

Living Green:  
The Neoliberal Climate of Protestant Environmentalism

Kevin Stewart Rose  
Charlottesville, VA

Bachelor of Arts, Wheaton College, 2009  
Master of Divinity, Duke University Divinity School, 2016

A Dissertation presented to the Graduate Faculty  
of the University of Virginia in Candidacy for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Religious Studies

University of Virginia  
May 2022

Committee Members:  
Matthew S. Hedstrom  
Kathleen Flake  
Grace Elizabeth Hale  
Willis J. Jenkins  
Bethany Moreton

“You’re just green enough”  
-Tim Kinsella

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgments _____	iv
Introduction _____	1
1. Crisis _____	24
2. Action _____	83
3. Lifestyle _____	146
4. Market _____	226
5. Family _____	274
Conclusion _____	320
Bibliography _____	334

## Acknowledgements

The first thing to acknowledge is my solidarity with the many graduate student workers in the field of Religious Studies and beyond who are asked to teach, research, and produce projects like this one while earning less than a living wage. I've been lucky in this regard. Fellowships have meant that I've made slightly more than \$15 dollars an hour most years. Even in my fortunate situation, I would not have made it through this experience without the support of graduate student organizers, including the people behind UVA's Religious Studies Graduate Student Association and the new Campus Workers United chapter.

There was a time when "grad school poverty" got justified by the promise of a stable job on the other end. Those days are over. So should the days of low-pay for graduate students. I can't imagine completing a dissertation like this one while earning less than \$15 an hour. I don't understand how people in that position get it done. I don't think they should have to anymore.

Now, on to my mentors. Lauren Winner, my advisor at Duke Divinity School, set me on a path toward this project in the first place. Lauren possesses a uniquely incisive understanding of Christian practice and she is uncompromising in the way she pushes her students to think critically about the tradition. By encouraging me to problematize my own environmental thinking, she fundamentally altered the course of my graduate training and scholarship and I'll always be grateful. Also at Duke, David Morgan and Molly Worthen provided thoughtful feedback on the earliest pieces of this project, which now make up most of chapter 5

At UVA, Matthew Hedstrom has been an incredibly generous mentor. I couldn't have asked for anything more in a doctoral advisor. Matt is an insightful and careful reader and I've always felt lucky to have an advisor willing to spend so much time with my work. He was a



champion and supporter of this project even during my lowest pandemic moments, expressing enthusiasm for my work even when months had gone by where I hadn't even picked it up.

Also at UVA, Grace Hale's incisive reading of my work has been an immense benefit, especially as I learned the trade of cultural history. Kathleen Flake, Willis Jenkins, Claudrena Harold, and Jalane Schmidt were all instrumental in helping me see how the project fits into larger scholarly conversations. Jack Hamilton offered comments on early versions of chapter 5 and Charles Matthewes and Paul Jones on early parts of chapter 4.

I am also indebted to the many graduate colleagues who read early versions of these chapters. Members of the Virginia Colloquium of American Religion, including Daniel Wise, Mae Speight, Isaac May, Jesse Robinson, Melanie Pace, Max Pigeon, Brittany Acors, Connor Kenaston, and Bradley Kime, read and commented on versions of chapters 2 and 5. Connor and Bradley deserve special mention for the many times they've commented on drafts. And Blair Wilner has been a vital conversation partner for years. I'm especially grateful for his engagement with my ham-fisted reading of Arendt and Barth in chapter 1.

Beyond my home institutions, my work has benefited from commentary and discussion at the North American Religions and the Religion and Economy units of the American Academy of Religion (AAR). Special thanks go to Daniel Vaca and Elayne Oliphant for spearheading the Religion and Economy unit, which got started just as I was designing this project, providing what feels like an ideal academic home for my research. At AAR, Marla Frederick provided helpful feedback on portions of chapter 4, while Pamela Klassen and Jennifer Graber generously offered commentary on portions of chapter 3. I received feedback on other portions of chapter 3 at the American Society of Church History. Religion and American Culture published an earlier version of chapter 5. Their editors, especially Philip Goff, were incredibly helpful in sharpening

my thinking as I stumbled through my first foray in academic publishing. As a member of these communities, Hillary Kaell deserves special mention as well. She has been a supportive conversation partner and much of my thinking on technologies of global intimacy in chapter 4 stem from our discussions. Her willingness to listen to and cheer on some random grad student is emblematic of the overall generosity of the friendly little subfield of U.S. religious history.

A Jefferson Scholars Foundation funded Forum for Interdisciplinary Dialogue on U.S. Religion and Histories of Capitalism brought this research into conversation with an outstanding group of graduate students and early career scholars. I'm especially grateful for comments and contributions from Eden Cosenstein, Lucia Hulsether, Kirsten Beales, Timothy Rainey, and Allison Kelley at that event. I'd also like to thank Kati Curts and David Walker for offering commentary on my and the other young scholars' research. Special thanks go to Bethany Moreton for her thoughtful reading of the very early pieces of chapter 3 I presented there. Portions of chapter 5 also benefited from discussion at the "Considering the Counterculture" conference at Princeton University in 2019; other portions of chapters 4 and 5 were strengthened by helpful feedback at the "MCC at 100" conference at the University of Winnipeg in 2021.

My research has been supported financially by the Jefferson Scholars Foundation, Institute for Humanities and Global Culture, and Environmental Resilience Institute (ERI) at UVa, as well as the Charlotte W. Newcombe Dissertation Fellowship from the Institute of Citizens and Scholars. An ERI grant funded research collaboration with Tahi Wiggins, who contributed greatly to the periodical research behind chapter 1. Travel grants from the Mennonite Central Committee, the Presbyterian Historical Society, and the Billy Graham Center supported visits to each. Thanks are due to the archives staff at each of these, as well as those at the United Methodist archives at Drew University and the staff at MennoMedia in Harrisonburg, VA.

I'm also lucky to have had gainful employment during the final year of writing through a teaching position with the college transition program at UVa. I owe a particular debt of gratitude to Karlin Luedke and Jennifer LaFleur. Karlin was incredibly supportive and understanding as I struggled to balance writing with a full-time teaching load, and Jennifer offered to pick up my slack at several crucial moments when a writing deadline interfered with teaching duties.

The time I had allotted for dissertation writing took place during a global pandemic. I found it nearly impossible to make progress on this dissertation at home or on campus, so most of it took place over long weekends in tiny cabins in the Blue Ridge Mountains. Joanna, my 12-year-old basset hound, kept me company on every writing trip except for the last one. She passed away a week before I left town for the final time to finish the manuscript. Her absence helped me realize how crucial her presence had been as I struggled to write throughout the pandemic.

Finally, a word for my partner, Jackie. It would be impossible to explain how important she has been to this whole process. She has been so forgiving, patient, supportive, and understanding as this research has so often threatened to take over our lives throughout the last five years. I struggled with balance and that left a real imprint on both of us. I couldn't have done it without her support, and I'm continually amazed by how much grace and patience she's had for me as I struggled my way through graduate school. Her incredible work as a trauma therapist is far more important than mine and yet I've dropped the ball over and over while trying to get this thing done, only for her to pick up the pieces. Maybe I'll write something else someday, but for now, it's time for me to be around again.

This project is dedicated to Jackie and Joanna. Without their presence in my life, I never would have had it in me to see things through.

# **-INTRODUCTION-**

“In my view, the conservation or environmental movement lacks a sound, well-developed moral and philosophical basis,” wrote a Natural Resources Defense Council attorney in 1971. “From your interest in encouraging a Christian stewardship of nature,” he continued in his letter to Kay Vickers Shannon, executive director of the National Council Churches’ new Ecology Church Action Project, “you may become the most important vehicle for the development of the basic philosophy.”<sup>1</sup> The attorney, Richard Hall, was writing to Shannon to celebrate the pair’s successful advocacy against the Virginia Electric and Power Company’s proposal for an environmentally-harmful damming project on a tributary of the James River. In 1970, Kay Shannon’s Ecology Church Action Project joined several other environmental groups in petitioning the Federal Power Commission to put a stop to the project. In early 1971, the power company admitted that its geologists had found sinkholes and layers of sand that meant the

---

<sup>1</sup> Richard M. Hall to Kay Shannon, February 19, 1971. GCAH Administrative Records of the Division of General Welfare of the General Board of Church and Society. Ecology Church Action Project – Revival 1970-1971.

proposed reservoir couldn't be made watertight, potentially damaging the area's water table.<sup>2</sup>

Though they didn't admit it at the time, reports agreed that public pressure from environmental groups was key in convincing them to change course.<sup>3</sup> Speaking on behalf of the Natural Resources Defense Council, Richard Hall hoped that Kay Shannon and the Ecology Church Action Project's distinctly religious approach would lead to many more environmental victories. "I believe your contribution to this victory was substantial because of your unique position and approach," he wrote, concluding on an optimistic note. "We look forward to working with you in the future and would be interested in being advised of your activities."<sup>4</sup>

Kay Shannon's work with the Ecology Church Action Project took place in a moment of intense enthusiasm for environmental action. Shortly after twenty-two million Americans gathered to observe the first Earth Day in April 1970, the National Council of Churches hired her to direct their new environmental programming, hoping to channel the Earth Day excitement of their mainline churchgoing constituents into a national, church-based environmental action network. Shannon envisioned local church-based action groups all around the country who could undertake the same kind of advocacy and organizing she had done during the Marble Valley controversy. "Action—relate to Nader's Raiders," said one of Shannon's colleagues at a planning meeting, "get the church people on the picket line."<sup>5</sup> On the one-year anniversary of the first Earth Day, the editors of *Christianity Today* made a similar call for environmental mobilization to their evangelical readership. "The task is staggering. We are talking here of terracide, the stupid, senseless murder of the Earth, man's killing himself by killing the

---

<sup>2</sup> Federal Power Commission, *Federal Power Commission Reports: Opinions, Decisions, and Orders*, volume 57, March 31, 1977, (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1981), 46.

<sup>3</sup> "Marble Valley Springs a Leak," *National Parks and Conservation Magazine*, 45:5 (May, 1971) 39-40.

<sup>4</sup> Hall to Shannon, February 19, 1971.

<sup>5</sup> "Discussion at ECAP 'revival' meeting in New York on September 17, 1971," September 20, 1971. GCAH Ecology Church Action Project – Revival 1970-1971.

environment on which he depends for physical life,” wrote the magazine’s editors. “Were Christians of today to take on the challenge of persuading men to change, they would be performing the greatest feat in the Church’s history.”<sup>6</sup>

The Ecology Church Action Project failed to make this vision a reality. In an ironic twist, by the time the Natural Resources Defense Council attorney’s letter projecting that Kay Shannon’s work might “become the most important vehicle” for developing a moral basis for environmental action arrived at the National Council of Churches’ offices, the Ecology Church Action Project had already collapsed. One month earlier, the executive committee had unceremoniously fired Shannon and put its environmental programming on hold until further notice, citing a lack of funding.<sup>7</sup> A parallel group of evangelicals who attempted to mobilize their churches around environmental issues faced similar setbacks, finding that, especially when they embraced forms of collective action or advocacy against the multi-national corporations causing so much deforestation, pollution, and resource depletion, or against the free enterprise system helping insulate their efforts, their financial backers quickly withdrew.<sup>8</sup>

\* \* \*

The failure of these efforts raises a question: if, as some have said, the 1970s can be remembered as the environmental decade, a period of unprecedented energy and enthusiasm for environmental politics, why weren’t evangelical and mainline Protestant groups equally successful at producing a significant or memorable Christian environmental movement across

---

<sup>6</sup> “Terracide,” *Christianity Today*, April 23, 1971, 27.

<sup>7</sup> Kay Shannon to Executive Committee, Undated, PHS NCC Office of Administration Records box 9 folder 1.

<sup>8</sup> The Anabaptist writer Ronald Sider relied on support from the evangelical Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization (LCWE) to organize an international consultation on “simple lifestyle.” An LCWE member wrote to him in 1978 threatening to withdraw funding: “Strong hesitations about the Consultation were expressed by some LCWE members, as you know, because they feared that it would be slanted towards left-wing politics without an adequate expression of ‘Free Market economy’ views.” John Stott to Ronald Sider, May 22, 1978, BGCA Lausanne Papers, box 36 folder 4.

these years? Scholars of religion in the United States have answered this in a couple of ways. In one version of events, American Protestant organizations were concerned about the environment, but chose to focus exclusively on publishing position statements. In this account, they lacked a vision, or even a desire, to engage in political mobilization beyond simply stating their assent to the secular movement's agenda at their annual conventions.<sup>9</sup> More recently, another account alleges that Protestant groups were intrinsically motivated by their belief in the sacredness of nature. In this rendering, their failure to generate sustained environmental action after Earth Day in 1970 can thus be explained by the fact that environmentalism was at the time stepping away from the question of protecting God's wilderness to a broader political agenda less rooted in a discourse of the sacredness of Creation. As nature faded into the background, Protestants lost their sense of connection to the environmental movement.<sup>10</sup>

Neither version of events can explain the repeated efforts at environmental mobilization that took place among mainline and evangelical leaders across the 1970s. National mobilization efforts, aimed at creating nationwide networks of environmental action groups, took place again and again throughout the decade. Mainline and evangelical Protestants did a lot more than just release statements of environmental commitment. In fact, they exhibited tremendous energy in their relentless efforts at mobilization, even willing to reboot and expand their formerly failed projects in hopes of tapping into their constituents' ever-growing anxieties about the future of the

---

<sup>9</sup> In the only focused survey of post-Earth Day Protestant environmentalism, political scientist Robert Booth Fowler wrote that, "[r]esolutions in support of ecological concerns show that environmental consciousness has often been on denominational agendas, though at times other evidence has been scant." Fowler, *The Greening of Protestant Thought*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 15.

<sup>10</sup> In a broader survey of environmental thought in American Christianity starting in the early nineteenth century, Mark Stoll is critical of post-Earth Day efforts, writing that, "Many environmentalists have celebrated the broadening of environmental concerns [in the 1960s and 1970s], a trend which has brought greater inclusiveness to a once very Reformed-Protestant movement. This shift however also entailed a loss of the moral energy, urgency, and focus..." Stoll, *Inherit the Holy Mountain: Religion and the Rise of American Environmentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 265.

planet. Yes, their optimistic vision of a nationwide network of Christian environmentalists engaged in direct action and advocacy against polluting industries and their political allies never came to fruition. But their efforts led to unintended, often ironic, outcomes that should not be neglected by historians of Christian environmentalism.<sup>11</sup>

This dissertation focuses on a series of short-lived mainline and evangelical environmental projects in the 1970s that, in their vision of mobilizing national networks of church-based ecology action groups, made a lasting, if unexpected, contribution to modern environmentalism through the spread of green consumer choice as a default, and, importantly, depoliticized form of environmental practice. Their dreams of a robust and influential Christian environmentalism in the 1970s had been inspired by the collective activism and direct action of labor, civil rights, and anti-war organizing that had dominated the previous decade. In reality, the postwar political economy in which they developed their environmental projects would pressure, influence, and discipline their efforts at every turn. As their work unfolded, they would ultimately help develop an apolitical, individuated form of environmental religion, an outcome that none of the chief organizers had planned on. Instead, it resulted from a convergence of pressures emanating from the political economy in which they worked: the crisis thinking that resulted from capitalist upheavals, the fragmentary logic of neoliberal political reason, and the

---

<sup>11</sup> In telling the story of failed projects and unintended outcomes, I'm influenced by David Walker's work in *Railroading Religion*, where he tells a "story of intriguing failure" to chart, "the dream and failure of Corinne to destroy Mormonism and spread a distinctly secular America, showing how railroads and affiliated industries both mobilized and incorporated multiple religious interests and—indeed—mainlined Mormonism in time." In Walker's research, Corinne was a project meant to do one thing (secularize the West), but through a story of failure and ironic outcomes, it led to competition from Brigham Young which helped do the opposite of the railroad town's original goal, putting Mormonism on the main line and making it a lasting fixture of the American West.

In this dissertation, I'm focusing on projects meant to produce a form of Christian environmentalism grounded in collective activism, direct action, and policy advocacy, but that, through a story of competing interests and unexpected outcomes, helped produce an extremely individualized way of engaging with environmental problems, through green consumer choice. Walker, *Railroading Religion: Mormons, Tourists, and the Corporate Spirit of the West* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 2.



direct discipline of wealthy financial backers who had a vested interest in steering Christian environmentalism away from practices that might place checks on capital accumulation.

Despite the stop-start nature of mainline and evangelical environmental projects in the 1970s, their organizing contributed directly to the emergence of a lasting form of environmental religion. By telling their stories, I attend to the way quotidian practices of consumption emerged as a central, often governing, feature of Christian environmentalism. In their reaction to the rising planetary consciousness of the 1970s, the white, middle-class evangelicals and mainliners who I refer to together as “mainstream Protestants,” developed a lifestyle religion, centered on green consumer choice, as their default form of environmental action. Tracing this process, I argue that the political economy played a central role in shaping, directing, and disciplining Christian environmentalism into a market-friendly form. Lifestyle religion, as a default mode of Christian environmental practice, emerged over the same years that postwar capitalism was fully remade in a neoliberal image. The neoliberal project sought to insulate market actors from the potential democratic pressures of the decolonizing postwar world. Its advocates frequently justified their anti-democratic financial and market instruments by promising that a ubiquitous free market would ensure true individual economic liberty, lending real, transformative power to each person’s individual consumer choices. Lifestyle religion offered—and still offers today—its devotees a way to embody their environmental concern through the promise of transformative consumer choice, while insulating the market from alternative forms of environmental action that might challenge the growing inequities of wealth and power that marked the era.

### **Planetary Consciousness**

A common assumption about the nature of environmentalism—that it focuses on nature—has meant that historians of religion in the United States tend to overlook the energetic,

if stop-start, ecology work of figures like Kay Shannon, even if it was lauded at the time as possibly “the most important vehicle” for developing a sound moral and philosophical basis for the movement.<sup>12</sup> Historical projects that take devotion to nature to be the basic characteristic of environmentalism inevitably conclude that Christian environmentalism fell off the map sometime around the mid-twentieth century, just as environmentalism was remaking itself in terms of global problems, including attention to poverty, war, trade, industrialization, decolonization, and so on.<sup>13</sup>

For historian Mark Stoll, the environmental movement lost its energy when it broadened past its Presbyterian roots, thus letting go of its central connection to the sacredness of nature.<sup>14</sup> According to another scholar, Evan Berry, “by the middle of the twentieth century, the struggle for environmental protection had been thoroughly politicized, requiring an increasingly secular, empirical, and rational framework to achieve collectively desired legislative outcomes.”<sup>15</sup> Both accounts offer a kind of secularization thesis: in the 1960s and 1970s, as environmentalism achieved prominence in public life, it transitioned to a more secular, scientific discourse, rather than the religious ones that prevailed in previous decades, which had rooted the movement in

---

<sup>12</sup> The conflation of environmentalism with nature has meant that in the subfield of religion and ecology, many books take “nature religion” as their primary focus. Catherine L. Albanese, *Nature Religion in America: From the Algonkian Indians to the New Age* (Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press, 1990); Bron Taylor, *Dark Green Religion: Nature Spirituality and the Planetary Future* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2010); Kerry Mitchell, *Spirituality and the State: Managing Nature and Experience in America’s National Parks* (New York: New York University Press, 2016); Mark Stoll, *Protestantism, Capitalism, and Nature in America* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1997); John Gatta, *Making Nature Sacred: Literature, Religion, and the Environment in America from the Puritans to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>13</sup> Writing about the environmental movement in the 1960s, historian Thomas Robertson writes, “the environmental movement of the 1960s grew not just from concern for ‘nature’ but also from concern about international affairs, especially poverty and war. In the wake of World War II, concern about overpopulation-induced poverty and war combined with new ecological models to bring about path-breaking ‘environmental’ ways of thinking.” Robertson, *The Malthusian Moment: Global Population Growth and the Birth of American Environmentalism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2012), 8.

