing frustrations with Johnson’s Great Society programs and joined with Billy Graham in the evangelist’s tour of Watts in the aftermath of the riots.<sup>127</sup> Following the riots, Hill served as a vocal supporter of conservative Los Angeles mayor Sam Yorty. Eventually Hill served as his advisor on numerous city initiatives and commissions.<sup>128</sup> Hill began blasting progressive responses to rioting and crime, calling Lyndon Johnson’s policies that stressed social uplift “Operation Frustration” for their inefficiencies and ineffectiveness. Indeed, he later noted to a journalist, it was the aggravation with Johnson’s “Operation Frustration” that led Watts to explode (he did not mention the original catalyzing moment of police brutality, which also had a deep history in the neighborhood).<sup>129</sup>

For whites wanting to ramp up law and order, such as Sam Yorty or Billy Graham, the presence of supportive black leaders like Hill was crucial.<sup>130</sup> In the aftermath of urban unrest, the presence of these black leaders enabled whites to maintain fervent law and order rhetoric and elide possible charges of overt race-baiting. In the same sermon where Graham called for tougher laws in the wake of Watts, he made sure to mention that he was “certain that the responsible Negro leaders are equally as disturbed as the rest of America at the things that are happening.” Though “An entire race should

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<sup>127</sup> “Richard Nixon Denounced by Pastor,” *Afro-American* [Baltimore, MD], November 10, 1962; Miller, *Billy Graham and the Rise of the Republican South*, 128.

<sup>128</sup> Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt*, 288.

<sup>129</sup> E. V. Hill, interview by Mark Joseph, accessed June 28, 2017,

[https://web.archive.org/web/20010518042150/http://www.mjmgroupp.com/Transcripts/EV\\_Hill.htm](https://web.archive.org/web/20010518042150/http://www.mjmgroupp.com/Transcripts/EV_Hill.htm).

<sup>130</sup> For more on Yorty’s crime control efforts, see Flamm, *Law and Order*, 70-1.

not be blamed for what a relatively few irresponsible people are doing,” Graham nevertheless asked Martin Luther King, Jr. and other civil rights leaders to declare a moratorium on protests until things settled down. He was careful to frame this request in such a way so as to avoid charges of racism. Besides arguing that extremists “on both left and right” ought to be curbed, he mentioned that he looked forward to traveling to Los Angeles soon with Ralph Bell, a black evangelist on his staff, to examine the situation firsthand.<sup>131</sup> Though many black leaders had decried Nixon’s law and order rhetoric in 1968 (calling it an appeal to “white backlash people”),<sup>132</sup> Hill put aside his earlier frustrations with Nixon and provided an important endorsement of his candidacy in the 1972 presidential campaign, one in which Nixon doubled down on his law and order messaging. Hill appeared regularly at Nixon rallies and was a key figure in mobilizing the candidate’s “Black Silent Majority,” a small but symbolically significant group of largely middle class African American preachers who lent their support to the candidate’s conservative cause.<sup>133</sup>

Hill endured critique from liberal black religious leaders for alliances like these but, in terms of the crime issue, he could rightfully declaim the “Uncle Tom” label. African American civic and religious leaders led anti-crime coalitions like Hill’s in cities nationwide. Though they were more likely than conservative whites to argue for the need for systemic social reforms in the broader fight against lawlessness (such as better

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<sup>131</sup> “Get Tough Policy Urged by Graham.”

<sup>132</sup> Thomas A. Johnson, “Negro Leaders See Bias in Call Of Nixon for ‘Law and Order,’” *New York Times*, 1968.

<sup>133</sup> Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt*, 334-5.

education, jobs, and the end of discriminatory practices like redlining), these efforts still would push for harsher criminal penalties and increased policing. In New York, the Rev. Oberia Dempsey (originally of Harlem's Abyssinian Baptist Church) led other black clergy in allying with governor Nelson Rockefeller to sign harsh anti-drug policies into law.<sup>134</sup> In majority-black Washington D.C., local pastors regularly partnered with the city council and activists to push harsher penalties for drugs, violent crimes, and gun possession, causes that African American neighborhoods in the city themselves supported overwhelmingly through ballot initiatives.<sup>135</sup> "Local Leaders Plan Crime War" read the headline of one *Los Angeles Times* article that chronicled a meeting of more than 125 black and white civic and religious leaders on the issue. The publisher of the *Los Angeles Sentinel*, a local black newspaper, had convened the meeting. Hill was present, as were pastors from other black churches (including some, like Second Baptist's Thomas Kilgore, who had been active in the civil rights movement). The *Times*' headline was accurate. At the meeting a white attorney spoke up and said that the city's rich and poor people all want "the same thing. We've got to come up with tougher penalties for people who commit crimes." The black pastor of the First African Methodist Episcopal Church concurred, critiquing local police for *not* patrolling black neighborhoods nearly enough.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Michael Javen Fortner, "'Must Jesus Bear the Cross Alone?' Reverend Oberia Dempsey and His Citizens War on Drugs," *Journal of Policy History* 27, no. 1 (January 2015): 118–56.

<sup>135</sup> Forman, Jr., *Locking Up Our Own: Crime and Punishment in Black America*.

<sup>136</sup> Jim Cleaver, "Local Leaders Plan Crime War," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, December 23, 1976.

Though they shared a similar concern with crime and often evinced the same disciplinary response, black and white Christian leaders nonetheless were operating from different reference points, both geographically and conceptually. Black pastors in cities saw firsthand how the introduction of heroin and increased violence were destroying the neighborhoods surrounding their churches, and sometimes harming the churches themselves. In Harlem 200 churches halted their Sunday night services because of fear of rising drug-fueled crime. Oberia Dempsey subsequently begged the Department of Justice to enforce law in “this raped, ravished and scourged city... We demand freedom to come and go without fear of being assaulted, mugged, brutalized by the drug crazed dope addicts, victims of the organized crime syndicate...” Dempsey had tried to ward off drug abuse through rehabilitation initiatives, but it was not enough.<sup>137</sup> Crime was personal, and more law and order may not have been the ideal response, but desperate times called for desperate measures. White evangelicals, by contrast, did not face nearly the same threats of crime in the suburbs for which they increasingly decamped in the 1950s and 60s. For Hill and others, the heat of the fires of Watts could be literally felt; Hill’s own church was just four blocks from the center of the uprising.<sup>138</sup> For Graham, they were more of a metaphor for a sinful and disorderly nation. It was no accident that in the same breath that Graham and other white evangelicals blasted criminals, they also warned of their conceptual connections of to godless communists and unruly, libertine student protestors.

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<sup>137</sup> “Churches in Harlem Hurt by Crime,” *Afro-American* [Baltimore, MD], January 25, 1969.

<sup>138</sup> Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt*, 288.

Black pastors' worries were more exigent than existential. Their own parishioners faced robbery, assault, and addiction, and something had to be done to put a stop to it.

Nevertheless, the crime concerns of black pastors would prove to be a helpful addition to the law and order consensus of white politicians and the evangelicals who supported them. Though some black Christian leaders voiced skepticism of the execution of the law and order paradigm (or outright hostility to it, in the case of Tom Skinner), white politicians and evangelicals were able to leverage black support of their anti-crime rhetoric and proposals where it counted: avoidance of the charge of race-baiting and promotion of the status of anti-crime efforts as “colorblind” and even a help to inner city black communities. The case of black evangelist Howard O. Jones was emblematic. Billy Graham appointed Jones to his staff in 1957, the first African American he had named to his inner ministerial circle. Often the only black person on the crusade platform, Jones regularly endured dirty looks from white audiences (and was denied entry to a whites-only hotel on a crusade trip abroad). Graham saw Jones as a key figure in both his evangelistic appeal to African Americans and in the distancing of his ministry from overt racists and segregationists, a move Jones himself termed “radical.”<sup>139</sup>

Though more conservative than Skinner, Jones could still speak in similarly pointed terms about the problems blacks faced in America even after desegregation. Jones had himself suffered a horrific assault as a young man by a group of drunken whites, as police stood by and did nothing to stop it (even threatening to shoot Jones’

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<sup>139</sup> Edward Gilbreath, “Jesus Was Not A White Man,” *Christian History*, 2014, <https://www.christianhistoryinstitute.org/443/magazine/article/jesus-was-not-a-white-man/>.

father if he interfered). He wrote about this episode in a book published by the evangelical Moody Press in 1968.<sup>140</sup> Elsewhere, in his book *White Questions to a Black Christian*, Jones argued that America's police forces needed to "undergo a major cleanup," removing the police who "use their badges, guns, and clubs as a means of displaying their racism and bigotry." He attacked the "double standard" of American courts, which dispensed justice unequally, with blacks being speedily tried and imprisoned while whites regularly avoided arrest and conviction: "the law is often pushed aside or changed to favor and protect the white lawbreakers."

The answer for Jones was clearly not more racialized law and order. But the way Jones framed his complaints about American criminal justice evinced a hope that law and order could be redeemed if it gained a fully colorblind status. He decried the work of black radicals like Angela Davis, who saw incarcerated blacks as political prisoners and called for the total abolition of prisons. Jones had confidence that, reformed of their past racial sins, prisons were able to function in a race neutral manner: "The truth is that today our prisons are filled with various races of people... Their imprisonment is punishment all guilty criminals deserve." He similarly characterized courts: "We must remove injustice from the courts, and enforce the law fairly in all cases," he wrote. "Individuals who break the law should bear the full penalty." The problem was not the tough prosecution of crime itself but the disparate manner in which it was prosecuted. "The majority of black

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<sup>140</sup> Robert Leo Heinemann, "The 'Social Gospel' of Black Evangelicals, 1968-1975: A Study of a Rhetorical Attempt to Alter Three Race-Related Images." (Ph.D. diss., The Ohio State University, 1975), 245-6; Howard O. Jones, *For This Time: A Challenge to Black and White Christians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1968), 155.

Americans want law and order...” Jones wrote. There is a need to “restore dignity and respect for the role of the law enforcement office.”<sup>141</sup> Jones did not specify what these ideas could look like in practice, but his continuing association with Graham and other mainstream white evangelicals who condemned overt racism while calling for tougher criminal justice indicated that there could be common ground. The practical outworking of this common ground would be further realized in the late sixties and seventies, especially in the state that exemplified a new frontier of politically savvy evangelical public engagement: California.

### **Golden State Discipline**

Ronald Reagan knew something had to change. The former film actor was worried about the direction of California in terms of the moral character of the populace and an overspending, inefficient government. This was why he was considering a run for governor in 1966. But the problems were not limited to the state. He sensed that conservative politics needed to evolve as well in order to appeal to a diverse populace. His Hollywood charm could only do so much to make dry conservative critiques of budgets and bureaucracy compelling to a broader public. If his campaign for governor was to succeed, he needed a new vision to energize the electorate.

This vision came from William Steuart (W.S.) McBirnie, a minister at the independent United Community Church of Glendale, CA and the founder of the

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<sup>141</sup> Howard O. Jones, *White Questions to a Black Christian* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1975), 97, 121, 125-134, 194-6.

California Graduate School of Theology. Embracing fundamentalist doctrine but eschewing its isolationism, McBirnie had been active in California conservative politics for several years. In 1965 he met with Reagan to brainstorm about a potential gubernatorial run. Their conversation at Reagan's home was difficult. Other advisors at the meeting were pressing Reagan to develop a driving concept for his campaign, but it was not yet clear what that should be. On McBirnie's way home from the gathering, however, inspiration struck. In a letter to Reagan ("Ronnie," as he called him) soon after, McBirnie suggested a "more positive direction which you might try out in a speech," one akin to other visionary slogans like the New Deal or Great Society. "Why not try," he proposed, "The Creative Society." This would be "more than a slogan," based on the idea that California's problems could be solved by its own talented citizens, "without the growth of bureaucracy." He then offered five examples, three of which related to business, science, and education. But the other two, including the example McBirnie led with, were related to criminal justice. "The legal profession could, if invited to participate creatively, clean out the snarls and log jams in the courts." Similarly, "the penal system could be overhauled, if the sociologists, psychologists, and others were invited to think new thoughts and if they were encouraged by a state administration which would change laws so as to create a new atmosphere of freedom to deal with old, tough problems." All of these examples of the Creative Society vision were built upon the ideals of self-help, individualism, and common sense. Unlike "the so-called Great Society," this vision would also transcend ideological lines, the "tired old stereotypes of Right Wing vs Left



Wing.” Perhaps most important, McBirnie concluded, the vision could have “national repercussions.”<sup>142</sup>

Reagan took the minister’s suggestions to heart, building on them in his famous “Creative Society” speech at the University of Southern California in April of 1966. He argued for re-implementation of the “original dream which became this nation...that you and I have the capacity for self-government.” The attempt to solve social problems through the centralized governmental efforts, most prominently seen in Johnson’s Great society, not only did not work but also abdicated freedom. Instead, a “Creative Society” would streamline government and unleash the “rich human resources of California,” the state’s business, scientific, educational, and charitable organizations: “The Creative Society must return authority to the local communities.” Until this point Reagan’s speech was largely vague in terms of specific issues, focusing mostly on the grand conservative vision. But then, paralleling McBirnie’s own emphases, he launched into the particular social problems the state faced. Like McBirnie, he also began with criminal justice: “A skyrocketing crime rate has given California almost double its proportionate share of crime--crimes of violence--simply because the state, as a result of certain judicial decisions, denies local governments the right to pass ordinances for the protection of the people.” Instead, “government must call upon the best minds in the field of human relations and law and penology for a creative study of our penal and our parole systems.” Later in the speech, Reagan offered another possible solution to crime with reference to

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<sup>142</sup> W. S. McBirnie to Ronald Reagan, November 30, 1965, Ronald Reagan’s Gubernatorial Papers, Series IV, Box C31, 66: The Creative Society, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library. I am grateful to Kelly D. Barton at the Ronald Reagan Library for sending me a copy of this document.

small, privately-run youth outreach efforts. A boys' ranch in Texas (likely a reference to Cal Farley's Christian ranch in Armarillo, which Reagan had visited a few years before) and a California B'nai B'rith lodge – exemplifications of “a little time and a little human compassion” – not only helped young men, but saved taxpayers thousands of dollars compared to government juvenile detention. Both institutions were not only privately run, but religious.<sup>143</sup> This was a logical response to the religious framing of the crime issue occurring on a national level at the time. And after all, it was a minister who had inspired Reagan's Creative Society vision, with crime concern as a major point. The emerging networks of California evangelicals, many of whom were transplants from the Bible belt, would be receptive to this message.<sup>144</sup>

This vision not only helped Reagan appeal to Golden State evangelicals, but it ultimately drove his outreach to other voters. Capitalizing on rising crime, the public's fresh memory of Watts, and Democratic incumbent Ed “Pat” Brown's failure to deal effectively with unruly student protestors at Berkeley, Reagan pledged throughout the campaign to fight crime and disorder.<sup>145</sup> He knew his audience. Polling at the beginning of the general election showed that crime was the top issue among California voters, with

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<sup>143</sup> Ronald Reagan, “The Creative Society” (University of Southern California, April 19, 1966), <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/news/742041/posts>.

<sup>144</sup> Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt*, 259-292.

<sup>145</sup> Seymour Korman, “Reagan Enters Governor Race,” *Chicago Tribune*, January 5, 1966; Seymour Korman, “Reagan Plans Police School If Elected,” *Chicago Tribune*, August 29, 1966.

“racial problems” coming in second.<sup>146</sup> Reagan won the governor’s race handily, by a margin of one million votes.<sup>147</sup>

Reagan had run his campaign in rhetorical opposition to the progressive specters of Lyndon Johnson and an overextended governmental bureaucracy, but that did not mean California was going to refuse the millions of dollars it received through the block grants of Johnson’s 1968 Safe Streets Act. Already evincing a sense of the national electorate’s sensibilities, Reagan argued that crime, not Vietnam, would also be the defining issue of the 1968 presidential campaign, and he knew that Republican success in the future would depend on strengthening governmental power in service of law and order.<sup>148</sup> To help execute his criminal justice plan, Reagan appointed Herbert Ellingwood as his legal affairs secretary. Ellingwood was a former district attorney in Alameda County and lobbyist for California’s law enforcement and state bar. Reagan advisor Ed Meese, a long time friend of Ellingwood, recommended him because of his experience in criminal law and in legislation development.<sup>149</sup> Along with Meese, Ellingwood worked on numerous projects related to the justice system, like judicial appointments (providing Reagan names of suitable candidates), corrections, trial court reform, campus disturbances, and disbursement of block grant funds for law enforcement. Ellingwood

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<sup>146</sup> Gerard DeGroot, *Selling Ronald Reagan: The Emergence of a President* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2015), 215.

<sup>147</sup> Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt*, 269.

<sup>148</sup> John Elmer, “Crime Top Issue: Reagan,” *Chicago Tribune*, September 29, 1967.

<sup>149</sup> Herbert Ellingwood, “Law Enforcement Planning and Coordination, 1969-1974,” an oral history conducted 1981 and 1983, interview by Gabrielle Morris, 1985, Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice in California, 1966-1976, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 6.

was also a committed evangelical. He was active in the Assemblies of God and was outspoken about the connections of his personal faith to his professional work, and the import of Christianity to the betterment of society.<sup>150</sup> “Every Christian should be involved in social action,” he wrote in one Pentecostal publication in 1968. Anticipating rebuke from “fundamentalist circles” who would “raise a red flag” at this contention, he acknowledged evangelism’s priority. He then he turned his sights to critiquing social gospelers and those who misunderstand the correct methods of Christian social action. Those who practice civil disobedience violate God’s commandment in Romans 13 for souls to “be subject to the higher powers.” Civil disobedience therefore is “unChristian.” By contrast, “the traditional methods of social action will accomplish our goals.” He spoke of his work with youth as an example. Ellingwood served as a lay leader for Teen Challenge and had used his legal background to help incorporate a half-way house.<sup>151</sup> Elsewhere he spoke of the church as a hospital for “all kinds of people...drug addicts, alcoholics, criminals, bad people and good people...there is a great deal of compassion.” And yet, Ellingwood continued, “At the same time there is a strong belief in individual responsibility.”<sup>152</sup>

It was this latter sentiment that framed Ellingwood’s implementation of criminal justice policy under Reagan’s governorship. The governor’s attitude toward criminal justice, Ellingwood claimed, was “aimed at developing individual and corporate

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<sup>150</sup> The Honorable Herbert Ellingwood, Billy Graham Oral History Program, interview by Lois Ferm, May 5, 1986, Collection 141, box 32, folder 2, Billy Graham Center Archives.

<sup>151</sup> Herbert Ellingwood, “Christianity and Social Action,” *Voice of Bethel*, August 1968. Found in Ellingwood, Law Enforcement Planning and Coordination, 1969-1974, 50.

<sup>152</sup> Ellingwood, Law Enforcement Planning and Coordination, 1969-1974, 41.

responsibility, [he was] more of a prosecutor than a regent.” Ellingwood worked on several policies to that effect. He helped develop policy that subverted the exclusionary rule (where evidence gathered through police misconduct could not be admitted in a trial) on the basis that the rule only served for “enhancing a criminal’s career.” Individual accountability demanded that criminals be held responsible for their actions and that this evidence should be admitted. Police who acted against policy could be disciplined separately from the trial.<sup>153</sup> For those convicted of crimes, mandatory penalties were administered, which required that certain crimes receive an absolute minimum sentence. This idea, which would later become known as “mandatory minimums,” was characterized by Ellingwood as originally being popularized by Governor Reagan’s administration before moving to other states. These were administered primarily for drug crimes, which Reagan viewed as “the principal social problem of the State of California,” and weapons violations.<sup>154</sup> Mandatory minimums were increasingly seen as a form of “colorblind” and egalitarian criminal justice, an attempt to eliminate disparities in sentencing between black, white, poor, and wealthy defendants. Though much later they would be criticized for their harsh application, they initially were welcomed by figures all over the political spectrum for their seeming fairness. A brilliant piece of political maneuvering, mandatory minimums could effectively appeal to hardliners who wanted

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<sup>153</sup> Ellingwood, 14-15.

<sup>154</sup> Ellingwood, 37-8.

tough penalties as well as those concerned with the rampant inequality in America's justice system.<sup>155</sup>

The Reagan administration's focus on individual responsibility led to a reframing of the crime problem in California in terms of "victim's rights." Though victim's rights would become a recurring theme of 1980s criminal justice policymaking, Ellingwood noted that Reagan was the first governor to frame crime in this way.<sup>156</sup> "Victim's rights" was another way to frame the anti-crime cause in neutral terms and broaden its appeal; the disproportionate number of victims of crime in black neighborhoods saw this framing gain particular traction therein, with black and white joint sponsorship of events like "California's Forgotten Victim's Week" (an event that E.V. Hill participated in).<sup>157</sup>

Reagan's trusted man here was Vernon Grose, a former aerospace engineer and current systems engineer at Tustin Institute of Technology. Grose served on committees like the California Council on Criminal Justice and the Governor's Select Committee on Law Enforcement Problems.<sup>158</sup> He was charged with the responsibility to develop policy around victim's rights, particularly in terms of trial court practices.<sup>159</sup> Grose was also an outspoken evangelical, well-known elsewhere for his public lobbying against evolutionary science and for the inclusion of creationism in California's public school

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<sup>155</sup> For more on the "liberal" history of mandatory minimums, see Murakawa, *The First Civil Right*, 92ff.

<sup>156</sup> Ellingwood, *Law Enforcement Planning and Coordination, 1969-1974*, 39.

<sup>157</sup> "Judge Heads Crime Panel," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, May 19, 1977. As I discuss in chapter five, the victims' rights movement initially was a progressive project (before conservatives in the seventies and eighties made it their own). See Gottschalk, *The Prison and the Gallows*, 77-80.

<sup>158</sup> Vernon Grose, "Making the Appellate Process Relevant to the Public" (The Fourth California Conference on the Judiciary Task Force on the Appellate Process, October 13, 1977), Collection 274, box 32, folder 1, Billy Graham Center Archives.

<sup>159</sup> Ellingwood, *Law Enforcement Planning and Coordination, 1969-1974*, 39.

curriculum.<sup>160</sup> Though lacking a formal legal or law enforcement background, Grose brought his unique training as an expert in systems engineering to his committee work in the true spirit of Reagan's "Creative Society," where private citizens drove governmental approaches to problems. Grose would work on criminal justice issues for the remainder of the 1970s, arguing that America's "Judeo-Christian" values necessitated a streamlined courtroom environment, where criminals did not escape on technicalities or endless appeals.<sup>161</sup>

With federal funding from the State Streets Act, California developed the most powerful planning effort of any state in the national war on crime.<sup>162</sup> Because of an intransigent Democratic state legislature, many of Reagan's own criminal justice policies were not implemented during his terms as governor. But these proposals would prove visionary. Beginning in 1975, under the leadership of Democratic governor Jerry Brown (the son of Reagan's earlier opponent), the state passed a series of laws that prioritized punishment over rehabilitation, increased the use mandatory minimum sentences, and revoked parole (or made it more burdensome). As a result, California prison populations grew enormously. The fundamental reason for this change was a perception by politicians that the public now wanted to get tough on crime, a product of Reagan's reframing of the political norms on crime in the state.<sup>163</sup> Evangelicals were not the only ones who had

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<sup>160</sup> Randy Moore, *Evolution in the Courtroom: A Reference Guide* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2002), 65, 125.

<sup>161</sup> Vernon Grose, "Making the Appellate Process Relevant to the Public."

<sup>162</sup> Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime*, 143.

<sup>163</sup> Joan Petersilia, "California's Prison Policy: Causes, Costs, and Consequences," *The Prison Journal* 72, no. 1-2 (June 1, 1992): 9, 10-18.

pushed Reagan in this direction, but their influence had been substantial. With a theological gloss that spoke volumes about how evangelical understandings of social engagement had shifted with the crime issue, Ellingwood wrote about this development during Brown's tenure in a piece on crime for an evangelical magazine. Deviating from the conversionist standard that had previously characterized Graham and other evangelicals, Ellingwood wrote, "It's not enough to say, 'Sin is the cause of crime and Jesus is the answer.'" Instead he praised a recent criminal justice change in his state, the abolishment of indeterminate sentencing, and the institution of mandatory, fixed penalties. "In California," he argued, "*punishment* is again legitimate."<sup>164</sup>

To be sure, crime was not the only issue that evangelicals in California were interested in. For example, they organized during Jerry Brown's tenure to support a ballot initiative to ban gays from public school employment.<sup>165</sup> "Family values" issues like these gained a powerful spokesman in University of Southern California psychologist James Dobson, who founded the highly influential Focus on the Family organization in 1977, originally basing the offices in Pomona, CA. But even here the influence of crime concern was palpable. Dobson's landmark 1970 work *Dare to Discipline*, which would sell millions of copies and go through numerous printings, was written as a response to "widespread drug usage, immorality, civil disobedience, vandalism, and violence."<sup>166</sup> In a manner strikingly similar to how evangelicals had blasted progressives who framed crime

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<sup>164</sup> Herbert Ellingwood, "Crime Hurts: The Christian's Role in Relieving the Pain," *New Wine*, May 1977, Duane Pederson Collection, Archives and Special Collections, David Allan Hubbard Library, Fuller Theological Seminary.

<sup>165</sup> Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt*, 374-387.

<sup>166</sup> James C. Dobson, *Dare to Discipline* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1970), 13-14.



in environmental terms, Dobson assailed so-called parenting experts who stressed “patience and tolerance, ruling out the need for discipline” because “love is enough.”<sup>167</sup> Dobson argued instead for a recovery of spanking, though fundamentally as an act of love. Throughout the book, Dobson framed his arguments with reference to broader concerns about social disorder and crime: there were discussions of the leniency of juvenile courts,<sup>168</sup> quotations from criminologists,<sup>169</sup> critiques of the allegedly anti-disciplinary ACLU and “tired old judges,” and the linkage of student riots to loss of disciplinary standards. He dismissed crime’s connection to poverty (“the crime rate will continue to escalate as long as the odds favor the criminal so definitely”<sup>170</sup>) and dedicated an entire chapter to drug abuse (cleverly titled “Discipline Gone to Pot”), written with input from the Los Angeles Police Department. This was, as the title indicated, not so much a book about family values but about *discipline*, a theme that would have resonated with the evangelical parents who had been hearing about crime in sermons, religious magazines, and political appeals for years. Law and order had helped to take evangelicalism public, and now it was coming back home.

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<sup>167</sup> Dobson, 12, 21.

<sup>168</sup> Dobson, 126ff.

<sup>169</sup> Dobson, 100-3.

<sup>170</sup> Dobson, 187.

## Chapter 4: An Errand to the Prison

Bill Lutker was frustrated. The Southern Baptist leader of a small evangelistic organization in Oklahoma, Lutker dedicated some of his time to ministry in local jails. He found few fellow believers who shared this interest. In reply to a 1957 enquiry from a Southern Baptist administrator about recent prison evangelistic efforts in the denomination, Lutker spoke bluntly about the problematic situation. A good Baptist, he referenced scripture in his complaint, quoting Matthew 25 to note that though “‘I was in prison and ye visited me’ has been in our position all that time...until now we have done very little in this field.” He reported a recent success in winning three inmates to Christ at a local jail, but felt alone in this work. Inmates there had told him they had no other resource: “‘you are the first one in here.’” Pushing the SBC administrator to respond, Lutker concluded his letter with an exasperated, capitalized flourish: “There is need for someone in a position like yours to give the challenge and the direction...YET NONE RISE TO THE OPPORTUNITY.” Other responses to the same administrator, while less aggravated, indicated similar issues. Though there was some interest in prison ministry, the work that did exist was disorganized, haphazard, and lacking broader support and recognition. Prison ministers had no inmate-focused curricula, encountered difficulty

gaining permission to get inside facilities, and faced a general lack of interest from fellow believers in providing even part-time financial support.<sup>1</sup>

Less than two decades later, the landscape had changed. A front-page article in a 1976 issue of the *Los Angeles Times* declared in its headline that a nationwide “Prison Revival” was in full force. The article was reprinted in other newspapers across the country. The piece listed famous converts that this revival (“most of it of the evangelical Christian variety”) had claimed, from members of Charles Manson’s clan to the Black Panther Eldridge Cleaver. The *Times*’ lead authority was a prison ministry leader named Ray Hoekstra, who made the bold assertion that “There is far more Christian action in prisons today than in the entire 200-year history of the American prison systems.” Other prison ministers, chaplains, and administrators corroborated the claim. The piece discussed the new ministry of Charles Colson, a former Nixon operative and new Christian convert, who had recently begun gathering men from various federal prisons to attend two-week seminars in Washington D.C. It also mentioned several other figures, like former NFL star Bill Glass, evangelists from Hoekstra’s publishing network, and small county jail ministers.<sup>2</sup> The article, published in what pollsters and commentators were calling the “year of the evangelical,” was a powerful acknowledgment that

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<sup>1</sup> B. G. Allison to A. C. Miller, January 21, 1957; Bill Lutker to A. C. Miller, February 21, 1958; Jack W. Manning to A. C. Miller, January 24, 1957; Joseph Stiles to A. C. Miller, January 25, 1957; Bill Lutker, “Friends Incorporated Newsletter,” January 1958, Collection 138-2, box 1, folder 17, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives.

<sup>2</sup> Russell Chandler, “Inmates ‘Reborn’: Conversions to Christ---A Prison Revival,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 15, 1976. Reprints included Russell Chandler, “Guards, Cells Don’t Bar Prisoners from Religion,” *The Anniston Star* [Anniston, AL], March 20, 1976; Russell Chandler, “Prison Inmates Getting Religion,” *Lansing State Journal* [Lansing, MI], March 27, 1976.

evangelicalism's arrival into prisons was part and parcel with their arrival on the American cultural scene more broadly.<sup>3</sup>

Even if Hoekstra was being hyperbolic, the *Times*' report rightly pointed to some important shifts that had occurred. A national evangelical prison ministry directory published a few years later confirmed it. It listed the founding dates of 317 active prison ministries "committed to sound Biblical principles." Only four ministries had nineteenth century origins (one of which was the Salvation Army Correctional Services), while fifteen were started between 1900-1959. Twenty-six ministries were started in the 1960s. In the 1970s, 140 ministries were started, most of them in the second half of the decade.<sup>4</sup>

This chapter examines the shift that occurred between Lutker's complaint and the *Times*' article, the emergence of a new evangelical prison ministry movement. This was the rise of a new domestic missionary crusade, and attending to its characteristics through the lens of missions history illumines its power and distinctiveness. First, it was evangelistic, focused intently on conversion. Evangelicals largely assumed that the masses of people inside America's prisons were ignorant of the gospel. In many evangelical prison ministers' minds, state-funded chaplaincy, with its generally liberal theological disposition, clinical emphases, and stress on facilitative religious diversity, was not a truly faithful Christian response. This transition mirrored the shift in American

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<sup>3</sup> "Counting Souls," *Time*, October 4, 1976, <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,918414,00.html>; Kenneth Woodward and John Barnes, "Born Again!," *Newsweek*, October 25, 1976.

<sup>4</sup> In total the directory listed nearly 500 entries, but many of them were branches of other ministries or did not have a founding date noted. Ivan Fahs, *Prison Ministry Directory 1986 Edition* (Wheaton, IL: Institute for Prison Ministries, Billy Graham Center, n.d.).

foreign missions that had occurred just a few decades earlier, as evangelicals interested in preaching the gospel internationally eclipsed mainline movements that had de-emphasized proselytization for social concern. Second, this missionary movement was entrepreneurial and grassroots. It existed largely because of the work of un-ordained laypeople unconnected to denominational infrastructure or large organizations (at least initially). Third, and most important, this movement found itself caught up in tensions that American missionary movements have often struggled with on their various errands (tensions that the *Times* piece and other accounts of the new prison revival largely ignored): how should traditionally minded preachers of the gospel relate to other Christians who had very different visions of missionary work, particularly those with more liberal sensibilities? Do missionary loyalties lie with colonizing forces, or with the “natives” they sought to reach (who usually bore the brunt of colonization)?<sup>5</sup>

These missionary challenges formed another series of recurring questions that evangelical prison ministers moved to answer, some more successfully than others: first, should prison ministers should align themselves with the burgeoning forces of law and order and the harsh and growing prison system it had produced, or with the prisoners caught up in it? Second, should the “established religion” of prisons (state chaplaincy) be challenged, accommodated, or embraced? There was no universal answer to these questions. Some evangelicals who ventured into prisons made their support of the

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<sup>5</sup> For an overview of these tensions throughout missionary history, see William R. Hutchison, *Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1993). Chapter seven of this work deals specifically with the tensions between evangelicals and Protestant liberals regarding visions of missionary work from the 1930s on.

growing carceral state known, while others questioned prisons' punitive nature and the political and cultural consensus that underlay it. Some evinced appreciation for state-funded chaplaincy, others scorned it. Many sought compromises. They acknowledged problems with prisons and the increasingly punitive culture that underlay them while also pointing to the necessity (and even the providential blessing) of confinement for lawbreakers. This idea, that one does not become truly free without first enduring captivity, was as powerful as it was problematic.

This chapter focuses on a diverse and influential cast of characters who ventured into prisons and triangulated various evangelical concerns in their work in the 1960s-70s. It begins with a discussion of evangelical prison work at mid-century, the kind that ministers like Bill Lutker practiced. This work indicated an alternative to the state chaplaincy paradigm with its stress on inmate conversion, but was limited in size and scope. The second part focuses on the arrival of a new fleet of evangelical prison ministers that likewise focused intently on inmate conversion but brought with them heightened aspirations for innovation and influence. They were marked by strategies and trends that increasingly characterized evangelical ministry and public life from mid-century on, like the adoption of small group ecclesiology, creative use of radio and print media, and stress on masculine virtues and fatherly fellowship. The culmination of all of these trends was a full-fledged evangelical prison ministry culture that, by the mid seventies, was noticed by national media and helped spawn countless other like-minded efforts. This chapter concludes with discussion of several tensions within this burgeoning missionary

movement that indicated its complicated place in prisons and American culture more broadly.

### **Old Time Prison Religion**

Thrice weekly at the Cook County Jail in Chicago, a red wagon bounced down the cellblock, filled with toiletry items to be passed out to indigent inmates. Pulling the wagon was the African American Baptist laywoman Consuella York. She was a striking sight, her tiny five-foot-two-inch frame cloaked in a black cassock, with a clerical collar and silver cross chain around her neck and a nun-styled covering on her head. Like many women ministers among the poor and imprisoned from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, she went by the title “Mother.” Emblazoned on the side of York’s wagon, in bright white lettering, were exhortations: “Look up! See God! Help is on the way. I love you.” These words and the wagon that bore them were emblematic of her ministerial approach: deep concern for inmates combined with an old-fashioned, almost quaint, evangelistic method.<sup>6</sup> This was a far cry from the new “scientific” state chaplaincy model, and while it shared similar conceptual emphases, it also obviously differed in scope from the work of York’s more famous evangelistic contemporaries, like Billy Graham.