<sup>14</sup> Stoll, *Inherit the Holy Mountain*, 265.

<sup>15</sup> Evan Berry, *Devoted to Nature: The Religious Roots of American Environmentalism* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2015), 2.

devotion to nature. This narrative implies that religion was present and active at one time, but that it faded into the background, looking more like “roots” (important, but less active than before) once the modern environmental movement achieved national prominence in the 1960s and 1970s. Conservation was religious, whereas modern environmentalism was not. It only had religious roots from the past. “This fundamental ingredient has receded from public view,” writes Berry, but it “continues to influence the way that nature and the natural are wielded as salient values in contemporary political contestations.”<sup>16</sup>

The declension narrative that views the 1960s and 1970s as a moment of secularization and thus decline for religious environmentalism has meant that scholarship on religion and ecology has tended to dwell on either side of the 1970s. Despite the fact that many remember it as the environmental decade, comparatively little attention has been paid to what evangelical and mainliners were doing throughout those years.<sup>17</sup> Projects that focus on Protestant ecology before and after the 1970s make worthy contributions to the field’s knowledge of religious environmentalism, but they leave a curious gap around the decade of American society’s most fervent environmental organizing.

While these accounts provide insight into the longer history of American environmentalism, the claim that the 1970s version, with its focus on politics, economics, nation-states, and former colonies was somehow less religious (or in Mark Stoll’s version, less Presbyterian), comes at the expense of attention to the intense religious production around the idea of “environmental

---

<sup>16</sup> Berry, *Devoted to Nature*, 2.

<sup>17</sup> Recent studies that focus on Christianity and the environment in the nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth century include: Stoll, *Inherit the Holy Mountain*; Berry, *Devoted to Nature*; Brett Grainger, *Church in the Wild: Evangelicals in Antebellum America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019). Studies that focus instead on Christianity and the environment in the present include: Amanda J. Baugh, *God and the Green Divide: Religious Environmentalism in Black and White* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2017); Joseph D. Witt, *Religion and Resistance in Appalachia: Faith and the Fight Against Mountaintop Removal Coal Mining* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2016).

lifestyle” throughout that decade. Mainline and evangelical environmental mobilization throughout the 1970s produced what I call lifestyle religion, a kind of individuated environmentalism that embraces personal practices of consumer piety in the free market as the proper method for saving the planet. The story of lifestyle religion sheds light on one of the biggest challenges for the fight against climate change: the depoliticizing tendency to focus on individual consumption that draws attention away from the nation-states and major corporations producing the lion’s share of emissions. Lifestyle religion, as a response to growing planetary consciousness around 1970, is another “religious root” of American environmentalism, one that cannot be explained by looking solely at theological beliefs about nature. Rather, it requires attention to more quotidian attempts to manage one’s relationship to the postwar political economy through the shared moral language and practices of responsibility developed within religious environmental networks.

One reason historians have tended to overlook evangelical and mainline efforts in the 1970s is the stop-start quality of projects like the Ecology Church Action Program, which often only lasted for a year or two. Another reason, however, is the importance of the shift from nature-based environmentalism to a broader set of political, economic, and social concerns that I group under the phrase “planetary consciousness.” By focusing on talk about the planet, rather than nature, I follow my subjects, whose environmental writings and practices made the same shift in the 1960s and 1970s. This also leads to a broader set of concerns that, though evangelical and mainline Protestants understood them as environmental at the time, have been left out of histories of Christian environmentalism because they are not strictly based on questions of conserving nature. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, pollution and nuclear technology were often viewed as twin planetary threats. These, combined with growing fears of an overpopulation

crisis, were the immediate inspiration for the first Earth Day in 1970. Less familiar is the world food crisis, which haunted the planetary consciousness of many North Americans from 1974 to 1976. Brought on by historic droughts and famines caused in part by rapid deforestation and industrialization in the decolonizing world, combined with a sudden spike in food prices around the world related to the oil embargo of 1973, for most observers at the time, the hunger problem was thoroughly environmental. Reflecting on world hunger in 1974, one Presbyterian denominational worker put it succinctly: “the hunger issue is the evidence of our failure to deal responsibly with creation and with the eco-system.”<sup>18</sup> For the rest of the decade and beyond, their response to the world food crisis would become a blueprint for environmental practices they developed.

Throughout the 1970s, mainstream Protestants reacted to a sense that their planet was in crisis, rather than a fear that wilderness areas were shrinking. This planetary vision of the environment, especially in its close relationship with the language of crisis, played a central role in shaping the environmental religion they developed. Mainstream Protestants in the U.S. experienced a haunting sense of worldwide interconnectedness, which combined with their own material experience of the same inflationary pressures exacerbating food shortages on the other side of the planet, and the knowledge of population growth and the rising influence of oil-producing nations outside of the West. In this moment of visible political and economic upheaval, they learned to think about environmental problems through a vision of the planet encircled by the free market, placing their lives in intimate relation with the rest of life on Earth. In the end, mainstream Protestants developed a market-friendly environmentalism that sought to

---

<sup>18</sup> Ed Huenemann, “Theological Perspective on the Hunger Issue.” PHS NCC Task Force on World Hunger Records, box 2, folder “Theological/Ethical Studies,” 3.

leverage their haunting sense of connection to the rest of the planet through the laws of supply and demand.

### **Mainstream Protestants**

Evangelical and mainline Protestant environmentalism followed a remarkably similar path throughout the 1970s. After Earth Day, both groups called for nationwide mobilization to meet the mounting environmental crisis. In response to these calls, the Ecology Church Action Project and Evangelicals for Social Action promulgated a vision of church-based action groups nationwide, engaging in collective activism and direct action modeled on the political movements of the 1960s. The two initiatives lost momentum by the middle of the decade, and in both cases, their organizers rebooted their efforts much more successfully by focusing more deliberately on the power of “lifestyle change” to alleviate planetary problems. At the end of the decade, their earlier visions of collective environmental action had been mostly replaced by this focus on green consumer choice. Thanks to the promised power of the free market, consumer lifestyle was said to bring about real change on the other side of the planet. And at sites of consumption, these lifestyle choices were said to transform the consumer as well, providing “liberation” from “bondage,” while allowing nuclear families to “live eucharistically”—perhaps even transforming the “ungainly, cumbersome, plodding” bodies of affluent North Americans into the “lithe grace” of people living on the other side of the planet.<sup>19</sup>

In light of these parallel movements toward “lifestyle religion” among evangelical and mainline environmental efforts, throughout this dissertation I use the phrase “mainstream Protestants” as a shorthand that includes white, middle-class Protestants of both evangelical and

---

<sup>19</sup> William Creevey, “Whose Hunger? PHS NCC Task Force on World Hunger Records, box 2, folder “Questionnaire”; Elaine Amerson, “Patchwork: A Joyful Mosaic,” BGEA Lausanne Records box 36 folder 42; Doris Janzen Longacre, *More-with-Less* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1976), 15.

mainline variety. I call these groups “mainstream” with a slight hint of irony, mimicking their own self-naming practices. One thing that united the two groups’ self-identification as “evangelical” and “mainline” in the postwar period was their shared desire to be viewed as legitimate, respectable, and influential religious movements, dwelling comfortably at the center of American public life. In the 1940s and 1950s, evangelist Billy Graham, *Christianity Today* editor-in-chief Carl Henry, and others embraced the name “evangelical” to try and shed the negative connotation that had come to surround fundamentalism. “It is up to us to make sure that the Christian church will return to a new leadership,” declared Harold Ockenga at the founding of the National Association of Evangelicals in 1942, “producing new statements for our government circles, influencing education and rebuilding the foundation of society.”<sup>20</sup> They wanted the ear of presidents. They wanted to appear in stylish suits on television rather than showing up as country bumpkins in political cartoons like their fundamentalist predecessors in the 1920s. In short, they wanted to be viewed as an influential part of mainstream public life.

Starting in the 1960s, *The Christian Century* embraced and popularized the word “mainline” for similar reasons. As a major mouthpiece of the Protestant denominations who made up the National Council of Churches, the magazine began using the term “mainline” to describe its readership in the 1960s as an attempt at shoring up their identification with mainstream America during a period of religious disaffiliation among young people in the counterculture, paired with the rising influence of competing Protestant groups, including Graham’s evangelicals. Historian Elisha Coffman writes, “The advent of the ‘mainline’ label, for all the term’s normative power, signified the tradition’s demotion from putative establishment to

---

<sup>20</sup> Ockenga, quoted in Daniel K. Williams, *God’s Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 17. Williams adds, “Abandoning the traditional term ‘fundamentalist’ in favor of the more optimistic-sounding ‘evangelical,’ the ministers who created the NAE looked forward to a time of ecumenical cooperation across regional and denominational boundaries.”

one brand in the marketplace.”<sup>21</sup> In short, by calling these two networks “mainstream,” I try to stay true to their own way of naming themselves, without necessarily endorsing the normative implications of any of the three terms.

Beyond this reflection of the two groups’ own naming practices, grouping mainline and evangelical Protestants, whom historians of Christianity have typically treated as polar opposites, yields important insights about the relationship between religion and the economy. The observation that their environmental mobilization followed nearly identical paths—responding to anxieties about the planet in crisis by first exploring modes of collective environmental action before turning to an individuated, market-friendly lifestyle religion—points to the way both networks attempted to manage their relationship to the postwar political economy from similar material positions. To be sure, evangelical and mainline Protestants often viewed one another as rivals. But just like any good rivalry, this grew from the fact that they were playing the same sport, in the same league, even in the same conference. As much as their rivalry reveals theological distance, it also belies their socioeconomic proximity by the 1970s thanks to massive postwar investment in the white middle-class.

Scholarship on American Protestants in the twentieth century has long focused on the theological and otherwise intellectual differences that set the two groups apart, while eschewing class analysis within the history of religion. Critiquing the few studies of religion and commerce that had used class analysis to understand religious history during the Market Revolution of the 1810s, church historian Mark Noll wrote that “market reasoning never exerted the role in theology that was exercised by republican political commitments or the principles of commonsense moral philosophy, the belief systems that did establish organic bonds with

---

<sup>21</sup> Elesha J. Coffman, *The Christian Century and the Rise of the Protestant Mainline* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 217.



religious life.”<sup>22</sup> And even as the rise of cultural history helped lead to more studies of American Protestants that looked beyond theology to take into account a wider web of social, political, and cultural inputs than church historians like Noll had done, differences in belief systems have still been given high priority, especially in the basic choice to restrict historical projects to the study of either mainliners or evangelicals.<sup>23</sup> In recent years, the study of American Christianity has benefited from growing interest in the relationship between religion and capitalism, but even here, most studies restrict themselves to studying either liberal or conservative Protestants, rather than attending to similarities that might arise from their shared material conditions.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> Noll is here specifically trying to refute the work of Charles Sellers and Paul Johnson. Sellers famously ascribed the many changes underway in American culture, religion, and thought to the Market Revolution and subsequent rise of capitalism that occurred after 1815. Johnson looked at Rochester, New York during the same period, arguing that Charles Finney’s revivals in the canal town helped discipline farmers and artisans for the rhythm of modern work. Mark A. Noll, *America’s God: Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 224; Johnson, *A Shopkeeper’s Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837* (New York: Hill and Wang; [1978] 2004); Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

<sup>23</sup> Studies restricted to mainline or, as they are often called, ecumenical Protestants in the twentieth century include: Coffman, *The Christian Century*; Jill K. Gill, *Embattled Ecumenism: The National Council of Churches, the Vietnam War, and the Trials of the Protestant Left* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2011); David A. Hollinger, *After Cloven Tongues of Fire: Protestant Liberalism in Modern American History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013); Michael G. Thompson, *For God and Globe: Christian Internationalism in the United States between the Great War and the Cold War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015); Heather A. Warren, *Theologians of a New World Order: Reinhold Niebuhr and the Christian Realists, 1920-1948* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

Studies restricted to evangelicals in the twentieth century include: George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, [1980] 2006); Joel A. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain Folk Religion, Grassroots, Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Religion* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2011); R. Marie Griffith, *God’s Daughters: Evangelical Women and the Power of Submission* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997); Matthew Avery Sutton, *American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2014); David R. Swartz, *Moral Minority: The Evangelical Left in an Age of Conservatism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012); Williams, *God’s Own Party*; Molly Worthen, *Apostles of Reason: The Crisis of Authority in American Evangelicalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>24</sup> The tendency in this literature is to treat evangelicals and capitalists as easy allies. Less has been said about the mainline’s relationship with big business. For one recent exception that looked at how the oil business related to both mainline and evangelical Protestants, see: Darren Dochuk, *Anointed with Oil: How Christianity and Crude Made Modern America* (New York: Basic Books, 2019). On evangelicals and capitalism, see: Daniel Vaca, *Evangelicals Incorporated: Books and the Business of Religion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019); Timothy E.W. Gloege, *Guaranteed Pure: The Moody Bible Institute, Business, and*

Inspired by recent scholarship on the way religion has been shaped by the state, this dissertation examines the way that post-Earth Day Protestant environmentalism was shaped and even disciplined by state governance. In the 1970s, environmentalism was driven by anxious reactions to decolonization and deindustrialization. The emphasis on green lifestyle choices that emerged by the end of the decade was fully embedded in the ascendant imagery of free markets and rational actors that helped justify neoliberal governance of the international political economy based on insulating market actors from democratic pressures.<sup>25</sup> The rise of lifestyle religion among evangelicals and mainliners, in other words, cannot be explained without attending to their shared material positions as white, middle-class Americans living through the height of postwar economic growth followed by the economic stagnation of the 1970s. The postwar decades saw historic levels of public investment in the constitution of a white, suburban middle-class through the G.I. Bill, Federal Housing Administration, Social Security, public higher education, and massive infrastructure spending that supported the growth of suburbs.<sup>26</sup> Then, the early 1970s saw the first major recession since the war, sparking a surge in anxiety about the state of the planet. Given the way evangelical and mainline environmental mobilization followed such parallel pathways across the decade, their shared material status as raced and classed social groups living through the massive public construction and consolidation of the

---

*the Making of Modern Evangelicalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015); Darren E. Grem, *The Blessings of Business: How Corporations Shaped Conservative Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Kevin M. Kruse, *One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America* (New York: Basic Books, 2015); Bethany Moreton, *To Serve God and Wal-Mart: The Making of Christian Free Enterprise* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

<sup>25</sup> Quinn Slobodian, *Globalists: The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 4-5.

<sup>26</sup> On the massive public investment, and consolidation, of the white middle-class after World War II, see: George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics*, 25th Anniversary Edition, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, [1992] 2018); Nell Irvin Painter, *The History of White People* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2010), 359-373; Lizabeth Cohen, *Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), especially 112-165 and 194-255.

white middle-class was a central condition of their attempts to manage surging anxieties about the stability of their suburban way of life on planet Earth in the 1970s. Accordingly, while other studies have examined the direct hand of the state in disciplining and shaping religion through things like court cases, legislation, FBI surveillance, and census forms, I attend to a more indirect technique of governance in the form of the political economy which provides a more quotidian, implicit set of material conditions that shape people's relationships with themselves, with others, and with the world.<sup>27</sup> And this approach, I argue, makes sense of the way evangelical and mainline Protestants followed such parallel paths, given their shared material positions as middle-class, white religious networks.

### **Lifestyle Religion**

The outcome of mainstream Protestant environmentalism in the 1970s was an emphasis on the power of responsible consumer choice as means for simultaneously liberating oneself from the bonds of consumer culture and helping manage the crises taking place on the other side of the planet. I call this lifestyle religion. Broadly speaking, I define this as a set of quotidian,

---

<sup>27</sup>While the study of religion and the state has conventionally focused on big, landmark moments in legal history, Judith Weisenfeld has offered an inventive analysis of the more quotidian ways religion and race are constructed and contested in relationship to the state through census records, draft cards, health inspectors. Weisenfeld, *New World A-Coming: Black Religion and Racial Identity during the Great Migration* (New York: NYU Press, 2016), especially 95-127.

Recent developments in the field have also advanced the study of religion and the state through attention to the role of intelligence agencies in both surveilling religious groups and involving them in statecraft. See: Lerone Martin, *The Gospel of J. Edgar Hoover: The FBI and the Making of White Evangelicalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, forthcoming); Michael Graziano, *Errand into the Wilderness of Mirrors: Religion and the History of the CIA* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021); Sylvester A. Johnson and Steven Weitzman, editors, *The FBI and Religion: Faith and National Security before and after 9/11* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2017); Matthew Avery Sutton, *Double Cross: The Missionaries Who Spied for the United States during the Second World War* (New York: Basic Books, 2019).

Studies of religion and the state focusing on court cases and legislation include: Winnifred Fallers Sullivan, *The Impossibility of Religious Freedom* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Tisa Wenger, *We Have a Religion: The 1920s Pueblo Indian Dance Controversy and American Religious Freedom* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Finbarr Curtis, *The Production of American Religious Freedom* (New York: NYU Press, 2016); Charles McCrary, *Sincerely Held: American Secularism and Its Believers* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2022).

personal practices that intensively manage one's consumer choices as a way of cultivating virtue while at same time, seizing agency in the globalizing market through the putatively predictable laws of supply and demand. If we take religion to mean something like those processes through which people negotiate relation, distinction, and value, and where they manage their relationship to power, then lifestyle religion helps devotees not just describe but in fact embody their sense of distinction, relation to others, and alignment or misalignment with existing forms of power. As Kathryn Lofton writes, "whatever else religion might be, it is a way of describing structures by which we are bound or connected to one another. Religion is therefore also a way of describing structures by which we distinguish ourselves from others, often by uniting around things that claim universal interest."<sup>28</sup> With lifestyle religion, the world of consumer goods is on offer as a site of acceptance and denial as the Christian navigates commodities whose flows through the global market provide dreams of a virtuous consumer. Through this consumer virtue, practitioners embody and enact their religious commitments while envisioning a trail of grateful workers and ecosystems, whose well-being is transformed by a somehow suddenly available bag of grain or bucket of fertilizer thanks to the invisible hand.