Evangelistic work in prisons did not disappear with advent of the state chaplaincy model in the years around World War II, but it did become less popular (despite the

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<sup>6</sup> Consuella York, interview by Robert Shuster, November 21, 1988, Collection 397, tape 3, Billy Graham Center Archives. See also Paul Galloway, “Saint of the Cell,” *Chicago Tribune*, February 2, 1989.

presence of occasional prison crusades from figures like Graham). When this work did occur, it typically took the form of small, informal missionary efforts. York offers an example of the evangelical prison ministry that *did* occur around mid-century. She displayed certain qualities that matched Holiness evangelists from fifty years earlier (like Elizabeth Wheaton), but her work was thrown in sharp relief in the midst of the new dominant chaplaincy paradigm.

York began evangelistic work at Cook County Jail in 1952, after an earlier stint in ministry at a local hospital during her final year at the Chicago Baptist Institute. York had heard from Mother Elizabeth Oglesby of a need for ministers at the jail and decided to accompany her to the facility to observe. Upon arrival Oglesby told York that, on the cellblock, “You watch as well as pray...you keep your eyes open.” On her knees in prayer and with her eyes wide open, York was moved by the sight of men looking back at her through the bars. She felt the Lord speaking to her: “Supposing one of those were your sons fifteen years from now. How would you feel?” From that moment on York felt a maternal connection to the inmates and a strong desire to reach them with the Christian message of salvation.<sup>7</sup>

Several aspects of York’s work are illustrative. First, she was *not* from the mainstream Protestant clergy culture of the day, either in its liberal or conservative forms. As a woman, York faced opposition to her sense of calling to ministry as she attended the Chicago Baptist Institute for her theological education. Though she strongly believed she

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<sup>7</sup> Consuella York, interview, November 21, 1988.



had a call from the Lord to preach, she regularly had to answer to skeptical seminary and denominational officials for challenging the overwhelmingly male ministerial status quo. She took a position as an associate minister at a small Chicago church, but the hostility and skepticism remained. Unlike the parish pulpit, York found that her gender did not limit her ministry inside the jail. Only rarely did an inmate challenge her because of it, and the few who did were no match for her sharp wit. "Mother York," one inmate scolded, "I don't think a woman should preach." She replied, "I don't think a man should sin." To others she stressed her pastoral calling with a reminder of their current status: "If some of you men would get up and do as you were [supposed to]...He wouldn't have to call so many of us [women]." A similar indicator of her status outside the clerical mainstream was that, for all of her efforts, she received no compensation. When one Associated Press reporter asked York if she had 501(c) tax-exempt status, she replied, "No, I've never even heard of it before." She later did gain tax-exempt status, but her ministry remained a low-budget affair, with all proceeds going to provide needed toiletries to inmates.<sup>8</sup>

Second, York was consistent in her presence at the jail. Local pastors and laypeople might make an occasional trip to the jail for a Sunday sermon or Bible study, but York showed up on a regular basis.<sup>9</sup> When an inmate would express indifference to her preaching, York would tell them, "You stick around long enough...you'll come around

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<sup>8</sup> Consuella York, interview by Robert Shuster, July 19, 1988, Collection 397, tape 2, Billy Graham Center Archives; Consuella York, interview, November 21, 1988.

<sup>9</sup> Paul Galloway, "Obituaries: Rev. Consuella York, 72; Jail Minister," *Chicago Tribune*, December 13, 1995.

to my way of thinking...This is not a study course for me. It's a way of life. So you may as well adjust yourself...I'm going to be your celly [cellmate] whether you like it or not, and I will return." Unlike the volunteers who showed up occasionally (some of whom ignored the seriousness of prison work, or who, in her words, just wanted to "tell some of those prisoners off"), York's work was a calling.<sup>10</sup>

But it was a vocation different from a state-certified prison chaplain. Not taking a salary or fiddling with Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) endorsements meant that York could preach a blunt message of Christian conversion unhindered by the need for religious sensitivity or therapeutic concern. This did not mean she was tactless or unaccommodating to non-Christians. For example, she graciously sought out snack items that contained no pork products to offer to Muslim prisoners. But she also was quick to tell these same inmates her own negative estimation of their faith in comparison to the Christian message: "if you [go to the] holy city of Mecca now and to the Mosque of Omar, and you look in there, they'll show you where the bones of Mohammed...the ashes... All the other places you go, to China, they'll tell you about Confucius, and he's dead... But you go to Jerusalem, and they say 'He's not here. He's risen as He said... the Christ we serve is alive. All your leaders are dead, and mine is alive.'" It was message as inspired as it was illiberal.

York was similarly straightforward regarding her sense of the sinful spiritual condition of inmates. She welcomed the improvement of prison facilities and the

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<sup>10</sup> Consuella York, interview, November 21, 1988.

expansion of prison educational programs. Yet environmental upgrades and therapeutic interventions had their limits. “Christ has to come in and change the heart of every individual,” she said. “That's the bottom line. If there is no heart change, all this other stuff won't mean nothing.” Particularly when faced with criminals who had committed serious crimes and had caused damage to others, there was simply no other way than that of repentance and conversion. “I try to make them see,” York said, “you've got to be sorry... suppose somebody did that to your mother or to your sister, or to your wife, your daughter. How'd you feel?...Remember, you done that to somebody's wife, somebody else's mother or sister... If you be sorry about it and tell the Lord you're sorry about what you have done, then the Lord can, He will forgive you.” This was a forceful message of conviction, but York was simultaneously compassionate. She knew Christ had her jailed flock in mind when he said that “I come to seek and save that which is lost” [Luke 19:10] and “I haven't come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance” [Matthew 9:13]. As she would tell downcast inmates who felt unloved because of their deeds, Christ died among thieves on the cross. He was, as Isaiah prophesied, “numbered with the transgressors” in an act of solidarity. “He understands well what's happening to you.”<sup>11</sup>

### **A Prison Revival**

Consuella York exemplified important attributes in the work of evangelicals in American prisons that became standardized and popularized by the mid-1970s. This later

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<sup>11</sup> Consuella York.

generation of evangelical leaders and organizations would further the themes of conversionism and lay leadership while adding their own unique emphases that tacked along with important developments in evangelicalism more broadly. The combined result was an evangelical prison ministry paradigm that persists to the present. This unique evangelical approach was formalized and innovated in the 1960s and 70s with the arrival of four other ministry leaders: Elton Trueblood, Bill Simmer, Bill Glass, and Ray Hoekstra. Trueblood's Yokefellows ministry pioneered lay-led small groups in prisons. Simmer's contribution was a privately funded, unapologetically conversionist prison chaplaincy model. Glass's particular influence was in the masculinization of prison ministry work. His ministry stressed athleticism as its attraction and pushed visions of fatherhood and fraternity as its goals for inmates. Hoekstra's key contribution was not so much a message but a method: he pioneered literature distribution to inmates, blanketing America's growing prisons and an interested public with prison-themed evangelical books and magazines. Though different, all four figures and their respective ministries had common emphases that other emerging evangelical prison ministries also channeled: they charted out new territory in terms of religious social organization, they connected prison concern to an increasingly curious public, they helped to define the terms of the ideal inmate conversion, and they proffered an important argument about the insufficiency of secular methods of rehabilitation and the practical necessity of inmate conversion as a solution to Americas' prison, criminal, and racial woes. They also helped to make evangelistic prison ministry popular, drawing others into the work for the first

time. Small evangelical “mom and pop” ministries very similar to York’s would become all the more common in the years ahead. American prisons have not been the same since.

### *Elton Trueblood and Yokefellows*

Elton Trueblood was an unexpected source for grand transformations, precisely because he prized smallness. He served as a chaplain at Harvard and Stanford (as well as a tenured professor at the latter), but later decamped for the tiny Earlham College in eastern Indiana in 1946 because he favored its size. He said he found Stanford’s “bigness” distracting, writing about this decision in a popular *Reader’s Digest* article entitled “Why I Chose a Small College.”<sup>12</sup> A Quaker with an undergraduate degree from Harvard and Ph.D. in philosophy from Johns Hopkins, Trueblood exhibited Unitarian tendencies in his early life before connecting with more evangelical strains in Quakerism later on. He eventually became highly regarded in more bookish evangelical circles, influencing intellectuals like E. J. Carnell and writing for publishing houses Baker and InterVarsity.<sup>13</sup> His fondness for smallness and simplicity often concealed his elite

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<sup>12</sup> Wolfgang Saxon, “Elton Trueblood, 94, Scholar Who Wrote Theological Works,” *The New York Times*, December 23, 1994; “Declares Small Colleges Better For the Students,” *The Franklin Evening Star* [Franklin, IN], August 22, 1956.

<sup>13</sup> R. Alan Streett, “Carnell, Edward John (1919-1967),” ed. Timothy J. Demy and Paul R. Shockley, *Evangelical America: An Encyclopedia of Contemporary American Religious Culture* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2017); D. Elton Trueblood, *Philosophy of Religion* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1973); D. Elton Trueblood, “The Self and the Community,” in *Quest for Reality: Christianity and the Counter Culture*, ed. Carl F. H. Henry (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973).

credentials, as well as his ambitions. He noted later in life that he had aspired to be something like an “American C.S. Lewis.”<sup>14</sup>

In the same way that he saw virtues in the modest status of Earlham, Trueblood believed in the power of the grassroots for the life of the church. While acting as dean of the chapel at Harvard, he told students gathered one Sunday in 1935 of the need for “abolition of the laity.” For Trueblood it was obvious God never intended for ministry to be handled by professional clergy while laypeople sat idly by. “Christianity withers when it’s a spectator sport,” he later told *Christianity Today*. “A layman in medicine is one who cannot practice. The same with law. But there is no place in the Christian Faith for those who cannot or will not practice. There are no passengers on the ship of Christ. All are members of the crew.”<sup>15</sup> In this he was a classic Quaker: all people had the sacred “inner light” inside them, and with it personal access to will of God. But his application was in line with emerging evangelical trends. Sensing that the postwar era would be a “post-denominational age,” Trueblood pushed for the empowerment of everyday, untrained lay Christians for the “purpose of renewal.” Laity could be mobilized in “cell groups,” especially on college campuses, building communities of mutual encouragement and spiritual support. The image that Trueblood gravitated toward to explain this ministry was that of the cattle yoke: drawing upon Jesus’s words in Matthew 11 to “Take my yoke upon you,” Trueblood believed he saw “Christ’s clearest call to commitment...Being yoked with Christ may mean a great deal more, but at least it means being a participant

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<sup>14</sup> Tony Campolo, “The Quiet Revolutionary,” *Christianity Today*, February 11, 1991.

<sup>15</sup> Campolo.

rather than a spectator...” He settled on the term “Yokefellow” to describe lay Christians who work together to further the faith without any formal theological training, formalizing the organization Yokefellows International in 1952. The first Yokefellow supporters primarily had professional backgrounds in business and law. Trueblood boasted that “not one of them earned his living by being professionally religious.” He later noted the similarities of this movement with the “Christian worker” movement of revivalist Dwight L. Moody a century earlier, who mobilized corporate leaders in pursuit of the Lord’s business and utilized the term “yokefellow” in his own day.<sup>16</sup>

The Yokefellow ministry grew, gaining crucial financial backing from sources like the Lilly Endowment. A new horizon opened up in 1955, when Trueblood addressed a conference of prison chaplains in Washington, D.C. on his small group renewal movement model. He recounted later that he “spoke on the power of the small group of people who have a common discipline and who share both their problems and their faith with one another.” Two chaplains took Trueblood’s exhortations to heart and established Yokefellow groups in prisons in Tacoma, WA and Lewisburg, PA. The model spread to other prisons and before long the movement formalized as the Yokefellow Prison Ministry.<sup>17</sup>

Over the next two decades Yokefellow Prison Ministry expanded into prisons in other states. By the 1970s one newspaper columnist in Asheville, North Carolina was

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<sup>16</sup> Elton Trueblood, *While It Is Day* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 109-114. For more on Moody’s Christian worker movement, see chapter one of Gloege, *Guaranteed Pure*.

<sup>17</sup> Trueblood, *While It Is Day*, 120; “Force of Yokefellow Prison Ministry Related At Parley,” *Palladium-Item* [Richmond, IN], March 21, 1976.

calling it “the most widespread prison ministry in the country.”<sup>18</sup> A chaplain estimated in 1977 that there were more than 400 Yokefellow groups working in prisons in 35 states.<sup>19</sup> The Yokefellows organizations formed in Pennsylvania (in 1968) and North Carolina (in 1970) would go on to be two of the largest: by the 1980s the Pennsylvania Yokefellows would have some sort of presence in every federal and state prison in the commonwealth, with more than 1,000 inmates participating.<sup>20</sup>

Small groups of around twelve persons (usually ten inmates and two non-inmates) would meet weekly in these gatherings to pray, read scripture, and talk about the skills needed for living in and outside of prison.<sup>21</sup> There was typically no hard programmatic element or structure to the discussions. Instead, they functioned similarly to the cell groups that were starting to proliferate in evangelical churches nationwide at the time, as sites of friendship, positive conversation, and spiritual accountability. “Coming to the meetings has meant a great deal to me,” one seventeen-year-old inmate told a local North Carolina newspaper. “Since getting involved with the Yokefellow group I have begun to go to church every Sunday and think differently about my life.” Another inmate from the same prison, who was about to complete his sentence, spoke in similar terms: “I feel better prepared to face the outside world, because these Yokefellow people have shown

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<sup>18</sup> Bob Terrell, “A Prison Ministry,” *Asheville Citizen-Times*, November 12, 1975.

<sup>19</sup> Florence Lawson, “Prison Ministry a Focal Point of 24th Yokefellow Conference,” *Palladium-Item* [Richmond, IN], March 20, 1977.

<sup>20</sup> Cheri A. Felts, “Yokefellows Prison Ministry Helps,” *The Gettysburg Times* [Gettysburg, PA], May 22, 1987; Barbara Fussell, “Yokefellow Ministry: Outside Force Gives Missing Ingredient,” *The Evening Telegram* [Rocky Mount, NC], April 1, 1979.

<sup>21</sup> “Force of Yokefellow Prison Ministry Related At Parley.”



me that I am not alone and that I do have friends...The Yokefellow program has helped me to gain confidence in myself.”<sup>22</sup>

Yokefellows was intentionally non-denominational, drawing volunteers from a variety of churches and Christian traditions. It also was less officially interested in inmate conversion and spiritual concerns than ministers like Consuella York or later evangelical ministry efforts, though observers did note that volunteers who participated hoped to “spread the gospel.”<sup>23</sup> Indeed, lay control meant that local Yokefellows groups had a great deal of power in shaping the agenda of meetings, so gatherings sometimes would turn into full-blown evangelistic revivals. A group of inmates who dubbed themselves “The McNeil Brothers” and a local ministry chairman called a Yokefellows retreat a “Holy Ghost victory” after six inmates from McNeil Island prison were baptized and others made deeper commitments to serve Jesus. “They call themselves ‘The McNeil Brothers,’” the announcement explained, “because they are born again members of the family of God.”<sup>24</sup>

Yokefellows’ lay-driven and ecumenical character reflected a hybrid of two trends in the social organization of American religion. Though precise quantitative data on small groups from this period time are hard to come by, one later study suggested that conservative Protestants were disproportionately more involved in small groups compared to Roman Catholics and mainline Protestants when the groups were based in

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<sup>22</sup> Barbara Fussell, “Yokefellow Ministry: Outside Force Gives Missing Ingredient.”

<sup>23</sup> Bob Terrell, “A Prison Ministry.”

<sup>24</sup> The McNeil Brothers and Daniel Smith, “Cops and Robbers Revival at McNeil Island,” *Prison Evangelism*, Winter 1979, 32/4/1, Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center.

churches. When they were unaffiliated with churches (and focused on addictions, community causes, general self-help, or other non-spiritual issues), small groups were more likely to attract Catholic, mainline Protestants, and infrequent churchgoers.<sup>25</sup> Yokefellow Prison Ministry combined both emphases. First, it was evangelically oriented. “When it began,” Trueblood said of his movement in 1977, “it represented an early form of the New Evangelicalism.”<sup>26</sup> But it was also one that was focused enough on the spiritual well-being of prisoners more generally that it could appeal to a wide variety of participants, and most crucially, prison chaplains. Yokefellows was not at all antagonistic toward chaplains, who regularly supervised their in-prison meetings and spoke highly of the ministry to newspapers and at conferences. But the ministry indicated that an alternative to the chaplaincy paradigm was possible. Yokefellows showed that Christians need not be paid or clinically and theologically trained in any formal sense. It was in this way a bridge movement for evangelicals, a non-threatening alternative to state-funded chaplaincy. And it exemplified a broader trend: the engagement of non-specialists in prison work. Yokefellows gave people who otherwise would never have interacted with prisoners a chance to get to know them and their concerns. The context was low-pressure and for inmates might only have been a short respite from the daily stresses of prison life. But for participants coming in from outside churches who found themselves newly sensitized to the plight of prisoners, the experience could be life-changing.

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<sup>25</sup> Robert Wuthnow, “Appendix: Small Groups--A National Profile,” in *I Come Away Stronger: How Small Groups Are Shaping American Religion* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 378-81.

<sup>26</sup> “Trueblood, David Elton, 1900-1994,” *Christianity Today*, February 6, 1995.

*Bill Simmer and Good News Prison Ministry*

The independent minister Consuella York and the lay-driven Yokefellows movement indicated that there were other possible prison ministry paradigms that did not depend upon state employment or clinical certification by the mainline religious establishment. But tough and ambitious though she was, the reach of solitary, independent evangelists like York was limited. Likewise, Yokefellows was growing, but their presence in prisons was intermittent, at most a few hours a week. There was space for innovation, on which a former Air Force intelligence officer named Bill Simmer capitalized. An Iowan born in 1928, Simmer experienced a Christian conversion at a Baptist church revival in Virginia in 1953. Not long after, he left a successful business career behind to attend Washington Bible College in Washington, D.C. Inspired by lessons learned from his professors (most of whom had been trained at Dallas Theological Seminary, an bastion of premillennial dispensationalism), Simmer began ministering in the nearby Fairfax County Jail, and eventually enlisted several other students.<sup>27</sup>

Simmer brought his business acumen to bear in organizing his jail ministry in three ways. First, he was ambitious, and he wanted to expand.<sup>28</sup> He was not content with a small ministry at just one institution, but had a desire to move to new locales and

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<sup>27</sup> William Leonard Simmer, Tape 1, interview by Robert Shuster, June 21, 1991, Collection 443, Billy Graham Center Archives.

<sup>28</sup> William Leonard Simmer, Tape 1; William Leonard Simmer, Tape 2, interview by Robert Shuster, June 21, 1991, Collection 443, Billy Graham Center Archives.

introduce others to prison work. He knew that many Christian ministries folded because they were too dependent on one leader: “if just one person is doing this then if they leave or die then it can’t continue.”<sup>29</sup>

Second, he wanted professionalism. Simmer felt there was a general lack of commitment in prison ministry, with most churches avoiding prisons as a site for ministry and the volunteers who *did* go showing up haphazardly.<sup>30</sup> He knew that if a new prison ministry effort were to succeed, it would also need to be properly funded. Though he appreciated the self-directed fundraising of foreign missionaries (and had nearly become one himself), he thought that the method of raising one’s own support was too unpredictable. Prisons were institutions built on regimentation and regularity, and Simmer believed wardens would not appreciate prison missionaries taking time off for fundraising furloughs. He wanted an organization that could pay chaplains a salary and raise funds on their behalf.

Third, Simmer was an entrepreneur, one who knew that economies needed innovation and disruption. He wanted to challenge what he believed was a staid status quo in prison chaplaincy, which had stability through state funding but with that a host of other problems. He believed that state chaplaincy generally attracted the “dregs” of those in ministry, people who had not made it as pastors or who had some personal failures (like divorce) that got them kicked out of their churches. Just as problematic, Simmer thought, state chaplaincy allowed for non-Christian ministers (like Muslims) or even

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<sup>29</sup> William Leonard Simmer, Tape 2.

<sup>30</sup> William Leonard Simmer, Tape 2.

women (whom he believed the Bible prohibited from preaching). With state chaplains, he said, “we are ministering side by side with people who we learned in seminary are just cults...if you are accepting government money, you have no choice in these matters.”<sup>31</sup>

Simmer’s answer was Good News Jail and Prison Ministry, which he founded in 1961. Simmer was the first full-time chaplain for Good News, working at Fairfax County Jail. The work was a combination of evangelism, discipleship, and pastoral care: impromptu preaching on the cellblock, leading Bible studies, and holding counseling sessions with depressed inmates. For Simmer, it was exhilarating. “Here was real Christianity,” he later said, “pitting the word of God against the system of the world...if there was a place where Satan dwells on earth it would be our jails and prison cells, and yet here I see the gospel effectively getting the attention of men and changing their lives...when mankind had given up.” Though focused on inmate conversion, Simmer and the others who joined him as paid chaplains sometimes worked to better inmates’ in-prison lives. Good News started libraries and educational programs in various facilities, and Simmer later launched the first inmate work-release program in the state of Virginia.<sup>32</sup>

In 1976 Good News had 21 chaplains in prisons on the East Coast, with a \$1 million budget.<sup>33</sup> They expanded westward soon after. Simmer and his chaplains proudly broadcast each of Good News’ distinctives as the ministry grew. Good News chaplain

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<sup>31</sup> William Leonard Simmer, Tape 3, interview by Robert Shuster, June 21, 1991, Collection 443, Billy Graham Center Archives.

<sup>32</sup> William Leonard Simmer, Tape 2.

<sup>33</sup> Helen Altonn, “Prison’s Chaplain Leads Busy Life,” *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, May 6, 1976.

Rick Bartosik, a graduate of Chicago's Moody Bible Institute and the evangelical Trinity College in nearby Deerfield, told a *Honolulu Star-Bulletin* reporter of his clear evangelical motivations for migrating to Hawaii to minister at two prisons there: "I'm not here as a do-gooder. I'm here to communicate the love of Jesus Christ, to communicate the gospel." Simmer echoed Bartosik. The way to address the "real spiritual vacuum" of prisons, he told the Honolulu reporter, was to provide "what a good, growing, thriving evangelical church offers its members on the outside."<sup>34</sup>

Good News indicated a new professional model for evangelicals who wanted to minister to inmates. It was emblematic not only of a shift in Christian prison work, but the latest in a long trend of innovation and rupture with the professional religious status quo in evangelical history more broadly. In the evangelical awakenings of the 1740s, spellbinding preachers like George Whitefield had led laity out of their churches and into fields for revivals, opening up a new religious marketplace where an upmarket degree from Yale or Princeton meant little. Similar breaks characterized the movement from then on, from early nineteenth-century camp meetings that moved worship out of churches and into the woods, to later Holiness "come outer" and fundamentalist challenges to established mainline denominations, to postwar evangelicals' use of mass media and stadium preaching to reach seekers who would never have otherwise darkened the door of a church.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Nadine W. Scott, "Good News Mission Program: State Prison Gets Spiritual Aid," *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, February 26, 1977.

<sup>35</sup> For standard treatments of this dynamic in evangelical history, see Harry S. Stout, *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991); Hatch,

Parallel with the emergence of a new prison ministry paradigm, evangelicals in the second half of the twentieth century were making similar moves in other realms of outreach and social engagement. These evangelical efforts were emblematic of what sociologist Robert Wuthnow called the postwar “restructuring of American religion,” where religious special interest groups increasingly challenged denominational dominance in American public life. Whether in foreign aid, higher education, or prisons, evangelical “special purpose groups” channeled new energy and dissatisfaction with what they saw as increasingly liberal theology and moribund organizational structures in the Protestant mainline. The broader source of this common expansion, as Wuthnow also argued, was the expansion of state power. From the New Deal into the 1960s, government influence expanded in nearly every major sector of American life.<sup>36</sup> In higher education, for example, the GI Bill dramatically increased the number of college students, with governmental grant funding for public universities following suit. Nondenominational and evangelical college student ministries such as Campus Crusade capitalized on growth in American higher education while also distinguishing themselves from campus ministries run by mainline Protestants.<sup>37</sup> Construction of suburbs (zoned by the state) meant there was quite literally new geographic territory for religious groups to exploit. New casual “megachurches” sprouted in America’s suburbs in these locales,

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*The Democratization of American Christianity*; Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*; Wacker, *America’s Pastor*.

<sup>36</sup> Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion*.

<sup>37</sup> Turner, *Bill Bright and Campus Crusade for Christ*, 3, 73.

taking on architectural, cultural, and organizational forms that stood in stark contrast to the tall steeple, downtown “First” flagship mainline churches in America’s cities.<sup>38</sup>

Broader anxieties about communism and the place of the United States on the international scene led evangelicals to build their own global relief agencies, like World Vision, which operated outside of the mission arms of Protestant denominations.<sup>39</sup>

The same was true of prisons. In the postwar era of law and order, the American state was expanding in its most core function: the ability to use coercive force for the maintenance of social order. The state had aligned with the Protestant mainline in the form of sponsored chaplains, but there was more territory for religious entrepreneurs to exploit. Simmer intuited this, and structured Good News as a direct challenge to the state chaplaincy paradigm. He did so with the argument that connected state chaplains with the worst parts of the prison system. In arguing for Good News’ necessity, Simmer said that he wanted a chaplain who was “not paid by Caesar.”<sup>40</sup> He believed that inmates would prefer a chaplain who was not paid by the very entity that was holding them captive. With a privately funded chaplain, “inmates know that this is not the ‘government’s man” and that they can trust him.”<sup>41</sup> In sum, Simmer wanted to build a ministry that would have the regularity, professionalism, and institutional access of state chaplaincy, but without

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<sup>38</sup> For more on these “new paradigm churches” see Donald E. Miller, *Reinventing American Protestantism: Christianity in the New Millennium*, revised edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

<sup>39</sup> David King, “The New Internationalists: World Vision and the Revival of American Evangelical Humanitarianism, 1950–2010,” *Religions* 3, no. 4 (2012): 922–49.

<sup>40</sup> Good News Jail & Prison Ministry, *The Good News Mission Story - 1981*, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wTlkb7HILNs>.

<sup>41</sup> William Leonard Simmer, Tape 2. Simmer similarly assured a journalist that the fact that his chaplains’ paychecks came from Good News (and that they would be sponsored as well by “Bible teaching and believing churches”) and not the government, meant that they would be kept “from becoming pawns of the state.” Nadine W. Scott, “Good News Mission Program: State Prison Gets Spiritual Aid.”



the various theological troubles, image problems, or inflexibility of the state-sponsored system. By the early 1980s, Good News employed 30 chaplains nationwide (and jumped to 370 worldwide by 2012).<sup>42</sup> But the broader impact was the charting of new conceptual terrain that later groups of evangelicals would incorporate, as more entered the contested religious terrain of the prison system.

### *Bill Glass*

Bill Glass was in prison because he had hit people. But he was no felon. Glass was a former defensive end for the Detroit Lions and Cleveland Browns, having played more than a decade of professional football. Before a successful career in the National Football League, Glass had played at Baylor. When he wasn't laying bone crushing broadsides on opposing quarterbacks during football season, he studied theology at Southwestern Theological Seminary (a Southern Baptist school in Fort Worth, TX), receiving a degree in 1963. Soon after, he began holding evangelistic crusades during off-seasons. When Glass's football career came to a close in 1969, he founded the Bill Glass Evangelistic Association and began work as a full-time evangelist.<sup>43</sup> After a few years leading crusades in various American cities, in 1972 Glass held a crusade at the Marion State Prison in Marion, Ohio. He had initially dreaded the event due to his a bad experience in prison ministry during his college years and the fact that his association

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<sup>42</sup> "Our History," Good News Jail and Prison Ministry, accessed November 30, 2017, <https://goodnewsjail.org/history/>.

<sup>43</sup> Bill Glass, *Free At Last* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1976), 23-4.

was already overburdened and in debt.<sup>44</sup> But the event was a success and Glass and his associates began planning other prison events alongside their standard city crusades, announcing in 1973 that he planned to visit three prisons a year every year.<sup>45</sup>

Prison crusades were logistically complex and expensive, but a generous gift from the owner of the Cleveland Browns helped keep Glass's prison ministry afloat in its first few years and ultimately served as a sign to Glass that he could ramp up this effort.<sup>46</sup> Glass kept his three-prisons-a-year promise until 1975, when the ministry held eight prison crusades (out of fifteen total for the year). The rate was similar the next year, and the ministry added more in later years as they transitioned to a full-time prison focus.<sup>47</sup>

Each weekend prison crusade followed a standardized format. Various athletes from professional sports teams put on clinics and demonstrations during the day on the prison yard, and in the evenings services were held with speakers offering their testimonies. The speakers included a mix of celebrities, athletes, former inmates, and Glass himself. For example, the Marion, Ohio crusade had athletic clinics led by players from teams like the Chicago Bulls and New York Yankees, as well as karate and weightlifting demonstrations. Jim King of the Bulls, Bobby Richardson of the Yankees,

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<sup>44</sup> Glass, 29-33.

<sup>45</sup> Gary D. Kinder to Board Members of the Bill Glass Evangelistic Association, September 27, 1972, Collection 455, box 2, folder 3, Billy Graham Center Archives; Watson Spoelstra, "You Came to Prison to Visit," *Goalposts*, February 1973, Collection 455, box 13, folder 9, Billy Graham Center Archives.

<sup>46</sup> Glass, *Free At Last*, 60.

<sup>47</sup> "Bill Glass Evangelistic Association Crusades," n.d., Collection 455, box 13, folder 9, Billy Graham Center Archives; John Rainwater to Bunny Martin, August 25, 1982, Collection 455, box 14, folder 2, Billy Graham Center Archives.

and Olympic weightlifter Paul Anderson joined Glass in the evening services.<sup>48</sup> Many of the athletes were or would soon become household names. Later, in the 1980s a budding UNC-Chapel Hill basketball star named Michael Jordan would volunteer at a Glass crusade, only narrowly avoiding serious injury when a karate demonstration he volunteered to help with went awry.<sup>49</sup> Numerous volunteer counselors (sixty in the case of Marion) would help provide a more personal touch, walking the prison yard and venturing into the cellblocks to chat with inmates and share the gospel.<sup>50</sup>

The key to Glass's appeal as an evangelist was his status as a former football star. Football-shaped promotional stickers from the early days of his ministry were emblazoned with photos of Glass in shoulder pads and slogans like "Get in the Game for CHRIST."<sup>51</sup> He made a name for himself as a speaker in the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. FCA events often featured sports clinics, where youth could rub shoulders with famous athletes and glean tips for catching, throwing, and tackling.<sup>52</sup> Glass borrowed the sports clinic idea from FCA and brought it into his city crusades and eventually his prison events. During the prison crusades, inmates could watch basketball stars like Jim King and Clifford Ray shoot three pointers, or take turns catching passes from quarterbacks like Roger Staubach.<sup>53</sup> According to one ministry worker, the most popular athletes Glass

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<sup>48</sup> "Tentative Schedule For Prison Crusade, Marion, Ohio," July 28, 1972, Collection 455, box 3, folder 15, Billy Graham Center Archives; Glass, *Free At Last*, 41-5.

<sup>49</sup> Rick Nielsen and Ron Kuntz, *Doin' Time: An In-Depth Look at Life Behind Bars Through a Window of Hope* (Grand Island, NE: Cross Training Publishing, 2001), 72.

<sup>50</sup> Glass, *Free At Last*, 36-7.

<sup>51</sup> "Crusade Promotion Stickers," n.d., Collection 455, box 13, folder 8, Billy Graham Center Archives.

<sup>52</sup> Glass, *Free At Last*, 13.

<sup>53</sup> Bill Glass, "See-Thru Views," n.d., Collection 455, box 14, folder 3, Billy Graham Center Archives.

brought were professional weight lifters. This was no doubt due to the spectacle of the astounding feats of strength these lifters would perform in front of crowds of inmates. Paul Anderson, an Olympic gold medalist who held the title of “Worlds Strongest Man,” bent nails and lifted tables upon which volunteers would sit. Other championship lifters challenged inmates to squat competitions, drove nails into boards with bare hands, performed push-ups with inmates on their back, and encouraged inmates to punch and jump on their rock-hard stomachs.<sup>54</sup>

Glass believed athletes’ star power and physical prowess could persuade otherwise suspicious or indifferent inmates to show up to his crusades. He explained his approach with reference to the success of his Marion crusade in a retrospective column entitled “Recreation in Prison Evangelism” for a Southern Baptist magazine. “Inmates enjoyed all forms of sports,” he wrote, “and they were thrilled to be able to meet and talk with some of the top athletes of the country.” More than this, “Prisoners are usually impressed by physical strength. Every one of the men I had with me was big and tough, or at least an eminently successful athlete, so the program went surprisingly well.”<sup>55</sup> The Glass newsletter quoted one inmate’s positive assessment in similar terms: “We didn’t want nobody preaching at us. We wanted to see the karate guy and listen to Bill Glass talk about football. After that night we just wanted to hear more about God.”<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Nielsen and Kuntz, *Doin’ Time*, 70-1.

<sup>55</sup> Bill Glass, “Recreation in Prison Evangelism,” *Church Recreation Magazine*, December 1983, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives.

<sup>56</sup> Watson Spoelstra, “You Came to Prison to Visit.”

Sports and athleticism were not simply sideshows, or even mediums for Glass's evangelism. They were a key part of the message itself. The power lifters who pumped iron and inmates alike were always quick to connect demonstrations of their physical prowess with spiritual transformation. In the words of one volunteer, the testimony of a weight lifter "silences the critics who believe Christianity is for wimps and sissies."<sup>57</sup> In his first prison crusade, while preaching to inmates gathered on the institution's baseball diamond, Glass gave a presentation of the Christian gospel in keeping with the setting. "First base in life is salvation...[Jesus] can forgive you just like he did me. You can have a whole new start in life...But then you're on to second base. Second base is relationship to other people...You must have Christian friends. On from there to the third base, which is service...Really happy people are the ones who have discovered the joy of service." By this point in his talk, Glass later noted, "they were really listening to me. I had their total attention." He then moved to the sermonic climax. "But what's home plate? It's heaven!" He gestured toward the counselors standing nearby. "If you'd like to find a way that you can have all your sins forgiven and have eternal life, hang around. These guys will be glad to talk to you about it."<sup>58</sup> This sports-inflected message was appealing not only for its communication of the Christian gospel, but also for its perceived pro-social qualities. One law enforcement official wrote Glass to ask him to hold a crusade in a local prison, noting "it is our very firm conviction that the active involvement of professional athletes in our recreational/rehabilitative program would propel inmates toward observing the

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<sup>57</sup> Nielsen and Kuntz, *Doin' Time*, 71.