I use "lifestyle religion" as a play on words, combining "lifestyle," an enormously popular neologism that arose in 1970s marketing and print media to describe the power of individual consumption, with a once popular expression in American religious history, "lived religion."<sup>29</sup> In recent years, scholars of American religion have shifted away from "lived religion," which in the late 1990s was popularized in reference to the study of quotidian religious experience, instead favoring investigation into the production of the category of religion within

---

<sup>28</sup> Kathryn Lofton, *Consuming Religion* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2017), 5

<sup>29</sup> David D. Hall, editor, *Lived Religion: Toward a History of Practice* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997); Robert A. Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950*, 3rd edition, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, [1985] 2010).

the context of the secular nation-state.<sup>30</sup> Refuting simple secularization theses that perceive a steady subtraction of religion from the modern world, these scholars insist that secularism provides the new frame in which religion occurs, rather than existing as its mere opposite.<sup>31</sup> And within this frame, religion is governed and disciplined into subjectivities and formations befitting of the modern nation-state through an emphasis on individuation and interiority that participates in, rather than interferes with, liberal governance in the form of both democratic politics and capitalist economics.<sup>32</sup>

Lived religion had helpfully rejected the grand theological narratives of an older style of church history, with its emphasis on the sayings and doings of powerful white men. But more recent studies of secularism, and the way both it and religion are co-constituted in relation to the modern nation-state, move beyond this approach. One familiar line of critique has been that lived religion over-emphasizes individual agency while giving sparse attention to genealogies,

---

<sup>30</sup> For examples of this approach, see Charles McCrary and Jeffrey Wheatley's review essay, "The Protestant Secular in the Study of American Religion," in which they commend an approach that examines "secularism's use as a strategy of governance with formal, yet flexible, qualities identifiable across case studies." McCrary and Wheatley, "The Protestant Secular in the Study of American Religion: Reappraisal and Suggestions," *Religion* 47:2, 2017, 270.

McCrary and Wheatley note that some of the most influential works in secularism studies have focused primarily on uncovering the "Protestant roots" of secularism, which has led to a focus on discourse over against material conditions and governance, especially as it occurs in literature and culture.

<sup>31</sup> The classic texts behind this view of secularism are: Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, and Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003); Saba Mahmood, *Religious Difference in a Secular Age: A Minority Report* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015); José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

For projects that apply some version of this view to religion in the United States specifically, see: Wenger, *We Have a Religion*; Tracy Fessenden, *Culture and Redemption: Religion, the Secular, and American Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007); Curtis, *The Production of American Religious Freedom*; Kathryn Lofton, *Oprah: The Gospel of an Icon* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011); John Lardas Modern, *Secularism in Antebellum America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

<sup>32</sup> This relates to Casanova's classic formulation: rather than be excluded from secular states, religion can in fact thrive in the modern public square as long as it complies with structural differentiation, its restriction into a separate sphere. Casanova describes "a process of functional differentiation and emancipation of the secular spheres—primarily the state, the economy, and science—from the religious sphere and the concomitant differentiation and specialization of religion within its own newly found religious sphere." Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*, 19.

discourses, and forms of governance that construct and constrain their subjects.<sup>33</sup> Instead, scholars of religion, secularism, and the state insist on greater attention to power, especially state power, in the production of religion and religious experience. This critique is well-founded, especially when directed at lived religion studies that narrate individual religious agency in a vacuum, with little attention to the broader assemblage of cultural, social, political, and economic forces at work in constituting individual or group experience.

With “lifestyle religion,” I am not attempting to salvage a sense that individual agency exists as some kind of superpower that can overcome the presence of state governance or neoliberal market discipline in the formation of twentieth-century American religion. On the contrary, I use the term to focus on neoliberal political reason’s own lionization of individual agency, promising people that, through the magic of the invisible hand, the individual can have real power in the world. If somewhat ironically, then, I use lifestyle religion to refer to the sense of individual agency that is central to neoliberalism’s vision of the free market, while still emphasizing the real, material limitations of individual economic choices to alter the state of the planet. Nevertheless, that vision (or illusion) of agency was certainly central to the mainstream Protestant environmentalism that was produced in the 1970s and that reverberates into the present.

Broadly speaking, then, this project theorizes religion and political economy in terms of the “religion of everyday life” that reifies or naturalizes capitalism. This follows Karl Marx’s

---

<sup>33</sup> Offering an alternative to lived religion, John Modern describes subjects whose “freedom is unquantifiable not because it is limitless or evolving but because it does not exist in essence. To have privileged the haunted strains of antebellum experience is to focus not necessarily on ‘lived religion’ but rather on the living conditions of religion in a secular age. How, I have asked, does a so-called religious life come together at the intersection of contingent forces that are all but invisible to the subject in question?” Modern, *Secularism in Antebellum America*, 290.

approach to understanding the relationship between religion and capitalism. Quoting from

*Capital* volume 3, philosopher of religion Jan Rehmann writes that Marx,

coins the concept of a ‘religion of everyday life’ characterized by a “bewitched, distorted and upside-down world haunted by Monsieur le Capital and Madame la Terre who are at the same time social characters and mere things.’ This everyday religion is deeply anchored in the socio-economic reality of capitalism; ‘the actual agents of production themselves feel completely at home in these estranged and irrational forms of capital-interest, land-rent, labor-wages, for these are precisely the configurations of appearance in which they move, and with which they are daily involved.’<sup>34</sup>

While Marx is best remembered for his pithy claim that “religion is the opiate of the masses,” when he looked closely at human affairs, he offered a much more nuanced understanding of religion: people use it to “feel at home” in relation to both capital and planet Earth. As a feature of the lived experience of neoliberalism, lifestyle religion helped mainstream Protestants make sense of their relation to the crises facing the planet by affirming the power they gained as free markets spread across the face of the Earth.

### **From Crisis to Lifestyle**

To tell the story of lifestyle religion as an attempt to manage environmental anxieties about the long crisis of capitalism, I begin by examining the term “crisis” itself. The dissertation’s first chapter, “Crisis,” focuses on the early period of modern environmentalism, between the landmark publication of Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* in 1962 and the first Earth Day in 1970, often viewed as the modern movement’s coming-out party. Focusing on mainstream Protestantism’s journals of record—*The Christian Century*, *Christianity Today*, and *Christianity and Crisis*—I trace the rise of crisis-talk after World War II. Crisis-talk’s logic was twofold: in order to manage crisis, mainstream Protestants were encouraged to look inward, before turning to practices of short-term forms of crisis management. In both directions, crisis-

---

<sup>34</sup> Jan Rehmann, “Religion,” in Jeff Diamanti, Andrew Pendakis, and Imre Szeman, editors, *The Bloomsbury Companion to Marx* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 391.

talk militated against recognition of the long crisis of capitalism, which produced a succession of upheavals in its search for new sites of capital accumulation. By the end of decade, the word “crisis” was commonly applied to planetary problems, helping enfold white, middle-class America’s anxieties about decolonial and racial upheavals into their environmental concern.

Chapter 2, “Action,” looks at the mainstream Protestant environmental projects that emerged in the first half of the 1970s. Both mainline and evangelical efforts initially attempted to mobilize their constituencies through a model of collective action inspired by the social movements of the 1960s. In the immediate wake of Earth Day in 1970, the mainline National Council of Churches formed an Ecology Church Action Project for just this purpose. After a failed attempt to translate a church-based, anti-racist program that had been pioneered in the Twin Cities, the project collapsed. Two years later, Evangelicals for Social Action gathered to craft a statement of evangelical social concern, likewise hoping to translate 1960s forms of collective social activism into church-based action on various social, political, and environmental issues. Within a year, the network was losing steam due to disagreements about the viability of this action model. In both cases, the prevalence of crisis-talk helped produce a widespread desire for personal, inward-facing responses to planetary concerns, rather than collective, outward-facing ones, paired with disinterest in (and, among financial backers, opposition to) structural change.

The central chapter, “Lifestyle,” views the second half of the decade as a turning point in mainstream Protestant environmentalism, where the ascendant language of lifestyle came to occupy a central place in both mainline and evangelical visions of appropriate religious practice in response to planetary crisis. In 1975, to respond to the environmental problem of the day, the “world food crisis,” the National Council of Churches rebooted the mobilization model it had



first explored through the Ecology Church Action Project in 1970. This time, its organizers chose to focus directly on the value of “lifestyle change,” encouraging local churches nationwide to form local groups and make covenants to change their lifestyle choices as a way of alleviating the world food crisis. Two years later, the evangelical Lausanne network for world evangelization invited the director of Evangelicals for Social Action to organize a series of “lifestyle consultations” for the same reason. Through the course of both NCC and Lausanne’s lifestyle mobilization, mainstream Protestant environmentalism became increasingly depoliticized, shying away from direct confrontation of state and corporate polluters, and instead embracing the promise of lifestyle religion, placing trust in the power of the invisible hand to alleviate global problems in response to their pious consumer choices.

The final two chapters examine spaces where lifestyle religion circulated, gaining solidity as a fixture of lived neoliberalism. Having negotiated the contours of lifestyle religion in the second half of the 1970s, mainstream Protestants relied on the infrastructures of consumer markets and family households to give it a degree of permanence. Chapter 4, “Market,” tracks the elaboration of market-based lifestyle thinking through the Mennonite Central Committee and Church World Service’s parallel fair trade projects, both of which arose in the immediate aftermath of World War II, but came to fruition in the 1970s with the rise of fair trade gift shops and catalogues that provided a robust material culture for lifestyle religion that was said to build intimate relations between mainstream Protestant consumers and the people suffering under the worst effects of planetary crisis. It also examines the market logics of Alternatives, Inc., a mainline project to provide a print network for lifestyle religion that likewise promised its readers a direct relationship with the alleviation of environmental problems through pious consumer choice.

Chapter 5, “Family,” examines the way lifestyle religion brought the neoliberal political economy into the intimate spaces of the nuclear family household, and ultimately, the bodies of its practitioners. The neoliberal project is, at its heart, an attempt to insulate market actors against democratic pressures. Part of this involves undermining the power of collectivities—the labor movement, the civil rights movement, and so on—who had successfully antagonized states and corporations between the 1930s and 1960s. Neoliberalism benefits from conceptions of human agency, social relations, and political involvement that center on individuals and families. Focusing on a popular environmental cookbook, *More-with-Less* and the catalogs produced by Alternatives, Inc., I close with an examination of the way lifestyle religion successfully channeled environmental concern into the heteronormative nuclear family, and ultimately, the individual bodies of consumers, while militating against the visions of collective action that had been pursued at the start of the decade.

After examining how lifestyle religion successfully channeled environmental concern into the heteronormative nuclear family, and ultimately, the individual bodies of consumers, the dissertation closes with a discussion of the way lifestyle religion has reverberated beyond mainstream Protestant environmentalism, shaping one especially popular approach to the fight against climate change.

# - 1 -

## **CRISIS**

Talking with the teenagers at his church in the mid-1970s, Ed Huenemann, a Presbyterian denominational worker, asked the high schoolers to predict the future: “The other night I met with a youth group in our local church—15 kids—and I asked them this question: (and I was shocked at the answer) How long do you think the world will last? (These were high school kids.) 13 of the 15 said it would end before the year 2000, which is within their lifetime.”

Reflecting on the conversation a few days later, Huenemann expressed dismay that a group of children in America’s middle-class suburbs would be haunted by this sense of the world in crisis. “Now when 13 out of 15 suburban kids feel that way, we’re having not just dreams but nightmares,” he later recalled. “And, unless the church can project more effectively than it has the dream of the Christian faith, to counter the nightmares of our next generation, I don’t think we can successfully address the issue.” For Huenemann, Christianity was meant to “project a political vision not only for itself but for human life as a whole. The dream must find expression

to save us from unreal reality.”<sup>1</sup> Rather than fulfill its task of projecting forth a dream of a harmonious world, it had succumbed to a foreboding nightmare of planetary crisis.

With the rebirth of the North American environmental movement in the 1960s and 1970s, popular thinking about ecology began to depart from questions of “nature” and “wilderness” familiar to participants of the conservation movement made famous by John Muir and the Sierra Club at the end of the previous century. In a postwar era characterized by compounding fears of nuclear technology and rapid decolonization, popular environmental consciousness began to center more and more on an image of the planet in crisis. Older discourses about safeguarding forest cathedrals against too much industrial expansion were overshadowed by pictures of planet Earth as a fragile spaceship with an uncertain future.<sup>2</sup> And for the many North Americans growing increasingly concerned about their seemingly insecure planet, their organizing watchword was “crisis.”

In mass media and other forms of public discourse throughout the 1960s and 1970s, crisis-talk was everywhere. During the 1960s in particular, much of the crisis-talk centered on the civil rights movement and growing unrest in major cities across the United States, what by 1968 was commonly referred to as the “urban crisis.” White middle-class anxieties about the urban crisis were not unrelated to their worries about the planet, which bubbled to the surface in these decades as part of a broad reaction to postwar decolonization. The urban crisis, even if some thought of as a situation specific to the American “inner-city,” was inseparable from a

---

<sup>1</sup> Ed Huenemann, “Theological Perspective on the Hunger Issue.” PHS NCC Task Force on World Hunger Records, box 2, folder “Theological/Ethical Studies,” 3.

<sup>2</sup> Writing about the environmental movement in the 1960s, historian Thomas Robertson writes, “the environmental movement of the 1960s grew not just from concern for ‘nature’ but also from concern about international affairs, especially poverty and war. In the wake of World War II, concern about overpopulation-induced poverty and war combined with new ecological models to bring about path-breaking ‘environmental’ ways of thinking.” Robertson, *The Malthusian Moment: Global Population Growth and the Birth of American Environmentalism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2012), 8.

worldwide struggle linked by a larger pattern in the international political economy, as capital and its political allies simultaneously managed groups that were deemed “surplus” to the economy, while moving capital overseas in search of cheap labor and natural resource extraction.<sup>3</sup> This pattern was driven by postwar deindustrialization, the growth of multi-national corporations, and the often coercive structural adjustment of decolonized nation-states, revealing the close connection between the urban crisis in U.S. cities and the more planetary concerns about population and food crises.<sup>4</sup> As colonized and segregated populations the world over struggled for civil and human rights, decolonization, and a democratic control over the international political economy, western regimes of governance continually reframed these decolonial struggles as “crises,” calling for modes of crisis management (often in the form of market discipline) in response.<sup>5</sup>

The result was a transition from frequent talk of a domestic “urban crisis,” to a series of planetary crises that emerged in quick succession between about 1967 and 1974: the ecologic crisis, the population crisis, the environmental crisis, the energy crisis, and the world food crisis.

---

<sup>3</sup> On the discourse of “population” and the practice of designating certain populations as “surplus,” see: Michelle Murphy, *The Economization of Life* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017).

<sup>4</sup> On capitalism’s production of cheap labor pools, Karl Marx writes, “What the capitalist system demanded was...a degraded and almost servile condition of the mass of people, their transformation into mercenaries, and the transformation of their means of labour into capital.” Marx, *Capital Volume One* (New York: Penguin Books, [1976] 1991), 880-881. On deindustrialization and U.S. capital’s overseas search for new labor pools, see: Jefferson Cowie, *Capital Moves: RCA’s 70 Year Quest for Cheap Labor* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999). On the link between the urban crisis and deindustrialization, see: Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996). On the connection between the civil rights and Black Power movements with a worldwide struggle for decolonization, see, respectively: Sarah Azaransky, *This Worldwide Struggle: Religion and the International Roots of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017); and, Sean L. Malloy, *Out of Oakland: Black Panther Party Internationalism during the Cold War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2017).

<sup>5</sup> In the 1970s, a proposal authored by economists from the Global South called for international democratic instruments to regulate western finance and capital. Their proposal was known as the New International Economic Order. See: Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019, especially 142-175).

On crisis management as a form of capitalist governance, see: Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (New York, Metropolitan Books, 2007).

This was the context out of which the modern American environmental movement emerged, with the first Earth Day in 1970 heralding its arrival right in the middle of these years of widespread crisis-talk. Working in the afterglow of the first Earth Day, mainline and evangelical attempts at environmental mobilization were rooted in a vision of the planet in crisis and thus bound up in postwar negotiations over capital moves and postcolonial governance.

By the mid-1970s, mainstream Protestant talk about the world had become thoroughly ensconced in the language of planetary crisis. In a call for a “New Protestant theology” submitted to the National Council of Churches, one United Church of Christ minister spoke directly to this haunting sense of crisis, choosing the phrase “food-population-resources-environmental-armament crisis” to try and capture the totality of the conditions that cast the future of planet Earth in doubt.<sup>6</sup> Writing in 1974, the UCC man stood on the other side of seven years of near constant crisis-talk, so that he could easily enumerate its conditions: “rapidly diminishing natural resources,” “the population explosion,” “the mounting food crisis,” “armament races are draining the world’s resources,” the “economic chasm between the industrialized countries and more developing countries is widening each year,” while control of natural resources lay solely in the hands of “industrialized countries, a few oil-rich nations, and mammoth multi-national corporations.”<sup>7</sup>

For middle-class Americans in the mid-1970s, the most haunting of these planetary crises was the world food crisis, brought on by decades of rapid industrialization and deforestation, paired with exacerbating inequalities in trade and resource distribution. These were the circumstances in which Ed Huenemann discovered the apocalyptic malaise of his church’s youth

---

<sup>6</sup> David S. Burgess, “The Need for a New Protestant Theology in the United States,” September 10, 1974. PHS NCC Task Force on World Hunger Records, box 2, folder “Theological/Ethical Studies,” 10.

<sup>7</sup> Burgess, “The Need for a New Protestant Theology in the United States,” 4-6.

group, who reported that the primary reason they expected the world to end by 2000 was hunger. In his theological reflections on the planetary nightmare his youth group had described, gathered by NCC officials alongside the UCC minister's call for a New Protestant theology for the food-population-resources-environmental-armament crisis, Huenemann believed that hunger was best seen as an environmental issue in line with the overall nightmare of the postwar planet in crisis: "the hunger issue is the evidence of our failure to deal responsibly with creation and with the eco-system."<sup>8</sup>

In the second half of the 1970s, as mainstream Protestants cemented their lifestyle-oriented form of religious environmentalism, world hunger was the planetary problem of the day. But the organizers behind Protestant environmental mobilization were unanimous on the fact that this was just one more crisis in the long series of ecological problems casting doubt over planet Earth's ability to survive into the new millennium. Focusing on the 1960s, this chapter traces the emergence of "planet" and "crisis" as two guiding concepts for the environmental networks that tried to mobilize mainstream Protestant churchgoers after Earth Day in 1970. In tracing the history of a vision—or, as Ed Huenemann and his youth group would have it, a nightmare—of planet Earth in crisis, I argue that mainstream Protestant environmentalism was profoundly shaped by the postwar political economy, which in the 1960s and 1970s was undertaking a massive expansion of western capitalist power by insulating its now-global market instruments from the threat of democratic pressures in the decolonizing world.<sup>9</sup> Many of the situations that got named as "crises" during these decades, implying a sense that they were unexpected

---

<sup>8</sup> Huenemann, "Theological Perspective on the Hunger Issue," 1.