<sup>58</sup> Glass, *Free At Last*, 43-5.

rules of good sportsmanship and a consequent greater respect for the rights and property of others.” Bringing in “celebrated and respected athletes” and offering sports activities “would serve as proof to inmates that ‘society’ is concerned with their welfare!”<sup>59</sup>

Sports and Christianity have long been entwined in American history, particularly within evangelicalism. Though early American Christians often worried about athletics’ corrupting influence (in part because of its association with gambling and the brutality of sports like boxing), by the mid-nineteenth century Christian leaders began to speak of the virtues of a “muscular Christianity”: manliness, morality, health, and patriotism.<sup>60</sup> The Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) emerged, with its stress on the complementarity of physical and spiritual fitness.<sup>61</sup> Though theological conservatives and liberals alike found common cause with the YMCA’s approach in its early days, by the early twentieth century fundamentalists began shifting some of the terms of the debate, particularly as the YMCA became a bastion for social gospel-styled progressivism. Billy Sunday exploited his status as a former baseball star in the 1880s in his hellfire preaching, but the key term here was *former*. Though he regularly argued for a highly masculine version of the faith, the fundamentalist Sunday assailed baseball for its un-Christian qualities and only embraced his past insofar as it was a means to an end. “Baseball and Christian work,” one study of Sunday has put it, were “mutually exclusive

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<sup>59</sup> Jack Heard to Bill Glass, March 26, 1975, Collection 455, box 14, folder 3, Billy Graham Center Archives.

<sup>60</sup> Tony Ladd and James A. Mathisen, *Muscular Christianity: Evangelical Protestants and the Development of American Sport* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999), 13-16.

<sup>61</sup> Ladd and Mathisen, 62.

endeavors.”<sup>62</sup> Culturally accommodating neo-evangelicals in the late forties and fifties evinced more friendliness to the cause of athletic faith, showcasing Christian athletes in their evangelistic events. At the same time he was broadcasting the miraculous testimony of the converted criminal Jim Vaus in his crusades, Billy Graham was also giving track stars like Gil Dodds a platform to speak about running life’s race for Christ.<sup>63</sup>

While he was indebted to this neo-evangelical tradition (having been one of Graham’s athletic platform guests in the 1960s) Glass represented a new and intensified phase of muscular faith.<sup>64</sup> He was resolutely conversionist and had little interest in offering a social gospel-styled gloss on the proper integration of physical and spiritual well-being. Unlike Sunday, Glass embraced sports beyond its basic pragmatic value and showed that good athletes not only could be good Christians, but also serve as ideal spiritual examples. But unlike Graham, Glass showed that an athlete could lead the charge and that athletics itself could be the centerpiece of an evangelistic crusade. As he wrote in one of his first books concerning the time he flew to speak at a Christian youth rally the day after winning the NFL championship, “A world’s championship football game and proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ were almost simultaneous events.”<sup>65</sup> Sensing the skepticism about sports within straight-laced evangelical culture, Glass told the *Los Angeles Times* in 1972 that his organization was “not a hyper-right,

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<sup>62</sup> Ladd and Mathisen, 78-81.

<sup>63</sup> Ladd and Mathisen, 96.

<sup>64</sup> Ladd and Mathisen, 126-7.

<sup>65</sup> Ladd and Mathisen, 126.

super-conservative organization politically, but we do defend sports – and Christianity – at points where it’s been unfairly attacked.”<sup>66</sup>

Glass’s intensifying prison interests from the mid-1970s on indicated that he saw prison ministry and muscular faith as another kind of simultaneous concern. This was also not an entirely new development. One of the very first celebrities of muscular Christianity, former boxer Orville Gardner, was famous for his evangelism in prisons in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>67</sup> In his own prison work, however, Glass innovated. His message gradually took on other valences beyond sheer athletic power, as manly fellowship and loving fatherhood became the chief ends to which his athletic evangelism was pointed. When Billy Sunday preached his fiery messages in the early twentieth century, he zeroed in on the need for a hard-nosed and aggressive Christian faith with literal fighting words: “I’d like to put my fist on the nose of the man who hasn’t got grit enough to be a Christian.”<sup>68</sup> By contrast, Glass reveled in highly relational and emotional language that prized intimacy between men, especially sons with fathers. The answer to innumerable social problems, according to Glass, was the recovery of the “The Blessing,” an assurance of unconditional love, value, and belonging.<sup>69</sup> The blessing ideally should come from a father, but it could also come from other trusted authority figures, mentors, or coaches (people who could be, in Glass’s words, “substitute fathers”). At its best, a blessing entailed strong verbal and physical affirmation. Glass spoke of the power of his

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<sup>66</sup> “Defends Sports: Glass, Ex-Pro Gridder, Now a Crusader,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 6, 1972.

<sup>67</sup> Ladd and Mathisen, *Muscular Christianity*, 11-13.

<sup>68</sup> Ladd and Mathisen, 79.

<sup>69</sup> Bill Glass and Terry Pluto, *Champions for Life: The Power of a Father’s Blessing* (Deerfield Beach, FL: Faith Communications, 2005).



own father's blessing in precisely these terms: "My earliest recollections are that my father would sit on my bedside and rub my back and tell me what a fine boy I was, and almost every night, he would kiss me on the mouth. He was a pro baseball player, a very manly man. But he had no problem expressing his love and blessing to me and to my brother and sister."<sup>70</sup>

Only later in his ministry did Glass devote sustained attention to detailing the specifics of fatherly blessing, like in his 2005 book *Champions for Life: The Power of a Father's Blessing*. But, as his co-author wrote in the introduction of this book, "'The Blessing' speech...has been the heart of his ministry for about thirty years." In his prison ministry, Glass sought to help inmates understand their own incarceration in these terms, as fractured fatherly relationships were the prime cause of criminality. "The one thing I noticed," Glass later said about his time in prison ministry, "[was] there were very few inmates who had good relationships with their father. I went down death row one day and there were forty-five people on death row in the state of Arkansas, and all those people hated their fathers. There's something that's consistent with criminals, especially criminals that are violent, and with bad relationships with their father, almost invariably."<sup>71</sup> The way forward then was for men to acknowledge their relational brokenness and to seek to connect to a new "father" figure. They could begin with their Heavenly Father, but loving relationships with other inmates and ministry volunteers who could bless them would be welcome as well.

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<sup>70</sup> Nancy Madsen, "The Power of a Father's Blessing: What Former NFL pro Bill Glass Has Learned after 36 Years of Prison Ministry," *Christianity Today*, January 2006.

<sup>71</sup> "Fathers Blessing," April 17, 2012, <https://vimeo.com/40544556>.

Fatherhood and fellowship were concepts that marked muscular Christian culture in America from the 1970s on. It reached a climax with the advent of the Promise Keepers, a para-church organization with similar athletic origins and emphasis. Founded by University of Colorado football coach Bill McCartney, Promise Keepers pushed men to keep their hearts pure, remain faithful to their wives, and to seek reconciliation with one another (often across racial lines). According to sociologist John Bartkowski, Promise Keepers triangulated a combination of “instrumentalist” and “expressive” forms of masculinity. Instrumentalist masculinity drew from essentialist notions of masculinity that stressed aggression and strength, while expressive referenced the possibility of intimacy among men. More provocatively, Bartkowski argued that the reason Promise Keepers emphasizes sports so much is because of the danger inherent to the expressive style: evangelical men might appear gay with all of the intimacy talk, so sports are referenced to alleviate any conscious or subconscious anxiety.<sup>72</sup> Glass no doubt would have seen his stress on sports in a less Freudian manner. But at least in terms of the combination of expressive and instrumentalist styles, Glass’s prison ministry was operating with the same basic concepts a full decade before the Promise Keepers brought them to national prominence. It was not hard to see why this approach was so appealing. After all, the most powerful of muscles, when well-trained, could also offer the most intimate embrace.

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<sup>72</sup> John P. Bartkowski, “Breaking Walls, Raising Fences: Masculinity, Intimacy, and Accountability among the Promise Keepers,” *Sociology of Religion* 61, no. 1 (2000): 35-50.

Though it shared certain theological commitments with the evangelical prison ministers from previous generations, Glass's brand of prison religion departed in its masculine character. Earlier in the twentieth century, women had been some of the most prominent prison ministers, even as they labored among men. They had claimed their right as women to preach the gospel and reach criminals with the message of Christianity. In Glass's ministry, men made up the vast majority of the ministry's staff, counselor roles, and speaker corps. But more important, the very message of the ministry itself was a masculine gospel of athleticism, fatherhood, and manly fellowship. In 1900 the paradigmatic evangelical prison minister was female who went by "mother." Now, it was a masculine endeavor, a legion of "fathers" entering prisons to offer inmates the blessings that they so desperately needed.

By bringing this particular form of muscular Christianity into prisons, Glass was helping create a new form of prison religion. And like other evangelical prison ministers, he was doing so outside of the given chaplain-led, diversity-sensitive religious norms of prisons. Though Glass regularly worked closely with chaplains to secure access to prisons (and regularly received and reported their praise<sup>73</sup>), he also consciously resisted parts of this culture in order to bolster his ministry's appeal. In front of inmates, Glass avoided appearing too close to the prison warden or anything that resembled what he called "the Establishment." He wanted Christianity to grow organically in prisons,

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<sup>73</sup> Watson Spoelstra, "You Came to Prison to Visit."

without too much top-down administrative influence or programmatic overhead.<sup>74</sup> He intentionally held his events outside of prison chapels. Chapels, Glass and his associates believed, were places that many inmates avoided, and “those are usually the inmates we are the most concerned about reaching.”<sup>75</sup> Anything that seemed too “churchy” at the outset was likely to fail, and “it was much easier to get the non-Christians to baseball fields than to the chapel.” The final night of a crusade would often take place in the chapel, but that was only after an entire weekend of bonding over sports, shared meals, and close conversations with counselors.<sup>76</sup> Glass’ approach was exemplified by one interaction he related in his 1976 book *Free At Last*. There, he told of a crusade counselor who managed to corner the prison’s psychologist in hope of bringing him to Christ. The psychologist apparently “had a church background,” Glass wrote, “but did not have a vital relationship with Jesus Christ.” Glass witnessed the interaction and could not have been more pleased. “Isn’t that something, Waddy?” he whispered to fellow evangelist Watson “Waddy” Spoelstra. “[He] has the guts to tackle a psychologist with the simple gospel plan.” Waddy agreed: “Yes, look. He’s gonna put the Four Spiritual Laws on him now.” Glass and Waddy were both thrilled when their counselor friend reported that the psychologist had indeed come to Jesus.<sup>77</sup> An organic, gutsy, and conversionist faith, one that sometimes put the religious status quo in its crosshairs – this was the kind of prison faith Glass hoped for.

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<sup>74</sup> Glass, *Free At Last*, 45, 68.

<sup>75</sup> Nielsen and Kuntz, *Doin’ Time*, 26.

<sup>76</sup> Glass, *Free At Last*, 45, 52.

<sup>77</sup> Glass, 118.

### *Chaplain Ray and International Prison Ministry*

Later in life Glass boasted that he had been in more prisons than “any man that’s ever lived.”<sup>78</sup> He no doubt had good reasons to believe this, but he had a serious challenger in Ray Hoekstra (about whom *Los Angeles Times* made a similar claim about in 1979).<sup>79</sup> Born in 1913 in Joliet, IL, Hoekstra grew up in the shadow of the famed Joliet Penitentiary, which he later said “trigger[ed] my initial concern with crime and punishment and their relationship to God and repentance.”<sup>80</sup> Though his parents were part of the Dutch Reformed Church (and later became Seventh-day Adventists), Hoekstra initially had little interest in religion. He left home as a young man and drifted around California (engaging in the occasional illegal activity) before “giving [his] life to God” during a service at the Anchor Rescue Mission in San Jose. He was ordained soon after, accepting a call as pastor of an independent church in Indianapolis. On a visit to New York he stopped by Sing Sing prison at the request of a friend, and found himself moved by what he saw: “The visit to Sing Sing reinforced my belief that the Lord was calling me to a special ministry for prisoners.”<sup>81</sup> He began making ministry to inmates and former inmates a part of his pastoral routine before fully entering prison work full-time.

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<sup>78</sup> “About Us,” Bill Glass: Behind the Walls, accessed November 30, 2017, <https://www.behindthewalls.com/about-us>.

<sup>79</sup> Charles Hillinger, “‘Chaplain Ray’ Serves Big Captive Audience,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 14, 1979.

<sup>80</sup> Chaplain Ray and Walter Wagner, *God’s Prison Gang* (F. H. Revell Co., 1977), 10.

<sup>81</sup> Chaplain Ray and Walter Wagner, 17.

By the early 1970s, Hoekstra (who by now had embraced the title “Chaplain Ray”) had found his ministry niche. Despite his title and his regular visits to prisons, Chaplain Ray was not a chaplain in the official sense, though he regularly worked closely with state-sponsored institutional chaplains. Instead, Chaplain Ray’s signature contribution was his blanketing of prisons with evangelistic literature and radio messages, under the auspices of International Prison Ministry (IPM), founded in 1972. At the end of the seventies, according to one account, IPM was sending 500,000 books and Bibles to prisoners each year, broadcasting on 100 radio stations in 38 different states, and publishing a prisoner magazine with a circulation of 150,000.<sup>82</sup>

Though Yokefellows, Simmer, and Glass were finding their way into prisons, these institutions still were difficult for outsiders to access. This was not only because of barriers and security clearances, but also the fact that prisons were often built in far-flung rural areas. Chaplain Ray’s efforts marked a different kind of evangelical entry into prisons, one in keeping with the recent history of evangelical engagement in American public life through the media. In the early twentieth century, conservative Protestants like Aimee Semple McPherson had been on the forefront of radio broadcasting.<sup>83</sup> In the 1930s and 40s radio became a ring in which conservative and liberal Protestants did battle, not simply over doctrine, but over the limited times available for broadcast. Conservatives were increasingly marginalized by national broadcasting companies’ alliances with mainline Protestant groups such as the Federal Council of Churches, who lobbied for

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<sup>82</sup> Charles Hillinger, “‘Chaplain Ray’ Serves Big Captive Audience.”

<sup>83</sup> Sutton, *Aimee Semple McPherson and the Resurrection of Christian America*, 2-3.

nonsectarian religious programming “of the widest appeal.” This meant “vague spiritual messages” instead of the blunter, sectarian sermons of conservatives.<sup>84</sup>

Broadcasters’ ideal religious radio programming resembled the ideal religion of the state chaplain-led prison ministry that was emerging around the same time. One commentator on religious radio in 1938 could have just as well been talking about prison religion when he wrote, “Quite naturally, radio corporations and sponsors do not want disturbers on their programs...They favor conciliators, pacifiers, minimizers of differences between sect and sect, not delvers into fundamental dogma, but sippers and samplers, tasters, purveyors of sweetness and light.”<sup>85</sup> Conservative Protestants, when they could broadcast on network stations, were now typically limited to an early Sunday morning slot.<sup>86</sup> Over the next few decades, some evangelicals worked to mitigate this loss of access, founding the National Religious Broadcasters Association (which became the “official radio arm” of the National Association of Evangelicals in 1947), to “foster and encourage the broadcasting of religious programs” that aligned with their theological outlook.<sup>87</sup>

Chaplain Ray carefully negotiated both radio worlds. As with prisons, if he wanted to have an impact he would need to be flexible. From the 1950s on, Chaplain Ray would purchase time on local affiliates of the ABC and Mutual broadcasting companies

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<sup>84</sup> Peter Manseau, “Religion News on the Radio,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and the American News Media*, ed. Diane Winston (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 130.

<sup>85</sup> Manseau, 132.

<sup>86</sup> Daniel Vaca, “Book People: Evangelical Books and the Making of Contemporary Evangelicalism” (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 2012), 200.

<sup>87</sup> Tona J. Hangen, *Redeeming the Dial: Radio, Religion, & Popular Culture in America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 123.

(the latter was home to the famous dramas like *The Lone Ranger*, *The Shadow*, and Larry King's first call-in show).<sup>88</sup> He also broadcasted on dedicated Christian (though no less commercial) stations, like New York City's WWDJ, where he was featured daily in the 8:45 am slot, just before Jimmy Swaggart's "Campmeeting Hour" at 9:00 am.<sup>89</sup> In 1971 his ministry promotional materials listed a presence on around forty medium-to-large city stations.<sup>90</sup> Chaplain Ray was still invested enough in the success of Christian radio that he served as president of the southwest chapter of the evangelical National Religious Broadcasters.<sup>91</sup>

Chaplain Ray's radio programs, which ran an hour or more in length (but often broadcast in shorter segments), were a combination of sermons and interviews – all prison-themed. Interspersed between conversations and sermons were performances of gospel songs by inmate choirs (such as the men's choir from San Quentin prison) and the reading of letters from listeners (most of whom were inmates themselves).<sup>92</sup> Interviews showcased stories and testimonies of inmate conversion. Other programs focused on Christians involved in prison ministry, or who had personal experience with being incarcerated. On one program Chaplain Ray featured Corrie ten Boom, a survivor of German concentration camps during World War II. A Dutch Christian, ten Boom was well known in evangelical circles for her stories of hiding Jews from Nazis and surviving

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<sup>88</sup> Associated Press, "Radio Chaplain' Reaches Prison Inmates," *Santa Fe New Mexican*, June 5, 1972.

<sup>89</sup> Edmund K. Gravely Jr., "Religious Radio Proves a Blessing - Even in New York," *The New York Times*, June 23, 1974.

<sup>90</sup> "Chaplain Ray Radio Logs," *Prison Evangelism*, 1971, 32/4/1, Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center.

<sup>91</sup> Associated Press, "Radio Chaplain' Reaches Prison Inmates."

<sup>92</sup> Ray Hoekstra, "Restitution - Forgotten Justice," n.d., Collection 320, tape 22, Billy Graham Center Archives.



the horrors of the death camps once she was captured and charged with sedition. She published several books, most prominently *The Hiding Place*, which was eventually made into a feature film. Chaplain Ray had met ten Boom at the Lausanne Conference on World Evangelism in Switzerland in 1974, and persuaded her to do an interview for his prison-themed program. She connected her own stories of brutal imprisonment (often in solitary confinement) in a Nazi concentration camp with that of her American incarcerated radio audience. She told inmates that just as God was with her in “the hiding place” of solitary, He could be with them in whatever difficult circumstances they might find themselves. However bleak things might be behind bars, prisoners who accepted Christ had an eternal hope: “on judgment day, Jesus is your lawyer, your advocate... we have nothing to fear.”<sup>93</sup>

Though he remained a regular radio fixture, Chaplain Ray joined with the broader evangelical move to book publishing that had occurred in the second half of the twentieth century.<sup>94</sup> He adapted some of his radio interviews into small paperbacks, which became the bulk of his book production. Most of the paperbacks told of famous criminals, or people who had committed particularly heinous crimes, coming to Christ. For example, *Disciple in Prison* (first published in 1975) told the story of Robert A. Johnson, a man imprisoned for the murder of his children. While awaiting trial, Johnson dedicated his life to the Lord in a jail cell. When the judge reduced his charges to second-degree murder (down from first degree, which would have likely given Johnson the death penalty), he

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<sup>93</sup> Ray Hoekstra and Corrie ten Boom, *Side One: Corrie Ten Boom Speaks to Prisoners with Chaplain Ray*, n.d., Collection 320, tape 14, Billy Graham Center Archives.

<sup>94</sup> Vaca, “Book People,” 192ff.

praised God for delivering him. Deliverance imbued Johnson with a sense of spiritual purpose that he was in prison to minister to others. The remainder of the book follows Johnson through prison life, focusing on his regular practices of prayer, evangelism, and Christian fellowship. This new life rescued Johnson from his guilt and from the travails of prison existence: “Being a prisoner, caged in a little cell of stone and steel, can be a dreadful life if that is all one has; but being a prisoner with Jesus living within takes away the dread and replaces it with hope.”<sup>95</sup>

Other Chaplain Ray paperbacks and radio programs followed a similar pattern: horrific crimes and criminal pasts, followed by an abrupt conversion to Christianity, and concluding with stories of “Jesus living within.” Chaplain Ray’s messages were clearly intended for the inmates who would tune in on their prison-issued radios or page through his latest book sent as a gift, and many of his interviews featured tips from lifers on how to manage the challenges of prison life. Unsurprisingly, this advice typically tracked back to Jesus, and sometimes in very simple terms. When Chaplain Ray asked Robert Johnson what advice he would give someone coming into prison for the first time, Johnson replied, “I feel that if a man could get the Spirit of Jesus...he could put his time aside and forget about it.” To be sure, there would be challenges, “but the Spirit that lives within me and the love that’s in my heart and the felling of contentment and peace help cast these disagreements aside.”<sup>96</sup> Whether with guests like Corrie ten Boom offering encouraging words or Chaplain Ray preaching that Jesus has solidarity with prisoners

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<sup>95</sup> Robert A. Johnson, *Disciple in Prison* (Dallas: International Prison Ministry, 1975), 17.

<sup>96</sup> Johnson, 87-8.

(“He was one of us”), the hope was that inmates could in turn feel welcomed by Jesus Christ no matter what they had done.<sup>97</sup>

## **Impact**

It is difficult to document the reactions of prisoners to these pioneering evangelical ministry efforts. No doubt many inmates simply wanted a break in the monotony of prison life, and attended Yokefellows small groups for the benefit of casual conversation or went to Glass’s events just for the spectacle of athletes performing feats of strength (which accorded with Trueblood’s and Glass’s intentions). It is also impossible to verify the “genuine” quality of the conversions that prison evangelists claimed, which often were reported as being very high. Other inmates, as we will see later, chafed at the prison ministry surge because of its over-spiritualized quality. But the occasional archived inmate letter indicates a level of deep appreciation for these ministries. An inmate named Don, from McNeil Island prison in Washington state, wrote to Bill Glass soon after the ministry’s visit there. He introduced himself as “the Texan who shook your hand. I was sincere in my thanks to you then and now.” Don explained that he was in prison for bank robbery and, with so much time apart from his wife and children, he was absolutely miserable. He “cried constantly” until he eventually found himself in the prison chapel, where he begged God for help: “I prayed like I have never done before. I asked God to help me and my family.” God answered, Don wrote, “by

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<sup>97</sup> Associated Press, “‘Radio Chaplain’ Reaches Prison Inmates.”

sending you and the men with you.” He reported that Glass’s talk at McNeil and the work of crusade volunteers all “helped me immeasurably.” For a man “looking for a way to salvage my life,” Glass’s talk “seemed to relate specifically to me.”<sup>98</sup>

Likewise, Chaplain Ray’s ministry to inmates was widespread and, for some, quite welcome. In 1972 IPM reported receiving around 150 letters every day from inmates (and that they answered every one in some form).<sup>99</sup> Inmate letters read on his radio program or published in Chaplain Ray books and magazines, though pre-selected, also give some sense of the power of the ministry. “Chaplain Ray,” one inmate named Charles wrote, “I am writing to you in deepest sincerity. I am in a Florida prison doing five years...I am deeply moved by all your material that I have read. The Spirit of Christ has touched me through this material.” Another inmate in Colorado told Chaplain Ray that “A lot of people here read your books...It’s good to know people still believe in you, even though you’re in jail.”<sup>100</sup>

Whatever their immediate impact among inmates, these ministries certainly exerted a profound influence in drawing other Christians into prison ministry and concern for inmates more generally. For every two prisoners that Yokefellows groups reached, around ten laypeople from local churches were getting involved in prison ministry, many of them entering prisons for the first time. Simmer’s Good News Ministries was staffed by professional chaplains, but it depended on private donations and connections to local

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<sup>98</sup> Don Morris to Bill Glass, n.d., Collection 455, box 14, folder 3, Billy Graham Center Archives.

<sup>99</sup> Associated Press, “‘Radio Chaplain’ Reaches Prison Inmates.”

<sup>100</sup> Charles E. Lasage and Michael Leiby, “Prisoners Touched By ‘Life Changing Books,’” *Prison Evangelism*, Winter 1979, 32/4/1, Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center.

churches.<sup>101</sup> Though the selling point of Bill Glass's crusades was the presence of athletes, each prison event relied upon a small army of volunteer counselors. For those who could not serve as an in-prison crusade counselor, Glass's ministry worked to encourage laypeople to build relationships with inmates through mail. Their "Friend of a Prisoner" program, or F.O.A.P., was an initiative that connected inmates who had accepted Christ at Glass crusades to volunteers on the outside who agreed to write them every thirty days and pray for them daily.<sup>102</sup>

Chaplain Ray in particular saw public outreach as a crucial part of his ministry. He encouraged broader Christian concern with prisoners and offered guidance for local churches interested in prison ministry. In an early issue of his *Prison Evangelism* magazine, Chaplain Ray noted that his goal was to reach both prisoners and public.<sup>103</sup> He aimed to convince these "freeworld" readers and listeners that prisoners deserved their care and concern.<sup>104</sup> Ever the evangelical preacher, Chaplain Ray could lay guilt and conviction on skeptics, blasting those who believed criminals to be outside the reach of the gospel.<sup>105</sup> He also regularly sketched for interested listeners and readers what the model prison ministry should look like. Christians were not to support the provision of generalized religious services in prisons or be content as long as inmates seemed

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<sup>101</sup> Helen Altonn, "Prison's Chaplain Leads Busy Life."

<sup>102</sup> Bill Glass Evangelistic Association, "Friend of a Prisoner," n.d., Collection 455, box 14, folder 3, Billy Graham Center Archives.

<sup>103</sup> "The Goal," *Prison Evangelism*, 1971, 32/4/1, Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center.

<sup>104</sup> Ray Hoekstra, "From the Chaplain's Desk," *Prison Evangelism*, Third Quarter 1978, 32/4/1, Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center.

<sup>105</sup> Ray Hoekstra, *Side Two: Ministry to the Small Jails*, n.d., Collection 320, tape 22, Billy Graham Center Archives.

spiritually validated by the state chaplain; they were to work to save inmates' souls. One chapter of a Chaplain Ray book indicated this dual approach of compassion for prisoners and gospel fervor. He told the story of Harry Howard, the Protestant chaplain at the famed San Quentin prison in northern California. He praised Howard for doing what no other chaplain would do, in two senses. Howard was willing to go directly to inmates' cells, practicing face-to-face ministry in a place deemed dangerous by most other chaplains. And even though he was a state employee, Howard also tried to convert inmates to Christianity. He did this, Chaplain Ray noted, even though he was supposed to be "neutral."<sup>106</sup> His message for potential prison co-workers was that their work should be characterized by a unapologetic sense of concern for inmate's humanity *and* their souls, over and against those who deemed inmates as beyond hope and those who believed in a more liberal brand of ministry.

The absence of formalized professional requirements and clinical training, combined with introduction through prison ministry networks and promotions by ministries like Bill Glass's, Yokefellows, IPM, and Good News, proved to be precisely what brought so many other evangelicals into the prison ministry movement. In 1976, one Honolulu newspaper profiled the new chaplain, Don Clevenger, at the nearby state prison. Clevenger had been introduced to prison work through his experience as a volunteer counselor at a Bill Glass crusade and follow-up discipleship events at the facility. "Many of us [volunteers] had never been in a prison," Clevenger noted, but the

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<sup>106</sup> Harry Howard and Ray Hoekstra, *Changed Lives in San Quentin* (Dallas: Acclaimed Books, 1985), 173ff.

experience deeply affected him. “You cannot come into a place like this and talk to a man for nine or 10 weeks without becoming closely related to him in a very personal way.” Though he was not an ordained pastor and had no formal theological training, he started subbing in as volunteer chaplain when the state chaplain resigned. Looking for further training, he got in touch with Bill Simmer and Good News, who provided him advice and materials to use. Simmer eventually came to visit Clevenger, who eventually formed a Good News Mission-Hawaii council with other prison ministers, many of whom also had originally volunteered with Glass. The lower barrier to entry opened access, but it also made for more difficult work. Clevenger worked for free, dedicating at least 20 to 30 hours a week to inmates. He felt guilty that he couldn’t do more: “I feel like I’m dropping the ball when I’m not here.”<sup>107</sup>

Clevenger’s story was emblematic of surging evangelical interest in taking up the challenge of prison ministry in the 1970s, often as a response to being introduced to prison work by leaders like Glass and Chaplain Ray, or through networks that Yokefellows and Good News helped facilitate. Many evangelicals started their own lay-driven ministries and connected with one another through conferences and associations. Duane Pederson, a minister who was popular in evangelical circles for his ministry in California to hippies (he had reportedly coined the term “Jesus People”) and inmates alike, assembled a gathering of prison ministers in 1978 for a “Congress of Prison Ministries.” More than sixty organizations were represented, with 200 people registered,

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<sup>107</sup> Helen Altonn, “Prison’s Chaplain Leads Busy Life.”

many of whom were there to hear Corrie ten Boom deliver an address (registered attendees were reportedly guaranteed a photo op with her).<sup>108</sup> The congress, according to Pederson, helped provide a sense of cohesion and common purpose for evangelicals who, until this point, thought they were the only ones laboring in prisons. “We didn’t know there were any groups out doing anything,” Pederson said he had heard one participant tell him. “We thought were the only ones!” Pederson told the gathering in his opening address that he was encouraged to see other Christians across the country getting engaged in prison work. He noted the diversity of theological beliefs of the participants, but it was clear that this would be an evangelical affair when he then said that “we have one goal: to proclaim the message of Jesus Christ, a freeing message, a message of new life.” The loud utterances of “amen” that could be heard coming from the audience in reply indicated that the gathered ministries from across the country had a unified purpose as co-laborers in the gospel.<sup>109</sup>

Other organizations that connected smaller prison ministries, most of them evangelical, would sprout up in the following years, such as the Association of Christian Prison Workers (which ten Boom helped found in the late 1970s, with Pederson) and the

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<sup>108</sup> Phil Wagner, a speaker at the conference, mentioned the photo op with Corrie ten Boom somewhat derisively in his talk, suggesting that some people might only be attending so they could rub shoulders with a celebrity. Phil Wagner, *Congress of Prison Ministries*, n.d., Duane Pederson Collection, box 50, tape 6, Archives and Special Collections, David Allan Hubbard Library, Fuller Theological Seminary.

<sup>109</sup> Duane Pederson, *Congress of Prison Ministries 1978: Opening Prayer, Welcome*, n.d., Box 50, cassette from Pederson, Duane, Bill McCoy, Corrie ten Boom, Jim Collier, Archives and Special Collections, David Allan Hubbard Library, Fuller Theological Seminary.



Coalition of Prison Evangelists (COPE).<sup>110</sup> COPE was founded in 1984 by Frank and Cheryl Costantino (Frank, a former inmate, had been the subject of a Chaplain Ray paperback). COPE counted around 300 ministries as members by the late eighties.<sup>111</sup> Other new ministry organizations started in the late 1970s that remain influential players in prisons work today. Kairos Prison Ministry was one unique product of this period. Beginning as a Roman Catholic-influenced *cursillo* program in 1976, it eventually rebranded in 1979 as the nondenominational Kairos Prison Ministry (which in 2017 had more than 30,000 volunteers in 37 states).<sup>112</sup> Though Kairos volunteers avoided explicit association with “revivalist” forms of faith, it adapted the “prison ministry” paradigm and name that was now being made intelligible by evangelicals: distinct from state chaplains, lay-driven, interdenominational, and dependent upon local churches.<sup>113</sup>

Most famous was the prison work of Charles (Chuck) Colson. A former Nixon administration “hatchet man,” Colson was a close advisor to the president who helped shape much of the administration’s political strategy. Known as a ruthless political operative, some said that Colson was the kind of man who would walk over his own grandmother if it meant getting Nixon reelected.<sup>114</sup> However, Colson’s political career collapsed when news of Watergate broke. Though he was not directly involved in

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<sup>110</sup> “Corrie Ten Boom’s Prison Ministry to Be Carried on by Duane Pederson,” n.d., Duane Pederson Collection, box 56, folder 7, Archives and Special Collections, David Allan Hubbard Library, Fuller Theological Seminary.

<sup>111</sup> Ann Sibel, “Clubs,” *Tampa Bay Times*, November 9, 1988.

<sup>112</sup> “Kairos Prison Ministry - The History of Kairos,” Kairos Prison Ministry, accessed December 12, 2017, <http://www.kairosprisonministry.org/history.php>.

<sup>113</sup> Selwyn Crawford, “Kairos Inc. Helps Inmates Cope with Life in Prison,” *The Orlando Sentinel*, January 1, 1982; Marvin Wamble, “Getting High on God’s Love,” *Reno Gazette-Journal*, July 21, 1982.

<sup>114</sup> Charles W. Colson, *Born Again* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 58.

Watergate, he confessed to crimes that came to light as a result of the investigations. He was sentenced to one-to-three years in federal prison. Before his trial, Colson converted to Christianity. While reared Episcopal, he later admitted he never thought much of religion during his early life and professional career. However, the combination of his lowly estate, the calming presence of several evangelical friends, and the convicting words of C.S. Lewis all conspired to claim him for Jesus. He eventually took his new faith with him into federal prison, where he served seven months.

Colson's newfound faith and a testing prison experience led him to found his own prison ministry organization, Prison Fellowship, less than two years after his release. Colson's interest in this ministry was rooted in his own experience of the loneliness and difficulty of prison life. But as he worked to establish Prison Fellowship, he was indebted to prison ministry strategies and networks built by others who had been working in prisons years earlier. For example, immediately after Colson decided to devote his life to prison ministry, he served as a special guest speaker at a Bill Glass crusade in Washington state. Much to his chagrin, Colson served as a karate expert's volunteer in a sword skills demonstration at the event, where he had a potato sitting on his neck chopped in half. "Quite a debut for our ministry, wasn't it?" he told his friend Fred Rhodes on the drive home. "I didn't think I'd be sticking my neck out quite so soon."<sup>115</sup> Bill Simmer actually visited Colson when he was incarcerated, and Good News allowed Prison Fellowship to utilize one of its halfway houses to board inmates for one of its

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<sup>115</sup> Charles W. Colson, *Life Sentence* (Lincoln, VA: Chosen Books, 1979), 154-60.

seminar events in the ministry's early days.<sup>116</sup> Colson addressed the 24<sup>th</sup> annual Yokefellows national conference in 1977. Though he was clearly the most famous speaker on the program (outshining even Elton Trueblood, who introduced Colson to the crowd), Colson needed association with this time-tested, respectable gathering of prison ministers in order to convince a skeptical public of his own heart change and his commitment to prison work. He was grateful for the connection. Trueblood announced that Colson had given a \$500 gift to help cover conference expenses.<sup>117</sup>

More important than these early personal connections were the broader conceptual innovations of evangelical prison ministry that shaped Prison Fellowship's emphases in its early days and into its eventual evolution into the world's largest prison ministry. Colson, a recent convert with no theological training, believed that prison ministry was a vocational calling for himself and for other evangelical laypeople. To be sure, Colson was smart. He dedicated himself to learning about both prisons and theology, devouring academic works on Christianity and criminology alike. But in his evangelical conversion he had internalized the idea that formally trained chaplains had no monopoly on prison work. Colson also worked from the outset of his ministry to frame prison ministry in terms of small-group "fellowship." Fellowships were characterized by inmates (mostly men) devoting themselves to one another, speaking about their struggles and hopes, all with the ultimate goal of becoming more devoted parents for their own

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<sup>116</sup> William Leonard Simmer, Tape 3; "Colson Tells of Prison Ministry," *Baptist Press*, April 29, 1076; Colson, *Life Sentence*, 60.

<sup>117</sup> Florence Lawson, "Prison Ministry a Focal Point of 24th Yokefellow Conference." For more on Colson's awareness of other prison ministries around the time of Prison Fellowship's founding, even as he describes their limitations, see Colson, *Life Sentence*, 277-8.

children. The combined effect was a ministry that sought to connect inmates to ministry outside the prison system, apart from state-funded chaplaincy and the progressive penology that informed the correctional environment. Instead, inmates would find spiritual rehabilitation through Prison Fellowship-funded chaplains and programs, and ultimately, through fellowship with each other.<sup>118</sup> Inmates' families were also seen as potential sites of radical transformation, culminating in popular programs like the Angel Tree Christmas gift program for the children of prisoners. Lastly, Prison Fellowship would become a global brand through savvy marketing and widespread media exposure. Colson's own successful memoirs *Born Again* and *Life Sentence* would be the first of several books he wrote linking his own spiritual autobiography to that of prison concern.

Prison Fellowship therefore was a product of an evangelical prison ministry culture made possible by the lay-driven, small group emphasis of Yokefellows, the private chaplaincy of Good News, the intimate masculine brotherhood and family focus of Glass, and the media savvy of Chaplain Ray. Colson and Prison Fellowship have received the most scholarly and popular attention of any prison ministry effort – evangelical or otherwise.<sup>119</sup> This attention is justified. Not long after its founding, Prison Fellowship began exerting tremendous influence both in prison work and in publicizing evangelical engagement with inmates more broadly. However, Prison Fellowship and

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<sup>118</sup> Oliver, “‘Hi, Fellas. Come on in.’ Norman Carlson, the Federal Bureau of Prisons, and the Rise of Prison Fellowship.”

<sup>119</sup> For example, see Sullivan, *Prison Religion: Faith-Based Reform and the Constitution*; Erzen, “Testimonial Politics”; Oliver, “‘Hi, Fellas. Come on in.’ Norman Carlson, the Federal Bureau of Prisons, and the Rise of Prison Fellowship”; David Dagan and Steven Teles, *Prison Break: Why Conservatives Turned Against Mass Incarceration* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Erzen, *God in Captivity*.

Colson were only part of the story of evangelical prison ministry. Focusing solely on Prison Fellowship or labeling Colson as evangelical prison ministry's mastermind misses other important characters and organizations who were influential in their own ways. Even as Prison Fellowship soared further into the public limelight in the 1980s, other smaller prison ministry efforts remained. Wheaton College's 1986 Prison Ministry guide showed a Prison Fellowship presence in a number of states across the country. But the vast majority of ministries were independent efforts unaffiliated with Prison Fellowship, even as they drew upon the common evangelical prison ministry culture that shaped Colson's ministry and their own.

Prison ministry had become such a powerful marker of evangelical social engagement in the late 1970s that other growing evangelical ministries adopted it. Campus Crusade for Christ, a ministry to students at American colleges and universities, started "P.S." Ministries in 1974. Campus Crusade staff member Larry Benton helmed the endeavor. Benton had gotten interested in prison work after he and his wife Beverly developed a relationship with a prisoner who had previously broken into their house, assaulted Beverly, and stolen their car. After offering the man forgiveness, the Bentons eventually led him to Christ through consistent letter writing over the course of three years. The "P.S." initials in the ministry's name reportedly stood for "personal Savior, prodigal son, personal solution, powerful solution and programmed solution." If the branding was a bit confusing, P.S. ministerial goals were familiar: establishment of

“para-chaplains” in state and federal prisons, and engagement of volunteer ministers for work in smaller county and city institutions.<sup>120</sup>

Prison ministry emerged in other quarters of evangelicalism as well. Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker’s PTL ministry network, which had started in 1974, was becoming well known (and rich) through its television programming. In the early 1980s, PTL started various service ministries, such as counseling, food distribution centers for the needy, and a home for unwed mothers. PTL also started a prison ministry. According to historian John Wigger, Tammy regularly visited prisons in the late 1970s, paying particular attention to the needs of women inmates. Inmates appreciated her because she spoke “without condescension or judgment.” Though regularly lampooned in American pop culture for her folksy demeanor and the gobs of makeup she wore on television, Tammy had a genuine connection with prisoners. As Wigger writes, “It was perhaps the only audience in front of which Tammy felt sure that she was not being judged for her lack of polish and sophistication.”<sup>121</sup>

PTL television programming was widely available in prisons (more than 1,000 carried the channel, Bakker claimed). In order to facilitate broadcasts, PTL offered to provide prisons with satellite equipment if they did not already have it. Like Tammy’s preaching, some inmates appreciated the offering. “A sermon in your cell, when you are there alone with your thoughts, can do a lot of good,” one inmate told a Louisville

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<sup>120</sup> “New Prison Ministries,” *Eternity*, May 1977, Duane Pederson Collection, Archives and Special Collections, David Allan Hubbard Library, Fuller Theological Seminary.

<sup>121</sup> John Wigger, *PTL: The Rise and Fall of Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker’s Evangelical Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 135-6.

reporter writing on the arrival of PTL programming at a nearby facility.<sup>122</sup> Bakker claimed that the cell sermons his ministry beamed out had helped convert 37,000 inmates.<sup>123</sup> Prone to hyperbole, he was probably exaggerating. But it was true that PTL had a significant prison presence across the country, with more than thirty PTL-affiliated prison ministry offices in several states by 1984.<sup>124</sup> The prison ministry appeal became personal for Jim Bakker after his own five-year prison stint for financial improprieties a few years later (he had defrauded investors in PTL's vacation timeshare business). Though he never jumped into the work full-time, he reportedly considered prison ministry as part of his public re-emergence after his release.<sup>125</sup>

### **Unresolved Tensions**

There were three unresolved tensions in the burgeoning prison ministry movement. First, the complicated relationship of this revival to state chaplaincy and other faiths, second, issues related to idealizing and validating inmate conversions, and third, the question of whether punitive crime politics were complementary or contradictory with evangelistic concern for inmates' souls. American foreign missionaries too had regularly faced "no-win" situations as they negotiated the competing demands of

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<sup>122</sup> Bill Powell, "PTL Shows Are Going to Inmates at Eddyville," *Courier-Journal* [Louisville, KY], March 14, 1983.

<sup>123</sup> Wigger, *PTL*, 136.

<sup>124</sup> Fahs, *Prison Ministry Directory 1986 Edition*.

<sup>125</sup> Hanna Rosin, "Jim Bakker's Revival," *Washington Post*, August 11, 1999, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1999/08/11/jim-bakkers-revival/4a658120-af44-49e9-b892-ddfe402800a8/>.

evangelism, national identity, and social concern.<sup>126</sup> Evangelical prison ministers likewise found themselves in difficult spots, pulled among competing ministerial ideals and constituencies.

### *Chaplaincy and Other Faiths*

The 1976 *Los Angeles Times* cover story lumped a few non-evangelical and non-Christian groups into the recent prison revival, like the Metropolitan Community Church (a ministry to the San Francisco gay community), the Church of Scientology, and a Muslim prisoner movement. It also quoted several prison chaplains, some of who seemed quite amenable to the new presence of evangelicals in prisons despite the clear differences in the scope and goals of their ministries. By the mid-1970s some evangelicals found themselves able to negotiate adoption of the “neutral” chaplaincy model (with its accommodation of religious diversity). Other evangelicals spoke of state chaplaincy in highly critical tones, setting up showdowns between the two groups.

The emerging evangelical prison interest occasionally manifested itself in the form of professional, state-sponsored prison chaplaincy. Some evangelicals seemed increasingly willing to play by rules of institutions, provided they could frame their work in ways that did not infringe on their consciences and made sense to their fellow believers. This was particularly true for denominations that sought to serve as endorsing agencies for evangelical chaplains. The Assemblies of God sponsored its first federal

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<sup>126</sup> Hutchison, *Errand to the World*, 13.



prison chaplain in 1971, and by 1978 there were forty Assemblies chaplains working nationwide.<sup>127</sup> Paul Markstrom, the head of the denomination's institutional chaplaincy program, was instrumental not only in helping interested Assemblies clergy and laity get involved in prison ministry, but also in interpreting the professional chaplaincy role to potential Pentecostal skeptics.<sup>128</sup> The official Assemblies of God chaplaincy manual presented progressive penology and psychotherapeutic instructions not unlike what would have been found in a great deal of CPE training materials of the day. This may have been alarming for Pentecostals, who often utilized supernatural categories in diagnosing and solving personal problems. But Markstrom penned a cautionary preface to assuage such concerns. "Certain areas and ideas presented in these papers may raise some questions... This treatise is not submitted as portraying final truths but is placed before you to assist in better understanding the dynamics of criminology and penology...with its weaknesses and strengths." Markstrom characterized those who had developed the chaplaincy manual as "honest and sincere" men, despite the fact that "the full supernatural power of God with its accompanying redemptive resources is not understood or brought into play." He concluded the preface with an exhortation to his fellow Pentecostals who would nonetheless seek to be in the world of clinical chaplaincy,

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<sup>127</sup> *Chaplaincy Ministries - 1941-2014* (AG Chaplaincy, 2015), 21, 24.

<sup>128</sup> Paul R. Markstrom, "Volunteers In Prison Manual," 1977, 27/5/3, Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center; Paul R. Markstrom, "Prison Ministry and Your Church" (Assemblies of God Division of Home Missions, 1982), 27/5/3; 100/2/1, Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center.

if not always of it: “As ambassadors of the most high God, let us always bring into focus the vast intrinsic resources of the Spirit-filled clergyman.”<sup>129</sup>

At other times, however, evangelicals expressed deep animus toward state-sponsored chaplaincy. The frustrations Simmer and other evangelicals had expressed with state chaplaincy (frustrations that had pushed them into ministry in the first place) started to boil over, particularly when prison administrators had to choose what religious authorities would exert authority in their facilities.

A Good News chaplain named Dale Pace published a book in 1976 entitled *A Christian's Guide to Effective Jail & Prison Ministries*. It was released by the Fleming H. Revell Company, who published Charles Colson's *Born Again* and Francis Schaeffer's *How Should We Then Live* that same year. Pace drew a great deal upon materials from Good News' chaplaincy courses, and Bill Simmer reviewed early drafts of the manuscript.<sup>130</sup> Pace argued in his introduction that the “Church's interest in ministry to prisoners is somewhat parallel to its interest in missions.” And as with foreign missions, this evangelistic zeal had sadly faded: “the Church has done little more than provide for prisoners the religious services sought by the state.” But based on recent evangelical activity, Pace was optimistic. A renewal of the “great missionary outreach” was possible, if only Christians would gain a biblical sense of urgency. “The harvest truly is plenteous,

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<sup>129</sup> Preface of Paul R. Markstrom, ed., *Chaplain's Manual* (General Council of the Assemblies of God, 196?). Evangelical prison ministry leader Duane Pederson also offered measured appreciation of the chaplaincy vocation, even as he pushed evangelicals to pursue independent prison ministry in his instructional guide *How to Establish a Jail and Prison Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1979), 23-5, 59, 61.

<sup>130</sup> Dale K. Pace, *A Christian's Guide to Effective Jail & Prison Ministries* (Old Tappan, NJ: F. H. Revell Co., 1976), 13.

but the laborers are few' ... There exists no more appropriate application for these words than to those sheep without shepherds in our nations jails and prisons."<sup>131</sup> Pace implied here that inmates had been without a shepherd for some time, and he made this sentiment all the more clear in his critiques of the progressive chaplaincy model throughout the book. Regarding the management of religious diversity, Pace wrote, "No godly chaplain is going to add to inmate confusion by assisting the spread of error and false teaching among the inmate population."<sup>132</sup> Regarding clinical approaches like CPE, Pace said that there was instead a "counseling privilege that dwarfs all others... soul winning."<sup>133</sup> Pace excoriated the American Protestant Correctional Chaplains' Association for its liberal tendencies, and offered the new Association of Evangelical Institutional Chaplains, Good News, and Chaplain Ray's IPM as more faithfully Christian alternatives.<sup>134</sup>

Pace's book was the closest thing to a textbook that the budding evangelical prison ministry movement had at the time. State chaplains did not receive it well. A 1978 article "Whatever Happened to that Old-Time Prison Chaplain" in *Corrections Magazine* by Philip B. Taft, Jr. discussed the conflict. Many chaplains who were trying to be "ecumenical" in their accommodation of various faith groups and use their clinical training to help inmates adjust psychologically, Taft noted, found their work challenged by upstart "dissident Christian sects." Taft highlighted the frustrations of "clinically-trained liberals" (like the American Correctional Chaplain's president) with Colson's

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<sup>131</sup> Pace, 19-22.

<sup>132</sup> Pace, 143.

<sup>133</sup> Pace, 144-5.

<sup>134</sup> Pace, 136-7.

Prison Fellowship chaplains, some of whom had been appointed by officials in a Memphis prison without certification by clinical chaplaincy accrediting bodies. He then turned to Good News, a “fiercely evangelical” group, and Pace’s book. Taft said that “mainline” chaplains despised the book: “It did us a disservice,” complained one federal chaplain, while another said that “Pace and his people are closed-minded bigots. Most CPE people don’t like him.” Colson, Pace, and “other independent non-denominational groups,” Taft reported one chaplain as saying, were “ding-a-ling evangelicals.”

Taft’s piece concluded with profiles of three different chaplains, two who had adopted the clinical, non-proselytizing model (one even preferring the term “social worker”), and one (a Pentecostal) who rejected the title of clinician. For Taft, neither approach seemed all that impressive: evangelicals were too illiberal in their views of God, while “therapy oriented chaplains” “seldom mention Him.” Taft gave no clear proposal of his own except to offer a few comments about nineteenth century penitentiaries, sites where chaplains held places of prominence and were key to the operation of the facility.<sup>135</sup> His longing for a simpler time missed the often horrific and equally contested history of prison work a century earlier. But he was right in naming the current problem. Prisons were state-controlled spaces with neutral aspirations that housed people of many different faiths, but were located in a society where evangelical religion was highly influential.

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<sup>135</sup> Philip B. Taft, Jr., “Whatever Happened to That Old-Time Prison Chaplain,” *Corrections Magazine*, December 1978, collection 274, box 9, folder 9, Billy Graham Center Archives. I am grateful for Kendrick Oliver’s work on prison ministry in helping me understand this broader contested landscape, as seen through the controversy over this article. Oliver, “‘Hi, Fellas. Come on in.’ Norman Carlson, the Federal Bureau of Prisons, and the Rise of Prison Fellowship,” 748.

### *Contested Conversions and Colorblindness*

One problem that prison administrators and critics of prison ministry often discussed was “jailhouse religion,” the worry that prisoners feign religious conversion and practice to get in the good graces of administrators, guards, and ministers. Evangelicals were offering a new and exciting religious product, but whether inmates were buying it in good faith was another matter. The 1976 *Los Angeles Times* piece mentioned one prosecutor who claimed that jailhouse conversions were a deceptive front. The other problem evangelicals faced was how to interface with the increasing public awareness of the growing numbers of black people incarcerated in American prisons. Evangelicals in prison ministry spoke to both of these developments, sometimes with peculiar results.

Evangelicals made their own arguments to convince others of the genuine nature of their model by deploying powerful conversion stories as proof that their methods were sound. These stories tended to come from ministers who had more interest in cultivating a public media presence, not so much from organizations (like Yokefellows) that spent less time broadcasting their work. For example, Chaplain Ray’s paperbacks and radio features usually focused on prisoners who had committed remarkable crimes, or who had achieved high levels of notoriety in their lawbreaking endeavors. Besides the murderous Manson gang members and Robert Johnson, there was Jack “Murf the Surf” Murphy (a famous jewel thief known for stealing the priceless Star of India gemstone from the New York Museum of Natural History), mobsters and Mafia associates like Frank Costantino

and Gene Neill, and “Public Enemy No. 1” Floyd Hamilton of the Bonnie and Clyde gang. Chaplain Ray used these stories as proofs: besides appealing to broader audiences, they proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that the gospel *worked* in prison. Christ could transform the vilest offenders and could therefore be trusted by prison administrators, other interested inmates, and the public more broadly. It was a strategy that had been used countless times before in Christian evangelism, beginning with the previously persecutory St. Paul’s self-referential proof of the power of the gospel: “Christ came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the worst” (1 Timothy 1:15). Inmates noticed. One article in an inmate journal mentioned that the only reading materials one could reliably find in solitary confinement were Bibles and Chaplain Ray’s “gangster to God” paperbacks. The response to the paperbacks for this author was to read the books their stories of “criminal exploits” and then “trash the book at the first mention of salvation.”<sup>136</sup> The books’ value here was found in their stories of sin, not redemption.

This approach had another effect: the defining of “crime” as an abstract concept in terms of professional gangsters, murder, and high-level offenses. This approach fit with the broader pattern of how American media narrated crime in the 1970s: focusing on high profile criminals (like serial killers) or devoting disproportionate attention to particularly heinous offenses.<sup>137</sup> This was just as true of Hollywood as it was of the nightly news: upon its release in 1972 the mobster drama *The Godfather* was the highest grossing film of all time, and movie studios upped their production of gangster films for

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<sup>136</sup> Gregory J. McMaster, “Hole Time,” *Journal of Prisoners on Prisons* 10, no. 1 & 2 (1999): 87–97.

<sup>137</sup> Philip Jenkins, *Decade of Nightmares : The End of the Sixties and the Making of Eighties America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 134-145.

years to come.<sup>138</sup> But the other effect was that, if crime could be made intelligible by defining it as sin, it also needed to be intelligible in terms of moral culpability. This was the advantage of big-time crime as well: it allowed Chaplain Ray to frame crime in terms of conscious moral choice. Chaplain Ray opened his foreword to Frank Costantino's 1979 book *Holes In Time* with the line: "Frank was a professional criminal. He deliberately decided to be a thief and a robber."<sup>139</sup> Framing Costantino's work in terms of deliberate intention and professionalism was a convenient foil to how evangelicals like Chaplain Ray envisioned the gospel taking hold in prison. Converting to Christ would involve leaving one vocation for another through the same kind of conscious choice that led one to crime in the first place. Conscious choice, whether in entering a life of crime or the life of faith, was a helpful sentiment for law enforcement and prison officials who were increasingly justifying their system's punitive existence with reference to individual responsibility and personal choice.<sup>140</sup>

What was often missing or underplayed in evangelical conversion narratives like Chaplain Ray's were the less remarkable ways that a great number of people also ended up in the American criminal justice system, like low-level theft or drug offenses. To be sure, more minor crimes and drug use showed up in Chaplain Ray's stories and testimonies, but they were typically in reference to the "gateways" that introduced ne'er-do-wells to the broader criminal underworld. There was no paperback on a teen who

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<sup>138</sup> Tim Dirks, "Top Films of All-Time," AMC Filmsite, accessed December 13, 2017, <http://www.filmsite.org/greatfilmssummary.html>.

<sup>139</sup> Frank Costantino, *Holes in Time: The Autobiography of a Gangster* (Dallas: Acclaimed Books, 1979).

<sup>140</sup> Jenkins, *Decade of Nightmares*, 149.

shoplifted once and yet found his life turned upside down through arrest and conviction. Neither was there much attention to systemic factors that led to crime, like the loss of inner city jobs that opened up drug markets as forms of economic opportunity (the exception being Chaplain Ray's argument that the freewheeling sixties helped foster a godless immoral culture that bred disrespect for the law).<sup>141</sup> There was also little conscious attention to race. Though black inmates regularly wrote Chaplain Ray and were featured in his magazine in short columns, the converts he dedicated his paperbacks and feature stories to were mostly white. The whiteness of Chaplain Ray's court of criminals was not unusual when compared to the overwhelming whiteness of American evangelical publishing and public ministry at the time. However, the black prisoner population in the American prison system had been growing at a steady pace, more than doubling from the mid-1920s to 1986 (by that year, 44% of all state and federal prison admissions were black).<sup>142</sup> The ideal convert, in Chaplain Ray's telling, was one who understood the moral weight of his or her crimes because they were unburdened by economic or racially discriminatory factors. It was a person who focused moral blame on themselves, not society, and made a conscious decision to follow Jesus.<sup>143</sup>

Bill Glass framed prisoner conversion narratives in a similar manner. He regularly spoke of the positive benefits that emerged from inmates turning to Christ in ways that minimized racial injustice or the complicated problems inmates faced while behind bars,

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<sup>141</sup> Harry Howard and Ray Hoekstra, *Changed Lives in San Quentin*, 1.

<sup>142</sup> Patrick A. Langan, "Race of Prisoners Admitted to State and Federal Institutions, 1926-86" (Bureau of Justice Statistics, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice, May 1991), <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/125618.pdf>, 5.

<sup>143</sup> Harry Howard and Ray Hoekstra, *Changed Lives in San Quentin*, 14-15.



even as his ministry recognized inmates' humanity and need for friendship. In Glass's telling, prisoners often came across as childlike. They needed entertainment and stimulation in order to pay attention (hence the need for athletic and celebrity events), and were emotionally needy.<sup>144</sup> One black inmate that Glass highlighted in one of his books, nicknamed "Lefty Dog," had eyes that "flashed with defiance" as he "ranted about all the injustices he suffered." When Lefty Dog accused Glass's team of being tools of the state and of white oppression, a counselor retorted that they were actually privately funded and that they had black volunteers who also worked with them. Eventually Lefty Dog came around, striking up a relationship with the counselors and asking them to write him. He "was no longer a left out dog," as his nickname indicated. Instead, he was "Frank... a man [who] had a name to prove his worth." He was now "appreciative and open. Rather than our biggest opponent, he was now a friend." With this new friendship and new name, Frank had left two other things behind: his anger and his blame of an oppressive and racist society and prison system. Strikingly, Frank/Lefty Dog did not convert to Christianity, but he had come to realize another important truth: that "love and respect" were the solution to inmate woes, not critical questioning of the prison itself or its racial dynamics.<sup>145</sup> For Glass, that was good enough.

The implication was that problems in American criminal justice were not the result of systemic racial issues related to poverty or policing, but interpersonal and

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<sup>144</sup> "A prison population is aware of physical strength," Glass told one reporter. "They're more impressed by athletic feats than the normal population." John M. Leighty, "Entertainers and Athletes Spread the Word in Prison," *Los Angeles Times*, December 7, 1986.

<sup>145</sup> Glass, *Free At Last*, 84-5, 100.

emotional challenges arising from of men’s abdication of their manhood and of openness to friendship. To be sure, Glass and his co-laborers were aware of America’s racial tensions. But they moved, quickly, to “reconciliation” as the marker of Christian influence in American criminal justice. The title of Glass’ first prison ministry book, *Free At Last*, indicated Glass’s hope that men could find spiritual and emotional liberation. Indeed, though he never mentioned Martin Luther King, Jr. and the civil rights leader’s use of the phrase “free at last” at the climax of his “I Have a Dream” speech, Glass and his co-laborers had internalized a form of King’s vision. They hoped to fight racial prejudice and create a “colorblind” Christian community behind bars. “Jesus loved us so much,” one of Glass’s ministry leaders said to one inmate, “that he just takes the color away and makes us color blind.”<sup>146</sup> The problem was that this colorblindness also helped blind evangelicals to the more subtle racial dynamics still at play as the criminal justice system was beginning to transform into a “new Jim Crow,” with a growing number of black men caught in its grasp.<sup>147</sup>

These tensions were evident in evangelical prison ministers’ references to Attica Correctional Facility in the 1970s and 80s. Attica, a prison in upstate New York, was famous for a 1971 prisoners’ uprising in response to the terrible conditions at the facility. Attica’s inmate population, as Heather Ann Thompson has chronicled, was “overwhelmingly young, urban, under-educated, and African American or Puerto Rican,” and was regularly subjected to cruel treatment. Though serious offenders were

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<sup>146</sup> Glass, 160-1.

<sup>147</sup> Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 102ff, 202.

incarcerated at Attica, there were also low-level lawbreakers serving sentences.<sup>148</sup> On September 9, 1971 prisoners took hostages and made demands for improved conditions (and amnesty for the uprising itself). But law enforcement eventually attempted to retake the prison by force. The retaking, which was hastily planned and utilized violent, shoot-first tactics (and unjacketed bullets, typically banned for their destructive potential), was bloody. Many hostages and inmates were killed, with some prisoners shot by guards *after* the retaking had been completed. The full mismanagement of the state's negotiations by figures such as governor Nelson Rockefeller and a later cover-up of many of the horrific details of the re-taking has only recently come to light.<sup>149</sup>

Many evangelicals clearly had a heart for the prisoners who faced brutal conditions like the ones that had prompted the Attica riot.<sup>150</sup> On his radio program Chaplain Ray hosted Attica chaplain Jeff Carter, who spoke in very humanizing terms about Attica inmates and criticized the impulse in American society that pushed for harsh punishment and ignored prisoner suffering (Carter was black, and had been appointed to Attica a few years following the uprising).<sup>151</sup> But elsewhere Chaplain Ray used the specter of Attica as a backdrop for his gangster-styled conversionism. In a TV special

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<sup>148</sup> Heather Ann Thompson, *Blood in the Water: The Attica Prison Uprising of 1971 and Its Legacy* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2016), 6-7.

<sup>149</sup> "Likely Attica Prison Riot Shooters Named, 45 Years Later," CBS News, August 24, 2016, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/likely-attica-prison-riot-shooters-named-45-years-later/>; Heather Ann Thompson, "Attica: It's Worse Than We Thought," *The New York Times*, November 19, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/19/opinion/attica-prison-torture.html>.

<sup>150</sup> For a discussion of the impact of Attica on evangelical prison ministry, see Oliver, "Attica, Watergate, and the Origin of Evangelical Prison Ministry, 1969-1975."

<sup>151</sup> Chaplain Ray Hoekstra, *Interview with Chaplain Jeff Carter of Attica Prison*, n.d., Collection 320, tape 1, Billy Graham Center Archives; Douglas C. Lyons, "Spreading the Gospel Behind Bars," *Ebony*, July 1988.

entitled “God’s Prison Gang” that he produced with CBS star Art Linkletter (who had also showcased David Wilkerson’s work on his program years earlier), Chaplain Ray assembled prominent “Public Enemies” to Attica for taped speeches and interviews.<sup>152</sup> Each interviewee had a unique rap sheet and an inspiring conversion story. George Meyer was Al Capone’s chauffeur, Floyd Hamilton was a bank robber who had associations with the Bonnie and Clyde gang, and Jerry Graham was listed as “the robber king” of California. An interview with Tex Watson, one of the infamous Manson murderers, was also included. Ted Jefferson was the only African-American featured, and was simply referred to as “one bad dude” (and he received the least amount of screen time of all the inmates featured). Each told how they had come to Christ in dramatic ways, and all (sometimes at the prompting of Chaplain Ray) stressed their emotional change of heart. Though they had been cold-hearted and numb criminals before, they could now cry and feel emotion. The gangster-to-Christ narrative in “God’s Prison Gang” was popular and effective. News releases played up the infamous origins of the interviewees as they promoted local viewings of the film. Pastors hosted screenings at their churches, while inmates and law enforcement officials wrote IPM to praise the special and ask for more materials from the ministry.<sup>153</sup> Chaplain Ray received an “Angel Award” at a banquet hosted by the Religion in Media committee at the Hollywood Palladium.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> In some IPM materials the special was listed under other names, like “The Public Enemies,” but it was eventually consistently marketed under “God’s Prison Gang.” Art Linkletter and Ray Hoekstra, “God’s Prison Gang,” n.d.; “Attica Television Special,” *Prison Evangelism*, February 1981, 32/4/1, Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center.

<sup>153</sup> “Shelocta Church Shows ‘God’s Prison Gang’,” *Indiana Gazette* [Indiana, PA], May 14, 1983; “Sheriff Saw TV Special,” *Prison Evangelism*, February 1981, 32/4/1, Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center;

The TV special was successful because it was a streamlined story, one that spoke confidently of the evangelical message's transformative power for the hearts and minds of lawbreakers. But it was difficult to know how to interpret the backdrop of Attica in light of this same message. What about the low-level criminals housed at Attica? What about the inmates at Attica who had endured regular beatings by prison guards, inhumane living conditions, or botched medical treatment? Christ had liberated gangster George Meyer's guilty conscience, but what did he have to say to Elliot "L. D." Barkley, a twenty-one-year-old who was in Attica simply for driving without a license (and thereby violating his parole) and who had been shot in the back during the Attica retaking?<sup>155</sup> "God's Prison Gang" did touch on some of the horrors of Attica before and during the uprising, but it made only the brief mention of the material changes needed to prevent future prison rebellions by treating inmates more humanely. Instead, the real solution to inmates' plight was spiritual rehabilitation through Christ.

Likewise, instead of dwelling on these complicated cases or the unequal racial dynamics they suggested, Bill Glass' answer was to point out how successful the evangelical message could be in defusing future prisoner protests. In *Free at Last* Glass quoted one journalist and ministry volunteer who noted that he "covered riots where blacks and whites were at each other's throats, killing and harming one another...As I

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"Former Prisoner Saw Attica TV Special," *Prison Evangelism*, Second quarter 1981, 32/4/1, Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center.

<sup>154</sup> "Attica Prison TV Special Honored With Angel Award," *Prison Evangelism*, Second quarter 1981, 32/4/1, Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center.

<sup>155</sup> Thompson, *Blood in the Water*, xv, 6-7, 229.

looked about the room [at the crusade], I noticed blacks and whites together, bound in true love because of Christ... To me, this will stand out above everything else, for I've seen only bitterness and hatred while covering stories of riots."<sup>156</sup> Glass seized on this sentiment, what he saw as the colorblind and calming potential of his ministry. Reporting on a recent crusade in Kansas that had experienced some violence in the weeks leading up to the event, Glass wrote to his supporters in a newsletter that his own crusades were ready "to fight a three-day battle to bring things under control." However, this would not be the revolutionary strategy of the inmates who had taken over Attica or the racial justice and prisoner's rights activists who cheered them on: "Not the Attica-styled thing, but a way that is much more effective – through Christ!"<sup>157</sup>

### *A Captive Audience?*

Streamlined conversion narratives focused on high profile criminals allowed evangelical prison ministers in the 1970s to frame their work in the most positive terms possible and sidestep complicated questions related to injustices at places like Attica. This was not because all these evangelical prison ministers loved punitive politics. Instead, they wanted to appeal to inmates, administrators, and the broader public. But it was a message easily adopted by Christian law enforcement officials who had a vested interest in fighting crime. For these Christians, the evangelical mode of prison ministry was a perfect complement to law and order.

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<sup>156</sup> Glass, *Free At Last*, 88.

<sup>157</sup> Bill Glass, "See-Thru Views."

Evangelical prison ministries were exemplars of the “Creative Society” that Ronald Reagan had heralded in his 1966 California gubernatorial campaign (inspired by minister W. S. McBirnie), and that political conservatives more generally idealized in 1970s and after. Here were private citizens working their way into a public space formerly controlled by the state, bringing to bear their unique, largely non-professional perspectives on a social problem. This accorded with McBirnie and Reagan’s vision that “the penal system could be overhauled, if the sociologists, psychologists, and others were invited to think new thoughts and...create a new atmosphere of freedom to deal with old, tough problems.”<sup>158</sup> But the issue was that advocates of this very Creative Society (like Reagan) had presided over the state’s *expansion* through bolstering law enforcement’s reach in fighting crime and punishing lawbreakers. Some evangelical prison ministers missed this dynamic altogether, while others saw it less as an irony and more as a complementary state of affairs.

Herbert Ellingwood had made a name for himself as a prosecutor and as legal affairs secretary under California governor Ronald Reagan. He was a strong advocate for the toughened and streamlined criminal justice platform that Reagan appealed to in his governorship, and later in his presidency. Ellingwood spoke at a 1972 event sponsored by the National Association of Evangelicals on the topic of “Making Faith Work – Across Two Worlds.” “Two worlds” was a reference to congressman John Anderson’s book *Between Two Worlds* (Anderson was also present at the event). Ellingwood aimed to

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<sup>158</sup> W. S. McBirnie to Ronald Reagan, November 30, 1965; Reagan, “The Creative Society.”

build on Anderson's work and outline his own understanding of how he negotiated spiritual and political callings as an evangelical Christian. Early in his talk Ellingwood gave an example: prison ministry. He told the story of a woman in the local jail who he had witnessed to. Though from a troubled background, she ultimately came to Christ. Through work like this, Ellingwood went on, "God is at work in the prison system." Indeed, the American prison system is "a beautiful picture, spiritually, as far as potential is concerned." He believed this was fully the result of evangelical prison ministry. Chaplains, by contrast, "haven't done too much about it." The impact was a prison revival among "Some of our worst guys...because people are involved on a one to one basis...showing the importance of personal salvation."

Ellingwood told more stories. He spoke of "a famous murderer" George Otis Smith, who had been led to Christ by someone in Ellingwood's Sunday school class. He talked about taking singer Pat Boone into a maximum security prison to witness. He summed up his prison ministry discussion by telling the gathered audience about prison ministry's huge potential in terms of maximizing spread of the gospel. "This is a captive audience," he concluded, "but it's one that ought to be exploited."<sup>159</sup>

Ellingwood seemed to be attempting a joke. But the sentiment was nevertheless accurate: forced confinement was not incidental to prison ministry, but welcome. It was not a context to be overcome, but an advantage to be, as he put it, exploited. At the 1978

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<sup>159</sup> Herbert Ellingwood, *Making Faith Work – Across Two Worlds*, 1972, National Association of Evangelicals records, Box 111, folder 6, Wheaton College Archives and Special Collections. Not long after this talk Ellingwood was recognized for his prison ministry work in *The Pentecostal Evangel*. "Bethelites Go to Prison," *The Pentecostal Evangel*, July 23, 1972.