<sup>9</sup> This definition of neoliberalism as "efforts to insulate market actors from democratic pressures," specifically as a reaction against the democratic potential "within the epochal shift of order that occurred at the end of empire" comes from: Quinn Slobodian *Globalists: The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 4-5.

moments of upheaval, were in fact predictable outcomes of this process: deindustrialization in American cities, calls for population control in the decolonizing world groups, dramatic resource extraction and industrial expansion in the Global South, and the precarity of multi-national corporations' cheap labor pools that at times pushed them to the brink of starvation. Planetary crisis-talk, I argue, produced a mode of engagement with environmental problems that carried with it a particular philosophy of ad hoc, just-in-time management of these difficult conditions, paired with a constant inward turn as observers looked to develop subjectivities that might help them weather the storm.

Although I focus extensively on their work in this chapter, neither the environmental writers like Rachel Carson and Buckminster Fuller who popularized planetary thinking, nor the Protestant writers like Karl Barth and Reinhold Niebuhr who helped circulate crisis-talk, are the prime, causal movers in this story, acting like great women and men single-handedly producing new forms of politics or religion. And in my broader focus on the concepts of planet and crisis, I don't mean to suggest that discourse itself, unmoored from material conditions or political economy, produced new religious forms or new political movements. Following Kathryn Lofton, I understand religion as a social process through which, "distinctions are named, sociality is explained, and relationship to power (natural and supernatural) is managed."<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, I narrate these writers' efforts as a way through which mainstream Protestantism's generally white, generally affluent religious networks sought to manage their relationship to the postwar political economy, characterized by an expansion of capitalist power in the form of the neoliberal project. I view their efforts as part of shared projects wherein mainstream Protestants worked out a new moral language to make sense of their relationship with the political

---

<sup>10</sup> Kathryn Lofton, "Why Religion Is Hard For Historians (and How It Can Be Easier)," *Modern American History* 3 (2020), 84.



economy.<sup>11</sup> Crisis-talk in particular served as a key discourse for managing one's relationship to capitalist power, a way of negotiating one's position as an affluent, middle-class white American, who, thanks to globalizing mass media, was made regularly aware of various kinds of suffering and precarity on the other side of the planet. Crisis-talk had a specific internal logic, which helped militate against the formation of a Christian environmental politics that might challenge international asymmetries, instead encouraging its speakers to turn inward to develop new subject positions that might help them weather the storm, while embracing palliative modes of crisis management toward the worst symptoms of neoliberal expansion as the planet was forcefully opened to unfettered capital accumulation.

### Planet

Though most centrally concerned with the deadly effects of insecticides on the natural world—the death of flora and fauna alike and the haunting silence of a spring devoid of insect and bird songs—Rachel Carson opened her landmark environmental text, *Silent Spring*, with a statement of planetary consciousness. In 1958, she had received a letter from a friend who spoke “of her own bitter experience of a small world made lifeless.”<sup>12</sup> According to Carson, her friend's description of the small world inspired her to begin writing the 1962 bestseller, which

---

<sup>11</sup> In her essay calling on historians of religion to be more reflective in their use of the term, Lofton praises Anthony Petro's use of “moral language” as a way of thinking through the question “What Is Religion?” In reference to the AIDS epidemic, Petro writes, “I use *morality* and *moral languages* to describe correct behavior, especially in regard to codes of sexual conduct or norms, and the ways that people talk about these norms.”

In thinking through the way new moral language around categories like “planet Earth” and “crisis” (and later in this dissertation, “lifestyle”) played a central role in mainstream Protestants management of their relation to the political economy in particular, I am also indebted to Bethany Moreton's work in *To Serve God and Wal-Mart* (which Lofton also praises for its handling of the role of religion in modern American history). In the book, she shows the way the Christian language of “family” and “service” were deployed to mediate people's relationship to the emergence of service labor in the postwar political economy. Lofton, “Why Religion Is Hard for Historians (and How It Can Be Easier),” 76; Petro, *After the Wrath of God: AIDS, Sexuality, and American Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 5; Moreton, *To Serve God and Wal-Mart: The Making of Christian Free Enterprise* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

<sup>12</sup> Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (New York: Fawcett World Library, [1962] 1969), ix.

has been remembered by historians as a watershed text in the emergence of modern environmentalism, a significantly different movement from the conservationist efforts that developed in the late-nineteenth-century.<sup>13</sup>

Although the word “planet” itself did not become prominent until later in the decade, Carson’s environmental writing signaled a shift toward holistic thinking about a “small world” over against earlier emphases on conserving nature. As a quote on her dedication page to Albert Schweitzer put it, the question here was not whether humanity would despoil the wilderness, but rather, whether it would end up “destroying the Earth.”<sup>14</sup> Dedicating her work to a Lutheran theologian and drawing on her own Presbyterian familiarity with biblical language to evoke a sense of wonder toward the Earth, Carson offered a religiously-inflected environmental vision grounded in planetary sensibility.<sup>15</sup> Written more than a decade before Ed Huenemann’s Presbyterian youth group described their shared nightmare of a dying world, Carson’s bestseller helped inaugurate this new form of environmental consciousness rooted in a vision of the planet in crisis.

---

<sup>13</sup> James Patterson writes that the environmental movement “had been building steadily for some time, especially since the publication in 1962 of Rachel Carson’s eloquent *Silent Spring*.” On the way this represented a fundamentally new political movement, differing significantly from conservationism, Sarah T. Phillips writes, “[w]hat environmental history has explored, within a voluminous literature, is the relation between the accelerated pace of environmental change since 1945 and the concomitant rise of modern environmentalism.” Summarizing the influential work of Samuel Hays and Barbara Hays in *Beauty, Health, and Pervance*, Phillips continues: “The Hayeses surveyed the contours of environmental politics and administration between 1955 and 1985...Most important, they drew a sharp distinction between the newer environmental impulses, part of the history of consumption, and the previous conservation movement, which had stressed efficiencies of production.” Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945-1974* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 725; Phillips, “Environmental History,” in Eric Foner and Lisa McGirr, eds., *American History Now* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2011), 304-305.

<sup>14</sup> Albert Schweitzer, quoted in Carson, *Silent Spring*, viii.

<sup>15</sup> On Rachel Carson’s use of biblical language of wonder, see Lisa H. Sideris, *Consecrating Science: Wonder, Knowledge, and the Natural World* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2017), 182-188; Mark R. Stoll, *Inherit the Holy Mountain: Religion and the Rise of American Environmentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 196-201.

Like Huenemann's youth group, Carson's vision was indeed nightmarish. She pictured a world haunted by a "grim specter," casting a "shadow of death" over the Earth.<sup>16</sup> The deadly force that haunted the pages of *Silent Spring* was a chemical one: the insecticides, herbicides, and other harmful pollutants that industries and agribusiness were spraying over the face of the planet. As a biologist, Carson still made regular reference to the language of "nature" that had prevailed in the conservation movement, frequently describing "man's war against nature," and the way "man proceeds toward his announced goal of the conquest of nature."<sup>17</sup> But the tone was different here, haunted by a sense that the Earth was now oversaturated with industries, technologies, and business interests that threatened its very existence. Her writing carried an end-of-days sensibility nowhere present in the canon of conservationist writings: "Along with the possibility of the extinction of mankind by nuclear war, the central problem of our age has therefore become the contamination of man's total environment with such substances of incredible potential for harm."<sup>18</sup>

With the haunting knowledge of modern technology's death-dealing potential brought on by World War II, Carson's mid-century context differed significantly from that of the early conservation movement with its focus on urban and industrial expansion into pristine nature and wilderness. Compare, for example, John Muir's writings near the turn of the century, where he focused primarily on the preservation of untrammeled nature, frequently drawing on religious language to position the wilderness as a sacred other. In the well-known controversy over the proposed damming of Hetch Hetchy valley, Muir likened proponents to the biblical serpent despoiling the pristine Garden of Eden: "Their arguments are curiously like those of the devil,

---

<sup>16</sup> Carson, *Silent Spring*, 14.

<sup>17</sup> Carson, *Silent Spring*, 18, 83.

<sup>18</sup> Carson, *Silent Spring*, 83.

devised for the destruction of the first garden—so much of the very best Eden fruit going to waste; so much of the best Tuolumne water and Tuolumne scenery going to waste.”<sup>19</sup> Like Eden, the nation’s great wildernesses were viewed as an untrammelled space of sacredness that unchecked industrialism threatened to ruin.

Whereas Muir looked at the wilds of California and saw a looming, untouched space of wildness that could be protected against creeping industrialization, little more than a half century later, Carson looked at her surroundings and saw a situation where humankind had come into intimate relation with every far corner, for better or for worse. The interconnectedness of planet Earth was an overriding theme in her work, as she wrote elsewhere: “in each of my books I have tried to say that all the life of the planet is inter-related, that each species has its own ties to others, and that all are related to the Earth.”<sup>20</sup> This was what, in *Silent Spring*, she called the “web of life,” reflecting her holistic view of ecology as a planetary system: “The Earth’s vegetation is part of a web of life in which there are intimate and essential relations between plants and the Earth, between plants and other plants, between plants and animals.”<sup>21</sup> This web of life had long hung in a delicate balance, since “the history of life on Earth has been a history of interaction between living things and their surroundings.” But, in the twentieth century, “one species—man—acquired significant power to alter the nature of his world.”<sup>22</sup> For Carson, “nature” in the abstract remained a salient category, but her environmental writing nonetheless reflected a shift toward planetary consciousness as she thought through her haunting sense of ecological death in an era of globalizing intimate connections. Muir had been writing in a

---

<sup>19</sup> John Muir, *The Yosemite*, (New York: The Century Company, 1912), 260.

<sup>20</sup> Carson, quoted in Linda Beecher Wood, *A More Perfect Union: Holistic Worldviews and the Transformation of American Culture after World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 40.

<sup>21</sup> Carson, *Silent Spring*, 64.

<sup>22</sup> Carson, *Silent Spring*, 16.

moment of anxiety about the “closing frontier,” fighting to preserve wild space as a sacred other. Just over a half-century later, Carson wrote at a moment of industrial saturation, hoping to rescue the web of life from humanity’s conquest.<sup>23</sup>

Writing from both a sense of wonder at an abstracted nature and a haunting feeling of planetary endangerment, Rachel Carson’s moral language of the “web of life” haunted by a “grim specter” worked as a mediating discourse between an earlier form of environmental consciousnesses based on the conservation of nature, and the modern form of environmentalism she helped inaugurate, with its emphasis on the insecure future of the entire planet. Through the rest of the 1960s, as environmental concerns grew in the wake of her landmark text, mainstream Protestants processed their sense of worldwide crisis in those same terms, thinking more and more about a planet—or a world, or an Earth—possibly coming to an end, rather than mobilizing around a desire to conserve pristine nature. For most of the 1960s, this was embedded in the same anxieties about nuclear proliferation to which Carson had linked her own concerns about the web of life. As one article in evangelicalism’s flagship magazine, *Christianity Today*, put it in 1962, the threat of nuclear war “is to humanity, to the planet, not to any given nation or system or scheme of national government,” before proclaiming in typical evangelical fashion that “everything that is owes its existence to Him and He came to this little Earth.”<sup>24</sup> Even if for evangelicals at the time, the central solution to global threats was a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, their writing reflected a broader sense of planetary consciousness that echoes Carson’s own, with recourse to existential threats to the planet and the precarious future of this little Earth.

---

<sup>23</sup> In a study of “holistic worldviews” in the second half of the twentieth-century, Linda Beecher Wood looks to Carson as a pivotal figure whose web of life imagery reflected an overriding theme of holism in her writings. Wood, *A More Perfect Union*, 25-52.

<sup>24</sup> William G. Pollard, “The Great Cosmic Turning Point,” *Christianity Today* July 6, 1962.

By the end of the decade, a specific discourse of “planet Earth” as a fragile, precarious spaceship, had come to organize these anxieties about the future of the world. Photographs taken by astronauts played a central role in this process. Carson had helped initiate a new environmental movement with her talk of a “small world” under a “shadow of death” due to human activity. When color images of that small world became widely available thanks to the Apollo missions, this kind of planetary consciousness spread even further. In 1966, counterculture scion Stewart Brand started a campaign calling for a photograph of planet Earth, distributing now iconic buttons that read “Why haven’t we seen a photograph of the whole Earth yet?”<sup>25</sup> Two years later, he got his wish when an astronaut snapped a picture of the entire Earth during an Apollo voyage around the back of the moon. This first color image of planet Earth was titled *Earthrise*, snapped on Christmas Eve, 1968 and remembered by one nature photographer as “the most influential environmental photograph ever taken.”<sup>26</sup> TV stations broadcast the image across the nation, stirring a widespread response to this new perspective on the planet. The next fall, looking back on the moment *Earthrise* flashed across their television screens, two mainline thinkers wrote that, “On Christmas Day 1968, Americans and those in many other countries saw a small, supremely beautiful globe floating in space...This was the greatest modern Christmas present that man has ever received.”<sup>27</sup> A year later, Brand printed the photograph on the cover of his *Whole Earth Catalog*, a central text in the counterculture and another important mediator of planetary consciousness (fig. 1).

---

<sup>25</sup> Robert Poole, *Earthrise: How We First Saw Ourselves* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

<sup>26</sup> *Earthrise 1968*, in Robert Sullivan, editor, *100 Photographs that Changed the World* (New York: Life Books, 2003), 172-173.

<sup>27</sup> David Graham and Robert Theobald, “The Changing Environment: Does the Church Have a Major Responsibility? Analysis and Action Proposals,” October 2, 1969. PHS NCC Christian Life and Mission Records, box 8, folder 9.

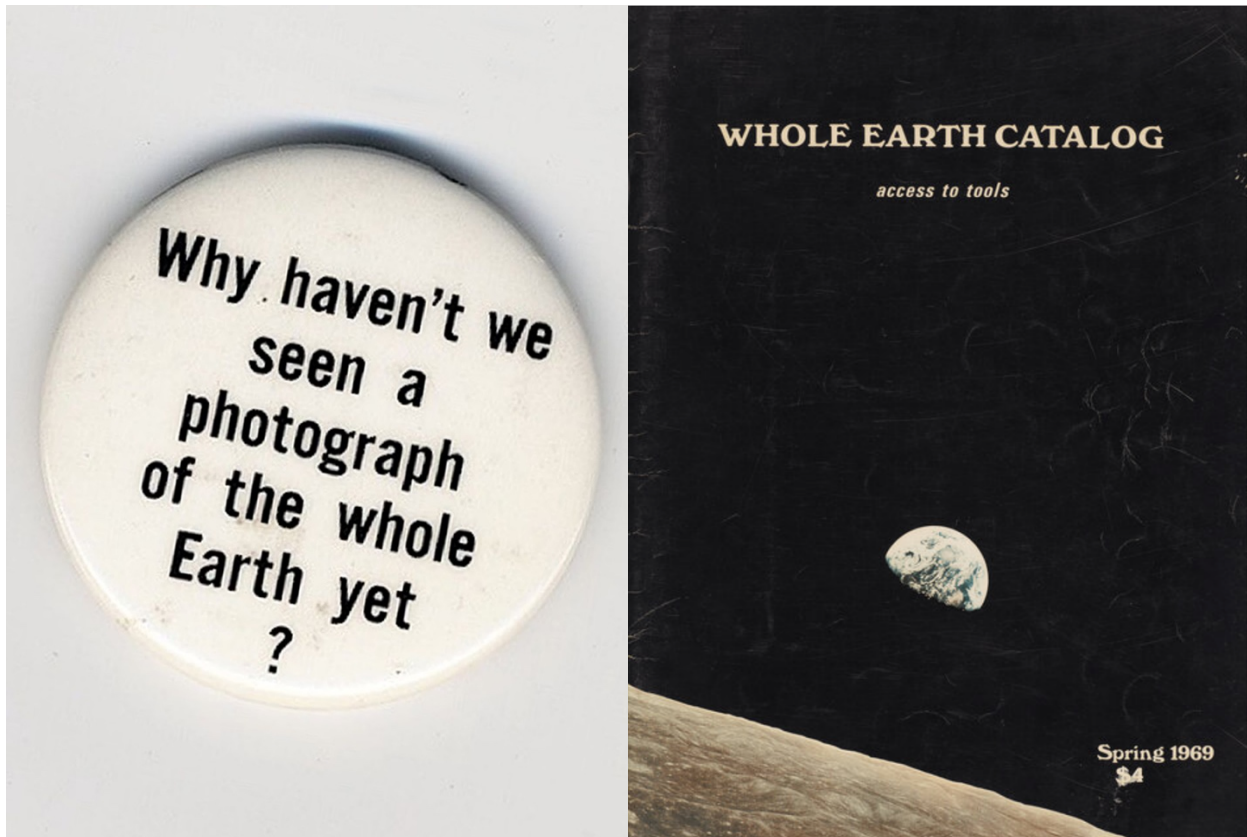


Figure 1 – Stewart Brand's button (1966) and the Whole Earth Catalog (first edition, 1969).

While Carson had helped mediate this shift in popular environmental thinking through her description of the web of life that encircled our small world, *Earthrise* became pivotal in garnering a widely popular vision of a small, fragile planet floating through the void. In an image largely made up of dark, negative space, with the moon's horizon looming much larger than the Earth itself, the photograph figured Earth as a tiny planet, floating precariously in the vast expanse of space. Reflecting on "The View from the Moon" in a *Christianity Today* editorial just two months after the image was taken, one evangelical described the impact of the picture in just these terms: "The planet Earth looked lonely and cold, cut off, whirling through infinite space for what possible reasons."<sup>28</sup> Some historians have noted an irony in the fact that a picture snapped

<sup>28</sup> Addison H. Leitch, "The View from the Moon," *Christianity Today*, February 28, 1969, 51.

by astronauts would stir up so much reflection on the fragility of planet Earth, given the space race's ties to imperial expansion. "Although it could have been read as a demonstration of technological superiority on one side of the divide," write Solvejg Nitzke and Nicolas Pethes, "the space race inadvertently opened an unexpectedly neutral view on Earth from the outside that revealed the unity, the vulnerability as well as the beauty of mankind's home."<sup>29</sup> But the pictured planet had its dark side as well, given the way that this new image of Earth was taken up by crisis-talk about overpopulation, ecological collapse, and world hunger that led most often to regimes of market-based crisis-management.