Congress of Prison Ministries, Duane Pederson invited Ellingwood to offer some introductory remarks. Ellingwood noted he was speaking on behalf of the attorney general, who he hoped would be “our next governor” (referring to Republican Evelle J. Younger, who was then running against incumbent Democrat Jerry Brown). Speaking to the gathered prison ministers, Ellingwood said that, “The programs that we’re involved in here are the programs that governors want to see promoted...So I’ll say on behalf of the state welcome...I hope that at all times that we can help you promote this particular cause.” Then, with a sly send-off, he closed: “If you ever have any problems, call me, in the attorney general’s office and then in the governor’s office.”<sup>160</sup> The fact that Ellingwood was even present at this evangelical prison ministry gathering was significant, but his remarks on behalf of California’s lead law enforcement office indicated just how excited those leading American criminal justice were about the movement.

Some law enforcement officials went further, using prison ministry as a foil for progressive correctional models. A 1977 film entitled *Set Free* told the story of evangelical revival in San Quentin Prison. The film largely tracked with the broader narrative laid out by Glass, Chaplain Ray, and other evangelical ministers. San Quentin chaplain Harry Howard (who regularly appeared in Chaplain Ray materials) told how the revival, helped along by prison ministry, had helped reduce violence at the prison, and several inmates interviewed confirmed the radical spiritual change at the facility and how

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<sup>160</sup> Herbert Ellingwood, Mike Khaled, John Nichels, *Congress of Prison Ministries, Special Attorney General State of California, “Your Turn,”* n.d., Duane Pederson Collection, box 50, tape 2, Archives and Special Collections, David Allan Hubbard Library, Fuller Theological Seminary.

God had led them out of sinful lives of drugs, black nationalism, and crime. Ellingwood was featured in the video, as were other law enforcement officials, like Los Angeles deputy chief Bob Vernon and FBI official Don Jones. The common point they made was that American prisons were in crisis. This was not because prisons were too harsh or because too many poor people of color were caught up in the justice system. The problem, Jones argued, was that “rehabilitation doesn’t work.” Instead, Jones elaborated, as he sat underneath the large FBI seal hanging over his office desk, “I am convinced that the only answer for a man’s problems, the only thing that makes him go straight, is a personal knowledge and faith in Jesus Christ.” Vernon offered similar thoughts, contending that it was impossible to change behavior “unless you change the man committing that behavior...from the inside out.” Following Ellingwood, Jones, and Vernon’s comments in the film were shots of inmates reading Bibles at San Quentin, testifying about their radical conversions (at least one of which was the subject of a Chaplain Ray feature), and saying the “Sinner’s Prayer” together.<sup>161</sup>

The simultaneous assault on the behavioral modification of rehabilitation, combined with the championing of the transforming power of the gospel, was very similar to the “Jesus alone” perspective that had been offered by Graham, Vaus, and Wilkerson years earlier. But here, the context of the argument was different. Those who needed heart change were incarcerated, already subject to outside state control. Toward the end of *Set Free*, ex-inmate prison minister looks into the camera and says, “I couldn’t

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<sup>161</sup> “Set Free,” 1977, AR 631-18, box 32, folder 7, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives.

depend on my government and my state, or my city government to give me another chance. The only way was Christ in my whole life.” For Ellingwood and other law enforcement leaders, and the filmmakers who juxtaposed the inmates’ comments with excoriations of the progressive correctional models, this was a perfect concluding example of the power of the gospel over the progressive correctional ideal. But it ignored the fact that state control itself was never in doubt, only the fact that it so often proceeded with a progressive gloss and without a divine referent.

That was why there was little mention at this point of total reform (much less abolition) of prisons by evangelicals and the law enforcement leaders who championed them. There was little said about the total disruption of prisons’ cold, bureaucratic grip, even as many evangelicals spoke of their desire to disrupt these facilities’ religious status quo. Instead, the image of inmates at prayer and reading scripture was the ideal vision: inmates’ hearts and minds were being changed, even as they remained subjects of the state. Souls were “set free,” but not bodies. Ray Rogers, an ex-inmate who now worked as a prison evangelist, confirmed this sentiment in a sermon to inmates on the San Quentin yard at the end of *Set Free*. He spoke forcefully to the gathered men of God’s forgiveness of sin: “He will abundantly pardon.” But then, as if sensing the potential slippage he had introduced with his language choice, he speedily resolved it. “You want a pardon? You want a pardon? Come to the Lord Jesus Christ. Don’t ask him to get out! Don’t ask him to bring your old lady back! Ask him for a new brain! Ask him for a new life!” The door to new life in Christ was open, even as prison doors remained locked shut.

Prisoners noticed. One inmate named Carl Robins, who was serving a life sentence for drug possession, penned a column for the *Houston Chronicle* that offered “An ‘inside’ view of prison ministries.” He said the Texas prisoners he knew had “mixed emotions” about the ministries. Many were frustrated that the ministries offered little practical help, and instead “want only to ‘lead them to heaven.’” One inmate Robins quoted, a robber serving twenty-five years, was blunt: “What about the prisoner’s earthly needs? Is he wrong for wanting freedom? For wanting to hold on to his wife and kids? For wanting a job and a decent place to live?” Most inmates were not worried so much about the illiberal nature of proselytizing or the threat that evangelicals posed to the state chaplaincy paradigm. They simply wished these prison missionaries would find a way to “translate love into practical assistance...helping a prisoner get out of prison and return to his family.”<sup>162</sup> Inmates knew prison could not be romanticized as a kind of spiritual retreat. Ministries who allied themselves with the carceral state too closely risked a high degree of distrust.

On his radio broadcasts Chaplain Ray occasionally evinced an understanding of the problem inherent to framing prison ministry in this way. He saw it as a challenge as old as Christianity itself: the dual (and sometimes competing) demands of justice and mercy. God’s forgiveness may have been unending, but Christians from St. Paul onward believed that the state had some sort of divine mandate to restrain and punish evildoers. Chaplain Ray knew for certain that the answer was not to be found in progressive

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<sup>162</sup> Carl A. Robins, “An ‘inside’ View of Prison Ministries,” *Houston Chronicle*, December 30, 1978, Collection 274, box 9, folder 9, Billy Graham Center Archives.

posturing. “Liberal speculators will tell you that poverty, society, environment, [or] genes are the cause of crime,” Chaplain Ray said in one radio broadcast, “but this is wrong.” Even if this approach was effective, he argued, all it does was make one clean on the outside but filthy on the inside, or, “what Jesus warns us about with the Pharisees.” By contrast, he proclaimed, “The gospel is the only real rehabilitation program that will work.” Just as important, “our God is a God of law and order and of justice. The gospel is not some namby-pamby attitude towards crime. Law and order demands justice.”

But then, a pivot. Law and order did demand justice, “but Jesus pays our debt.” Jesus has stepped in to meet the requirements of justice on the cross and thereby made mercy possible. Christians therefore have an obligation to act mercifully towards criminals. When they do not care for criminals, they are ignoring the second part of God’s dual command in Micah 6:8 to “do justly, *and* to love mercy.”<sup>163</sup>

Chaplain Ray believed that a way to make sense of these biblical demands of justice and mercy was to focus on restitution. He pointed to the vast distance between the biblical ideal of punishment and the current state of affairs. “Vast expensive prisons are a relatively late invention of mankind,” he noted in one radio broadcast. By contrast, “in the biblical epoch, there was no need for large prisons.” He quoted texts like Exodus

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<sup>163</sup> Chaplain Ray told the biblical story of the Good Samaritan to illustrate this point. We learn from this story, he contended, that there are three kinds of people: takers (like the criminals who rob), “island dwellers” (self-centered people who don’t care about others who are suffering, in this case the religious leaders who pass by the robbed and beaten man), and givers (those, like the Good Samaritan, who help others who are in pain). Our prisons are obviously filled with takers, but “the folks who say ‘lock em up’ are the island dwellers, people who live to themselves in islands of self-sufficiency.” The givers, by contrast, “are those who minister to victims and even criminals themselves.” Chaplain Ray then turned to the listener: “Who are you? Each of us must decide who we will be.” Ray Hoekstra, “The Three Causes of Crime, and the One Sure Cure,” n.d., Collection 320, tape 24, Billy Graham Center Archives. Transcriptions of Chaplain Ray’s recordings are my own.

22:1, which indicated that the penalty for stealing livestock was repayment four or fivefold in return. Restitution was a form of “forgotten justice,” but its recovery could eliminate the necessity of new prisons being constructed while taking the plight of victims of crime seriously. He gave a modern-day example. “If someone is sent to prison after burning your house down, you haven’t received justice, and neither have taxpayers [who paid for the trial], or the person who did the crime.” A person sat in a publically funded prison with little hope of rehabilitation, just as likely to return to the life of crime after the sentence was served, while the victim suffered deep financial and emotional loss with no hope of recovery. “There’s no justice in this kind of punitive, expensive, fruitless, crime breeding system,” Chaplain Ray concluded. The answer was clear. “If we’ll turn back to the simple basics of the Bible and wherever possible, substitute restitution for retribution, then we’ll have simple biblical justice and the benefits will be more and more rehabilitation.”<sup>164</sup>

Chaplain Ray called himself a law and order conservative, but emphasized that at the same time he was “compassionate.” He heralded the work of law enforcement, but the evangelical prison ministry paradigm gave him a way to reframe this push in terms of mercy. To listen to Chaplain Ray try to reconcile these commitments could be frustrating; on his radio broadcasts he often seemed to be unsure of how exactly to negotiate the demands of justice and mercy, frequently catching and correcting himself when he starting leaning too far one way or the other. There was promise in the restitution model,

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<sup>164</sup> Ray Hoekstra, “Restitution - Forgotten Justice.”

but Chaplain Ray was also unclear as to what it would look like practically, or how it could be applied to crimes that resisted quantification. Also, as a biblically informed model, he did not speak about how it could be applied to society more broadly (indeed, the actual work of IPM never focused on pushing this reform in terms of actual policy change in the criminal justice system). Prison ministry had given Chaplain Ray some sense that there was another way beyond both the progressive and punitive paradigms. But without a consistent theological or practical vision for how to relate justice and mercy, the tension remained. It would be up to later prison ministry leaders to work on developing a more robust response.

## Chapter 5: “There Are Better Ways”

“Please God, Help me.” Charles “Chuck” Colson scribbled on a yellow legal pad, from inside the dingy dormitory at the federal prison camp located at Maxwell Air Force Base near Montgomery, Alabama. “I read the 37<sup>th</sup> Psalm & Daily Bread for today but I can’t control myself...the heavy gloom just won’t seem to lift this time...I can’t escape from my own mind and the depression is nearly overwhelming.” Colson, who had been incarcerated for his role in various Nixon administration illegalities, was feeling profound isolation and despair. He had converted to Christianity right before entering prison, but behind bars he wrestled with the spiritualized piety that designated him free in Christ. He knew that being “born again” in theory should set his mind above earthly concerns: “I suppose if I am true to Christ...what is done to me...shouldn’t matter.” But his own personal experience in prison seemed to be driving him away from the Lord. Incarceration was not a redemptive blessing.

Colson also journaled about the horrors of prison life he and other prisoners endured. Inmates at Maxwell felt “bitter and destroyed,” given their rat and roach-infested housing, forced labor for little-to-no pay, and regular mistreatment by the prison’s staff. He blasted the bureaucratic morass, with its nonsensical rules and regulations. Some prisoners had found a crate of unused flight jackets that the Air Force had disposed of, and grew excited about the possibility of having some warmer clothes during chilly winter months. But the prison, which only provided substandard, worn-out jackets, refused to allow them to wear the higher quality Air Force clothing because it did



not match the required brown inmate uniform. The warm jackets sat unused. As a result, Colson and fellow inmates had to track down brown dye, sometimes having visitors sneak it in covertly, and color the jackets on their own. More frustrating than capricious rules around clothing was the harsh, unpredictable sentencing. Long sentences (often disproportionate to the crimes committed) and unclear expectations for parole, Colson jotted down in his notes, “eroded men’s souls.” As he reflected on the flight jacket fiasco and his frustration with prison regulations, Colson concluded that “Idiocy [is] so present...damn system denies any rights to Prisoners and subjects him to real risks.” That Maxwell was a minimum-security facility with more privileges than many other American prisons did not matter much to Colson. “It is all capital punishment of the soul; simply a question of degree, whether man’s flesh is destroyed in electric chair or one year is taken away...”

Colson grew close to some of his fellow inmates. He participated in a Bible study and prayer group, a parallel to his elite “fellowship” back in Washington, D.C. A lawyer by training, Colson helped some inmates with legal matters (despite warnings from prison administrators not to practice law in prison). Other times he assisted with more simple tasks, like the drafting of a letter to a judge for an illiterate inmate. The fact that prisoners had so few resources and that illiterate inmates could not even read their own

charges (much less argue against them) was infuriating to Colson. As he left Maxwell after a seven-month sentence, he told his new friends he that would not forget them.<sup>1</sup>

Colson stayed true to this promise. The fellowship he experienced at Maxwell with other inmates helped to spur him on to prison ministry. He would soon become the most popular figure in the evangelical prison ministry movement as the founder and leader of Prison Fellowship. Prison Fellowship's ministry work was significant in its own right, notable especially for its professionalism and ambitions. Though initially small, it quickly moved on from shoestring status. By the early eighties Prison Fellowship was operating with a multi-million dollar budget, 12,000 active monthly volunteers, and a large nationwide staff.<sup>2</sup> But Colson's most groundbreaking effort was where Prison Fellowship departed from the path other prison ministries had pioneered: the direct engagement of issues of prison and criminal justice reform.<sup>3</sup> Colson never forgot the

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<sup>1</sup> Charles W. Colson, "Notebook #1," n.d., Collection 275, box 10, folder 6, Billy Graham Center Archives, 1-9. Colson also related the Air Force jacket and dye story in chapter 25 of Charles W. Colson, *Born Again* (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, 1976); Colson, *Life Sentence*, 24.

<sup>2</sup> "Ministry Goals for 1982 In Comparison With 1980 and 81," *Jubilee*, February 1982, Evangelism and Missions Journals, Wheaton College Archives and Special Collections. Scholars that discuss Colson and Prison Fellowship generally focus on prison ministry or his influence in the "born again" subculture of the 1970s and evangelical public life in later decades. For examples of the former, see Sullivan, *Prison Religion: Faith-Based Reform and the Constitution*; Erzen, "Testimonial Politics"; Erzen, *God in Captivity*; Oliver, "Attica, Watergate, and the Origin of Evangelical Prison Ministry, 1969-1975"; Oliver, "'Hi, Fellas. Come on in.' Norman Carlson, the Federal Bureau of Prisons, and the Rise of Prison Fellowship." For the latter, see Kendrick Oliver, "How to Be (the Author of) Born Again: Charles Colson and the Writing of Conversion in the Age of Evangelicalism," *Religions* 5, no. 3 (September 11, 2014): 886-911; Miller, *The Age of Evangelicalism*, 13; and Jeff Sharlet, *The Family: The Secret Fundamentalism at the Heart of American Power* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> Two works have discussed Colson's reform efforts. Cultural theorist Andrea Smith focuses on the various discourses present within conservative evangelicalism more generally on prison issues, with the aim of developing an account of the "unlikely alliances" available to marginalized people groups (chiefly Native Americans). Political scientists David Dagan and Steven Teles have shown how Colson was a key influencer in more recent conservative criminal justice reform work. This chapter builds on some of their arguments and nuances others, particularly Smith's general equation of Colson with rising "Christian right" forces in the 1980s. Smith, *Native Americans and the Christian Right*; Dagan and Teles, *Prison Break*.

horrors of prison life. Though he was convinced that the work of saving souls was of paramount importance, he came to believe God could also use him to do alleviate the bodily suffering of prisoners, something he himself had experienced.

Colson approached prison and criminal justice reform with similar conceptual frameworks as past evangelical advocates for both inmate ministry and law and order, but with different results. He combined skepticism of state bureaucracy, an individualistic anthropology, and a personal influence model of social change all into a potent critique of the burgeoning carceral state. The result was an early entry in what later was called “compassionate conservatism,” an approach that tried to adopt the anti-statist, individualistic, faith-based ideals of the conservative movement, shore up flaws in application, and direct them toward humanitarian ends.<sup>4</sup> There was no better target for a conservative looking to do good than the nation’s prison system, the “most thoroughly implemented government social program of our time.”<sup>5</sup> Other evangelicals, particularly those aligned with the burgeoning Christian right, continued to advance arguments in favor of expanding and toughening American criminal justice, but they increasingly had to reckon with Colson. Since Colson’s approach to reform depended on conservative

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<sup>4</sup> Conservative journalist Marvin Olasky was the first to use the term “compassionate conservatism,” beginning in his work in the late 1980s and early 1990s (chiefly his book *The Tragedy of American Compassion*). Though Olasky eventually became close with Colson (who promoted Olasky’s written work), his early articulation of compassionate conservatism typically focused on issues related to poverty and the welfare state. The politician who is most often associated with compassionate conservatism is president George W. Bush, who read Olasky’s work while governor of Texas and utilized the phrase regularly in his later campaigning. See chapter one of Marvin Olasky, *Compassionate Conservatism: What It Is, What It Does, and How It Can Transform America* (New York: Free Press, 2000) and Marvin Olasky, *The Tragedy of American Compassion* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 1994).

<sup>5</sup> Prison abolitionist Angela Davis famously deployed this line, drawn from Elliott Currie, in her landmark work *Are Prisons Obsolete?*. Angela Y. Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003), 11; Elliott Currie, *Crime and Punishment in America* (New York: Macmillan, 1998), 21.

arguments and alliances, however, he also had to reckon with them. The result was that Colson gradually built trust with other conservative evangelicals who may have otherwise looked askance at the reform agenda. But his general comfort with Reagan-era conservatism meant that Colson's vision always risked being marginalized or co-opted for more punitive causes by those who had not experienced the horror of prison life firsthand. He came to represent, for better or worse, the bendable social conscience of American evangelicalism.

This chapter begins by showing how Colson and his various ministry efforts adopted a reformist evangelical approach to crime, punishment, and imprisonment in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Though this approach departed from the spiritualized practice of prison ministry pioneered over the past decade, it was still grounded in Colson's personal experiences of prison evangelism. It was also firmly conservative in character, a rebuttal of what Colson saw as a progressive, rehabilitative prison regime. Colson's cause ran into challenges in the mid-1980s. Other evangelicals continued to push for law and order, and his reform work floundered at times in the face of broader social pressures and internal tensions. From the mid-1980s on his reform cause regularly had to regroup, make peace with competitors, and work out compromise models, like restorative justice. Advocating compromise had a dual legacy: Colson's movement was regularly co-opted by other evangelicals and political leaders seeking compassionate cover for punitive politics in the 1990s, but it also allowed him to maintain strategic influence and persist as a trusted presence in the halls of power. By the 2000s Colson had become one of the most popular and influential evangelicals in Washington, outpacing activists for more

traditional culture war causes through his careful political maneuvering and relationship building.<sup>6</sup> The chapter closes with a discussion of the complex contemporary legacy of his reform movement.

### **Conserving Justice**

Colson's prison reform work grew out of his ministry experience. He adopted a consciously conservative philosophy to matters of reform, drawing on complementary criminological theories and Protestant theologies to fashion his own critique of American prisons. He carefully built alliances with other evangelicals and influential public figures as he developed his philosophy, and eventually began lobbying politicians directly for prison reform.

Colson's ventures into reform work did not happen immediately after his conversion. His evangelistic prison ministry work was the most immediate product of his experience of incarceration. But as he traveled to prisons across the country in his early ministry, Colson began to think about new possibilities. For the first few years of his work after Prison Fellowship's founding, Colson was reluctant to voice publically any strong critiques of American prisons. If reform was mentioned, it was usually as an outgrowth of the longstanding evangelical personal conversion social strategy: convicts coming to Christ would ultimately solve the crime problem and eliminate the need for

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<sup>6</sup> Based on interviews he conducted with various political elites, sociologist D. Michael Lindsay contends that Colson has had more overall influence than family values leaders like Tony Perkins or former Southern Baptist Convention policy lobbyist Richard Land. D. Michael Lindsay, *Faith in the Halls of Power: How Evangelicals Joined the American Elite* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 59.

prisons.<sup>7</sup> The reluctance to voice negative appraisals was partly a result of his tenuous relationship with prison administrators. In his bestselling memoir *Born Again* (published in 1976, the same year Prison Fellowship began work), Colson wrote briefly about the poor conditions at the Atlanta County Jail. This was a facility he never spent time in personally but that had housed fellow inmates he lived with at Maxwell, who told him harrowing tales about their experiences. Not long after publication of the book, officials at the Atlanta jail accused Colson of libel and threatened to sue for defaming the prison. His public ministry had only just begun and its long-term success was now in question. Colson was forced to go on an apology tour of the facility (though he later said he thought the jail had deceptively covered up their inhumane conditions only *after* he had made the accusations public).<sup>8</sup>

Colson's evangelistic focus was also a reflection of his new involvement in conversion-centered and conservative evangelical culture. After observing and interviewing Colson at a Washington prayer breakfast in 1976, journalist Garry Wills called him "a bit shuffling and apologetic over his reform efforts, since much of the evangelical movement opposed the social gospel." When Wills mentioned Catholic peace activist Philip Berrigan as a possible comparison during the interview, Colson made sure to note his opposition to politically active ministers. Wills noted the starkness of the shift

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<sup>7</sup> For example, in response to a reader's question about prison reform in his "My Answer" advice column, Billy Graham praised Colson's "prison efforts" in 1975 (before Prison Fellowship had even begun substantial ministry programming, much less reform work), referencing the hope that conversion would provide the ultimate rehabilitation. Billy Graham, "My Answer," *Pensacola News Journal*, October 18, 1975.

<sup>8</sup> Colson, *Life Sentence*, 181ff.

in the former Nixon aide's persona. Here was "a supremely political man now renouncing politics."<sup>9</sup>

The longer Colson spent working in prisons, however, the less he shuffled. In April of 1978 Colson and Prison Fellowship staff bounced around new ideas, such as hiring two or three staff members to research prison reform and stay in touch with legislators on prison issues.<sup>10</sup> A few months later Colson was speaking at an evangelistic event for Prison Fellowship at a federal penitentiary in Atlanta (a separate facility from the county jail where he had previously had trouble). This prison, which housed 2,000 inmates, had seen an enormous amount of violence as of late, with regular murders, fires, and assaults. Though Colson and his fellow ministry volunteers welcomed this challenge, they knew the success of their event was in question, for two reasons. First, it was blazing hot, and the prison lacked any air conditioning. Second, and more challenging, Colson had been told that the inmates would be skeptical of overtly preachy religious talk or mentions of Jesus Christ. Instead, some of Colson's inmate advisors suggested before the event, "Maybe you could talk about prison reform, Chuck. Everybody is for that." Colson reluctantly agreed. But while standing before the 800 inmates gathered to hear him speak, Colson had a change of heart. In the heat of the moment, he folded up his notes he had

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<sup>9</sup> Garry Wills, "'Born Again' Politics," *New York Times Magazine*, August 1, 1976. See also Oliver, "Attica, Watergate, and the Origin of Evangelical Prison Ministry, 1969-1975," 134. Other journalists noticed Prison Fellowship's evangelistic prioritization, with one profile characterizing Prison Fellowship as "a new movement based in Washington to help prisoners in federal institutions. But it is not another government program, and it does not promise to reform the system." Marie Coutu, "Colson Group Shares the Faith," *Waterbury American*, June 14, 1977, Collection 274, box 9, folder 8, Billy Graham Center Archives.

<sup>10</sup> Michael Cromartie to Charles W. Colson, April 21, 1978, Collection 274, box 10, folder 12, Billy Graham Center Archives.

sketched on prison reform and put them in his coat pocket. He then told the men gathered before him that they could find new life in Jesus Christ.

As Colson narrated this story in his follow-up book to *Born Again*, entitled *Life Sentence*, it seemed as if he had foresworn reformist advocacy. After all, inmates accepted Christ in droves at the event and afterwards thanked Colson profusely for his spiritual exhortation. But as he departed the facility Colson looked at the faces of the inmates who had welcomed him and realized they were not only converts, but his “Brothers.” His eyes turned also to the five-story wall of cages where men would be herded after he left. “What a torture,” he thought, “These men come back from the spiritual high of this meeting and then live in this hell. But this, too, will change. I know it will. When Christians see what this is all about, they will do something, I know.” This was, Colson wrote, narrating of his own sense of call, a “life sentence” to mobilize fellow believers on the outside to help meet prisoners’ needs across the nation.<sup>11</sup> After his visit Colson spoke about the situation in Atlanta to reporters. Adopting the mantle of spokesman for the prisoners there, he talked about the inhumane conditions, chiefly overcrowding (which Colson claimed was responsible for the violence).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Colson and his associates regularly told stories about other troubling prison visits in the late seventies and early eighties that motivated him finally to seek reform, like in Santa Fe, NM, Stillwater, MN, and Walla Walla, WA. It is not clear that one was *the* actual turning point, but since Atlanta was the one selected by Colson himself for his second book, it became one of the most prominent. Colson, *Life Sentence*, 291-301; David Peterson, “Stillwater Prison Improved, Colson Says,” *The Minneapolis Star*, April 26, 1979; Daniel W. Van Ness, *Crime And Its Victims* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 12; Jonathan Aitken, *Charles W. Colson: A Life Redeemed* (New York: Doubleday, 2005), 320.

<sup>12</sup> Alice Murray, “Colson Says Inmates Hot, Not Scared,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, June 28, 1978.



For the rest of 1978, Colson began regularly including comments about various prison problems in his speeches to evangelical groups and detailing his opposition to oppressive aspects of American criminal justice. He spoke to 4,000 members of the Church of the Nazarene about the need for Christians to get involved in prisons and his frustrations with the challenges inmates had with re-entry into society (“They can’t vote, they can’t get a driver’s license and they can’t be bonded for employment”). He mentioned that a Virginia state official had proposed restoring his citizenship rights, but Colson refused the offer until there was a system-wide change for all inmates.<sup>13</sup>

Up to this point Colson largely had spoken about the need for prison and criminal justice reform as a personal cause, but beginning in 1979 he led the evangelistically focused Prison Fellowship to adopt the task as its own. In Prison Fellowship’s annual report for the year, Colson summarized the tragic state of American criminal justice. Prisons were overcrowded, but the only solution lawmakers had offered was to simply build more. This was the wrong approach, Colson argued. Besides costing taxpayers billions of dollars, expanding American prisons did nothing to address “The additional cost in human lives, both to non-violent offenders who would be ruined by unnecessary incarceration, and to the society which imprisons them...America faces a prison crisis unprecedented in our nation’s history.” He urged Prison Fellowship supporters to “weigh our criminal justice practices against the commands of scripture” and look to alternative methods, like halfway houses and alcohol treatment programs. A year later, Prison

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<sup>13</sup> Rita Gillmon, “Colson Asks Aid For Inmates,” *San Diego Union*, July 7, 1978, Collection 274, box 9, folder 8, Billy Graham Center Archives.

Fellowship published their first mission statement, which listed three goals: building up Christ's church in prisons, connecting local churches to prison ministry, and working for "a more just and effective criminal justice system."<sup>14</sup>

Colson's calls for reform were rooted in his growing sense of injustices that inmates faced, but they also were a result of his realization that he could frame the cause in terms that, at best, transcended political divisions or, at least, appealed to the generally conservative political leanings of fellow evangelicals. Part of this appeal had a pragmatic bent, as evidenced in the Prison Fellowship mission statement. Not only would Prison Fellowship's criminal justice reform proposals advocate for moral (or, "more just") ends, it would push for practical and "effective" goals. Reform would "control crime, save tax funds, and aid victims."<sup>15</sup> This also was why, standing outside the Atlanta federal prison, Colson had critiqued the horrible conditions but avoided a direct challenge to conservative Georgia politicians or the prison's warden. From his time in political life, Colson knew that there was no need to alienate sympathetic authority figures and allies with needless boat-rocking.<sup>16</sup>

In 1979 Colson spoke at the annual convention of the Southern Baptist Convention in Houston. At the time, the SBC was embroiled in debates over biblical inerrancy and the denomination's political stances, and this convention was ground zero for such conflicts. Speaking like a missionary at home on furlough, Colson urged the

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<sup>14</sup> Sally Clower, "Justice Fellowship Case History" (Prison Fellowship Research & Development, January 1992), 1-2. I am grateful to Dan Van Ness for sharing this document with me.

<sup>15</sup> Clower, 2.

<sup>16</sup> Alice Murray, "Colson Says Inmates Hot, Not Scared."

gathered crowd of 15,000 to pray that prisons would be opened up to Christian evangelism. He garnered applause in his talk when he urged Baptists to resist the “moral rot and sickness” of television and the “glib, sentimental pietism” of forms of Christianity that did not demand repentance.<sup>17</sup> Evangelism, anti-Hollywood sentiment, and guilt inducement for sin – this was messaging totally in line with the conservative piety of the SBC faithful. But then Colson made his way to the offstage pressroom, with a different message in mind: his opposition to capital punishment. He noted before reporters that many Baptists at the convention would disagree with him on the issue, so he offered what he hoped would be compelling rationale. “As a lifelong conservative, I have always been reluctant to give the state the power to take human life.” He had clearly thought about the issue, citing statistics that indicated the death penalty’s failure to deter crime and his own experience with death row inmates who claimed innocence. Then, he issued the ultimate Baptist broadsides, mobilizing biblical authority, conversionist rationale, and suspicion of the state’s pretensions to divine claims. “In my reading of the New Testament,” Colson argued, “I cannot accept the practice of capital punishment if I am to live by the commandments of Jesus.” The death penalty eclipsed the possibility of Christian conversion, because “Once you execute that man, it’s too late. I don’t think the state should play God.”<sup>18</sup> It was not clear if Colson was changing any minds at the SBC conference, but he knew his audience. More moderate members of the SBC who were anti-death penalty (often seminary professors or denominational leaders) could agree with

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<sup>17</sup> Bob Stanley, “Colson Urges Prayer To Open Texas Prisons,” *Baptist Press*, June 13, 1979.

<sup>18</sup> Jim Newton, “Colson Opposes Capital Punishment,” *Baptist Press*, June 13, 1979.

that conclusion, while more conservative laity could find something to appreciate in his argumentation and the broader evangelical persona he had maintained.

From the outset of his public ministry, Colson's conservative political philosophy was on display. As he narrated his own indictment in *Born Again*, he noted that he "knew now what it was like for one person to stand virtually alone against the vast powers of government." He went on to speak of his life preceding conversion as characterized not only by sin, but a lack of true understanding of the conservative tradition, despite having worked his whole adult life in Republican politics: "How calloused I'd been all those past years about the importance of one individual's rights." He spoke about the challenges that offenders and inmates faced in the criminal justice and prison system as if he were detailing a small business owner suffering under governmental over-regulation: individuals were being constrained by inefficient bureaucracies, unable to live up to their full potential.<sup>19</sup>

The other side of this equation was that Colson believed the individual facing down the vast powers of government was a self-determined rational actor who could make his or her own moral choices. Not long after he began his prison ministry work, Colson began reading the work of psychiatrist Samuel Yochelson and psychologist Stanton Samenow, who had together written a three-volume work entitled *The Criminal Personality*. Based on research conducted among what Yochelson and Samenow dubbed "hard core" offenders, the authors concluded that criminals exhibited "rational choice" in

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<sup>19</sup> Colson, *Born Again*, 1976, 224.

their own development. Cutting against the grain of a great deal of recent criminological, sociological, and psychological theory, they focused on “how much a criminal is a victimizer, rather than a victim – a molder of his environment, rather than a mere product of that mold.” Indeed, they pointed out that many of their subjects were economically secure and employed: “Slums are cleared, job opportunities are offered, schooling is provided, but crime remains.” They discounted standard therapeutic measures designed to rehabilitate criminals through outward verbal self-discovery, like psychoanalysis. Instead, they argued, change had to come by actually altering criminals’ internal thinking and motivations. Since a criminal had deluded himself into thinking that he was “basically decent,” what was needed was for him to face “just how rotten a person he was.” To do otherwise, to focus on the environment (slums, jobs, and schools) was to ignore the fundamental issue of the “inner man.”<sup>20</sup>

Academic reviewers were skeptical that Yochelson and Samenow had made a worthwhile scholarly contribution. One review of volume one concluded that the work’s case studies lacked theoretical value and that “it must be doubted seriously whether Volume I will find its way into many such classrooms.”<sup>21</sup> Its questionable academic import was of little consequence though when Colson began to promote the theories widely in his own writing and speaking. He made a few modifications along the way.

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<sup>20</sup> Stanton E. Samenow, “The Criminal Personality: New Concepts and New Procedures for Change,” *Humanist* 38, no. 5 (September 1, 1978): 18; Samuel Yochelson and Stanton E. Samenow, *The Criminal Personality* (New York: J. Aronson, 1976); Richard A. Dienstbier, “Exceptions to the Rule: A Review of The Criminal Personality, Volume I: A Profile for Change,” *Law and Human Behavior* 1, no. 2 (1977): 207–16.

<sup>21</sup> Dienstbier, “Exceptions to the Rule: A Review of The Criminal Personality, Volume I: A Profile for Change”: 215-16.

Yochelson and Samenow remained agnostic about the ultimate cause of crime, *why* criminals made the choices they did. Colson had an answer: sin, the spiritual sickness that ailed all people and distorted their desires. Christ had solved this problem through his death and resurrection, and Christian conversion (being “born again”) was the proper response. In the same way that Yochelson and Samenow argued that their treatment regimen was meant to “capitalize on and intensify whatever self-disgust is present,” Colson knew he had to begin with sin as well. This was a classic Protestant move: preach the law (which no one could live up to), allow sinners to feel their inevitable guilt, and then offer the gospel. Yochelson and Samenow had proposed *habilitation* as the name for their clinical intervention in changing criminal thinking (as opposed to outer rehabilitative efforts, “more as educators than psychotherapists”).<sup>22</sup> Colson had a different term: discipleship, the process of living into one’s conversion through practices of Christian prayer, scripture reading, and accountability. For him, the Washington fellowship was the habilitative project that had awakened him from his own spiritual ignorance. Applied in prisons, in a “prison fellowship,” he believed the results could be the same.