Even so, historians correctly observe the way this picture of a small and lonely world drifting through the void was interpreted at the time as a sign of unity, vulnerability, and beauty. Soon after its publication, the picture became connected to the notion of Earth as "spaceship," architect and futurist Buckminster Fuller's signature metaphor for describing planetary fragility.<sup>30</sup> Only a year after *Earthrise* first appeared, visually affirming Fuller's "spaceship Earth," mainstream Protestant thinkers were deploying Fuller's language to discuss environmental problems. The writers who had called the image the greatest Christmas present humans had ever received went on to reflect that, "it helps him to understand that we must find ways to live together on what has been aptly described as 'spaceship Earth.'"<sup>31</sup> Mainline observers seemed keenly aware of the way this image was producing a new environmental

---

<sup>29</sup> Solvejg Nitzke and Nicolas Pethes, "Introduction," in *Imagining Earth: Concepts of Wholeness in Cultural Constructions of Our Home Planet* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 7.

<sup>30</sup> R. Buckminster Fuller, *Operating Manual for Spaceship Earth* (New York: Dutton, 1963). Fuller's contribution to planetary thinking went far beyond his popularization of the spaceship metaphor. His well-known geodesic domes were themselves meant to manifest the synergy of individual parts, mimicking the planetary web of life. Of Fuller, Linda Beecher Wood writes, "Through his world maps, natural resource charts, World Game, and international connections, he championed global interdependencies." Wood, *A More Perfect Union*, 9..

<sup>31</sup> David Graham and Robert Theobald, "The Changing Environment: Does the Church Have a Major Responsibility? Analysis and Action Proposals," October 2, 1969. PHS NCC Christian Life and Mission Records, box 8, folder 9.



sensibility based on an image of a small planet with an uncertain future. The same year, in a background paper commissioned by the National Council of Churches, another writer combined Fuller's metaphor with Rachel Carson's ecological language in 1969, suggesting that "[t]he spaceship Earth is the natural habitat of man...The natural environment tends toward an ecological balance or 'web of life' set in a delicate, dynamic equilibrium."<sup>32</sup>

By 1970, the year that Earth Day heralded the start of an environmental decade rooted more in this ascendant vision of planetary crisis than an earlier emphasis on conserving nature, this vision of Earth as a precarious, plunky spaceship had become commonplace in both evangelical and mainline Protestant environmental writing. "We have to shift from a frontier mentality of using up and moving on," declared one writer in *The Christian Century* in 1970, "to a spaceship mentality of living on a fixed set of resources."<sup>33</sup> That same year, Carl Reidel, an evangelical environmental scientist at Williams College in Massachusetts, delivered a talk quoting both Buckminster Fuller and Adlai Stevenson, who had written, "We travel together, passengers on a little spaceship, dependent on its vulnerable supplies of air and soil." Reidel was aware that this planetary metaphor owed its existence to astronaut photography, adding that Stevenson had deployed the analogy "several years before we were able to look back from the moon at our little planet." "Earth is spaceship," continued Reidel, quoting Fuller, "and all its passengers for two million years that we know of have gone about their business without even knowing they were on board ship."<sup>34</sup> Based on his talk on the subject, Harold Lindsell, *Christianity Today's* editor-in-chief decided to interview Reidel for a special issue on the

---

<sup>32</sup> Earl D.C. Brewer, "Mission in the Seventies: A Background Paper on Some Trends and Issues," PHS NCC Records.

<sup>33</sup> Ian G. Barbour, "An Ecological Ethic," *The Christian Century*, 87:40 (October 7, 1970), 1183.

<sup>34</sup> Carl H. Reidel, "Our Violent Affluence: The Environmental Tragedy," December 2, 1970, BGCA *Christianity Today* Records, box 21 folder 29.

environment in early 1971, titled “Christianity and the Environmental Crisis,” where he affirmed his planetary consciousness, stating, “man is inextricably linked to the entire web of life on this planet.”<sup>35</sup>

For many evangelicals, the apocalyptic register of Carson and other environmental writers’ planetary visions would have felt familiar, given the popularity of premillennial thinking in their movement. Billy Graham, postwar evangelicalism’s most influential public figure, was very fond of end-times rhetoric in his sermons. Although his deep concern with respectability meant he generally steered away from explicit predictions about the rapture or Armageddon, in the 1970s many evangelicals would have connected the eschatological language in his crusades to a bestselling book predicting Armageddon in the very near planetary future.<sup>36</sup> Published in 1970, Hal Lindsey’s *The Late Great Planet Earth* sold 7.5 million copies in its first decade.<sup>37</sup> In the book, Lindsey channeled fears about the planetary future, especially regarding the threat of nuclear war (combined with a healthy dose of Christian Zionism) into a dispensational interpretation of the Bible that concluded planet Earth would reach its end time within a couple of decades. Though approaching it from a significantly different angle, Lindsey and many of his readers reached the same conclusion as the mainline youth group whose concern about planetary crises in the middle of the decade led them to predict the world’s ending before the year 2000. The book was popular enough that it earned a 1979 film adaptation narrated by Orson Welles,

---

<sup>35</sup> Carl H. Reidel, “Christianity and the Environmental Crisis,” *Christianity Today*, April 23, 1971, 4.

<sup>36</sup> Of Graham, Matthew Sutton writes, “He masterfully integrated the apocalyptic theology of his predecessors with the irenic disposition and respectability of the new evangelicals.” Matthew Avery Sutton, *American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2014), 327.

<sup>37</sup> Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1970); sales figures from Sutton, *American Apocalypse*, 346.

with a poster and VHS box cover that clearly mimicked the astronaut photography that had helped inspire so much planetary consciousness in the late-1960s and early-1970s (fig. 2).<sup>38</sup>



*Figure 2 - The Blue Marble (1972) and The Late Great Planet Earth film poster (1979)*

By the mid-1970s, planetary consciousness had been cemented in mainstream Protestant environmental piety, with mentions of “nature” becoming increasingly rare. In the Episcopal Church, this vision of the world as a small, fragile planet floating in space was even incorporated into its official sacramental language. In the summer of 1974, at the height of a national furor over the “world food crisis,” Howard Galley, an editorial assistant involved in the Episcopal Church’s prayer book revision process, wrote a new Eucharistic Prayer rooted in planetary thinking. Looking at the moon from his office window late one night, he reported being reminded of the astronaut photography of the late-1960s that had made the world seem so

<sup>38</sup> *The Late Great Planet Earth*, directed by Robert Amran and Rolf Forsberg (Amran and RCR, 1978).

small.<sup>39</sup> In that moment, he sat down and wrote, “At your command all things came to be: the vast expanse of interstellar space, galaxies, suns, the planets in their courses, and this fragile Earth, our island home.”<sup>40</sup> After a long editorial process, the Episcopal Church officially published its new prayer book revision in 1979, making this prayer for spaceship Earth into an official Eucharistic liturgy, thus tying planetary consciousness to the sacraments in at least one mainline denomination.

While *Silent Spring* was certainly replete with references to the natural world in its concern for insects, birds, and vegetation, it nowhere treated “nature” as some abstract other to be recognized as sacred and preserved from human industrial expansion. Instead, Carson’s vision of a small world encircled by a web of life helped mediate the ascendance of planetary thinking over against previous generations of environmentalists’ focus on nature. Simply put, the 1970s version of environmentalism was no longer about preserving nature. Rather, it assembled a set of political concerns inseparable from the postwar neoliberal project that was working to create conditions for capital expansion in a globalizing world. With their wide embrace of planetary thinking, mainstream Protestants connected their environmental thinking to questions of globalization and the proper management of a putatively overpopulated postcolonial world. And this planetary thinking carried with it an inherent register of precarity, fragility, and insecurity. The world seemed now like a tiny spaceship alone in a cold, inhospitable expanse. Planet, as newly salient environmental language, arose in tandem with another word: crisis. As mainstream Protestant environmentalists worked to negotiate their relationships to the postwar political

---

<sup>39</sup> Lynette Wilson, “Empowering Episcopalians and the Next Generation to Care for Creation,” *Episcopal News Service*, April 13, 2015; Josh Thomas, “‘This Fragile Earth, Our Island Home’ and the Legacy of Howard E. Galley,” *Gay Spirit Diary*, April 13, 2015. <https://joshtom.wordpress.com/2015/04/13/this-fragile-earth-our-island-home-and-the-legacy-of-howard-e-galley/>.

<sup>40</sup> *The Book of Common Prayer* (New York: Church Publishing Incorporated, 2007), 370.

economy, their efforts deeply embedded in and inspired by the growing prominence of crisis-talk in the late 1960s.

### Crisis

While the birth of the modern environmental movement is appropriately dated to the early 1960s, with Carson's *Silent Spring* rightly seen as a major catalyst, significant environmental activities among mainstream Protestant groups would have to wait until the first Earth Day in 1970. Earth Day served as a kind of coming-out party for the planet-conscious version of environmentalism that Carson had helped mediate in the 1960s. By then, "crisis" had become a watchword in most mainstream Protestant environmental writing, helping to organize their environmental mobilization in alignment with a postwar political economy that was simultaneously producing crisis conditions through its capital moves and embracing crisis management as a form of governance. Crisis-talk helped frame the ecological and social consequences of capital accumulation as aberrant moments, discouraging their recognition as expected, systemic symptoms of a political economy fundamentally based on asymmetry as western states and corporations accumulate capital through various forms of economic discipline and political violence.<sup>41</sup> In mainstream Protestant contexts, crisis-talk also tended to lead to an inward turn as its conversation partners tried to cultivate subjectivities that might offer shelter

---

<sup>41</sup> On the inherently violent process of accumulation central to capitalist expansion, see: David Harvey, *New Imperialism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 137-182. According to Harvey,

Hegemonic state power is typically deployed to ensure and promise those external and international institutional arrangements through which the asymmetries of exchange relations can so work as to benefit the hegemonic power...The primary vehicle for accumulation by dispossession, therefore, has been the forcing open of markets throughout the world by institutional pressures exercised through the IMF and the WTO.

Although Harvey focuses primarily on post-1973 crises to tell this story of accumulation by dispossession, Quinn Slobodian has helpfully contextualized this project of neoliberal governance as an immediate postwar reaction against decolonization, as western economists, politicians, and corporate firms searched for financial instruments to ensure conditions for global capital expansion. As Slobodian has shown, this process began with the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in 1947, a predecessor to the more familiar World Trade Organization (WTO), founded in 1994. Slobodian, *Globalists*; Harvey, *New Imperialism*, 181.

from the storm of these frequent, yet putatively aberrant, moments of upheaval. Responding to their sense of a planet in crisis, then, mainstream Protestant environmentalism found itself closely aligned with the postwar political economy's modes of governance in the twin forms of ad hoc crisis management and the subjective interiorization that helped break apart New Deal and civil rights collectivities.<sup>42</sup>

That a UCC writer in 1976 chose to refer to two decades of global problems as a single, protracted crisis, what he called the “food-population-resources-environmental-armament crisis,” reflected the way crisis-talk rose to heightened prominence in American public culture between 1962 and 1976.<sup>43</sup> Across these years, Protestant environmental writing embraced, in quick succession, the language of “ecological crisis,” “population crisis,” “environmental crisis,” “energy crisis,” and “food crisis.” In their frequent recourse to the concept, Protestant environmentalists reflected the broader history of American Protestantism in the twentieth century, which returned frequently to the idea that the world was in a continuous state of crisis as a way of articulating the proper position of the Christian church in the world, as a moral community that would time and again rise to meet the crises of human history.

For the evangelical writers at *Christianity Today*, one reason crisis-talk was such an intriguing proposition was its connection to neo-orthodoxy and the theology of Karl Barth. Ever the critics of liberal Protestantism's departure from supernatural belief, Carl Henry and his colleagues at the neo-evangelical journal of record were fascinated by Barth's rejection of

---

<sup>42</sup> On crisis management, see: Klein, *Shock Doctrine*; on fragmentary interiorization, see: Daniel T. Rodgers, *Age of Fracture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

<sup>43</sup> David S. Burgess, “The Need for a New Protestant Theology in the United States,” September 10, 1974. PHS NCC Task Force on World Hunger Records, box 2, folder “Theological/Ethical Studies,” 10.

liberalism in favor of what became known as crisis theology.<sup>44</sup> Carl Henry, the magazine's first editor-in-chief, was particularly intrigued by the theology of crisis. Crisis theology, according to Henry, "convinced Continental thinkers that to take Christianity seriously, one must take divine initiative and special revelation and incarnation seriously and realize that 'modernism is heresy.'"<sup>45</sup> A few months later, Henry remained enthused by the fact that the "American frontiersman moved toward crisis theology, and by 1958 as many Protestant ministers listed themselves in the neo-orthodox camp as in the modernist movement."<sup>46</sup>

Articulated most fully in the 1921 second edition of his commentary on *The Epistle to the Romans*, Barth's crisis theology joined other a host of other writings at the time that viewed the existential crisis of World War I as a refutation modern liberalism's confidence in the trusty linearity of human progress. In his theology of crisis, Barth claimed that all of human reality was in fact rooted in crisis, which on an epistemological level sprung from "what Kierkegaard called the 'infinite qualitative distinction' between time and eternity." For Barth, this qualitative distinction was a crisis of knowledge, because, put simply, "God is in heaven, and thou art on Earth."<sup>47</sup> The result, in Barth's theology, was a sense that God is wholly other to humanity's perception of the world. This was the original crisis. The various existential crises of human history, including World War I, flowed outward from it. Intellectual historian Douglas Cremer summarizes, "Theologically, Jesus Christ represented this krisis as the 'permanent krisis of the relation between time and eternity,'" but at the same time, "Krisis also applied to the condition of

---

<sup>44</sup> Molly Worthen recounts Henry's fascination with Barth, and Barth's ambivalence toward Henry and the neo-evangelical movement in: Worthen, *Apostles of Reason: The Crisis of Authority in American Evangelicalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 15-16.

<sup>45</sup> Carl Henry, "Liberalism in Transition," *Christianity Today*, December 20, 1964.

<sup>46</sup> Carl Henry, "Theological Default in American Seminaries," *Christianity Today*, September 11, 1964.

<sup>47</sup> Karl Barth, "Preface to the Second Edition," *The Epistle to the Romans*. London, Oxford University Press, 1933.

humanity in the early twentieth century,” so that in Barth's thought, crisis was a kind of “bridge between the nature of Christianity and the needs of the concrete historical situation of Europe in the 1920s.”<sup>48</sup>

In this system, the Christian believer depends on knowledge of God as revealed through the life of Jesus Christ, despite the inevitable and ongoing crises of human existence. “Barth’s commentary on the Epistle to the Romans (in the second edition) establishes something like a Christian existential structure of life amidst crisis,” writes theologian Dietrich Korsch. “The theological crisis is the KRISIS before God; the temporal crises must be undergone by keeping the eyes open, but without an engagement of the realization of a whole.”<sup>49</sup> Developed in the crucible of World War I, Barth’s crisis theology offered the chance at a Christian existence that, through intimate knowledge of Jesus’s life, was sheltered from the chaotic currents of modern life. As Korsch puts it, Barth’s commentary on Romans implied that “besides the stormy weather in society, religion in itself executed a dialectical structure that was, in contrast to the incomplete events outside, internally coherent.”<sup>50</sup>

The evangelicals at *Christianity Today* read Barth this same way. Writing in 1958 on “Contemporary Views of Revolution,” one contributor wrote, “The first World War seemed to explode quite decisively the eschatology of inevitable progress, and led to deep-seated uncertainty as to the rightness of the anthropocentric view of religion which had so gaily sponsored it.” Crisis theology was one important response, “which summoned the Church in the

---

<sup>48</sup> Douglas J. Cremer, “Protestant Theology in Early Weimar Germany: Barth, Tillich, and Bultmann,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 56:2 (1995), 294.

<sup>49</sup> Dietrich Korsch, “Theology as Language of Crisis: Karl Barth’s Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans,” in Lar K. Bruun, Karl Christian Lammers, and Gert Sørensen, editors, *European Self-Reflection between Politics and Religion: The Crisis of Europe in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 107.

<sup>50</sup> Korsch, “Theology as Language of Crisis,” 109.



name of God to humble herself and listen to his catastrophic Word.”<sup>51</sup> While generally speaking, *Christianity Today* writers were primarily interested in the crisis theology’s return to a supernatural reading of the Gospel as an alternative to liberal modernism with its rejection of miracles, the stormy weather of the 1960s gave its message an added weight. “We are now accepting rapid change as normal,” said W.C. Fields, Southern Baptist chief of public relations in a report to the 1963 annual convention of evangelical editors. According to a report on the convention in *Christianity Today*, Fields continued, “this recognition affects so-called ‘crisis theology’—‘we are seeing things in a slightly different light,’” implying that the upheavals of the early 1960s had given added appeal to the idea of faith as shelter from the chaos of modern life.<sup>52</sup> Though the *Christianity Today* report gave no specifics regarding their anxiety about “rapid change,” one thinks of the confluence of events like the founding of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, and the FDA’s approval of the first birth control pill within a few months of each other in 1960. In quick succession, these events signaled the rise of Black-led direct action and sexual liberation respectively, things that would have troubled many white, middle-class evangelicals at the time.

*Christianity Today*’s silence on the exact nature of these “rapid changes” was telling. It reflected the magazine’s general approach, having been founded by Billy Graham in 1956 as a mouthpiece of respectable neo-evangelicalism. Like Graham, the magazine was deeply concerned with public relations, generally reticent to weigh in on the “racial crisis,” the “urban crisis,” or the major reforms that civil rights advocates were calling for at the time. Through the 1960s, it included subtle references to the widespread feeling that the world was in crisis, such as a 1964 advertisement for a hymnal “For Crisis Times,” declaring that “Christians have always

---

<sup>51</sup> James I. Packer, “Contemporary Views of Revelation (Part I),” *Christianity Today*, November 24, 1958, 3.

<sup>52</sup> “Crisis Theology,” *Christianity Today*, June 7, 1963, 32-33.

sung in times of stress, trouble, and unrest. This superb collection gives you hymns of salvation and dedication bringing your people closer to God in days of challenge and decision.”<sup>53</sup> Despite these passing references to “times of stress, trouble and unrest,” *Christianity Today*’s editorials joined Graham in treating racism as a matter of the heart, while largely circumventing direct address of racial unrest or federal reforms.

On the other hand, the evangelical magazine’s primary mainline rival, *The Christian Century*, drew on the language of crisis frequently throughout the 1960s as a way of making sense of civil rights upheavals. Beginning in the immediate aftermath of Arkansas school integration in 1957, the magazine printed stories about “Men of God in Racial Crisis,” the church “In Time of Crisis,” and an excerpt from Martin Luther King Jr.’s *Stride Toward Freedom* titled, “The Church and the Race Crisis.”<sup>54</sup> In the first part of the decade, the magazine referred often to the “racial crisis,” before transitioning around 1967 to frequent mention of the “urban crisis” in reference to rioting that took place in cities like Detroit that year and intensified the following year in the aftermath of King’s assassination and the rise of the Black Power movement.<sup>55</sup>

In its reflection on these racial and urban crises, beginning in the aftermath of the *Brown v Board of Education* Supreme Court decision in 1954, and accelerating across the 1960s, *The*

---

<sup>53</sup> “For Crisis Times,” *Christianity Today*, January 17, 1964, 37.