Colson’s staff was briefing him on the work of Yochelson and Samenow as early as 1977, and he regularly cited them as inspirations for both his prison ministry and reform efforts from then on.<sup>23</sup> Regarding reform, Colson referenced them to contend that state response to offenders had to acknowledge their moral choices and allow for the

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<sup>22</sup> Samenow, “The Criminal Personality: New Concepts and New Procedures for Change”: 18.

<sup>23</sup> Gordon Loux to Charles W. Colson, August 24, 1977, Collection 274, box 10, folder 12, Billy Graham Center Archives.

possibility of their transformation. Colson believed that the awful conditions in modern correctional facilities meant that neither of these results were attainable. Overcrowding caused further violence and gang activity, lack of paid prison labor encouraged laziness, and harsh punishment of nonviolent offenses bred resentment.<sup>24</sup>

Colson found theological inspiration for his reform views in the work of Jacques Ellul and C.S. Lewis. Ellul, a French philosopher who regularly wrote on Christianity, gave Colson the conceptual tools to understand the brokenness of large human institutions. Colson channeled Ellul's anarchic tendencies into a conservative critique of the state's power over individual freedom, families, and voluntary associations, as well as its eclipse of their reliance on God.<sup>25</sup> Colson had learned the basics of the faith through Lewis' *Mere Christianity*, so he sought out what the trustworthy Oxford don had to say about punishment. He read Lewis' 1953 piece "The Humanitarian Theory of Punishment," where the scholar argued against the rehabilitative (humanitarian) paradigm and for retributive theory. In the hands of an earlier generation of evangelicals (like those at *Christianity Today*, where the piece had been covered in 1959), Lewis' articulation of the importance of "the concept of Desert" was seen as a justification for tougher punitive measures. Colson, however, zeroed in on Lewis' description of the horrors of the progressive rehabilitative paradigm: "It may be said...They are not punishing, not inflicting, only healing. But do not let us be deceived by a name...to be re-made after

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<sup>24</sup> Phil McCombs, "Colson Crusades to Free Inmates, Build No Prisons," *Washington Post*, December 2, 1981, Collection 113, box 95, folder 10, Wheaton College Archives and Special Collections; William F. Buckley, Jr., "The Reformation of Charles Colson," *The Washington Post*, April 20, 1982.

<sup>25</sup> Charles W. Colson and Ellen Santilli Vaughn, *Kingdoms in Conflict* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1987), 333-341. Colson also cited Ellul throughout his earlier work *Life Sentence*.

some pattern of ‘normality’ hatched in a Viennese laboratory to which I never professed allegiance... no one but you will recognize as kindnesses and which the recipient will feel as abominable cruelties.”<sup>26</sup> Colson believed this to be an apt description of what modern prisons were doing: ineptly trying to treat criminal behavior as if it were an illness and naming correctional practices as rehabilitative, which in turn caused observers to overlook the practices’ machine-like impersonality or, even worse, their injustices.

Colson used Lewis’s analytical frame as he described his visit to Purdy Women’s Prison in 1980 in an internal Prison Fellowship memo. What struck him was not so much the poor conditions (the prison was nice, as prisons went), but its sterility. “It was straight out of *1984*,” he wrote, “a modern, clean efficient institution, yet somehow I had the feeling that I was in a laboratory, not in a prison.” The banal character of the “crisp, cold, efficient social workers” and other administrators of the “bureaucratic machine” (including the chaplain) in the prison unsettled him: “The head woman...looked fully capable of marching people into gas chambers and beating them with a club.” His meeting with the inmates gave him a similar impression. They seemed to be in a “mechanical” stupor. “Whatever goes on in this prison totally destroys the emotions of the residents. I suspect that’s part of the therapy, part of the treatment.” Colson then reflected on what this meant for his ministry’s relationship in the broader criminological currents of the day. Here was the rehabilitative paradigm at its pinnacle but, citing Lewis, it was little more than a “test tube...the ultimate expression of totalitarianism in our

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<sup>26</sup> C. S. Lewis, “The Humanitarian Theory of Punishment,” *Res Judicatae* 6, no. 2 (June 1, 1953): 224–30.



society, cloaked as it is in the appearance of humanness.”<sup>27</sup> Rehabilitation was oppression.

Colson’s conservatism as it related to the problem of prisons was a potent blend of traditionalism, with its focus on the cultivation of (Christian) virtue, and libertarianism, with its skepticism of the state. This combination reflected the integration of these themes in American conservatism more broadly in the years after World War II, usually with anti-communism as the major foil. Generally, Colson utilized the libertarian strain for his critiques and the traditional one for his constructive proposals, though he leaned into one or the other as it suited his purposes. This approach followed the principled pragmatism of other prominent postwar conservatives, like William F. Buckley.<sup>28</sup>

Trusting him as a fellow conservative, Buckley found Colson compelling. In the mid-1960s Buckley had trumpeted the law and order cause, labeling criminals as evil and lobbying for tougher laws over and against restraints on policing.<sup>29</sup> But in 1982 he hosted Colson on his “Firing Line” television show and wrote approvingly of Colson in the *Washington Post* a few days later. He not only praised his ministry efforts, but also his work “persuading the American public for God’s sake to listen to reason” on prison reform: prison populations were growing too fast, a humanitarian and fiscal disaster, and

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<sup>27</sup> Charles W. Colson to David Bovenizer, “Purdy Women’s Prison at Gig Harbor, Washington,” 1980, Collection 274, box 16, folder 6, Billy Graham Center Archives.

<sup>28</sup> George H. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945* (New York: Basic Books, 1976).

<sup>29</sup> Flamm, *Law and Order*, 78; William F. Buckley Jr., “Police Review Boards: Whose Delinquencies Concern Us?,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 26, 1966.

half of inmates were not even convicted of a violent crime. Colson's cause, as Buckley put it with his trademark literary flourish, was "profoundly conceived, existentially appealing, splendid in ambition." He was delighted that these ideas were coming not from progressive activist, but a Christian conservative.<sup>30</sup>

These were conservative arguments, but radicals and progressives concerned about prisons appreciated them. Many had likewise come to see the failures of the rehabilitative paradigm themselves. As socialist academic and activist Robert Martinson famously wrote in 1974 in his consideration of correctional efficacy, "nothing works."<sup>31</sup> Colson welcomed complementary views like this, and structured his reform efforts to operate separately from Prison Fellowship's evangelistic ministry, so as to not alienate outsiders. "It's very important," he wrote to Prison Fellowship employees, "that we broaden its appeal so that it will reach mainliners, other activists and big hunks of the evangelical church...It's the results that I care about in the long haul, not the credit to the organization."<sup>32</sup> Al Bronstein, the head of the ACLU's prison reform project, was quoted in a front-page piece in the *Washington Post* on Colson's advocacy. "He's doing great

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<sup>30</sup> "Where to Go on Prison Reform," *Firing Line*, April 15, 1982, Firing Line broadcast records, Hoover Institution Archives, <https://digitalcollections.hoover.org/objects/6681>; Buckley, Jr., "The Reformation of Charles Colson." This piece also appeared in Buckley's *National Review* and other newspapers, under Universal Press syndication. William F. Buckley Jr., "On the Right: Prison Reform," *National Review*, May 14, 1982. I am grateful to Alex Callaway for bringing Colson's presence on *Firing Line* to my attention. Colson's presence in Buckley's column was cited positively soon after by liberal congressman Theodore Weiss in a House committee hearing on correctional facility usage, as Weiss called the bluff of a Reagan-appointed deputy attorney general on the prudence of building more prisons. "Hearing before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Government Operations, House of Representatives, Ninety-Seventh Congress, Second Session, on H.R. 4450 and H.R. 6028: Federal Surplus Property to Be Used by State and Local Governments for Correctional Facilities" (U.S. Government Printing Office, April 21, 1982).

<sup>31</sup> Robert Martinson, "What Works? Questions and Answers About Prison Reform," *The Public Interest* 35 (Spring 1974): 22-54.

<sup>32</sup> Charles W. Colson and David Bovenizer, January 29, 1980, Collection 274, box 16, folder 6, Billy Graham Center Archives.

things. Everything he's saying about prisons and [bad] conditions and alternatives to incarceration is almost exactly what we're saying...Colson is reaching a conservative audience that we can't reach."<sup>33</sup>

Colson's staff soon began pushing the National Association of Evangelicals to consider prison reform as a lobbying issue.<sup>34</sup> Colson began writing occasionally for *Christianity Today* in the late 1970s, and became a regular columnist in 1985.<sup>35</sup> Likely in part because of Colson's influence, the magazine evinced a shift on criminal justice issues, allowing for much more sympathy toward criminals than had existed a generation earlier.<sup>36</sup> More important, however, was Colson's regular presence in major newspapers, on television, and at Christian conferences and events. Just as Colson had helped publicize the "born again" catchphrase as a marker of public evangelical faith in the mid 1970s, he was beginning to construct a new form of conservative evangelical social engagement possible at the outset of the 1980s, transforming the evangelical conscience on a challenging public issue.

Colson quickly gained awareness of the historical precedents for this approach. At the behest of his assistant Michael Cromartie, a former volunteer with the progressive

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<sup>33</sup> Phil McCombs, "Colson Crusades to Free Inmates, Build No Prisons." In internal correspondence Colson mentioned his desire to work with the ACLU to combat horrible prison conditions in Washington state. Charles W. Colson to David Bovenizer, "Purdy Women's Prison at Gig Harbor, Washington."

<sup>34</sup> Gordon Loux to Floyd Robertson, March 11, 1980, Collection 113, box 35, folder 34, Wheaton College Archives and Special Collections.

<sup>35</sup> Colson's pieces for *CT* were a mix of cultural commentary, theological ruminations, and discussions of prison issues. Two early pieces are Charles W. Colson, "Watergate or Something like It Was Inevitable," *Christianity Today*, March 12, 1976; Charles W. Colson, "Religion up, Morality Down," *Christianity Today*, July 21, 1978.

<sup>36</sup> For example, see Larry R. Isitt, "Willie: Maximum Freedom in a Maximum--Security Prison," *Christianity Today*, April 6, 1984.

evangelical magazine *Sojourners*, he acquainted himself with nineteenth-century evangelical reform work in prisons. Cromartie sent Colson an excerpt of Norris Magnuson's *Salvation In The Slums*, a work on the history of late nineteenth-century Salvation Army and Holiness work with the poor and prisoners.<sup>37</sup> Colson was enthusiastic, forwarding it to several Prison Fellowship staff members. "The attached article is MUST reading and rereading for each of us," he wrote. "There are remarkable historical parallels with our ministry."<sup>38</sup> However, Colson also knew that nineteenth-century evangelical reform projects had regularly failed, particularly the penitentiary system. He was confident that, under his leadership and with a renewed focus on the message of Christ, this time it could be different. After reading the work of Charles Silberman and David Rothman, Colson quoted Rothman's words to a Prison Fellowship staff member in a memo: "each generation 'discovers anew the scandals of incarceration. Each sets out to correct them and each passes on a legacy of failure.'" But, Colson concluded, "our hope, of course, is in Christ and in Him who brings justice to mankind. Without sounding triumphal, I think this is what has been lacking in the past since the days of John Howard and Elizabeth [Fry, both British prison reformers from the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries]."<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Magnuson, *Salvation in the Slums: Evangelical Social Work, 1865-1920*.

<sup>38</sup> Charles W. Colson, September 7, 1978, Collection 274, box 11, folder 1, Billy Graham Center Archives.

<sup>39</sup> Charles W. Colson to David Bovenizer, February 23, 1980, Collection 274, box 16, folder 6, Billy Graham Center Archives. Though he did not note the title, Colson had likely been reading Rothman's *The Discovery of the Asylum*. Charles E. Silberman, *Criminal Violence, Criminal Justice* (New York: Random House, 1978); David J. Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971).

Colson was nothing if not confident, but he had good reason to be. He was reaching the public in ways that other Christians with prison reform aspirations had failed. Progressive evangelicals' outreach on criminal justice provides a point of contrast, from the critiques of "law and order" race-baiting by activists like Tom Skinner, to the public speeches made by none other than the most prominent evangelical politician in the country, Jimmy Carter. As the Southern Baptist peanut farmer-turned governor considered a run for president, he spoke out on the need for criminal justice reform. His most famous speech on the topic was delivered in 1974, known also for its citations of Reinhold Niebuhr and Bob Dylan as political inspirations and because gonzo journalist Hunter S. Thompson praised the speech. Carter's speech sounded populist tones on the negative effects prisons had on the poor, bolstering his status as a progressive icon and helping to lift him above presumed Democratic presidential nominee Edward Kennedy.<sup>40</sup> But, as with much of Carter's later political career, his criminal justice reform push failed to connect to conservatives and did not move the needle much for evangelicals who might have been sympathetic to the issue. Colson, by contrast, framed his theology and politics in a manner that likely would have left Thompson unimpressed, but that fellow conservatives could find compelling.

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<sup>40</sup> Randall Balmer, *Redeemer: The Life of Jimmy Carter* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 59-61

## **Political Consequences**

A great deal of Colson's early work on prison reform was simply promoting the issue to anyone who would listen. But he gradually moved into lobbying work on concrete matters of prison administration and policy. He began by forming a bipartisan task force to offer him policy recommendations. At the suggestion of the task force and the president of the Christian Legal Society, Colson hired young evangelical attorney named Daniel Van Ness to serve as Special Counsel on Criminal Justice in 1981.<sup>41</sup>

One of Colson's first efforts was in Washington state. Though he had been troubled by his visit to the Purdy Women's Prison, his primary target was the state's prisons for men. More than any other state he had visited, Colson saw the conditions in its prisons as horrifying, even "demonic," for their overcrowding, use of solitary confinement, and filthy living quarters. "The Washington State system," he instructed his staff, "is one we need to assault."<sup>42</sup>

The men's prison at Walla Walla was the biggest challenge. In October of 1979 Colson visited the facility. A guard had been killed only months before, prisoners were on lockdown as a result (in their cells twenty-three hours a day), and Colson was nervous. Upon entry into the facility he saw how poorly administrators had handled inmate concerns. Once in front of the inmates who gathered to hear him speak, Colson launched into his standard evangelistic spiel. Unlike other contexts, however, the inmates at Walla Walla responded unenthusiastically, with cold stares. As he departed the prison he told

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<sup>41</sup> Clower, "Justice Fellowship Case History," 3-4.

<sup>42</sup> Charles W. Colson to David Bovenizer, "Purdy Women's Prison at Gig Harbor, Washington," 6-7.

two inmates, “We’ll do everything to help you guys.” He assigned two Prison Fellowship staff members to the facility to begin running a fellowship seminar and reconciling rival gangs inside the prison. Within a few weeks a staffer had led a few men to Christ, and things began to simmer down.

As Colson recounted this story a few years later, it seemed at this point to have a similar arc as the ministry narrations of evangelists like Bill Glass: a prison has problems, a prison minister enters, and unruly inmates are settled. But all was not well. Despite Prison Fellowship’s best efforts, the horrors of Walla Walla remained. Some inmates protested by slashing their wrists, blood pooling in the cellblocks. A Prison Fellowship minister looked on in shock at the sight, and then moved to quell the chanting of other inmates, who were threatening further violence. “Don’t blow this thing,” he told them, before promising that Colson would speak to the state legislature about the problems. The gospel may have been preached and souls won for Christ, but more work was needed.

Colson had cultivated contacts in the state’s political class, including Bob Utter, the chief justice of the state supreme court. Colson went to the state legislature and met with both the Democratic and Republican caucuses about the problem. The immediate result was a House resolution pledging to address conditions at Walla Walla. Over the next few years Colson and his staff continued to lobby state leaders about the prison, with varying degrees of success. He rejoiced when a ruling came down from a U.S. District Court that practices at Walla Walla constituted “cruel and unusual punishment,” but was saddened months later when he returned to the facility and found that horrible conditions remained, particularly among inmates housed in solitary confinement. Inmates had

demanded the warden, who had ignored their complaints, be removed. Colson, who visited the inmates housed in solitary, saw why. The warden had refused to do anything about the human waste and rotting food strewn all over the unit, declining even to enter the solitary unit. Though he typically avoided direct confrontation with prison administrators, Colson was incensed. He held a press conference the next day where he detailed the conditions. The warden was soon transferred from the facility. Progress was slow, but under the leadership of Judge Utter (who took a chairmanship of a prison reform committee) and other Christians who Colson had lobbied to get involved, conditions at the prison began to improve.<sup>43</sup>

An anecdote that Colson shared as he later narrated events at Walla Walla was emblematic of the conceptual shift he had introduced into the evangelical prison ministry paradigm. He told the story of a Walla Walla inmate named Fred LeFever, who had recently come up for parole after his imprisonment for robbery. LeFever had joined a prison ministry while incarcerated and reconciled with his victims. During his parole hearing Fred confessed to other robberies, despite the good chance he would have avoided a guilty verdict. As a Christian, he said, “I knew I had to come clean... Even if you should decide that I should be further punished, I will go back to prison and serve Jesus Christ in there.” But instead of returning him to prison, the judge set LeFever free,

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<sup>43</sup> Charles W. Colson and Ellen Santilli Vaughn, *Kingdoms in Conflict*, 293-300; Charles W. Colson to Ralph Veerman, November 14, 1978, Collection 274, box 48, folder 28, Billy Graham Center Archives; Charles W. Colson to David Bovenizer, “Purdy Women’s Prison at Gig Harbor, Washington,” 6-7; Associated Press, “Colson Says Give Cons a Hand in Running Prison,” *The Oregon Statesman*, October 24, 1979; Janet Evenson, “Must Learn More of Inmates: Colson,” *The Oregon Statesman*, October 25, 1979; Betty Stevens, “Colson Praises Prison Ministry,” *Lincoln Journal*, May 16, 1985; Richard W. Larsen, “Chuck Colson’s Visit - Words of Hope For Our Prisons,” *The Seattle Times*, April 9, 1985.



ordering him only to pay restitution to the victims (a sentencing formula that Colson and Utter had been pushing in the state since Walla Walla). The gathered family members, friends, and Prison Fellowship staff rejoiced, bursting into the doxology inside the courtroom.<sup>44</sup> For Colson, the work at Walla Walla was indistinguishable from his evangelistic work. “There was simply no way that we, as conscientious Christian ministers, could decline [prisoners’] requests. And so we found ourselves, without having planned it that way at all, in the prison reform business, not instead of our prison ministry but as a natural inescapable outgrowth of it.”<sup>45</sup>

Colson believed this cause could move beyond the state level. In 1982 he ventured to Washington, D. C. to testify before the House Judiciary Committee on revisions to the federal criminal code. In a potent display of political showmanship, Colson packed the audience of around fifty people, many of whom were inmates and their families currently in Washington attending a Prison Fellowship seminar. Colson went on to discuss how his ministry had led him to concern with poor prison conditions and unjust sentencing practices. He explained the high moral stakes of the hearing: “in the United States today we incarcerate more people as a percentage of population than any other nation on the face of the Earth except the Soviet Union and South Africa, and we have the highest crime rate.” He then asked the committee to go even further on the code reforms they were considering, to address the barbaric system of American

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<sup>44</sup> Richard A. Larsen, “Aftermath of a Stickup - A One Eyed Angel,” *The Seattle Times*, April 14, 1985; Charles W. Colson and Ellen Santilli Vaughn, *Kingdoms in Conflict*, 300-1.

<sup>45</sup> Charles W. Colson, “Is There A Better Way? A Perspective,” *Christian Legal Society Quarterly* II, no. 3 (Summer 1981): 13.

punishment that was “100 years behind the times.” Colson made sure to stress that crime was a moral issue and that punishment was still necessary, particularly for violent crimes. He also acknowledged the tempting pull of “law and order” politics for elected officials. But, he pleaded, “There are better ways.” He urged the committee to add provisions in the code that required judges to only use prisons for incapacitation of violent offenders, to note sentence reductions for good behavior, and to reform the sentencing and parole process so as to “get the men out of prison as soon as possible.”

Colson pulled no punches when it came to demonstrating his evangelical credentials. He spoke passionately work of Prison Fellowship and in overtly religious terms about his own conversion and call to ministry: “I sit here today because I have committed my life to Jesus Christ, and this what I believe God called me to do.” But he made sure to note that his evangelistic work was only the beginning of his calling: “I can’t go to a prison and just preach to guys living in conditions that are subhuman. I care about them just as Jesus cared as much about feeding people as preaching to them.”<sup>46</sup>

Through his calls for prison reform and his activism on the issue, Colson had developed a resolution to the tension his brethren had introduced over the past twenty years as evangelicals called for both more law and order and for heightened ministry to prisoners. He made prison reform a “safe” issue by framing it in terms that made sense to political conservative instincts and by tying humanitarian impulses and political

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<sup>46</sup> Charles W. Colson, “Hearing on Federal Criminal Law Revision, Part 1: Desirability of Reduced Use of Incarceration to Punish Criminals, Particularly Nonviolent Offenders; Potential for Alternative Forms of Punishment for Crime,” February 5, 1982, Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Committee on the Judiciary, U.S. House of Representatives.

consequences directly to Christian conversion. In 1983 Colson wrote approvingly in *Christianity Today* of a Christian judge who recently bucked the harsh trends of the criminal justice bureaucracy. This judge had declared mandatory minimums unconstitutional while attempting to give leniency to a convict who turned his life around and converted to Christianity.<sup>47</sup> Colson's praise of the judge was striking. Mandatory minimums had been advocated fifteen years earlier by evangelicals like Herbert Ellingwood, but here was Colson using the same conservative line of reasoning to push against them: mandatory minimums were actually representative of state overreach. More importantly, however, Colson knew that this criminal in question had undergone a change of heart, a *conversion*. This was the goal that earlier evangelical prison ministers had isolated and promoted, but had largely restrained in terms of political import.

### **Thorns in the Flesh**

Colson was not the only politically savvy evangelical seeking to influence politicians and the public on criminal justice issues in the early 1980s. The new "Christian right," exemplified by figures such as Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell, and organizations such as the Moral Majority (founded by Falwell in 1979), had their own plans for mobilization on the issue.

The "Christian right" is regularly used as umbrella term for a variety of conservative evangelical personalities, organizations, and movements in the second half

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<sup>47</sup> Charles W. Colson, "Taking a Stand When Law and Justice Conflict," *Christianity Today*, February 4, 1983.

of the twentieth century. Daniel Williams's definition of the "second stage" of Christian right development at this historical moment is helpful. Beginning in the late 1960s, conservative Protestants began making inroads into the Republican Party, not on a Cold War platform as in the 1940s and 50s, but as a reaction to the threats of feminism, abortion, pornography, and gay rights.<sup>48</sup> The Christian right increasingly drew battle lines of the culture war around issues of crime and punishment as they began their struggle against the onslaught of liberalism more broadly. The most persistent mobilization of the Christian right around crime and punishment was rhetorical: a continuation of the trope of law and order. Law and order was something that had been lost; America's moral foundations were crumbling as a result of the rising tides of secularism, feminism, and humanism. Though this mobilization on crime was similar in tone to past calls for law and order, at the turn into the 1980s it exhibited some important differences. The focus was less on rioting and the perception of widespread disorder in the streets and more on the dangers of drugs and the negative impact of crime on victims.

In the eyes of the Christian right, the political and social effects of liberalizing social shifts were twofold: first, an unfortunate *rise* in public expectation for the federal state apparatus to exert influence in areas of human life best left up to more traditional institutions of local governance, the family, and the church, and second, an equally worrisome trend of state *withdrawal* in the enforcement of the moral laws of America. Simply put, the government spent too much time interfering in matters that it should have

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<sup>48</sup> Williams, *God's Own Party*, 2010, 3.

stayed out of (like school prayer or the market) and not enough time catching criminals. Along with divorce, abortion, and pornography, Jerry Falwell listed rising crime (particularly drug dealing) as signs of America's moral decline in a 1982 newspaper op-ed. "Crime is epidemic," he complained, and "criminals are better protected by the law than the people on whom they prey." Falwell warned that he and other concerned Americans would not remain silent on these issues. Listing Martin Luther King, the Berrigan brothers, and William Sloan Coffin as examples, Falwell pledged that the Moral Majority would take up the cause of justice and moral realignment by registering voters and mobilizing local campaigns on various issues of Christian concern.<sup>49</sup>

Concern about crime was not the only, or even the most important issue that Falwell and the Moral Majority mobilized upon. But it was nevertheless a reference point in their public appeals. Concern about drugs framed some of their rhetoric. One Moral Majority marketing brochure listed ten matters of concern, like abortion, support for Israel, and concerns about family values. The fourth concern listed was "the illegal drug traffic," and the brochure noted that "through education, legislation, and other means, we want to do our part to save our youth from death on the installment plan."<sup>50</sup>

The Moral Majority's lobbying efforts on criminal justice policy focused less on drugs and more on crimes related to violence and sex. Throughout the late 1970s to the mid-1980s congress frequently debated how to revise and update the U.S. criminal code. This was a bipartisan discussion, with diverse voices such as congressmen Strom

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<sup>49</sup> Jerry Falwell, "Perspective: America's Shameful State," *Chicago Tribune*, April 16, 1982.

<sup>50</sup> Moral Majority, Inc., "What Is the Moral Majority?," n.d., General Materials of the Moral Majority, box 1, series 1, folder 1, Liberty University Archive.

Thurmond (a Southern Republican) and Edward Kennedy (a New England Democrat) both agreeing that revision was necessary. The Moral Majority and liberal groups like the ACLU also both saw revision as essential, but their specific crime policy recommendations diverged. For example, in 1981/82 the Moral Majority criticized proposed code changes that replaced life sentences for murder and rape with 25-year sentences without possibility of parole. At the very same House subcommittee hearing on the criminal code where Colson had testified, Moral Majority vice president Ronald Godwin appeared to make his own case. He told the subcommittee “we are experiencing a violent crime wave that is sweeping America... We call for a restoration of existing maximum penalties and insist that all existing death penalties be carried forward...” Godwin framed his appeal in populist terms. He testified that he received around 15,000 pieces of mail daily, many of them concerned about violent crime. Americans of all stripes (particularly African Americans) wanted tougher laws, and that congressmen should likewise “check their mailboxes” to hear the voices of their fearful constituents. He claimed that ministers regularly told him “people no longer want to go to church on Sunday night...because they are afraid to leave their homes after dark.” When Representative John Conyers voiced concerns about Godwin’s understanding of the harm of long sentences, Godwin doubled down: “I just simply know this, that while the person is in jail he can’t rape my wife or my daughter and he can’t perpetuate a violent crime...I believe it is genuinely the primary concern of most people.”<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Ronald S. Godwin, “Hearing on Federal Criminal Law Revision, Part 1: Objections to H.R. 1647, H.R.

Though Godwin's testimony was criticized by both liberals and conservatives for derailing carefully crafted legislation that made concessions to various constituencies, it nevertheless produced results. Because of Moral Majority lobbying, two senators withdrew their sponsorship of the proposed revisions that would have taken this particular crime bill in a less punitive direction.<sup>52</sup> Later, seven amendments were added by Republicans on the Senate Judiciary Committee to "relate to the concerns expressed by the Moral Majority." They generally were focused on crimes of a sexual nature, like the doubling of prison terms (from six to twelve years) without parole for obscenity and sexual exploitation involving minors. Even though the Moral Majority was pleased with these additions, it nonetheless opposed the bill, which eventually died for lack of broad support.<sup>53</sup> Though the Moral Majority had only been on the political scene for a few

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4711, and S. 1630 Reductions of Jail Sentences and Other Provisions Liberalizing Federal Treatment of Various Crimes," December 14, 1981, Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Committee on the Judiciary, U.S. House of Representatives. Godwin's testimony also contained several broadsides against the loosening of obscenity laws, linking the Moral Majority's crime worries with its common concern about sex.

<sup>52</sup> Beth Spring, "Moral Majority Aims at the Criminal Code," *Christianity Today*, February 5, 1982. The major revision to the U.S. criminal code would not officially come until 1984, when the Comprehensive Crime Control Act was passed, which, in the words of Ted Kennedy was "the most far-reaching law enforcement reform in our history." Among the results of this act was elimination of federal parole, the establishment of mandatory minimum sentencing, and increased protection of federal seizure powers. Christian Parenti, *Lockdown America*, 50. In addition to the 1982 efforts discussed above, the Moral Majority would be active in lobbying for other criminal code changes long before the monumental 1984 bill passed, such as a 1981 effort to make women engaging in interstate prostitution subject to punishment. Associated Press, "Senate Panel Approves Criminal Code Revisions," *The Nashua Telegraph* [Nashua, NH], November 19, 1981.

<sup>53</sup> As one postmortem of the criminal code revision failure put it, "despite the refutations by respected members of the conservative community, the doubts generated by the criticisms proved difficult to erase from the minds of those who had little time to sort through for themselves the various charges and countercharges." Ronald L. Gainer, "Report to the Attorney General on Federal Criminal Code Reform," *Criminal Law Forum* 1, no. 1 (September 1, 1989): 173. See also Albert P. Melone, "The Politics of

years, in leading a populist charge to kill code revision bill it had shown its ability to exert power in a manner similar to other influential interest groups, such as labor unions and civil liberties advocates.<sup>54</sup>

Perhaps more important than their work on the federal level was the Moral Majority's influence in state and local politics, particularly judicial elections. The chairman of the Ohio branch of the Moral Majority announced in 1981 that his organization would be targeting "lenient" judges in the upcoming election by mailing out a scorecard of judicial candidates' records on issues of note: "I feel that we can curb crime by causing the people involved to get sentences that would cause them to recognize teeth in our laws." The prosecutor in populous Hamilton County responded to the chairman's proclamation by announcing his support for the effort, saying he would help make judges' records available. "I believe in what the Moral Majority stands for," he said, "the precepts of God and their desire to see that justice is administered in our courts...finally, we've got somebody who is speaking out about too much leniency in the courts...People are entitled to know which judges go easy on defendants."<sup>55</sup> Other political aspirants saw the value of playing off of Moral Majority concerns about crime as well. At a Florida election rally hosted by the Moral Majority, one local candidate

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Criminal Code Revision: Lessons for Reform," *Capital University Law Review* 15 (1985-86): 191-204; Steve Snider, "Moral Majority: Potent Non-Lobby," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, April 21, 1982.

<sup>54</sup> Barbara Ann Stolz, "Interest Groups and Criminal Law: The Case of Federal Criminal Code Revision," *Crime & Delinquency* 30, no. 1 (January 1984): 91-106.

<sup>55</sup> Associated Press, "Moral Majority Eyes Ohio's Judges," *The Akron Beacon Journal*, July 28, 1981; Bob Weston, "Leis To Offer Records on Judicial Decisions to Moral Majority," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, July 28, 1981.



mentioned law and order alongside more well-known Christian right tropes like pro-life politics and taking America back for God. According to the local paper covering the event, “His talk of ‘law and order’ brought a few bursts from the crowd when he promised to ‘vigorously enforce’ drug laws in Pinellas County.”<sup>56</sup>

The Christian right’s mobilization of law and order acquired another new valence in the 1980s: victims’ rights. The crime victims’ movement arose originally in the 1950s and 60s, a product of progressive organizers in the U.S. and Europe who linked victims’ concerns with the broader economic and political aims of the welfare state. In other western nations that had a strong welfare apparatus, the victims’ movements remained closely linked to the provision of social services as the century wore on. But the comparative weakness of the welfare state in the U.S. meant that victims’ concerns eventually grew detached from progressive politics and instead channeled into the broader retributive political consensus that coalesced in the late 1960s and 70s (like in Reagan’s California).<sup>57</sup> By the 1980s it had become the lingua franca of various anti-crime constituencies, the Christian right included.

President Ronald Reagan sought out guides to help craft his administration’s approach to securing victim’s rights, assembling a team of legal and criminological experts for a Task Force on Victims of Crime in 1982. He also invited a preacher: Pat Robertson, the president of the Christian Broadcasting Network and host of “The 700 Club” television program. Both the network and the program were leading forums for

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<sup>56</sup> Jon East, “Moral Majority Rally Attracts 25 Candidates,” *St. Petersburg Independent*, August 20, 1980.

<sup>57</sup> Gottschalk, *The Prison and the Gallows*, 77-80.

conservative evangelical news and entertainment at the time. Robertson was himself originally ordained as a Southern Baptist, but exhibited charismatic sensibilities more typically associated with Pentecostals. Before his ordination Robertson had attended Yale Law School. After failing the bar exam, he entered ministry, but his legal interests and aspirations remained. He regularly interfaced with key figures in Reagan’s legal circle, naming Herbert Ellingwood to the board of trustees of CBN University (later Regent University) and hosting Ed Meese (a key leader in Reagan’s gubernatorial administration and later his attorney general as president) on “The 700 Club.” The legal ideology that Robertson, Ellingwood, and Meese shared (that later made its way into the Regent Law School curriculum) was a stress on God’s “objective legal order that man is bound to obey.”<sup>58</sup>

Robertson was delighted to be named to the Task Force. It was an important sign that Reagan, who had sometimes been at odds with the religious right since assuming the presidency, was willing to accept political influence from conservative evangelicals on a key public issue.<sup>59</sup> “We live in a society that has gone to extremes at times to protect the rights of defendants, those accused of crimes, while often neglecting the rights of those victimized,” Robertson said in his announcement of his acceptance of Reagan’s

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<sup>58</sup> Edwin Meese, “Introduction,” *Regent University Law Review* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 1–4.

<sup>59</sup> In his discussion of the broader travails and conflicts between the religious right and Reagan, historian David John Markley called Robertson’s appointment to this task force an “important trophy to Robertson and his followers.” David John Marley, “Ronald Reagan and the Splintering of the Christian Right,” *Journal of Church and State* 48, no. 4 (Autumn 2006): 851–68.

invitation. “We hope to arrive at some practical proposals...that will lessen the physical, financial, and emotional toll now imposed on crime victims in our land.”<sup>60</sup>

The Task Force’s final report was a combination of troubling descriptions of crime victims’ struggles and a series of recommendations for federal and state action. The report opened with a detailed story of a violent rape and the various challenges the victim faced in getting help, working with law enforcement, and pushing for prosecution of her assailant. At each stage, the report argued, the victim was forced to endure new trauma. Some of the report’s recommendations directly addressed problems in this process, like suggesting that victims need not testify in person.<sup>61</sup> Other parts focused on criminal justice directly, such as the recommendations for abolition of the exclusionary rule, the abolition of parole, and the limitation of judicial discretion in sentencing in order to limit unfair or “token punishment” that would do injustice to past victims or endanger future ones.<sup>62</sup> These recommendations for a tougher approach to crime, regular appeals from conservatives in the 1960s and 70s, were now linked to the rights and welfare of victims.

Robertson highlighted this linkage. In a Department of Justice-sponsored interview several years later, he commented on the importance of the task force in connecting the well being of victims with punitive criminal justice. He spoke of the challenges that rape victims faced in seeking justice, the “indignities” that caused “re-victimization.” But as a result of the report, in his home state of Virginia, “something

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<sup>60</sup> “CBN President Member Of Crime Task Force,” *New Journal and Guide* [Norfolk, VA], August 11, 1982.

<sup>61</sup> Lois Haight Herrington et al., “Final Report of President’s Task Force on Victims of Crime,” December 1982, 17.

<sup>62</sup> Lois Haight Herrington et al., 29-31.

happened.” Though there was still much work to be done, there had been serious progress. “We abolished parole here in the state of Virginia and I know that violent crime has gone down. We've got an exile program for anybody that's found guilty of using a firearm in the commission of a felony. I think that the idea that not only are we helping victims, we're getting tough on criminals and that's the flip side of this report.”<sup>63</sup>

The report included specific directives for religious communities in its “Recommendations for the Ministry” section. The section’s commentary began with a nod to the recent surge in religious concern for prisoners, as well as a note of concern that crime victims had been overlooked as a result: “All too often, representatives from the religious community come to court only to give comfort, support, and assistance to the accused. This is indeed a noble endeavor...[But] there is as great a need for a ministry to victims as there is for a ministry to prisoners.” One of the report’s featured quotes from a crime victim made the same point, though more bluntly: “We were left alone to bury our daughter...People don’t know what to do or say so they stay away. Even the religious stayed away. To this day they visit the killer and his family weekly, but for the victim’s family there doesn’t seem to be any time.” The need was obvious: clergy and laity should

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<sup>63</sup> Doris L. Dolan et al., *An Oral History of the Crime Victim Assistance Field: Task Force Roundtable Interview Transcript*, interview by Anne Seymour, 2002, Justice Solutions, NPO, funded by the Office for Victims of Crime, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice, <http://vroh.uakron.edu/transcripts/TaskForceRoundtable.php>. Parole was abolished in Virginia in 1994, through the influence of attorney general Jim Gilmore (who Robertson regularly backed). Gilmore also backed legislation to charge minors (as young as fourteen) as adults for violent crimes. Eric Lipton, “Gilmore’s Conservative Views Apparent,” *Washington Post*, October 26, 1997.

get involved in victim support and counseling and should foster a broader awareness that “every congregation will have members who are victimized.”<sup>64</sup>

Conservative Protestant activism on crime and victim’s rights occurred on the local level as well. In Philadelphia, around 400 people (representing 100 churches) gathered for the first meeting of Concerned Citizens Against Crime at the local civic center in 1984. Under a giant banner that read “CITIZENS VS CRIME,” the Philadelphia Boys Choir performed, while local religious leaders, police commissioner Gregore Sambor, and assistant district attorney (and later Pennsylvania supreme court justice) Ronald Castille exhorted the gathered crowd to work as “your brother’s keeper” through crime prevention. Fundamentalist icon Carl McIntire also was in attendance. Reflecting religious anti-crime alliances of years past, this was a multiracial, if largely conservative affair. The event was organized by a black pastor, the Rev. B. Sam Hart, president of the Grand Old Gospel Fellowship and founder of the first black-owned radio station in the area. For Hart, the crime victims’ cause was personal; his son and daughter-in-law had been murdered in their home only months earlier. Combatting serious crimes like these would not happen through social programs or education. Instead, the answer was the change of human hearts through divine power, as well as constraint by the state. “The answer lies, principally, in being able to change a man. And this is something only God can do. This is something the church and state can work together on, hand-in-hand, to

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<sup>64</sup> Lois Haight Herrington et al., “Final Report of President’s Task Force on Victims of Crime,” 95-6.

effect the spiritual side.” Hart therefore spoke of his organization’s support of neighborhood watch-style programs and partnerships with local police.

The highlight of the event was the reading of a letter from President Reagan, who had previously named Hart to his civil rights commission in 1982 (though the minister resigned over criticisms of his traditional stance on homosexuality). Reagan praised the Philadelphia group’s work, linking it with similar “watch programs” across the nation. “What we are really witnessing is a reaffirmation of American values,” he wrote. “A sense of community and fellowship, individual responsibility, caring for family and friends, and a respect for the law.”<sup>65</sup>

The 1980s Christian right was controversial and often ineffective in much of its direct political advocacy, with Reagan’s selection of Sandra Day O’Connor (who Christian pro-life groups opposed) as his first Supreme Court nominee being the most obvious example. But on crime, it was thoroughly in the mainstream and touching a nerve. Worries about crime, drugs, and victim’s rights aligned it closely with other interest groups and engendered sympathy from people who might have otherwise looked askance at Falwell’s fundamentalism or found him too controversial to count as an ally. These included members of women’s rights groups that increasingly joined with law and

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<sup>65</sup> Kissette Bundy, “Reagan Backs Crime Fight of Christians,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, April 27, 1984; “Crime Fighter,” *Philadelphia Daily News*, April 5, 1984; Walter F. Naedele, “Rev. B. Sam Hart, 80, Broadcaster,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 26, 2012, [http://www.philly.com/philly/obituaries/20120126\\_Rev\\_\\_B\\_\\_Sam\\_Hart\\_\\_80\\_\\_broadcaster.html](http://www.philly.com/philly/obituaries/20120126_Rev__B__Sam_Hart__80__broadcaster.html). For photos of the event see box 612, folder 26 of the Carl [Charles Curtis, Jr.] McIntire Manuscript Collection at Princeton Theological Seminary.

order coalitions in support of tougher anti-rape and sexual assault laws.<sup>66</sup> One member of Mothers Against Drunk Driving (a victims' rights group founded in 1980 that lobbied for more than 2,500 anti-drunk driving, victims' rights, and underage drinking laws<sup>67</sup>) registered her approval of the Moral Majority in a letter to her newspaper in 1981. Though she no longer attended church, she argued that "I think more of the churches should get involved and help Jerry Falwell and the Moral Majority try to get some law and order and decency back in our country like we used to have. Jerry Falwell and the Moral Majority are the only ones who have tried to do anything in this line."<sup>68</sup>

Pat Robertson understood this broad appeal. He reflected upon the work of the crime victim's task force in a retrospective Department of Justice interview. "I think the question was there was a cry in the society for some remedy. It was a perceived need all across the board. That's why the recommendations of this task force have found virtually universal acceptance. There's been almost no criticism of these recommendations because they touched a nerve right down to the community and I do think they've been implemented." When Robertson ran for the Republican presidential nomination in 1988, he referred to his experience on the task force to indicate his credentials as a "national policy leader."<sup>69</sup> He did not win the nomination, but that credential was a memento of the Christian right's influence in bolstering the anti-crime cause in terms of victim's rights, terms that many other Americans readily accepted.

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<sup>66</sup> Gottschalk, *The Prison and the Gallows*, 131.

<sup>67</sup> Gottschalk, 89-90.

<sup>68</sup> Ashton N. Burruss, "Making Excuses," *Free Lance-Star* [Fredericksburg, VA], September 18, 1982.

<sup>69</sup> For example, see Americans for Robertson, "'Robertson for President' Advertisement," *Quad-City Times* [Davenport, IA], January 10, 1988.

This competing evangelical crime cause and the populist sentiments it drew upon posed big problems for Colson's reform movement. Skillful politicians picked up on this intra-religious tension. In Mississippi Colson had advocated in 1982 for alternatives to incarceration for nonviolent offenders.<sup>70</sup> Though he garnered support from the Democratic governor, the effort ultimately failed in the state senate. Critics had successfully marked the bills as "soft on crime" (even though they were far more modest than the original suggestions promoted by Colson). State senator Robert Crook, who opposed the reform measures, hinted that Colson was an untrustworthy carpetbagger, working against the peoples' interest in public safety.<sup>71</sup> This was all standard law and order-styled populist politicking. But Crook went further, one-upping Colson's Christian bona fides with his own diagnosis of the crime problem. The "two reasons people do not commit serious crimes," he contended, were "(1) A personal moral code based on Christian teachings and (2) Fear of swift and certain punishment as an effective deterrent to crime."<sup>72</sup> The message in the thick of the Bible belt was as clear as it had been in the halls of congress with Godwin: Colson did not have a monopoly on Christian messaging on criminal justice, and he had a long way to go if he was to convert skeptics to his cause.

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<sup>70</sup> William C. Hammack and Robert Crook, "Pro-Con: The Governor's Task Force On Corrections," *The Mississippi Lawyer* XXIX, no. 3 (December 1982): 20–23; "Colson Backs Prison Ideas," *The Clarion-Ledger* [Jackson, MS], October 15, 1982; Associated Press, "Corrections Leaders Impressed by Colson," *The Greenwood Commonwealth* [Greenwood, MS], October 15, 1982.

<sup>71</sup> Associated Press, "Labelled As Soft On Crime...Prison Release Bill Killed," *Laurel Leader-Call* [Laurel, MS], February 9, 1982.

<sup>72</sup> Hammack and Crook, "Pro-Con: The Governor's Task Force On Corrections."



## **Restoring Justice**

Colson and other evangelicals advocating for prisoners realized that they had to take the more punitive Christian right coalition and its mobilization of victims' rights seriously if they were to gain influence and change policy. The contrast between Godwin and Colson's congressional testimony was clear. Dan Van Ness, Colson's associate who had been present at the hearing, told *Christianity Today* in response: "We have to check our instinct to raise prison sentences, because it's a false impulse. It makes us look like we're getting tough, but it really doesn't accomplish anything."<sup>73</sup> But the question remained as to how Colson and his allies would manage the conflict over the long-term, whether through direct confrontation or by building consensus with conservative Christian constituencies and Republicans and Democrats more generally. They chose the latter option, organizing two key efforts to further their religious and political influence. Along the way they would integrate the victims' rights cause into their broader reform framework. The first effort was an ambitious campaign to pass national legislation. The second was the development of restorative justice, an alternative model to the criminal justice status quo.

Colson had a complicated relationship with the Christian right, chiefly Jerry Falwell. As Falwell entered the public eye, Colson expressed frustration with the Moral Majority leader's approach to political engagement. The problem was less about the core issues Falwell mobilized on and more about the methods and his ideological foundations.

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<sup>73</sup> Beth Spring, "Moral Majority Aims at the Criminal Code."

Colson was privately troubled by Falwell's willingness to equate conservative politics with Christian theology, calling Falwell's equation of the two "awful" in internal memos to Prison Fellowship staff in 1980.<sup>74</sup> But Colson was also friendly to Falwell, calling him "brother." They each went to bat for the other professionally in crucial ways.<sup>75</sup> Falwell urged a news organization covering crime to devote attention to Colson's work, while Colson praised Falwell's adoption ministry to unwed mothers in Prison Fellowship newsletters.<sup>76</sup> It was a genuine, if sometimes tenuous friendship. More than that, Colson knew he could not alienate Falwell and his allies if he was to maintain broad appeal among conservative evangelicals.

Colson carefully fostered a relationship with Falwell, going to great lengths to quell Falwell's outrage whenever their relationship seemed to be on the rocks because of political differences.<sup>77</sup> This paid dividends in terms of achieving sympathy for the criminal justice reform cause. This was seen chiefly through the impact that Colson and Prison Fellowship had on Cal Thomas, a Moral Majority staff member and close aide to Falwell. When Colson wrote to the Moral Majority to protest Ron Godwin's testimony on

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<sup>74</sup> Colson found some of his inspiration from Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder, who published an article that argued that the right wing was in effect becoming a statist group. This was, Colson put it, "what's really wrong with the whole Moral Majority approach." Charles W. Colson to David Bovenizer, August 13, 1980, Collection 274, box 16, folder 7, Billy Graham Center Archives; Charles W. Colson to David Bovenizer, January 29, 1980, Collection 274, box 16, folder 6, Billy Graham Center Archives; Charles W. Colson to David Bovenizer, February 23, 1980.; Charles W. Colson to David Bovenizer, September 12, 1980, Collection 274, box 16, folder 7, Billy Graham Center Archives..

<sup>75</sup> Charles W. Colson to Jerry Falwell, March 14, 1983, Collection 274, box 31, folder 1, Billy Graham Center Archives.

<sup>76</sup> Jerry Falwell to Charles W. Colson, March 2, 1983, Collection 274, box 31, folder 1, Billy Graham Center Archives.; Mark DeMoss to Charles W. Colson, November 15, 1984, Collection 274, box 31, folder 1, Billy Graham Center Archives.

<sup>77</sup> Charles W. Colson to Jerry Falwell, August 20, 1981, Collection 274, box 31, folder 1, Billy Graham Center Archives; Charles W. Colson to Jerry Falwell, March 4, 1986, Collection 274, box 31, folder 1, Billy Graham Center Archives.

the need to make the criminal code more punitive, Thomas responded considerately, saying the point “is well taken.” Colson had pushed the Moral Majority to consider how alternatives might be found for non-violent offenders, and Thomas admitted he thought this idea was compelling and that that he “would lobby Jerry” on it.<sup>78</sup> Colson was thrilled about the possibility of “converting” Falwell, telling Dan Van Ness that “this is an opportunity to turn the Moral Majority around. This would be one of the most significant things we could accomplish this year.”<sup>79</sup>

Colson’s cultivation of the Christian right’s goodwill was necessary given his next big project: making a bold move on national policy, beyond state-level reforms and testimony before subcommittees. Colson had lunch with Senators Sam Nunn and William Armstrong. He convinced both of them of the humanitarian and fiscal benefits of promoting sentencing alternatives for nonviolent offenders, like community service, instead of incarceration. The bipartisan alliance of Nunn, a Democrat from Georgia, and Armstrong, a Republican from Colorado, would ensure that the proposal would have widespread appeal. The senators invited Dan Van Ness to help them draft the legislation.<sup>80</sup> On July 20, 1983 the senators introduced Senate bill S. 1644, the Sentencing Improvement Act of 1983. The bill recapitulated the logic of Colson’s advocacy from the past few years: reduce incarceration rates and prison overcrowding by requiring courts to

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<sup>78</sup> Cal Thomas to Charles W. Colson, November 8, 1982, Collection 274, box 31, folder 1, Billy Graham Center Archives.

<sup>79</sup> Charles W. Colson to Daniel W. Van Ness, November 19, 1982, Collection 274, box 31, folder 1, Billy Graham Center Archives.

<sup>80</sup> “Senators Propose Alternative Sentencing Bill,” *Jubilee*, January 1983, Evangelism and Missions Journals, Wheaton College Archives and Special Collections; Clower, “Justice Fellowship Case History,” 6.

use fines, probation, or community service for nonviolent offenders. And, as if nodding toward skeptics, the bill also referenced and built upon the success of the victim's rights movement, like the task force Pat Robertson served on: victims should receive restitution through payment or an arrangement of an alternative sentence. It also declared that imprisonment was totally appropriate for violent offenses or for offenders who presented a substantial danger.<sup>81</sup>

Colson and Van Ness proved adept in mobilizing broad support for the bill. They distributed a fact sheet on the legislation to Christian groups, and published requests for support in their ministry newsletter.<sup>82</sup> Though the NAE and *Christianity Today* had helped lead the evangelical charge for law and order in past decades, they joined Colson's coalition and endorsed the bill. Other progressive Christian groups joined as well.<sup>83</sup> Crucially, Colson also counted the Moral Majority among the supporters of the measure (likely attracted to the bill because of its emphasis on restitution for crime victims).<sup>84</sup> Armstrong and Nunn did not mention Colson or evangelical advocacy in their

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<sup>81</sup> Sam Nunn, "Sentencing Improvement Act of 1983," Pub. L. No. S.1644 (1983), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/98th-congress/senate-bill/1644>; William L. Armstrong, "Prudent Use of Prison Space: The Sentencing Improvement Act," *Journal of Legislation* 11, no. 2 (1984): 237–48.

<sup>82</sup> Prison Fellowship, "Questions and Answers on the Nunn-Armstrong Sentencing Improvement Act of 1982," October 1982, AR 138-2, box 45, folder 36, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives; "Justice Fellowship Update," *Jubilee*, October 1963, Evangelism and Missions Journals, Wheaton College Archives and Special Collections.

<sup>83</sup> Kenneth S. Kantzer, "A New Solution to the Crisis in Our Prisons," *Christianity Today*, June 17, 1983; Larry Braidfoot and William Armstrong, December 2, 1982, AR 138-2, box 45, folder 36, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives; Larry Braidfoot and Sam Nunn, December 2, 1982, AR 138-2, box 45, folder 36, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives; "Legislation on the Federal Agenda," *Criminal Justice Update: A Newsletter of the National Interreligious Task Force on Criminal Justice*, Fall 1983, AR 138-2, box 45, folder 36, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives; "Sentencing Reform," National Association of Evangelicals, 1983, <https://www.nae.net/sentencing-reform/>.

<sup>84</sup> Charles W. Colson, "Another Point of View: 'A Struggle for Justice,'" *Jubilee*, March 1984, Evangelism and Missions Journals, Wheaton College Archives and Special Collections.

floor speeches, but they did not have to when they had the most vocally evangelical senators on their side: Mark Hatfield. The Oregon senator delivered his own speech supporting the measure, one that repeated concern for criminals and suspicions of tough on crime solutions from earlier in his career.<sup>85</sup>

However, the bill soon ran into problems. A challenge was the presence of another major piece of criminal justice legislation, the Comprehensive Crime Control Act, a collection of bills that represented the long hoped-for criminal code revisions that numerous members of congress supported (the same general legislative thrust that Godwin and Colson had testified on in 1981).<sup>86</sup> Armstrong and Nunn argued in their floor speeches that their bill was compatible with the objectives of this other legislation, part of which included some harsher sentencing procedures for certain offenses. But there were concern among Reagan's Justice Department staff that the sentencing provisions would be a distraction. Lacking a presence on the judiciary committee, Armstrong and Nunn could not force the issue. Attempts to even add the bill in the broader legislative package as an amendment also failed. The only available option Armstrong and Nunn had remaining was to put a "sense-of-the-senate" resolution derived from S. 1644 into the

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<sup>85</sup> Senator Mark Hatfield, Speaking on S. 1644, 98<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> session, *Congressional Record* (July 20, 1983): 19861-2.

<sup>86</sup> For the broader history behind this general legislative thrust, see Murakawa, *The First Civil Right*, 99-104 and Katie Stith and Steve Y. Koh, "The Politics of Sentencing Reform: The Legislative History of the Federal Sentencing Guidelines," *Wake Forest Law Review* 28, no. 2 (1993): 223-90.

legislation, a symbolic move with no legal force. The resolution carried with it an expiration date of two years.<sup>87</sup>

Hatfield was angry about the result, and publically reamed the Justice Department in response. “I am very disappointed...due to the fact that the Justice Department has stonewalled any effort to come up with a meaningful alternative program to sentencing.” The Justice Department, he noted, had been complaining constantly about prison facilities, but their rejection of the Nunn-Armstrong measure showed that this was empty rhetoric. The “meaningless” resolution was “not a half a loaf, it is barely a crumb.” Then Hatfield pivoted to the heart of the matter: the harmful punitive potential of the Comprehensive Crime Control Act if sentencing reform were not included. “Perhaps this body should pause and consider whether this highly touted anticrime bill will have the impact upon crime that it alleges.” The country was facing a crime problem, he acknowledged, but tough “doubled or tripled” sentences would not deter crime. Instead, “People will be going to prison for longer periods of time...and our overcrowded prisons will become more so,” a fiscal problem and a catalyst for heightened recidivism. “We have dodged the issue long enough and have smothered it in anticrime rhetoric long enough. Our approach to corrections is an unabashed failure.”<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> William L. Armstrong and Sam Nunn, “Alternatives to Incarceration: The Sentencing Improvement Act,” in *Crime and Punishment in Modern America*, ed. Patrick B. McGuigan and Jon S. Pascale (Washington, D.C: The Free Congress Research and Education Foundation, 1986); Senators Sam Nunn and William Armstrong, Speaking on Amendment No. 2684, 98<sup>th</sup> Congress, *Congressional Record* (January 31, 1984): 991-995.

<sup>88</sup> Senator Mark Hatfield, Speaking on Amendment No. 2684, 98<sup>th</sup> Congress, *Congressional Record* (January 31, 1984): 999-1001.

Colson was similarly irate. He dashed off a column to Prison Fellowship supporters in the ministry's monthly newsletter where he reported and explained the letdown. Ever the conservative, Colson explained the failure not as a result of a "law and order" surge or even the intransigence of the Reagan administration (he cited Attorney General William French Smith's warnings about relying too much on prisons), but because of the overweening power of big government: "Entrenched bureaucracies can be formidable barriers to the popular will." He argued that prosecutors in the Justice Department had opposed the measure in hopes they could maintain the "threat of prison to coerce defendants into plea bargaining." At the conclusion of the letter he listed the contact information of congress and the White House so that Prison Fellowship supporters could voice their support for future reform efforts. He was hopeful that a new chapter might be written with "the Christian conscience aroused – God's people sharing His passion for justice and breaking down entrenched prejudice."<sup>89</sup>

Colson's missive was heartfelt, but perplexing in places. If the bill was the product of such massive cultural and religious consensus, how could it fail? If Attorney General Smith was theoretically supportive of such measures, why had his Justice Department torpedoed the measure? The answer lay just as much in the even deeper cultural consensus that crime remained a threat and that it should be dealt with primarily through punitive measures. As Dan Van Ness put it a few years later, the act was

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<sup>89</sup> Charles W. Colson, "Another Point of View: 'A Struggle for Justice.'"

“relatively simple and low-key in a lot of places, but it was very controversial.”<sup>90</sup> It failed to gel with the broader political consensus, and the non-binding sense of the senate resolution (which was not renewed two years later) was “like a small weather system meeting a hurricane.”<sup>91</sup> This hurricane had many contributing forces, like the demands of victim’s groups and inner-city advocates concerned with rising urban crime. These were messages that other conservative evangelicals had made their own. It was striking that the Moral Majority, an organization that had not offered nearly the level of constructive engagement on criminal justice matters as Colson, nevertheless saw the broader cultural consensus and political outcomes align with its earlier lobbying. A few years later Cal Thomas even indicated his own support for de-carceration in a column that called for a reconsideration of the Nunn-Armstrong bill.<sup>92</sup> But the damage had already been done. The effect of the sentencing portion of the Comprehensive Crime Control Act was a set of guidelines that stressed “certainty and severity” – the use of mandatory minimum sentences became standard and, as one report put it, “greatly increased both the percentage of individuals receiving prison sentences and the length of sentences for many offenses.”<sup>93</sup> Hatfield’s prediction about the core legislation had come true, and his

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<sup>90</sup> Clower, “Justice Fellowship Case History,” 91.

<sup>91</sup> Daniel W. Van Ness, interview by Aaron Griffith, February 19, 2018.

<sup>92</sup> Cal Thomas, “Building More Prisons Is No Way To Fight Crime,” *Los Angeles Times Syndicate*, May 26, 1989.

<sup>93</sup> National Research Council’s Committee on Causes and Consequences of High Rates of Incarceration, *The Growth of Incarceration in the United States: Exploring Causes and Consequences*.



warnings about prison overcrowding would prove prescient as well, as incarceration rates rose exponentially over the following decade.<sup>94</sup>

Over the rest of the 1980s Colson and his allies at Prison Fellowship made some significant changes in their approach. Some were organizational. In 1983 Prison Fellowship incorporated its reform efforts under the separate entity of Justice Fellowship, distinct from its prison ministry work.<sup>95</sup> Dan Van Ness was elected Justice Fellowship president a year later. But the major change was what Justice Fellowship staff called a “paradigm shift,” one that placed the needs of crime victims at the forefront and intentionally framed the cause as criminal justice reform, not prison reform. It also was an attempt to circumvent the inefficiencies and unpredictability of governmental bureaucracy, the very system that had bitten them in the Nunn-Armstrong ordeal. They called it “restorative justice.” This paradigm shift gave evangelicals a framework to address humanitarian ills, while also ameliorating the concerns of a public that had placed the needs of crime victims at the center of debates about crime and punishment.

The restorative justice model was not the invention of Colson or Van Ness. Colson and his evangelical allies had instead drawn from an unlikely source as they looked to reframe their political engagement: the Anabaptist tradition. From their origins in the sixteenth century, Anabaptists differed from the Catholic and the magisterial Reformed

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<sup>94</sup> The Sentencing Project, “Trends in U.S. Corrections,” June 2017, <https://sentencingproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Trends-in-US-Corrections.pdf>. Though the most important piece of national crime legislation in the 1980s, the Comprehensive Crime Control Act was not the direct cause of the growth in incarceration on the *state* level, as it was focused only on the federal system. However, it set the national tone for states and counties and was emblematic of broader shifts in crime policy on more localized levels.

<sup>95</sup> Clower, “Justice Fellowship Case History,” 7.

traditions in their commitments to adult baptism, pacifism, suspicion (or even rejection) of civil authority, congregational polity, and a literal emphasis on the commands of Jesus. They developed ecclesiological systems and theological rationale to address peacefully matters of church conflict accordingly. For example, assorted Anabaptist traditions practiced “binding and loosing,” a communally driven form of confrontation of offenders and discipline drawn from Jesus’ commands to his followers in Matthew 18 to bring unresolved disputes before the church. The hope was that offenders would be reconciled to those they had harmed and ultimately restored to the earthly Christian community. This presaged their spiritual and eternal reconciliation. As Jesus said, “whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 18:18, NIV). Anabaptist groups disagreed on how to apply these general theological principles. For example, the followers of Jakob Ammann in Switzerland (later known as the Amish) distinguished themselves by fully excommunicating (shunning) those who did not submit to discipline, while other Swiss Brethren and Mennonite groups argued for more moderated stances. The overarching goal of all Anabaptist communities, however, was to restore the health of the community after a violation had occurred and leave the door open to the full reintegration of the offender into community life. Both approaches also rejected violent punishment of offenders and downplayed the obligation of offenders to civil authority.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Clifford K. Dorne, *Restorative Justice in the United States: An Introduction* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2008), 167-9.

In the North American context Anabaptist groups continued restorative disciplinary practices, and in the twentieth century they began increasingly arguing for their public value beyond ecclesial concerns. Anabaptist voices in conversations on crime and punishment were often eschewed, like in the 1960s when neo-evangelicals at *Christianity Today* clearly indicated their preference to more Reformed modes of thought over that of Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder on criminal justice matters. But beginning in the late 1970s the Mennonite scholar and activist Howard Zehr began renewing the Anabaptist-styled disciplinary vision. In 1978 he worked with social workers and probation staff to develop a Victim-Offender Reconciliation Program, or VORP. This program emphasized conflict resolution through face-to-face meetings and restitution agreements with the aid of trained third parties, often as a partial or total substitute for prison time.<sup>97</sup> He eventually began contending for restorative justice's import in broader evangelical circles, publishing an article in the journal of the Christian Legal Society that argued for a recovery of forgiveness and love of enemies as frameworks American criminal justice. “[Christ] urges us to love those who offend us, to welcome them back, to reconcile them to the community, to forgive and to restore, to move beyond legal retaliation to no retaliation.” A truly Christian vision of justice, according to Zehr, depended upon Christ-like restoration of wrongdoers.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Mark Umbreit and Marilyn Peterson Armour, *Restorative Justice Dialogue: An Essential Guide for Research and Practice* (New York: Springer Publishing Company, 2010), 37; Howard Zehr and Mark Umbreit, “Victim Offender Reconciliation: An Incarceration Substitute,” *Federal Probation* 46, no. 4 (December 1982): 63–68.

<sup>98</sup> As scholars of American indigenous peoples' movements have shown, there is a much longer and diverse history of restorative practices in North America beyond Zehr and Anabaptist roots. However, most

Love and forgiveness (even of criminals) were not unfamiliar concepts to evangelicals. But under sole Mennonite supervision, the restorative approach would have limitations. This was evident in the rest of Zehr's Christian Legal Society piece, where he spoke about American criminal injustice in terms of the moral problems of militarism. With arms buildups and law and order, "The reasoning process is exactly the same... Both rely upon threat and force, upon the 'big stick' approach, expecting to take care of the enemy by coercion and fear." The message was emblazoned in large bold letters in a Mennonite Central Committee-designed graphic that the journal published as an accompaniment to Zehr's article: "Crime is a peace issue."<sup>99</sup> This may have been a compelling message for certain Christian advocates of social justice, particularly the small evangelical left (no strangers to anti-war activism and militarist skepticism). But it was a vision that would be harder to sell to most evangelicals, who were far more comfortable with America's capacity to mobilize violence at home and abroad in pursuit of justice.

Colson and the staff of Justice Fellowship believed that they had something to add to the Mennonite restorative justice equation: popularity and the possibility of large-scale integration with the state. Zehr and his allies had largely toiled in relative obscurity, with their activism's appeal restricted primarily to Mennonite enclaves in Indiana and

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scholars of restorative justice identify Zehr at the key figure in formalizing the approach in terms of western legal norms and practices. Smith, *Native Americans and the Christian Right*, 50-51.

<sup>99</sup> Howard Zehr, "Our Military Mentality Approach to Criminal Justice," *Christian Legal Society Quarterly* 2, no. 3 (Summer 1981): 9-11.

Virginia, a reflection of the denomination's limited widespread appeal. Besides lending his own name to the movement, Colson brought a Reformed sensibility to restorative justice, one that allowed for the more positive role of governmental authority and power in the theologically rooted equation of reconciliation and restoration. As Van Ness put it, "We saw all the restorative justice work going among the Mennonites, but also recognized that they weren't really saying much about the state. Justice Fellowship could come in and make it possible for policy to be implemented."<sup>100</sup> The hope was that Colson's high profile and political savvy could help move a small Mennonite movement to new heights.

Just as Colson had something to offer, restorative justice likewise gave Colson the framework to name victims as his foremost concern and to circumvent the state's burdensome obligations and procedures. According to restorative justice theory, American legal procedure was flawed in how it framed the stakeholders in a criminal case as "offender vs. the state" (like, *Miranda v. Arizona*). This framework was an attempt to satisfy the state's inherent demand for justice (represented by the common image of the balance of the scales in courtrooms), but it tragically overlooked the victim of the crime. By contrast, restorative justice framed an offense as a wrong against the immediate victim and the community more generally. The restoration was not a rebalancing of the scales as much as it was making tangible human relationships right. Restorative justice practitioners therefore sought ways for victims to enter into guided

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<sup>100</sup> Daniel W. Van Ness, interview, February 19, 2018.

conversation with offenders so that they their needs could be discussed and met. This often meant financial restitution. But it could also result in direct conversation with offenders about *why* they committed a crime and what its damaging effects had been.<sup>101</sup>

While keeping the broader contours of the restorative approach intact, Colson and his allies added their own rhetorical twist. Restorative justice allowed them a way to frame crime to the public as a harrowing matter and criminals as feared enemies. In 1981 Zehr had lamented the recent turn in American culture to identifying criminals as “an alien ‘enemy’ who is sharply differentiated from us... Viewing offenders as objects rather than persons allows them to be treated in inhumane ways without pangs of conscience.”<sup>102</sup> By contrast, when Justice Fellowship’s Van Ness published his restorative justice book *Crime and its Victims* in 1986, InterVarsity Press placed an image on the cover of a frightening criminal visage reaching through a broken house window to undo a latch. The gloved hand of the criminal and his glaring countenance were a stark contrast to the flowery wallpaper visible around the window. Matching the artwork was the title itself: “CRIME,” in large font at the top of the cover, followed by “VICTIMS” in significantly smaller font at the bottom. Van Ness himself initially disliked the cover, but the evangelical InterVarsity Press knew their audience (and the book went on to win several evangelical publishing awards).<sup>103</sup> By foregrounding criminals, crime, and the

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<sup>101</sup> Zehr and Umbreit, “Victim Offender Reconciliation: An Incarceration Substitute,” 68. See also Howard Zehr, *The Little Book of Restorative Justice* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2002).

<sup>102</sup> Zehr, “Our Military Mentality Approach to Criminal Justice,” 9.

<sup>103</sup> In 1987 the book won the Eternity Book of the Year award and was an Evangelical Christian Publishers Association Gold Medallion winner. Van Ness, *Crime And Its Victims*; Daniel W. Van Ness, interview, February 19, 2018.

needs of victims, restorative justice enabled Colson to move away from the prison inmate as the sole object of humanitarian compassion. Justice Fellowship, as one internal description of the organization's mission and history read, had moved from prison reform to criminal justice reform. With fear of crime continually on the rise, possible converts to the reform cause were simply not going to see the humane treatment of prisoners as an issue of primary concern. But framing the issue in mutualistic terms, linking prisoners' rights with victims' rights, offered a way forward.

Restorative justice was an attempt to triangulate numerous strands of evangelical social engagement at one time, in one package. The cover of Van Ness' *Crime and the Victim* was emblazoned with laudatory blurbs from Cal Thomas, Carl F. H. Henry, and Mark Hatfield, respectively representing the religious right (Thomas had only recently left the Moral Majority), the moderate evangelical center, and its liberal wing. This kind of triangulation continued into the 1990s. Colson wrote a lead article on restorative justice for the law review of Pat Robertson's Regent University. He framed restorative justice not as a progressive social activist agenda or program but as a recovery of biblical values and "objective truth," precisely what Ed Meese had identified as Regent's legal tradition in his introductory piece in the school's very first law review a few years earlier. Colson used the biblical example of the tax collector Zacchaeus, who made restitution to victims he had defrauded after a visit with Jesus. If the situation had happened today, Colson argued, Zacchaeus would have pled not guilty, victims would have not been reimbursed, and Zacchaeus would sit in prison (and likely re-offend upon release). Instead, "Jesus' response was so much better. Justice was done. Truth was acknowledged.

Peace was established.” Here was a Colson, a conservative evangelical with strong humanitarian sympathies, translating an Anabaptist ethical vision into terms that future lawyers from a Christian right icon’s law school could find appealing.

### **Remaining Tensions**

The careful articulation and implementation of restorative justice had seemingly enabled Colson and Prison Fellowship to become all things to all people in their criminal justice reform efforts. On paper, restorative justice made sense; victims received justice, offenders paid back their debts, neighborhoods became safer, and the government saved prison space. And when tried, it often worked. Van Ness and other Justice Fellowship staff made progress lobbying local leaders on the efficacy of the model. They set up task forces in 22 states in order to promote restorative principles to churches and legislatures. In 1991 these task forces helped pass 21 separate bills that aimed to reduce prison overcrowding while also mandating offender restitution to victims. In conservative Alabama, Justice Fellowship helped provide a “middle road between imprisonment and routine probation for nonviolent offenders.” In Maryland, Justice Fellowship successfully lobbied for three new laws (in partnership with victims’ rights groups) that expanded victim eligibility for compensation. Restorative justice also gave the reform effort cover to push for legislation that was more prisoner-focused, such as a Justice Fellowship-sponsored bill in Minnesota that kept juveniles from adult facilities.<sup>104</sup> With victim-

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<sup>104</sup> Clower, “Justice Fellowship Case History,” appendix A.



focused restorative justice as its driving paradigm, it seemed at the turn of the 1990s that Colson and his reform-minded allies might have found a model for shifting the tide of American law and order.