<sup>54</sup> Ernest Q. Campbell and Thomas F. Pettigrew, “Men of God in Racial Crisis,” *The Christian Century* January 1, 1958, 663-665; “In Time of Crisis,” *The Christian Century*, January 1, 1958, 940-941; Martin Luther King Jr., “The Church and the Race Crisis,” *The Christian Century*, October 8, 1958, 1140-1141.

<sup>55</sup> In 1968, the magazine reprinted correspondence between Sarah Patton-Boyle and John Howard Griffin as an example of “the dilemma that now confronts the concerned white liberal.” According to Boyle and Griffin, as “concerned white liberals,” violent uprisings were so concerning because they seemed to abandon King’s message of creative nonviolence. Thomas Sugrue’s classic *The Origins of the Urban Crisis* offers a helpful alternative to this narrative, shifting attention away from cultural explanations of poverty that were popular at the time, arguing that instead of the Rebellion being responsible for Detroit’s deindustrialization, as many people believe, it was the other way around. Sarah Patton Boyle and John Howard Griffin, “The Racial Crisis: An Exchange of Letters,” *The Christian Century*, May 22, 1968, 679-683; Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996). See also: Khalil Gibran Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

*Christian Century*'s crisis-talk offered a theory on Christianity's proper place in modernity. Religion and crisis, in the pages of the mainline magazine, dwelled in symbiotic relation, helping posit a place of religion in modern public life through repeated calls for churches to meet the crises of the day. *Century* writer Harold Fey reported throughout 1963 on the NCC's commitment to seeing "Churches *meet* racial crisis."<sup>56</sup> *The Christian Century* writers drew on this language of the church "meeting" crisis frequently, as in a 1969 "Roundup: Religious Agencies and the Urban Crisis." The report surveyed denominational efforts that "will continue to foster efforts to raise money to *meet* the urban crisis." These included the Episcopal General Convention's "special three-year \$9 million program to help *meet* the nation's race and poverty crisis;" the United Presbyterian Church's General Assembly decision to launch "a \$10 million Martin Luther King Fund to help *meet* the race and poverty crisis;" and the United Church of Christ's Michigan conference's budget item dedicated to "crisis-*meeting*."<sup>57</sup>

In mainline crisis-talk, religion was theorized as a moral community that, through a shared understanding of the world, could meet, confront, and manage the various crises of modern life. The *Christian Century*'s language of church-meets-crisis was just one iteration of a longstanding Protestant use of crisis-talk to theorize religion's place in the modern world. This positioning of American Protestantism in symbiotic relation with the crises of modern society had its most iconic articulation in Christian realist Reinhold Niebuhr's aptly named *Christianity and Crisis*. Founded in 1941 as an interventionist alternative to the still pacifist *Christian Century*, Niebuhr's journal of Christian opinion declared that "as Protestant Christians we stand confronted with the ultimate crisis of the whole civilization of which we are a part and whose

---

<sup>56</sup> Harold Edward Fey, "NCC acts on racial crisis," *The Christian Century*, June 19, 1963, 797-798.; and, Fey, "Churches meet racial crisis," *The Christian Century*, December 18, 1963, 1572-1573, emphasis mine.

<sup>57</sup> "Roundup: Religious Agencies and the Urban Crisis," *The Christian Century*, January 1, 1969, 223-235, emphasis mine.

existence has made possible the survival of our type of faith and our type of Church” in its opening pages.<sup>58</sup> This opening editorial for Niebuhr’s planned alternative to *The Christian Century* has generally been remembered as a statement of opposition to Nazi Germany.<sup>59</sup>

“*Christianity and Crisis* began publication a quarter-century ago when the world was confronted with a particular crisis,” declared a call for papers for the journal’s 25th anniversary colloquium in 1966, “[t]he journal tried to help America meet the challenge of militant Nazism.”<sup>60</sup>

Looking closely at Niebuhr’s opening editorial in 1941, however, crisis-talk seemed to transcend the specific threat of Nazi Germany. For Niebuhr and the colleagues that joined him in founding an interventionist alternative to *The Christian Century*, the “Crisis,” capitalized throughout its opening editorial, referred to a broad existential threat to Protestant civilization. To be sure, in 1941, this took on the specific form of Nazi totalitarianism. But Niebuhr clarified that “crisis” was in some ways a constant condition of twentieth century life, noting that “for the past thirty years the world has lived through a continuous series of recurring crises.” In the title of the journal, he clarified, “By Crisis we do not mean any of these secondary symptoms of a critical condition. We mean *the* Crisis itself; not the crisis of some segment of the social order, but of the whole social order.” Yes, this threat to the whole social order had been made manifest by Nazism in that historical moment, but Niebuhr nonetheless gestured toward a broader sense of crisis, as a condition paired with Christianity, helping constitute the religion’s role in the world. Crisis moments represented threats to the modern democratic social order that Christianity had helped develop. For Niebuhr, they also provided the crucible through which religion’s role in the

---

<sup>58</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, “The Crisis,” *Christianity and Crisis*, February 10, 1941, 1-3.

<sup>59</sup> Mark Hulsether, *Building a Protestant Left: Christianity and Crisis Magazine, 1941-1993* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1999), 24.

<sup>60</sup> Johannes Hoekendijk and Tom F. Driver, “Call to the Colloquium,” *Christianity and Crisis*, May 30, 1966, 107.

world should be defined: creating decisive moral communities who are pressed into action in response to crisis. “As Protestant Christians,” wrote Niebuhr, “we stand confronted with the ultimate crisis of the whole civilization.”<sup>61</sup> Crisis confronts. It provokes a response. It calls religious communities into action.

In these twentieth-century Protestant magazines, religion and crisis were theorized together again and again. Crisis gave religious communities a clear sense of what they could do in the modern world. Stated most succinctly by the title of Niebuhr’s journal, *Christianity and Crisis*, this vision of religion in symbiotic relation with crisis was particularly compelling because of a widespread sense among mid-century Americans that crisis had become a permanent state of affairs. Niebuhr had articulated this in 1941, writing that “the existence of some kind of a crisis has become normal for our generation.”<sup>62</sup> The journal’s twenty-fifth anniversary colloquium likewise affirmed this sense of permanent crisis in its call for papers on “The Crisis Character of Modern Society.” “The recurrent crises of these years, occurring in all areas of social and political life,” declared the event organizers, “have led many persons to suspect the existence of an underlying ‘state of crisis,’ which may be not merely chronic at this period but permanent.”<sup>63</sup> This feeling of permanent crisis was a haunting one, as middle-class Americans worried about the long-term future of their world. But it could also be quite productive. Practically speaking, permanent crisis offered a stable position for religion as a force in the modern world, insofar as American Protestants viewed it as a call for religions to rise to the occasion and meet its call. Crisis was constant, meaning that religion would always have something to do. As the colloquium chairman put it, twentieth-century affairs raised the question,

---

<sup>61</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, “The Crisis,” *Christianity and Crisis*, February 10, 1941, 1.

<sup>62</sup> Niebuhr, “The Crisis,” 1.

<sup>63</sup> Johannes Hoekendijk and Tom F. Driver, “Call to the Colloquium,” *Christianity and Crisis*, May 30, 1966, 107.

“what does it mean for the self and society that we are now in a situation of ‘permanent crisis’?”<sup>64</sup>

In his landmark intellectual history of the concept, Reinhart Koselleck argued that the word “crisis” serves a central purpose in modern discourse because of the way it positions human history, and by extension, the present, as an object of analysis and critique.<sup>65</sup> As anthropologist Janet Roitman summarizes, Koseleck showed that within a modern “consciousness that posits history as a temporality upon which one can act...crisis is a criterion for what counts as ‘history’; crisis signifies change, such that crisis ‘is’ history; and crisis designates history as such.”<sup>66</sup> In Koseleck’s rendering, within a post-enlightenment intellectual environment, “the link between the Utopian philosophy of history and the revolution unleashed since 1789, lies in the presupposed connection of critique and crisis.”<sup>67</sup> By viewing the world in a state of constant crisis, modern thought inhabits a space of critique, crisis’s cognate. Because Christian metaphysical presuppositions had become less authoritative, post-Enlightenment thinkers embraced the language of crisis for this express purpose, claiming a new starting place for themselves, “critique,” in order to produce knowledge of history and humankind’s place in it.<sup>68</sup>

---

<sup>64</sup> “Recollections of the Chairman: The Morning Session,” *Christianity and Crisis*, May 30, 1966, 109.

<sup>65</sup> According to Koselleck, “the critical process of enlightenment conjured up the crisis in the same measure in which the political significance of that crisis remained hidden from it.” Reinhart Koselleck, *Critique and Crisis: Enlightenment and the Pathogenesis of Modern Society* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, [1959] 1988), 9.

<sup>66</sup> Janet Roitman, *Anti-Crisis* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 7.

<sup>67</sup> Koselleck, *Critique and Crisis*, 9

<sup>68</sup> Important for Koselleck is the fact that crisis and critique share roots in the ancient Greek, *krino*, to judge or decide, and *krisis*, a word used in legal settings to refer to the judgment that resolves a dispute, and in medical contexts to refer to the key turning point between life or death in the course of a disease. As Dietrich Korsch writes, after the enlightenment, when crisis became a key word for understanding society, two presuppositions were made: “The one is that a society can be understood as an organism, which can be ill and be threatened by collapse; the other is that society itself must be understood as a permanent struggle to be decided,” Korsch, “Theology as Language of Crisis,” 95.

According to Koseleck, crisis-talk produces knowledge in settings where the modern philosophy of history has replaced Christian eschatology with secular conceptions of progress.<sup>69</sup> Crisis-talk allows people to ask “what went wrong?” in order to know the world has history. “Because observation takes place from within immanence,” he writes, “crisis serves as a distinction or transcendental placeholder in the occupation of an imminent world.”<sup>70</sup>

By thinking of twentieth-century conditions as a never-ending succession of crises, mainstream Protestants gained a new starting place for producing knowledge of their religion’s place in the modern world. This was the basic sensibility of *Christianity and Crisis*, an alliterative pairing blazoned across the top of each issue of Niebuhr’s journal of Christian opinion. Without offering an answer to the question, a physicist at the magazine’s 25th anniversary colloquium on the Crisis Character of Modern Society implied this very thing, that religion is defined, religion is produced, in its relationship to crisis, when he asked, “In this crisis, then, shall we redefine the role of ideology and in particular the role of religion?”<sup>71</sup> Conceiving of modernity as a succession of crises, Protestants in the United States always had a place to look when considering religion’s role in the world.<sup>72</sup>

---

<sup>69</sup> Koselleck writes of “a philosophy of history which by name alone was an eighteenth-century product. It was largely the successor to theology. Christian eschatology in its modified form of secular progress...” Koselleck, *Critique and Crisis*, 130.

<sup>70</sup> Roitman, *Anti-Crisis*, 9.

<sup>71</sup> “Highlights of the Afternoon Session,” *Christianity and Crisis*, May 30, 1966, 115.

<sup>72</sup> This public use of crisis thinking to produce knowledge of Christianity’s role in the world predates *The Christian Century*’s prolific use of the word in the 1960s, as well as Niebuhr’s use in the 1940s, with at least one significant antecedent in the form of the Social Gospel. Walter Rauschenbusch’s famous *Christianity and the Social Crisis* undertook these same kinds of deliberations, noting that the “social crisis” of industrial labor and urban poverty was “the overshadowing problem of our generation,” and then producing an influential picture of Christianity as a relevant force with a prominent role in the world of social change. Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1907), xi.

### Crisis-talk in Motion

But crisis is no neutral conversation partner for producing knowledge of religion. By asking “what went wrong?” crisis-talk posits a normal, real world to which humanity needs to return.<sup>73</sup> Rather than starting a conversation about the need to address underlying structures, crisis-talk tends to lead to “the affirmation of long-standing principles, thereby precluding certain thoughts and acts,” especially those that challenge or question the very legibility of whatever is said to be in crisis (race, markets, populations, and so on).<sup>74</sup> For mainstream Protestants, crisis-talk consistently led to a twofold movement circumventing the need for radical change: in response to crisis, they turned inward to focus on interior religious experience, acts of piety, and personal growth as shelters from the storm, and then, turned outward to offer modes of ad hoc crisis management that did not question the basic terms of the world posited as normal by the naming of certain conditions as an aberrant crisis.

First, then, crisis-talk invites its speakers to focus on the personal, cultivating new subjectivities through which to exist on a crisis-stricken planet. In her remarks at the 1966 *Christianity and Crisis* colloquium on the Crisis Character of Modern Society, the political philosopher Hannah Arendt stated this directly. “If the series of crises in which we have lived since the beginning of the century can teach us anything at all,” she said, “it is, I think, the simple fact that there are no general standards to determine our judgments unfailingly, no general rules under which to subsume the particular cases with any degree of certainty.”<sup>75</sup> For Arendt, this disruption called not for the collective development of new standards or rules, but instead, the development of new individual dispositions in the face of crisis. She had in fact already

---

<sup>73</sup> Roitman writes that crisis “is a distinction that secures ‘a world’ for observation.” Roitman, *Anti-Crisis*, 38-39.

<sup>74</sup> Roitman, *Anti-Crisis*, 6.

<sup>75</sup> Hannah Arendt, “Highlights of the Afternoon Session,” *Christianity and Crisis*, May 30, 1966, 115.



theorized crisis in a 1958 essay on the “Crisis in Education,” where she argued that because constant crisis undermines a society’s ability to produce standards or criteria for judgment, society’s best path forward would be to simply teach people to make judgments in the moment, without criteria or standards.<sup>76</sup> In her remarks at the *Christianity and Crisis* colloquium, she closed on a similar note. “By talking, therefore about the unprecedented and by making decisions as we must, even though they may one day prove wholly inadequate,” she concluded, “I believe we will become more adequate in dealing with the crisis, even if we fail to define it.” Despite her emphasis on individual dispositions in these comments, Arendt’s body of work as a political philosopher by no means encouraged individualistic or atomizing approaches to political life. In fact, she stated her hopes that the development of critical capacities in the present would “eventually lay the groundwork for new agreements” in collective political life. But, at a colloquium centered on crisis-talk, she reflected that, at least in the present moment that seemed characterized by never-ending crisis, communities should focus primarily on becoming more adequate at making judgments in the immediate face of such upheavals.<sup>77</sup>

Crisis-talk tends toward personal, individualized responses that can keep the self from becoming unmoored in the swirling storm of modern life. For many in the mainline, this looked just like what Arendt described in her reflections on crisis, with their responses focusing on the need for personal study to cultivate one’s own critical faculties for understanding the crises at hand. This was reflected in the NCC’s frequent use of “study/action” in its crisis-response

---

<sup>76</sup> Philosopher Steven DeCaroli has written recently that, for Arendt, the purpose of education in a world of crisis is to teach “them how to *judge in the absence of criteria*. This is the particular burden of the educator, who must exercise authority in order to guide children toward a disposition that is not susceptible to authority, and who bear the enormous responsibility of mediating between the old and the new—between the past which remains a source of criteria and the future which requires that we learn to think in its absence.” Crisis dictates the production of *dispositions*, rather than a questioning of underlying or long term causes of the conditions of suffering and precarity that we call “crisis,” things that might be prevented through new standards and regulations. DeCaroli, “Arendt’s *Krisis*,” *Ethics and Education*, 15:2 (2020), 184.

<sup>77</sup> Arendt, “Highlights of the Afternoon Session,” 116.

programming in the late 1960s and 1970s.<sup>78</sup> For evangelicals, on the other hand, the tendency was to look to a personal devotional state that could sustain the self through crisis conditions thanks to an existential sense of relating to God. As the crisis theology that fascinated *Christianity Today's* editors suggested, religious experience could be seen as a point of spiritual mooring as the Christian piously anchors herself or himself in the knowledge of God.<sup>79</sup> Throughout the 1960s, the magazine consistently referred to the racial and urban crises as “matters of the heart.” When in 1970 Billy Graham addressed the environmental crisis, he used the same language. Asked to comment on the subject that summer, he wrote, “I believe a clean heart makes for a clean house, a clean yard, and clean environmental conditions.”<sup>80</sup> A few months later, he complained that out of everything he had read on the environment, “few in my estimation get to the heart of the problem, for the problem of pollution is really a problem of the heart.”<sup>81</sup> Though they diverge slightly on this point—mainline writers focusing on developing a critical disposition through intensive study and evangelical writers focusing on matters of the heart—they nonetheless agreed on this basic logic of crisis-talk, that it should lead to an inward

---

<sup>78</sup> See, for example: Stephen C. Rose, *Study Action Guide: Justice on the Spaceship Earth* (New York: Council Press, 1968); H.B. Sissel, *Help for the Smaller City: A Study/Action Guide* (New York: Division of Christian Life and Mission, National Council of Churches, 1968).

<sup>79</sup> The slight divergence here in the interior, affective states mainstream Protestants sought to cultivate in the face of crisis—mainliners’ focus on knowledge of the world, and evangelicals’ focus on knowledge of God—follows the exact contours of Reinhart Koseleck’s argument, that “crisis” enables critical knowledge of the world in contexts where a secular philosophy of history has displaced Christian eschatology. Crisis and critique emerge out of a “philosophy of history which by name alone was an eighteenth-century product. It was largely the successor to theology. Christian eschatology in its modified form of secular progress...” For evangelicals, their continued attachment to end-times thinking, as seen in Billy Graham’s Cold War apocalypticism and the wide popularity of *The Late Great Planet Earth*, meant that their crisis-talk led them to cultivate devotional, rather than critical, subjectivity. Koseleck, *Critique and Crisis*, 130.

<sup>80</sup> Billy Graham to H.E. Fraumann, July 9, 1970. BGCA Collection 580, BGEA-Montreat Office, box 209, folder 5.

<sup>81</sup> Billy Graham, “Our Environment,” October 29, 1970. BGCA Collection 580, BGEA-Montreat Office, box 188, folder 15.

turn as Christians try to develop an affective state that could provide them safe harbor amid the upheavals of modern life.

Once these interior states had been produced, the second move of both evangelical and mainstream Protestant crisis-talk was to embrace ad hoc forms of immediate, short-term crisis management. “For better or for worse this break in the tradition—that is, a loss of general standards and rules—cannot be undone,” according to Arendt at the 1966 colloquium on the Crisis Character of Modern Life.<sup>82</sup> General standards had failed. Instead, a new normal of constant crisis called for in-the-moment judgments for the sake of crisis management. According to another speaker at the event, this recognition was at the very heart of *Christianity and Crisis*’s entire project: “As the organizing group of *Christianity and Crisis* courageously showed 25 years ago, the changing world crisis itself teaches the necessity of discriminate judgment, to cite Reinhold Niebuhr, so that a fundamentally war-opposed group found itself saying that under certain circumstances war is necessary.”<sup>83</sup> Reflecting crisis-talk’s two-fold movement, the speaker called on people to embrace the critical disposition of “discriminate judgment” in order to better make ad hoc, in-the-moment decisions in relation to each crisis.

For many in the mainline, this training in crisis disposition, with its twofold embrace of interiorized responses and ad hoc modes of crisis management, happened throughout the 1960s primarily in relation to the “racial crisis” and, later, the “urban crisis.” In the fall of 1967, the General Board of the National Council of Churches issued a resolution calling on its constituent denominations to mobilize a nationwide crisis response to civil rights upheavals, reflecting a growing sense of concern among white liberals over rioting in urban centers. Many onlookers rightly expected the riots they had seen in the summer of 1967 to worsen the next year.

---

<sup>82</sup> Arendt, “Highlights of the Afternoon Session,” 115.

<sup>83</sup> Gerald Holton, “Highlights of the Afternoon Session,” 114.

According to the resolution, “We cannot meet this crisis on the basis of ‘business as usual.’ The crisis is a national emergency necessitating a commitment of national resources and a personal sacrifice commensurate with the gravity of the emergency.”<sup>84</sup> Five months later, NCC leadership reconvened in San Diego for a consultation on the crisis, declaring that “this nation is in the midst of its most threatening domestic crisis of the last one hundred years.”<sup>85</sup> The result was a two-year communications effort known as “Crisis in the Nation” that called for a major Christian education push in mainline churches, focusing on the urban crisis, including a specific request that churches replace “present adult education curriculum of the churches for April-May-June quarter with materials dealing with the crisis in the nation,” in anticipation of summer riots. The program also called for the organization of relief efforts in cities affected by riots as well as funding for “local black groups,” but the overall emphasis was on providing curriculum materials to Protestant churchgoers.<sup>86</sup>

In this way, the NCC’s response followed the usual course of crisis-meeting, providing an educational push meant to help people make an inward change, paired with outward focus on ad hoc crisis management efforts. According to one denominational survey, the primary impact of the program on the 18,000 people in southern Presbyterian churches who had completed

---

<sup>84</sup> NCC General Board, “Atlanta Resolution, 1967, reprinted in Earl D.C. Brewer, “A Report and Evaluation of the Crisis in the Nation Program 1968-1969.” PHS NCC Communications box 1. Page 4.

<sup>85</sup> “Special Order on Crisis in the Nation,” February 21, 1968, reprinted in Margaret J. Thomas, “The Crisis in the Nation: Presbyterian Church, U.S. Involvement.” PHS NCC Communications Records, box 3. 41.

As Koseleck would have it, this description of a current crisis as the worst or most pressing in history (or at least since the Civil War) is too be expected of a religious community that no longer believes in an approaching end time: “That the crisis in which one currently finds oneself could be the last, great, and unique decision, after which history would look entirely different in the future—this semantic option is taken up more and more frequently the less the absolute end of history is believed to be approaching with the Last Judgment. To this extent, it is a question of recasting a theological principle of belief. It is expected of world-immanent history itself.” This also helps explain why in the 1960s, the mainline was so much more prolific in its use of crisis-talk than were evangelicals. Koseleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 243.

<sup>86</sup> “The Crisis: Past, Present, and Future,” February 17-18, 1968, reprinted in Thomas, “The Crisis in the Nation,” : Presbyterian Church, U.S. Involvement. PHS NCC Communications Records, box 3. 43.

“comprehensive and in depth study of the crisis confronting the nation in race relations” had indeed been inward.<sup>87</sup> Survey respondents were asked to list their highlights from the crisis study groups they had joined in 1968 and far and away the most popular aspect for participants was “personal growth, insight, and talking together.”<sup>88</sup> As they tried to weather the storm of summer riots in 1968, inward growth through in-depth study offered them a personal place of safe harbor.

Despite the widespread popularity of the study groups, the Presbyterian survey showed very little direct involvement in local relief or reform efforts, so that the compiler concluded with a complaint that “only well under one half of one percent of our people are willing to act upon their learnings and involve themselves in the mission to today’s world.”<sup>89</sup> Her complaint reflects what historian David Hollinger has identified as a growing gap between mainline clergy and their congregations during this period.<sup>90</sup> But while this is sometimes interpreted as a simple fact of clergy growing more politically progressive than their constituency, part of the story here seems related to the way crisis-talk tends to steer people toward short-term, in-the-moment responses, rather than broader, longer-term structural interventions. When asked to list the weakest points of the program, the most common complaints from study group participants were “lack of interest, “not enough time,” and “not enough solutions that were applicable.”<sup>91</sup> So while the survey’s compiler was frustrated with what she perceived as a sweeping lack of interest in practical involvement, responses from the churchgoers who encountered the curriculum suggest

---

<sup>87</sup> Thomas, “The Crisis in the Nation,” 33.

<sup>88</sup> Thomas, “Crisis in the Nation,” 25. Of respondents, 51 chose “personal growth, insight, and talking together” as a highlight, far ahead of the chasing pack with the second place entry being “guest speakers” with 39.

<sup>89</sup> Thomas, “Crisis in the Nation,” 33.

<sup>90</sup> David Hollinger, *After Cloven Tongues of Fire: Protestant Liberalism in Modern American History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013)

<sup>91</sup> Thomas, “Crisis in the Nation,” 25. Unlike the “personal growth” highlight, which was far ahead of second place, these three lowlights were in a virtual tie, with 22, 21, and 21 respondents choosing them, respectively.

that the Crisis in the Nation programming itself was hamstrung by its short-term nature and its lack of applicable solutions, both symptoms of its crisis management approach.

In fact, when NCC staff were asked to evaluate the program in 1970, several explicitly expressed misgivings about their impression that the organization was planning “to develop an ‘emergency’ or ‘crisis’ style” moving forward. One staffer wrote, “‘Crisis Management’ is a phrase I heard earlier this summer in our building as the style of the future. I think it is unnecessary if we but plan ahead by moving now on the conditions which lead to urban riots,” with another saying outright, “I am opposed to crisis administration in favor of the kind of planning and projection process which foresees trends and needs in society and sets up programs to meet them with sufficient lead time to allow for sound analysis and program development.”<sup>92</sup> Crisis in the Nation had led a national mobilization of its “crisis style,” encouraging mainline churchgoers around the country to engage in acts of crisis management paired with personal growth. In so doing, the program helped produce knowledge of their religion’s place in the world, in symbiotic relationship with what many saw as a constant succession of crises that weren’t to be questioned so much as they were to be managed through acts of personal piety and/or critical judgment, paired with short-term relief. The staffers who worried this would be the NCC’s path moving forward proved prescient. Toward the end of the decade, this crisis style merged with growing planetary consciousness, leaving the forms of mainstream Protestant environmentalism that developed after the first Earth Day in 1970 firmly rooted in a vision of spaceship Earth in crisis.

---

<sup>92</sup> Brewer, “A Report and Evaluation of the Crisis in the Nation Program 1968-1969,” 15-16.

## Our Ecologic Crisis

As these concepts of “planet” and “crisis” began to coalesce toward the end of the decade, one essay played an outsized role in inspiring conversations about Christianity’s role in environmental problems. The piece came from a somewhat unexpected place, a lecture delivered by a medieval historian best known at that time for his work on the cultural impact of technological developments such as stirrups, sails, and mills. In his lecture for the American Association for the Advancement of Science meeting near the end of 1966, Lynn White turned his attentions, like many at the time, toward ecological crisis. For White, like Rachel Carson in 1962, ecology had reached a critical condition because of expanding human influence, reflected by the twin threat of nuclear proliferation (“Hydrogen bombs are of a different order: a war fought with them might alter the genetics of all life on this planet”) and population growth, with the rapid rise of giant cities and waste piles that attended it (“With the population explosion, the carcinoma of planless urbanism, the now geological deposits of sewage and garbage, surely no creature other than man has ever managed to foul its nest in such short order”).<sup>93</sup>

White was dubious, however, of proposals for short-term, quick fixes, which, “however worthy as individual items, seem too partial, palliative, negative: ban the bomb, tear down the billboards, give the Hindus contraceptives and tell them to eat their sacred cows.”<sup>94</sup> Instead, ever the historian, White hoped to excavate the roots of crisis. In the course of his lecture, he made the now famous argument that “what we do about ecology depends on our ideas of the man-nature relationship,” meaning that, thanks to “the Christian axiom that nature has no reason for existence save to serve man,” it should be concluded that “Christianity bears a huge burden of

---

<sup>93</sup> Lynn White Jr., “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,” *Science* 155:3767 (March 10, 1967), 1204.

<sup>94</sup> White, “Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,” 1204.

guilt” for the modern technological advancements that had led to so much ecological harm.<sup>95</sup>

Ultimately, White hoped that by reclaiming Saint Francis’s “alternate Christian view of nature and man’s relation to it,” western Christianity might be able to rethink its relationship to the planet.<sup>96</sup>

Published in the AAAS journal *Science* a few months later, the lecture-turned-essay caused immediate shockwaves in mainstream Protestant intellectual circles. Although to that point they had offered much less crisis-talk in response to the events of the 1960s than their mainline counterparts, the neo-evangelicals affiliated with *Christianity Today* were especially energized by White’s remarks about the “ecologic crisis.” In fact, thanks to V. Elving Anderson, an evangelical and genetics researcher in the audience for White’s December 1966 talk, the magazine published a response to White’s lecture in January 1967, two months ahead of its March appearance in *Science*.<sup>97</sup> Ever conscious of their public brand, the editorial board at *Christianity Today* published a terse, half-page response, stating, “We suggest that Dr. White take another look at the biblical evidence to make sure that he is not simply transferring guilt from secular man, and the secular scientist in particular, to a misunderstood scriptural heritage.” The editors went on to quote Anderson, who “commented that White’s ‘understanding of the biblical view of nature is quite superficial,’” before defending their respectability on this topic by pointing out that “[a]s recently as the November 25, 1966 issue,” the magazine had criticized people for “despoiling nature, which is a gift of God.”<sup>98</sup>

---

<sup>95</sup> White, “Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,” 1206, 1207, 1206.

<sup>96</sup> White, “Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,” 1207.

<sup>97</sup> David Kenneth Larson, “God’s Gardeners: American Protestant Evangelicals Confront Environmentalism, 1967-2000,” Ph.D. Dissertation (University of Chicago, 2001), 42.

<sup>98</sup> “Scientific Exploitation of Nature,” *Christianity Today*, January 20, 1967, 404.



Evangelical reactions to White's lecture continued into the spring. In May, Elving Anderson joined a "Consultation of Christian Scholars" organized by *Christianity Today* to lead a panel discussion on White's remarks. Major figures like Carl Henry, the magazine's editor-in-chief, and Bill Bright, founder of Campus Crusade for Christ, attended the event in Northern Virginia to discuss the role of Christian scholars in modern intellectual life. Notably, much of the conversation about Lynn White's essay focused on developing a shared "line of attack" against the historian's critiques, exploring ways that they might publicly "disassociate" their movement from the things White had pointed out.<sup>99</sup> Recorded on tape and archived at the Billy Graham Center at Wheaton College, the conversation ultimately sounds more like a public relations team trying to develop a public response to protect their brand, than it did an earnest reaction to a sense that the planet was in crisis. Arriving somewhat late to the crisis style of religious engagement with public issues, it was not until genuine fears about the "population explosion" coalesced around Earth Day 1970 that evangelicalism's public figures would start considering environmental issues with a sense of urgency beyond their immediate concern with the neo-evangelical brand.

Both *Christianity Today* and *The Christian Century* continued to take aim at refuting White's thesis in the immediate years after its publication. In 1969, the *The Christian Century* ran a piece from Hebrew Bible scholar Walter Brueggemann that questioned the value of attempts from writers like White to revalue nature through figures like Francis of Assisi. Instead, Brueggemann made a typical move, attempting to salvage Genesis 1, where White had located the problem of Christianity's teachings about man's dominion over nature. Brueggemann argued that "a closer look at this biblical 'charter' reveals that it is more subtle and ambiguous

---

<sup>99</sup> Consultation of Christian Scholars, *Discussion of Christianity and Ecology*, May 30, 1967, Airlie House, Warrenton, VA]. BGCA *Christianity Today* Records, AUDIO TAPES, item T20.

than conventional eisegesis implies. Indeed, while it may have fostered new forms of exploitation, it may also open the way to a true understanding of the relation between man and his world.”<sup>100</sup> In a similar vein, another editorial from *Christianity Today* in early 1970 defended Genesis’s positive relationship to ecology by clarifying that “the Scripture tells man to subdue Earth—not exploit it. And to ‘be fruitful’ means more than perpetrating an endless round of reproduction. Nothing can be fruitful unless there is a livable environment.”<sup>101</sup>

Ironically given the fact that direct responses to “The Historic Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis” came exclusively from intellectuals and were mostly rooted in the question of protecting Christianity’s public image, Lynn White’s essay is treated as a foundational text in the study of religion and ecology to this day, with the vast majority of sociological and historical studies in the literature on religion and the environment in the U.S. taking White as their starting point and, in some way, working to test his thesis. Todd LeVasseur and Anna Peterson observed this in their introduction to a recent edited volume devoted to White’s legacy: “To no small extent, most work including scholarly writing and also teaching—in the fields of environmental philosophy, ecotheology, and environmental humanities generally constitute a reply to or commentary upon White’s article.”<sup>102</sup> Accepting White’s terms of debate, scholarship on religion and ecology tends to assume that “what [religions] say and do about climate change—whether they encourage concern or help their adherents recognize and cope with the challenge—could...make a decisive

---

<sup>100</sup> Walter Brueggemann, “King in the Kingdom of Things,” *The Christian Century*, September 10, 1969, 1165.

<sup>101</sup> “Fulfilling God’s Cultural Mandate,” *Christianity Today*, February 27, 1970, 25.

<sup>102</sup> Todd LeVasseur and Anna Peterson, “Introduction,” in LeVasseur and Peterson, eds., *Religion and Ecological Crisis: The Lynn White Thesis at Fifty* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 4.

difference,” in the words of another recent review speaking in the terms of today’s pressing environmental problems.<sup>103</sup>

By attending so closely to the question of what religions say about nature, this scholarship more or less embraces a Protestant conception of the nature of religion: a community

---

<sup>103</sup> Robin Globus Veldman, Andrew Szasz, and Randolph Haluza-DeLay, “Introduction: Climate Change and Religion—A Review of Existing Research,” *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture*, 6:3 (2012), 263. For recent studies that take this optimistic view of the power of religious ideas in environmental resistance, see: Justin Farrell, *The Battle for Yellowstone: Morality and the Sacred Roots of Environmental Conflict* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015); Joseph D. Witt, *Religion and Resistance in Appalachia: Faith and the Fight against Mountaintop Removal Coal Mining* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2016); Evan Berry, *Devoted to Nature: The Religious Roots of American Environmentalism* (Oakland: The University of California Press, 2015).

In one extreme case, historian Mark Stoll’s study of Protestant beliefs about nature concludes with a critique of the Black-led environmental justice movement of the 1980s, taking issue with its emphasis on contesting political violence rather than focusing on the sacredness of nature. Stoll writes that, although their churches nurtured and participated in the defense of communities against polluters, black and Hispanic environmental action has almost always been limited in scope and aims. Perhaps because the view from the lower rungs of society encourages resentment of those whom they regard as privileged elites, their movements have not produced an inclusive ideal of society that might address environmental problems more comprehensively.

Stoll goes on to defend the causes of national parks and wildlife conservation that have been criticized as “elite causes,” suggesting that nature conservation is the normatively “comprehensive” agenda African American and Hispanic activists are giving up on. Stoll’s project never establishes why wilderness conservation is more comprehensive than the defense of communities against polluters, apart from his assumption that the priorities of his favored subjects—industrious white Presbyterians—seemed to prioritize it. For Stoll, the vitality of the environmental movement from the end of the nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth can be explained by its leaders’ Presbyterian virtues: “the moral energy, urgency, and focus with which the children of Calvinism had infused the movement.” By contrast, after African Americans became involved primarily in the 1980s, Stoll sees the movement as lacking energy and focus, and the narrative becomes filled with verbs like “wilting,” “drooping,” and the movement is envisioned as “weak, divided, and wandering in the wilderness.” This contrast in language in his description of white and Black Protestants might be understood as itself a participation in racial formation through religious environmentalism. His deployment of language that suggests African American environmentalists are directionless and without energy or focus reproduces certain negative racial stereotypes while maintaining an image of middle-class whiteness as the normative center of environmentalism, even after white Protestant engagement has faded and African Americans became increasingly involved.

The idea that environmental justice is “less comprehensive” than the nature-focused projects of white Presbyterians is easily contested. Ethicist Willis Jenkins maintains that “as environmental justice projects deploy civil rights practices to confront racist distribution of toxins, they expand the basic notion of justice that those rights practices carry, in ways that begin to ecologically rethink the human person.” Throughout his chapter on environmental racism, Jenkins disputes the idea that grassroots environmental justice organizing is a ghettoized distraction from a broad environmental agenda, instead critiquing the “preoccupation with developing an ecological worldview” for missing environmental justice’s crucial contestation of the “whiteness of mainstream environmental thought.” Mark Stoll, *Inherit the Holy Mountain*, 274, 265, 267, 275; Willis Jenkins, *The Future of Ethics: Sustainability, Social Justice, and Religious Creativity* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2013), 205, 192.

formed around a set of beliefs based on canonical texts.<sup>104</sup> I understand religion differently, as a form of social organization that proceeds in close relationship to political economy and other social processes, and through which categories of identity, difference, and value are worked out and relationships to power are managed.<sup>105</sup> In the crisis-talk of the 1960s and 1970s, religious communities often determined the public shape of their religion with crisis as their conversation partner. The political economy that produced those crises helped dictate a certain set of individuated, market-friendly modes of crisis management that can't be explained by looking at a religious tradition's sacred texts and beliefs about nature.

Although White's thesis certainly garnered written responses from mainstream Protestantism's intelligentsia, most of the actual environmental mobilization that took place in the 1970s—thinking here of the mainline's Ecology Church Action Project and its successor, World Hunger Education/Action Together, as well as the evangelical simple lifestyle networks organized first by Evangelicals for Social Action and later through the Lausanne Movement—had very little to say about nature. These efforts tended to focus instead on mainstream Protestants' feeling that planet Earth was in crisis, floating precariously through space at its carrying capacity and calling for immediate crisis management. While much of religion and ecology scholarship takes White's thesis—what we do about ecology depends on our ideas—as its point of departure, I look instead to the “population explosion,” lurking beneath the surface of

---

<sup>104</sup> The classic treatments of the way Religious Studies scholarship has often accepted and imposed a Protestant conception of religion are: Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

<sup>105</sup> Kathryn Lofton, “Why Religion Is Hard For Historians (and How It Can Be Easier),” *Modern American History* 3 (2020), 16.