And yet, into the 1990s, prison populations still grew. Sentences continued to toughen.<sup>105</sup> Politicians bent over backwards to appear tough on crime. Indeed, punitive anti-crime politics became such a bipartisan affair that it seemed like Democrats might outdo Republicans. During the 1992 presidential primary Governor Bill Clinton famously refused clemency for convicted murderer Ricky Ray Rector as a way to engender sympathy from voters (despite the fact that the Rector had a severely limited mental capacity).<sup>106</sup>

What happened? Why did the careful lobbying from Colson and like-minded evangelical humanitarians repeatedly fail to gain broader traction? Part of the answer has to do with expediency, not ideology. It was simply easier and cheaper for politicians and their supporters (at least, in the short term) to construct justice systems that locked offenders away. By their very nature, restitution and restorative justice efforts were challenging to implement. They were resource intensive and required the interest of victims, law enforcement, and offenders. It was simply easier for most involved to plea bargain away any given case so as to move through the criminal court docket as quickly as possible.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> The Sentencing Project, "Trends in U.S. Corrections."

<sup>106</sup> Peter Applebome, "Death Penalty; Arkansas Execution Raises Questions on Governor's Politics," *The New York Times*, January 25, 1992.

<sup>107</sup> Regarding the import of plea bargaining and prosecutors, see Pfaff, *Locked In*.

In terms of religious engagement, something else occurred. Though the Moral Majority dissipated in 1989, the Christian Coalition emerged the same year and quickly became the leading religious right lobbying organization. They made crime one of their key issues. Unlike earlier Christian law and order activism, however, the Christian Coalition's platform reflected some of the new elements that Colson had helped introduce into conservative politics. Ralph Reed, the head of the Christian Coalition, knew Colson's testimony and work well. After Reed has his own radical Christian conversion experience as a young Republican activist, Colson's *Born Again* was the first book (other than the Bible) that he read.<sup>108</sup>

In 1995 the Christian Coalition debuted their "Contract with the American Family" in a room at the Capitol, with several members congress in tow (including Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich). The "contract" contained ten points that were a combination of religious right concerns from a decade earlier (restricting pornography and abortions), with new additions drawn from the new compassionate conservative agenda (encouraging support of private charities over governmental programs). The contract's tenth point was titled "Punishing Criminals, Not Victims." Parts of it were classic law and order. It urged the personal responsibility of criminals, noted the dangers of rising crime, and advocated "swift, sure punishment" as a response. It warned that not enough criminals saw prison time. But, the contract then pivoted to the positive possibilities of community service. It quoted Colson as the authority, using a story that he

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<sup>108</sup> Ralph Reed, "Colson's Life and Legacy," *National Review* (blog), April 23, 2012, <https://www.nationalreview.com/2012/04/colsons-life-and-legacy-nro-symposium/>.

regularly told about doctor he had met while at Maxwell who he believed should have been allowed to practice medicine as a form of community service. It then moved to a discussion of victims' rights and criminal justice that "restores the victim" in addition to punishing the offender. Though it never used the term "restorative justice," the contract drew upon the framework that restorative justice often advocated, about the need to reframe criminal justice away from offender's obligations to the state model to offender's obligations to the victim. But, unlike restorative justice, the contract saw the restorative stress as a desirable net loss for offenders. The heading of this section was "Criminal Rights Versus Victim Rights," suggesting that the two were in direct conflict (a point restorative justice advocates like Colson did not make).<sup>109</sup>

It was this kind of activism that produced punitive legislation in the mid-1990s, not only in terms of pushing Republicans to act, but also leading Democrats to take up the anti-crime cause as well. One of President Bill Clinton's landmark pieces of legislation was the Violent Crime and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, which built on Reagan's legacy by further cementing incarceration as the primary governmental response to crime through regulations that further lengthened prison terms and increased the likelihood of imprisonment.<sup>110</sup> To justify tougher crime policy, Clinton and his allies

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<sup>109</sup> Christian Coalition, *Contract with the American Family* (Nashville, TN: Moorings, 1995), 121-9. Andrea Smith makes a similar point in her discussion of conservative evangelical reactions to Colson's agenda in the mid-1990s. She points to a writer at the conservative *World* magazine who praised Prison Fellowship in one article but then in another argued for mandatory minimums, reducing appeals in death penalty cases, and increasing prison sentences of nonviolent offenders. Smith, *Native Americans and the Christian Right*, 62.

<sup>110</sup> National Research Council's Committee on Causes and Consequences of High Rates of Incarceration, *The Growth of Incarceration in the United States: Exploring Causes and Consequences*, 70-1.

cited political scientist John DiIulio, Jr.'s concept of "super-predator," which warned of a growing cadre of "radically impulsive, brutally remorseless youngsters," lacking "pangs of conscience." The only correct response to these "super-predators," DiIulio argued, was to put more people in prison, or, as First Lady Hillary Clinton argued at the time with direct reference to the term, to "bring them to heel."<sup>111</sup> Democrats obliged, having DiIulio testify on behalf of their legislation, while conservatives likewise concurred. Former Reagan cabinet member William Bennett co-authored DiIulio's book *Body Count* (which helped popularize the super-predator argument), while the Christian Coalition cited DiIulio in their *Contract With The American Family* on the necessity to consider criminals as moral agents deserving punishment in the face of rising crime.<sup>112</sup>

Restorative justice was lost in this storm. It was a compelling program, but easily co-opted or eclipsed for more simplistic solutions. As Dan Van Ness put it, restorative justice was like classical music, and law and order politics like rock n' roll: if you have both on at the same time, even at the same volume, people will hear the beat-driven sound of rock. Restorative justice had dynamics that were appealing to many, but its implementation required a level of nuance that was hard to attain, particularly for politicians seeking votes.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>111</sup>William J. Bennett, John J. DiIulio, and John P. Walters, *Body Count: Moral Poverty...and How to Win America's War against Crime and Drugs* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996); James Traub, "The Criminals of Tomorrow," *The New Yorker*, November 4, 1996; John J. DiIulio, "Arresting Ideas: Tougher Law Enforcement Is Driving down Urban Crime," *Policy Review* 74 (Fall 1995): 12–16; C-SPAN, *Hillary Clinton on "Superpredators,"* 1996, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j0uCrA7ePno>.

<sup>112</sup> Christian Coalition, *Contract with the American Family*, 125.

<sup>113</sup> Daniel W. Van Ness, interview by Aaron Griffith, January 19, 2018.

This was the paradoxical legacy of Colson's criminal justice reform efforts: like the prisoners he ministered to, he advocated solutions that met fellow conservatives (particularly Christian conservatives) where they were, on their own terms. The downside was that Colson sometimes gave conservatives ways to wriggle out of thinking too critically about their own positions on crime and punishment. This not only occurred on issues related directly to restorative justice. Colson's use of Samenow and Yochelson's theories to frame the crime problem in terms of individual choice made more systemic analyses difficult. He was not always clear on this issue himself. Colson would speak of his own understanding that crime was a challenging problem because people often faced difficult economic choices; he said regularly that every person, no matter how moral, was only a few missed meals away from becoming a thief.<sup>114</sup> But his emphasis on personal responsibility, while useful for framing offender obligations in restorative matters and the depths of God's grace for sin, allowed fellow conservatives who mobilized his ideas (like Reed) to underplay or ignore socioeconomic problems that underpinned criminal behavior.

Critics of Yochelson and Samenow's work, the theoretical underpinning of Colson's approach, had realized this in the late 1970s. Academic reviewer expressed concern that Yochelson and Samenow's work, by discounting rehabilitation, would play into a punitive penal philosophy, those "who harken to the call, 'let the punishment fit the crime,' or, more precisely, 'lock 'em up' because nothing works in rehabilitation." It

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<sup>114</sup> Smith, *Native Americans and the Christian Right*, 56.

would be “grist for hard-liners,” as an otherwise sympathetic reviewer in *Science* put it. Reviewers noted that the Yochelson and Samenow did not actually advocate retribution in their study, but contended that this would be the broader effect if their theory was implemented.<sup>115</sup> This was analogous to what happened with Colson. By advocating for a similar understanding of the fully rational, morally determinative “criminal personality,” he opened the door for others to accept that theory while rejecting his own compassionate solutions. Law, without gospel.

Economics was a comparable issue. Colson regularly complained that the government was spending too much money building new prisons. He attracted the interest of fiscal conservatives who believed the same thing, particularly when faced with tightening state budgets. When asked by a Washington state reporter about what impact budget cuts would have on his reform program, Colson replied that “In a sense, that sort of thing has helped. We're not talking about building more new big prisons. The answer is not more prisons. The answer is more alternatives to prison.” However, Colson left the door open for conservatives to embrace his fiscal skepticism but do little to address other issues at stake. The result was political cover to defund what in-prison programs or rehabilitation efforts that did exist, hoping that nonprofits, churches, and prison ministries could pick up the slack. When they did not, there was little accountability. The same reporter who reported Colson’s delight in defunding of prison programs also noted that the reform picture in Washington state as a whole was still far from ideal. Though Colson

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<sup>115</sup> Gene Stephens, “Review of The Criminal Personality, Volumes I and II,” *American Journal of Criminal Justice* 3, no. 1 (March 1978): 80–82; Costance Holden, “The Criminal Mind: A New Look at an Ancient Puzzle,” *Science* 199, no. 4328 (February 3, 1978): 511–14.

had pushed some reforms and brought important attention to the issue of inmate welfare, prison budgets were still getting slashed and some facilities remained overcrowded.<sup>116</sup>

Moments like this exemplified how compassionate conservatism was easily co-opted (or implicated) in the structural inequities linked to the rise of neoliberalism more broadly. Colson's rhetoric about prisons regularly eclipsed his ability to offer a constructive response. This was a problem facing other religious social service providers emerging at the same time as well. As Jason Hackworth has shown, private religious organizations like Habitat for Humanity made a devastating public critique of governmental housing projects possible. They showed how inefficient governmental housing programs were by offering the same services more cheaply and effectively, a development that the media and politicians frequently trumpeted. As a private organization though they were never themselves able to fill the housing void on their own, but they effectively lodged the self-fulfilling prophecy into the public mind that the governmental effort was doomed to fail (and therefore, worthy of being cut).<sup>117</sup>

Colson's mind also changed in important ways that played into problematic accommodations and compromises. Beginning in the late eighties, Colson consciously adopted the "worldview" ministry mantle, speaking out on a host of cultural and theological issues from a conservative evangelical perspective, like abortion, scriptural

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<sup>116</sup> Larsen, "Chuck Colson's Visit - Words of Hope For Our Prisons."

<sup>117</sup> Jason R. Hackworth, *Faith Based: Religious Neoliberalism and the Politics of Welfare in the United States* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2012), 63-85.

inerrancy, religious liberty, the loss of “objective truth,” and feminism.<sup>118</sup> Naming crime as a moral issue (as opposed to an environmental or systemic one) was a recurring point in this work. Though he had always held strong views on many of these issues personally (and sometimes referenced them in print), now he had made opining on them a key part of his public ministry. The most prominent example was Colson’s public advocacy for U.S. entry into Iraq in 2002, under the rationale that a preemptive strike was “charitable” and accorded with “just war” requirements.<sup>119</sup>

Certain aspects of Colson’s understanding of crime and punishment sharpened as he waded deeper into these other cultural and political battles. His change of heart on the death penalty was the most prominent example. In 1982 Colson received a note from a Prison Fellowship staff member that the famed serial killer John Wayne Gacy, Jr. had written the organization from death row. Gacy had been given a Prison Fellowship newsletter, and wanted some more literature from the ministry. Sensing the seriousness of this exchange, Colson began corresponding with Gacy directly, sending him books, and eventually meeting with him in person. Gacy’s replies included a pencil drawing he had completed, of Jesus crowned with thorns, captioned “He Is Risen.”<sup>120</sup> Though Colson was on record as being against the death penalty as late as 1990,<sup>121</sup> just a few years later he

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<sup>118</sup> Colson noted in a later edition of *Born Again* that he began to focus on “the moral crisis in America” through his “worldview” ministry at this time. Charles W. Colson, *Born Again* (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, 2008), 374.

<sup>119</sup> Charles Colson, “Just War in Iraq,” *Christianity Today*, December 9, 2002, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2002/december9/just-war-in-iraq.html>.

<sup>120</sup> “John Wayne Gacy Correspondence,” 1982-1980, Collection 274, box 31, folder 6, Billy Graham Center Archives.

<sup>121</sup> Charles Colson, “Voting for the Executioner,” *Christianity Today*, October 8, 1990.



reported that the experience had disgusted him. He believed Gacy to be arrogant and without “a hint of remorse,” despite claiming to be a Christian. It was this experience that led Colson to evolve on capital punishment: “there was simply no other appropriate response than execution if justice was to be served.” He acknowledged flaws in administration of the death penalty, but ultimately came to believe it was the biblical solution to crimes of premeditated murder. If Colson was to commit fully to defending the “sanctity of life” on matters like abortion, then he believed he had to support the execution of offenders like Gacy out of respect for the lives of his victims. From the mid-1990s on, Colson regularly returned to the Gacy story and the “conversion” it had prompted. Even as Prison Fellowship remained internally divided on the issue, evangelical publications and websites broadcasted Colson’s new message in direct opposition to anti-death penalty appeals from other Christians.<sup>122</sup>

These shifts served to alienate Colson from progressive activists who shared his broader concerns. Though he had never seen himself as walking in lockstep with the likes of the ACLU, now he was increasingly framing his ministry in direct opposition to progressives on various non-prison related matters. But there was an upside to this. Colson, by fostering trust with fellow conservatives and by making his own shifts into more traditionally conservative ideological territory, was able to change some hearts over

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<sup>122</sup> Randy Frame, “A Matter of Life and Death,” *Christianity Today*, August 14, 1995; Charles W. Colson, “Preserving the Dignity of Man,” *BreakPoint*, June 8, 2001, <http://breakpoint.org/2001/06/preserving-dignity-man/>; Charles W. Colson and Harold Fickett, *The Faith: What Christians Believe, Why They Believe It, and Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008); Charles W. Colson, “Why I Support Capital Punishment,” *The Gospel Coalition*, accessed February 28, 2018, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/why-i-support-capital-punishment/>.

the long run. Prison populations continued to grow into the 2000s, but after the 2008 financial crisis it became apparent to many lawmakers that the cost was unsustainable. Colson had continued to cultivate relationships and preach his reform cause, and he ventured deeper into other conservative political and ideological battles. It further endeared him to conservative activists and politicians. Chief among them was Pat Nolan, a former California Republican legislator who had been imprisoned in 1994 for crimes relating to illicit payments from campaign donors. While in prison Nolan became acquainted with Prison Fellowship, and Colson invited him to lead Justice Fellowship when he was released. As political scientists David Dagan and Steven Teles have noted, Colson (who was nearing the end of his career) and Nolan “were able to form a genuine reform cadre, one with power at the highest levels of the Republican party.”<sup>123</sup>

In contrast to Dan Van Ness, who was a political independent and concentrated Justice Fellowship’s work on connections to progressive evangelicals like Howard Zehr, under Nolan’s care Justice Fellowship became directly engaged with conservative elites. Though Nolan repudiated the punitive legislation he had advocated for as a legislator (often under the guise of victim’s rights), he still had the Republican bona fides that allowed him to reach figures like Newt Gingrich.<sup>124</sup> He and Gingrich penned a *Washington Post* op-ed in 2011 that declared, “The criminal justice system is broken, and

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<sup>123</sup> Dagan and Teles, *Prison Break*, 45-6.

<sup>124</sup> Andrea Smith notes that Nolan now laments the Victim’s Rights Act that he once sponsored as a legislator, which “has done nothing to help victims but has served only to strengthen prosecutions.” Smith, *Native Americans and the Christian Right*, 65.

conservatives must lead the way in fixing it.”<sup>125</sup> The op-ed also publicized the new Right On Crime Campaign, a collection of conservative signatories (like anti-tax crusader Grover Norquist and family values activist Tony Perkins) who urged focus on the “huge costs in dollars and lost human potential” as a result of over-incarceration. Nolan’s influence in forming the coalition had been instrumental. The result, as Dagan and Seles put it, was “a new conventional wisdom” on criminal justice: “The notion that the United States unnecessarily incarcerates far too many people is becoming standard conservative fare, rather than a pathbreaking proposition.” The political consequences could be seen in red states like Georgia, where Republican governor Nathan Deal, at the behest of conservative reform lobbyists affiliated with the Right On Crime movement and evangelical pastors in the state who had been organized by Prison Fellowship, pushed legislation that allowed for lower sentencing options for key nonviolent offenses and increased funding for drug treatment programs. Other conservative states followed suit with similar programs.<sup>126</sup>

The story of John DiIulio, Jr., the policy wonk who had previously provided the ideological foundation for punitive crime policy in the mid-1990s with his “super-predator” warnings, was emblematic of this broader political shift. In the early 1990s DiIulio met Colson at a dinner for conservative leaders and began to debate prison policy. As DiIulio put it, it was a battle between “me as the young get-tough hawk and him as the

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<sup>125</sup> Dagan and Teles, *Prison Break*, 105; Newt Gingrich and Pat Nolan, “Prison Reform: A Smart Way for States to Save Money and Lives,” *The Washington Post*, January 7, 2011, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/01/06/AR2011010604386.html>.

<sup>126</sup> Dagan and Teles, *Prison Break*, 106-136.

old pro-reform dove.” DiIulio undercut Colson by pointing out how the reformer’s use of statistics to bolster his position was flawed (DiIulio himself had authored some the reports Colson regularly cited). But instead of taking the move personally or dusting his feet of his ideological nemesis, over the next few years Colson continued to gently push DiIulio. By the end of the decade, with a “renewed Catholic heart,” DiIulio had “joined Colson’s pro-reform ‘restorative justice’ chorus” and began advocating for rapid decarceration, increased funding for treatment programs, and the end of mandatory-minimum drug laws. Colson, according to DiIulio, “softened and spiritualized my views on crime.”<sup>127</sup> This was classic Colson: careful outreach to a key influencer, pushing him to a change of heart that could in turn lead to a change in prisons.

## **Conclusion**

Colson died in 2012, but his reform legacy persisted. The 2016 election was emblematic of the simultaneous hope and peril of the work of Colson on criminal justice and prison reform issues. In 2016 voters passed several important criminal justice reform referenda in states across the country. Many were in the spirit of recent executive actions by President Barack Obama, who rolled back some mandatory minimum requirements on the federal level and reinstated some prisoner education programs (that had previously

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<sup>127</sup> John J. DiIulio, Jr., *Godly Republic: A Centrist Blueprint for America’s Faith-Based Future* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); John J. DiIulio, Jr., “Chuck Colson and Second Chances,” *The Wall Street Journal*, April 24, 2012.

been cut under the Clinton administration).<sup>128</sup> But many of these referenda were passed in red states, with Republican voters leading the push. They were the product of concentrated “Right on Crime” lobbying from figures like Pat Nolan (who had since left Justice Fellowship to become the director of the American Conservative Union Foundation's Center for Criminal Justice Reform) and Prison Fellowship (which had re-integrated Justice Fellowship back under its organizational umbrella as an advocacy division). At the same time, however, these voters also pushed Donald Trump, the self-proclaimed “law and order candidate” into the White House.<sup>129</sup> Trump installed the likeminded Jeff Sessions, one of the country’s most vocal proponents of tougher anti-drug prosecution measures, as his attorney general. Even within Trump’s own administration, however, a tension could be seen. Likely because of the influence of conservative criminal justice reform advocates, in his 2018 State of the Union address Trump urged prison reform and “second chances” for inmates.<sup>130</sup>

In 2018, the cause of prison and criminal justice reform remains in doubt, for many of the same reasons that efforts in the mid-1980s were stymied. Progressive activists have targeted “the new Jim Crow” with vigor, pushing liberal political consensus away from Clintonian law and order. But if mass incarceration is to be

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<sup>128</sup> Nick Anderson, “Obama Proposes Expansion of Pell Grants to Spur College Completion,” *Washington Post*, January 19, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/grade-point/wp/2016/01/19/obama-proposes-expansion-of-pell-grants-to-spur-college-completion/>; Kevin Liptak, “Obama Cuts Sentences of Hundreds of Drug Offenders,” *CNN*, January 17, 2017, <https://www.cnn.com/2017/01/17/politics/obama-cuts-sentences-of-hundreds-of-drug-offenders/index.html>.

<sup>129</sup> Louis Nelson, “Trump: ‘I Am the Law and Order Candidate,’” *Politico*, July 7, 2016, <https://www.politico.com/story/2016/07/trump-law-order-candidate-225372>.

<sup>130</sup> Donald J. Trump, “State of the Union Address,” January 30, 2018, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/president-donald-j-trumps-state-union-address/>. For a broader discussion of this seemingly paradoxical development, see the preface of Pfaff, *Locked In*.

combated in the current divisive political and cultural climate, it will be because figures like Chuck Colson made the issue viable for a broad spectrum of middle America. More than this, Colson was the most prominent voice in making sure Americans understood that prisons and criminal justice were religious issues, one that people of faith needed to take seriously. Michelle Alexander, lawyer, author of *The New Jim Crow* (what Cornel West called the “secular Bible for a new social movement”), and the leading public authority on mass incarceration, recently joined the faculty of Union Theological Seminary because she came to see the religious valences of the issue. “I would like to imagine that a wide range of people of faith and conscience who sing songs from different keys may be able to join in a common chorus that shakes the foundations of our unjust political, legal and economics systems, and ushers in a new America.”<sup>131</sup> If this wide-ranging social movement that can change the hearts and minds of Americans is someday fully realized, it will be following in the footsteps of Colson, a compassionate conservative who also knew something about the power of conversion.

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<sup>131</sup> “Michelle Alexander Joins Union Theological Seminary,” September 12, 2016, <https://utsnyc.edu/michelle-alexander-joins-union-theological-seminary/>.

## Conclusion

On February 21, 2018, Billy Graham died at his home in Montreat, North Carolina at the age of 99. Graham's son Franklin had procured two caskets a few years earlier, one for his father and one for his mother Ruth (who died in 2007). The caskets were simple, made of inexpensive wood and lined only with a mattress pad. They cost \$215 apiece. Though economical, viewers of Graham's casket would have noticed the caskets had been handcrafted with care. If they looked closely, they would have seen three names burned into the side of the coffin: Richard Liggett, Paul Krolowitz, and Clifford Bowman. These were three men who had built the caskets while incarcerated at Louisiana State Penitentiary, popularly known as Angola. Several other inmates assisted with the project as well, all a part of a carpentry program that Angola warden Burl Cain had helped initiate in order to provide caskets for inmates at the prison.

Graham's burial in this casket was significant for two reasons. First, it was physical evidence of the long-established linkage of Graham's public identity with particular conceptions of crime, punishment, and redemption. Though Graham had not regularly preached in prisons, it seemed perfectly natural to his son (and the numerous journalists reporting his burial) to have him buried in a casket built by the hands of prisoners. It was a symbol of the evangelical piety that he represented, a faith that stressed God's love and forgiveness of sin. The casket was a symbol of Graham's message of the gospel's capacity to transform individual lives through the power of conversion, even those in the depths of prisons. The Angola carpenters themselves

realized this. Graham “showed us the love of God,” one of the men said. “Nobody is beyond redemption. I’ve been redeemed.”<sup>1</sup>

Second, the caskets indicated the moral complications of this same linkage. Though the inmates counted it “a great honor and a privilege” to build Graham’s casket, they were nonetheless caught up in a prison system filled with problems. Louisiana’s correctional system budget reportedly dedicated only 1% of its funds to comparable rehabilitation programs for inmates.<sup>2</sup> The inmates’ work was a form of free or low-cost convict labor that Louisiana and other states regularly utilized, what critics often named as exploitative and a form of modern-day slavery (as of 2017, the pay scale for inmates in Louisiana ranged from \$0.04 to \$1.00 per hour).<sup>3</sup> Cain himself was an overseer in this system even as he was an evangelical hero. He was the facilitator of the spread of the gospel even as he presided over the execution process, including the lethal injection of his brethren. Even when read in the most positive light possible, the story of evangelicals’ fascination with places like Angola threatened to obscure these troubling realities. For the Graham family, the coffins were a testimony to God’s power of forgiveness and love. This power, however, was easily spiritualized and streamlined.

The tension between these two aspects of Graham’s burial in an Angola casket was one that evangelicals had wrestled with over the past half-century, as they made

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<sup>1</sup> Anna Douglas, “The Story behind Billy Graham’s Casket and the Prison Inmates Who Made It,” *The Charlotte Observer*, March 1, 2018, <http://www.charlotteobserver.com/news/special-reports/billy-graham-life/article202833794.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Ridgeway, “God’s Own Warden.”

<sup>3</sup> “Prison Wages: Appendix,” accessed March 17, 2018, [https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/wage\\_policies.html](https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/wage_policies.html); Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 157.



concern about crime, punishment, and prisons a key marker of their public identity. It remains to be seen if Graham's burial in this casket represents the entombment of the evangelical cause he represented, both with prisons and in American public life more broadly.

Just over a decade after Burl Cain's chapel message at Wheaton College in 2005, another prominent speaker arrived on campus to deliver a talk. Bryan Stevenson, the founder of the Equal Justice Initiative, had come to speak about the problems in American criminal justice that he had seen firsthand as an advocate for incarcerated children and death row inmates (some of whom had been incarcerated at Cain's Angola prison). Stevenson was no stranger to evangelicalism. He had attended college at Eastern University, a school best known for various socially engaged, progressive evangelical professors and alumni (like Tony Campolo, Ron Sider, and Shane Claiborne). He had written a bestselling memoir laced with Christian themes, entitled *Just Mercy*, and become a sought-after speaker at prominent evangelical churches and gatherings, including Willow Creek, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, and the Q Conference.<sup>4</sup> This was all in addition to his burgeoning secular public profile as a MacArthur "Genius"

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<sup>4</sup> For example, see Redeemer Center for Faith & Work, "Grace, Justice, & Mercy: An Evening with Bryan Stevenson and Rev. Tim Keller," June 1, 2016, <https://vimeo.com/168964644>; "Q Contributors: Bryan Stevenson," Q, accessed March 14, 2018, <http://qideas.org/contributors/bryan-stevenson>; Bryan Stevenson, *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2014).

Fellow, TED talk speaker, guest on innumerable television and radio programs, and the subject of glowing profiles in publications like *The New Yorker*.<sup>5</sup>

At Wheaton, Stevenson shared some difficult details about the current realities of American criminal justice. He also had tough words for the packed room of evangelical students and professors: though the Christian church had a responsibility to care for a broken world, it had regularly failed in “increasing the justice quotient.” Unlike most evangelicals over the past half-century, Stevenson placed race and inequality at the forefront of his discussion of the ills of criminal justice. An African American, Stevenson had experienced racist police misconduct as a young man. His law career had shown him firsthand how the justice system disproportionately enveloped and harmed poor people of color. The answer for Stevenson was not found in prison sermons, incremental reforms, or through pushing the system toward neutral “colorblind” status. Instead, he wanted to see a full-on national confession of the injustice woven into the fabric of America through its racial history, its constitutional amendments (most obviously the thirteenth amendment, which allowed for forced labor of prisoners), and its contemporary expressions of retribution.<sup>6</sup> “We [as Christians] have an insight on what is on the other side of repentance, what is on the other side of acknowledgement of wrongdoing—which is repair,” Stevenson told *Christianity Today* in a cover story that profiled his work. “And if we give voice to that, maybe we can encourage our nation to do better at recovering

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<sup>5</sup> “Bryan Stevenson,” Equal Justice Initiative, accessed March 14, 2018, <https://eji.org/bryan-stevenson>; Jeffrey Toobin, “The Legacy of Lynching, on Death Row,” *The New Yorker*, August 15, 2016, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/08/22/bryan-stevenson-and-the-legacy-of-lynching>.

<sup>6</sup> “Prison Labor and the Thirteenth Amendment,” Equal Justice Initiative, accessed March 18, 2018, <https://eji.org/history-racial-injustice-prison-labor..>

and acknowledging and responding to this history of bigotry and discrimination that has burdened us for so long.”<sup>7</sup> To that effect, Stevenson advocated for a large monument to black lynching victims in Montgomery, Alabama. He undoubtedly shared many of the same sensibilities and critiques of American criminal justice as Colson had, as well as many of the same religious dispositions. But his cause was not a simple conservative recovery. It was instead an invitation to a new future.

In making an argument about the mainstream quality of the inhumanity in American criminal justice, Stevenson picked up on a potential challenge for evangelicals that this dissertation has also sought to highlight. America’s system of mass incarceration does great harm to poor and minority communities nationwide. Despite recent reforms, it still locks people away for long periods (regularly in inhumane conditions) and offers little in the way of opportunities for restoration. But like the very evangelical innovation of the penitentiary itself in early America, postwar evangelicals saw their lobbying for tougher forms of criminal justice as a needed intervention, fully in step with the spirit of the age. Evangelicals were able to make this argument successfully because so many other people saw crime as an issue of public concern and proposed similar solutions. Those who wish to challenge mass incarceration or save evangelicalism from enmeshment with punitive politics even in this current moment must reckon with this history, a story of believers at times being fully in and of the world around them.

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<sup>7</sup> D. L. Mayfield, “Facing Our Legacy of Lynching,” *Christianity Today*, August 18, 2017. For an account of Stevenson’s visit to Wheaton, see “Renowned Activist Bryan Stevenson Visits Campus,” *The Wheaton Record*, October 24, 2016, <http://www.wheatonrecord.com/news/renowned-activist-bryan-stevenson-visits-campus/>.

Stevenson also urged the Wheaton community to “get proximate” to problems of injustice, to enter difficult situations and embrace their discomfort. As they had with Burl Cain, students responded positively to Stevenson’s address, offering him a standing ovation. One student told the college’s newspaper that “I think we do need to care about our world, and I think God wants us to do so...I’m going to be mulling over a lot of the things he said and trying to discuss it with friends and get more perspective.”<sup>8</sup> Proximity as a driver for caring about a broken world was an appealing notion, likely because it represented a continuation of aspects of evangelical fascination with matters of crime and punishment. “Get proximate” was the call that evangelicals like David Wilkerson, Consuella York, Ray Hoekstra, and Chuck Colson had heeded, as they moved into crime-troubled neighborhoods and prisons. Theirs was a religion built to travel, easily mobilized and adapted for innumerable circumstances. It was a gift for ministering to those who were suffering or lonely. And since emphasis on personal conversion via proximity could make things truly *personal*, it also could be an important starting point for new social consciousness. Jim Vaus advocated for Harlem’s delinquent youth not because of his politics, but because they were his neighbors. For Colson, getting proximate was the impetus of his reform work. He could not forget his imprisoned brothers who he had shared life with, or the faces of the desperate looking at him through the bars after his in-prison ministry events had concluded. This proximity was a parallel to that of Jesus

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<sup>8</sup> “Renowned Activist Bryan Stevenson Visits Campus.”

himself, who in his death was named as a criminal and executed between two convicted offenders.<sup>9</sup>

For many offenders and inmates, this evangelical work of proximity was good news. And it is ongoing today, as evangelicals continue to pursue fellowship with offenders, visit and write letters to those on the inside, head up programs to bring Christmas presents to the children of a prisoners, and welcome formerly incarcerated people into their churches and workplaces, all legacies of the 1970s prison ministry surge. This is work, as Billy Graham's casket carpenters put it, that shows the love of God and the promise of redemption. If evangelicals do manage to participate in the full dismantling of America's system of mass incarceration, it will likely be because they have continued to invest in and learn from experiences like these, experiences that can interrupt the seemingly natural order of punitive politics and gesture towards an alternative way of life built on grace, restoration, and second (and third, and fourth...) chances.

If this way of life is to be more than just a gesture, however, evangelicals must not restrict the radical political implications of proximity, prayer, and friendship with fellow believers on the inside. After all, the Bible says that God's incarnational ministry not only began with Jesus's declaration that the Spirit of the Lord was now upon him but also, as he told a gathered crowd, that the Spirit had sent him to "proclaim freedom to the

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<sup>9</sup> As theologian Karl Barth wrote, "If anyone identified himself with prisoners it was [Jesus Christ].... That is the Lord who has mercy on you: this prisoner who is your liberator, the liberator of us all." Karl Barth, *Deliverance to the Captives* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1961), 75-84. Cited in John Thompson, "Sermons in a Swiss Prison," in *Prison, Christian Reflection: A Series in Faith and Ethics* (The Center for Christian Ethics at Baylor University, 2012), 58.

prisoners” (Luke 4:18). As it did with Jesus, this work may push American evangelicals to be at odds with the spirits of the age, particularly if it means confronting head-on the ways race remains determinative in coding perceptions of criminality. For evangelicals already engaged in prison ministry work, this call should not be too burdensome. Even if they are not politically active, most prison ministers today know something is wrong in American criminal justice. They want to see prisoners treated humanely and restored to society, and they know that it is a problem that so many of the inmates with whom they work are disproportionately people of color. For other evangelicals, particularly those who feel the pull of law and order politics, proclaiming freedom to the captives will be a taller order. There will need to be, as Stevenson argued, widespread repentance of past punitive sins. This will be particularly hard for those evangelicals who want to believe in their movement’s internal integrity and a timeless gospel witness. But repentance like this might better be seen as a conversion. And conversions are what evangelicals do best.

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## **Biography**

Aaron Griffith was born September 11, 1985 in Birmingham, AL. In 2008 he graduated from Wheaton College in Wheaton, IL, with a Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy. In 2013 he graduated from Duke Divinity School with a Master of Divinity, *summa cum laude*. He will complete his Th.D. at Duke Divinity School in 2018. He is the recipient of the Lynn E. May Study Grant from the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, a Graduate Fellowship in Interfaith Engagement from Duke University Chapel, a dissertation fellowship from the Center for the Study of Philanthropy and Voluntarism at Duke University's Sanford School of Public Policy, a Religion in North Carolina Digital Collection Mini-Grant, a Louisville Institute Doctoral Fellowship, and a Duke Divinity School Office of Black Church Studies Travel Grant. He has published in *Fides et Historia*. In the fall of 2018 he will begin a postdoctoral fellowship at the John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics at Washington University in St. Louis.