White's own crisis sensibility, and leading directly to the first Earth Day, as an alternative site for tracking the modern Protestant environmentalism that coalesced during these years.

### **Population**

Although environmental consciousness and planetary thinking had been in the ascendency since 1962 thanks to Rachel Carson's bestseller as well as the countercultural imagery of "whole Earth," "small planet," and "spaceship Earth," the immediate and most pressing context that led to the organization of the first Earth Day in 1970 was the surge of anxiety about a worldwide "population explosion." Lynn White Jr. had of course mentioned this. Like many at the time, in his lecture, he had elevated population growth to the same status of planetary threat as the hydrogen bomb.

Though worries about overpopulation lurked beneath the surface of most environmental writings throughout the 1960s, the most visible herald of "population crisis" came in the form of the biologist Robert Ehrlich's bestselling *The Population Bomb* in 1968. Even the cover elevated the pitch of crisis to new levels, posing at the top of the page two options for the future of the planet: "Population Control or Race to Oblivion?" The coloring of the title "The Population Bomb" was itself stylized to reflect a literal, violent explosion, and just beneath, a highlighted warning in all caps declared: "While you are reading these words four people will have died from starvation. Most of them children." Next to Ehrlich's name at the bottom of the cover, an image of a lit bomb was captioned with a final reminder: "The Population Bomb Keeps Ticking" (fig. 3).

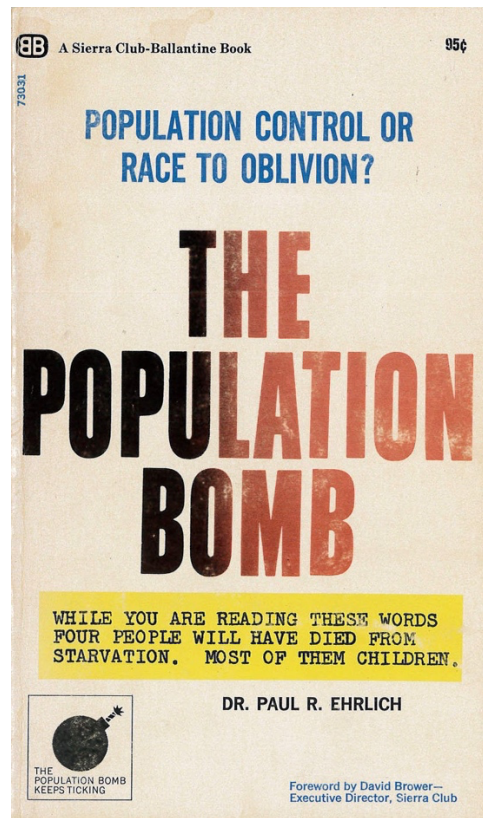


Figure 3 - Paul Ehrlich, *The Population Bomb*, 1968.

Inside the book, Ehrlich's deep pessimism continued, with a frequent refrain that "the battle to feed all of humanity is over."<sup>106</sup> Disaster was on its way and there would be no stopping massive starvation events that would arrive in the 1970s. According to the biologist, the only hope now would be for the United States to "use our political power to push other countries into programs which combine agricultural development and population control. And while this is being done we must take action to reverse the deterioration of our environment before population pressure permanently ruins our planet."<sup>107</sup> Generally speaking, the book was steeped in planetary consciousness and crisis talk, noting that the U.S. is "just one country on an ever-shrinking

<sup>106</sup> Paul Ehrlich, *The Population Bomb* (New York: Ballantine, 1968), xi. Ehrlich added throughout the book that "it is now too late to take action to save many of those people" and "the battle to feed humanity is already lost" (17, 36).

<sup>107</sup> Ehrlich, *The Population Bomb*, xi.

planet. It is obvious that we cannot exist unaffected by the fate of our fellows on the other end of the good ship Earth.”<sup>108</sup>

To avoid this outcome, Ehrlich called for pressure on the developing nations to enforce population control. The text was deeply haunted by the specter of decolonizing nations, where Ehrlich located most of his concern. He opened the book by describing “the *feel* of overpopulation,” describing a trip to Delhi where on a taxi ride back to his hotel,

we entered a crowded slum area...The streets seemed alive with people...People thrusting their hands through the taxi window, begging. People defecating and urinating...People, people, people, people. As we moved slowly through the mob, hand horn squawking, the dust, noise, heat, and cooking fires gave the scene a hellish aspect.<sup>109</sup>

At its heart, Ehrlich’s environmental message about the existential threat to spaceship Earth, was deeply rooted in a visceral sense of disgust and terror at the teeming masses of the decolonizing world, for whom Ehrlich called for some shockingly authoritarian practices of enforced population control.

This observation that *The Population Bomb* and the overpopulation scare in general was connected to a larger project of postcolonial governance is not a new one. “‘Population’ became a problem during a historical moment when neoliberalism was unfolding and the primary purpose of states was increasingly understood to be the fostering of ‘the economy,’ itself a historicizable twentieth-century problematic,” writes Michelle Murphy. “Harnesses to the enhancement of the national economy, this new era of calculative practices designated both valuable and unvaluable human lives: lives worth living, lives worth not dying, lives worthy of investment, and lives not worth being born.”<sup>110</sup> The very term, “population,” came to be associated with value judgments toward human lives, often differentiated through racial and

---

<sup>108</sup> Ehrlich, *The Population Bomb*, 132.

<sup>109</sup> Ehrlich, *The Population Bomb*, 15-16. Emphasis in original.

<sup>110</sup> Michelle Murphy, *The Economization of Life* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 6-7.

colonial categories of difference to mark off certain lives as surplus. But rendered in a “crisis style,” of course, the coherence of the category itself wasn’t to be questioned. Rather, forms of crisis management were called upon to protect the economy.

Ehrlich’s bestseller relied centrally on the linkage of “population” with “crisis,” helping channel the ascendant crisis sensibilities of the 1960s into the modern environmental movement that came into full bloom two years later. Historian Thomas Robertson points out that “a growing sense of crisis in the United States—stemming from varied yet simultaneous crises that all seemed beyond the problem-solving capacity of the system—also fueled Ehrlich’s pessimism and helped drive the appeal of the book.”<sup>111</sup> For Ehrlich, this included the urban riots that had garnered so much crisis-talk in the second half of the decade. “In January 1968, he described riots as ‘symptoms of mankind’s serious disease of overpopulation,’” Robertson summarizes again. “In February, he predicted ‘increasing riots’ if population problems were not addressed.”<sup>112</sup>

Examining the function of crisis-talk in the 1960s, as this chapter has done, leaves the question of the actual social, political, and economic conditions that were being named “crises” unanswered. In fact, crisis-talk itself encourages its conversation partners to look away from such formations and instead explore practices of crisis management while developing subjectivities that provide a personal sense of shelter from the storm. But Ehrlich’s use of “population crisis” to shore up modes of governance meant to protect the health of the “economy” under neoliberalism around 1970 should call attention to another, very real sense in which crisis was central to twentieth-century history: as a central mechanism of capitalist accumulation.

---

<sup>111</sup> Thomas Robertson, *The Malthusian Moment*, 138.

<sup>112</sup> Robertson, *The Malthusian Moment*, 139.



Never a nebulous abstraction that can be analyzed sufficiently as a “discourse” or a “logic,” always a concrete project undertaken by specific actors to facilitate the spread of financial markets and capitalist power the world over, neoliberalism came to fruition in the early 1970s as policy makers, economists, and business owners responded to the rumblings of recession by embracing financial and monetary measures that could facilitate continued deindustrialization paired with global capital expansion in the drive for new sites of extraction and accumulation. As the era of formal colonialism drew to a close after World War II, economists and policymakers set to work constructing a new economic order that could maintain the asymmetries in wealth and power that colonialism had produced, ensuring the continued dominance of North America and Western Europe through the freedom of market actors to globe hop in search of cheap labor and resources. As Quinn Slobodian has shown, the neoliberal economist Frederik Hayek and his colleagues in the Mont Pellerin society viewed the expansion of democracy in the decolonizing world as a direct threat to capitalist expansion, and they sought in various ways to limit it. In 1960 Hayek spoke directly to the risk that decolonization posed to his economic project, writing, “limiting the powers of democracy in these new parts of the world is the only chance of preserving democracy in those parts of the world.”<sup>113</sup> Later, Milton Friedman showed his assent to the idea that “restricting political freedom, as commonly understood, was necessary under some circumstances to preserve economic freedom,” when he came out in opposition to universal suffrage in Apartheid South Africa.<sup>114</sup>

---

<sup>113</sup> Quoted in Slobodian, *Globalists*, 14.

<sup>114</sup> Slobodian, *Globalists*, 151. Slobodian’s detailed account of specific neoliberal writings provide concrete evidence for David Harvey’s famous retort to neoliberal’s self-proclamation as a project for universal liberty: “neoliberalism confers rights and freedoms on those ‘whose income, leisure, and security need no enhancing.’” Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 38.

This effort at ensuring safe passage for capitalist expansion in a decolonizing world where true democracies might run the risk of challenging it echoes a long-term problematic in American capitalism, the question of what to do with surplus populations. Capital's voracious drive for cheap and pliant labor pools and its inevitable production of unemployed masses has never been a closed system. Rather, it has always been accompanied by human beings caught up in a kind of limbo.<sup>115</sup> Colonial, racial, and gendered regimes of violence and discipline have long been a solution here, dealing death to some and training others to see themselves at odds with those who might otherwise represent class allies.<sup>116</sup>

Ehrlich's interpretation of massive urban poverty in Delhi, India in terms of "the *feel* of overpopulation," and his calls for sterilization programs and other coercive birth control policies, were a next step in this long-term work of categorizing people as surplus to capital's requirements. His affective narrative about the crisis was thus attempting to make sense of what, in Marxist theory, is understood as the long-term, permanent crisis of capitalism: the inevitable decline in profits that results from the depletion of labor and resources. In capitalist production, commodities are produced independent of demand, with credit propping up the production process while capital awaits consumption of its products. At the same time, in capital's work of extracting surplus value through cheaper and cheaper labor, this temporary propping up of production through credit will inevitably burst like a bubble. Unemployment is the inevitable outcome, with the continuous creation of "stagnant surplus population."<sup>117</sup> Ultimately, according

---

<sup>115</sup> On "cheap labor" in capitalist political economies, see: Marx, *Capital*, 880-881. On "surplus life," see: Murphy, *The Economization of Life*, 51.

<sup>116</sup> These practices of political and social violence, meant to govern and even negate surplus life, date back to the seventeenth century. As Barbara Fields has shown in her classic essay on the subject, racial ideology was developed to militate against cross-racial solidarity among European and African poor people living on the margins of colonial Virginia's systems of production. Fields, "Slavery, Race, and Ideology in the United States of America," *New Left Review* 1:181 (May 1, 1990), 95-118.

<sup>117</sup> Joshua Clover, "Crisis," in Jeff Diamanti, Andrew Pendakis, and Imre Szeman, eds. *The Bloomsbury Companion to Marx* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2019), 294.

to Joshua Clover, through the many cycles of temporary crises, “this compulsion toward rising levels of productivity ceaselessly increases the proportion of means of production in relation to labor expended in the production process.” The result is a waning capacity to extract surplus value, and a decline in profit follows: “productive reinvestment ceases no matter the money supply, and capitalism—bereft of its existential basis in real accumulation—enters into crisis.”<sup>118</sup>

Often through severe political violence, the political economy had sought temporary fixes to this problem by relocating its centers of credit and capital, as well as its sites for extracting cheap labor and natural resources. This process of realignment can help explain the real, material conditions that haunted visions of the planet in crisis from Karl Barth onward. World War I, the historical upheaval that inspired Barth’s crisis theology, involved the realignment of world capitalism as credit and finance transferred from the UK to the US.<sup>119</sup> Unemployment in the U.S.’s former industrial centers through the process of deindustrialization as capital looked elsewhere for cheap labor was clearly at the root of the urban crises of the late 1960s.<sup>120</sup> And the neoliberal project itself might be seen as part of this process, given the way economists worked to restrict democratic pressures in the decolonizing world in order to insulate market actors as they searched for new sites of capital accumulation.<sup>121</sup> The situation of population density and urban poverty in 1960s Delhi, where Ehrlich had been so disturbed by what he viewed as “overpopulation,” was the result of a decade and a half of intensive foreign capital investment in

---

<sup>118</sup> Clover, “Crisis,” 293.

<sup>119</sup> “The First World War can be understood as the rearrangement of the capitalist world-system within what would be the transfer of primacy from the UK to the US.” Clover, “Crisis,” 293.

<sup>120</sup> Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*; Cowie, *Capital Moves*.

<sup>121</sup> “The general thrust of any capitalistic logic of power,” writes David Harvey, is that territories “should be continuously opened up.” Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, 139. See also: Slobodian, *Globalists*, 14.

the rapid industrialization of newly independent India's urban centers.<sup>122</sup> In short, the teeming slums of Delhi that where Ehrlich experienced “the *feel* of overpopulation,” alongside the “The Crisis in the Nation” of urban riots in Detroit and Chicago are ultimately products of the long-term crisis that is capitalism's depletion of labor, resources, and, eventually, profit. Crisis-talk provided mainstream Protestants with a conversation partner through which to manage their relationship to this logic of power.

### Earth Day 1970

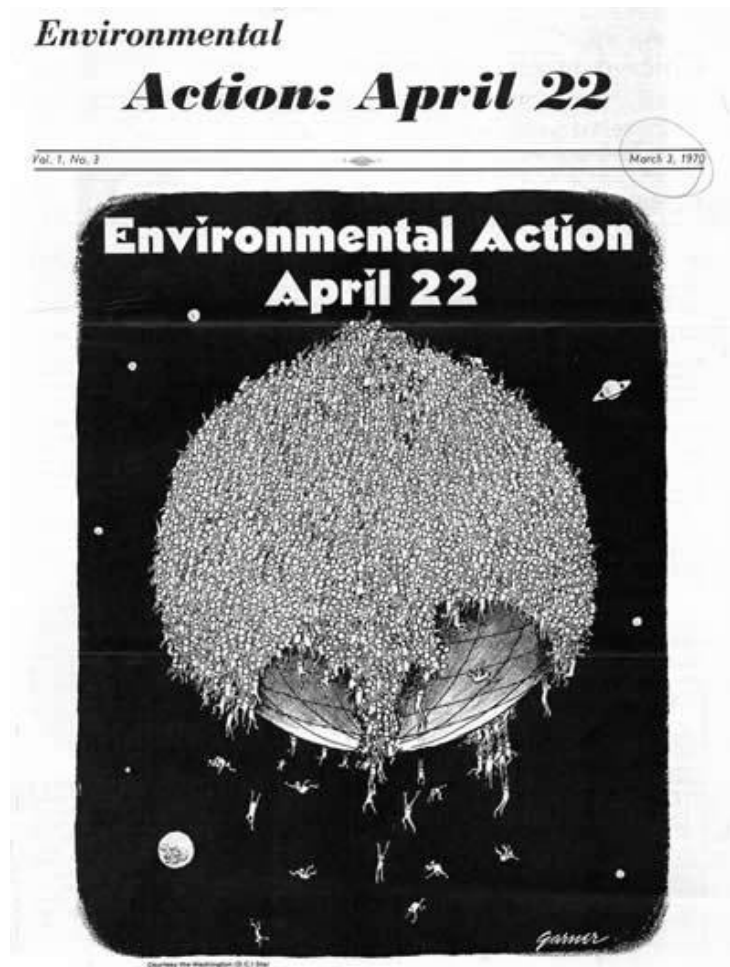
These were the inauspicious circumstances of the first Earth Day: the culmination of several years of North American anxieties about the pressing crises of “surplus populations” in Detroit and Delhi. As Robertson has written, “Earth Day represented, in many ways, the apotheosis of the view of spaceship Earth in jeopardy. Despite their other numerous divisions, many Americans could agree with the metaphor's core concept: that the Earth's resources were limited and running short.”<sup>123</sup> The result was an historic display of environmental concern across the country, with some estimating as many as twenty-million people participating in what was organized as a “teach-in” on the crises facing planet Earth. These crises were numerous, but they deeply embedded in planetary consciousness, which involved concern for interrelated anxieties about poverty, war, decolonization, rioting, and “overpopulation,” all exacerbated by the shrinking capacities of the planet to support human life. In March of 1970, an image on the cover

---

<sup>122</sup> A 1964 drought and a subsequent industrial recession in 1965 resulted in, in the words of one economic history, “a prolonged period...in which the installed [industrial] capacities could not even be fully utilized.” Ehrlich's impactful trip to Dehli, then, came in a precise moment of capital retreat after nearly two decades intensive surplus value extraction through rapid industrialization. Yes, the teeming masses of Delhi were unemployed and facing desperate circumstances. But no, this wasn't an issue of overpopulation so much as it was one more iteration of capitalism's long term crisis. Dietmar Rothermund, *An Economic History of India: From Pre-Colonial Times to 1991* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 137.

<sup>123</sup> Robertson, *The Malthusian Moment*, 176.

of *Environmental Action* magazine invoked this image of an overpopulated spaceship Earth as it proclaimed the upcoming Earth Day teach-ins the following month (fig. 4).



*Figure 4 - Environmental Action, March 2, 1970.*

As the first Earth Day neared, bureaucrats at the National Council of Churches were hard at work organizing an ecology action project for the mainline. On April 1<sup>st</sup>, NCC issued a press release asking churches across the U.S. to observe the Sunday before Earth Day as “Environmental Sunday.” Looking to build on Earth Day enthusiasm, the press release also announced, “that the NCC was in the process of mounting a major program related to ecological

problems.”<sup>124</sup> According to the press release, a task force made up of leaders from the mainline denominations was planning a major conference on “Human Survival and Quality of Life” for later that year, while also exploring the possibility of on-going regional actions on environmental issues.

Ultimately, this task force coalesced into the Ecology Church Action Project (ECAP), a short-lived but ambitious effort at mobilizing church-based environmental action nationwide. At the time, the National Council of Churches was in the process of reimagining its role and ECAP’s emergence very much reflected this. Since the 1940s, the inter-denominational group had served as the institutional embodiment of its member churches’ aspirations to be seen as the “mainline” of American Christianity. Following the lead of Reinhold Niebuhr and other Christian realists like John Foster Dulles, the council had at the time embraced the patriotic, interventionist principles of the day. That, along with their public role in advocating for the foundation of the U.N., had given them the ear of elected officials on Capitol Hill and in the White House who had a vested interest in the Christian electoral constituency the council represented. By the mid-1960s, historian Jill Gill estimates the NCC represented nearly half of America’s voters, and as long as they shepherded that flock toward realist interventionism, their influence was left unchallenged.<sup>125</sup>

At times, the NCC’s status at the ear of the president (or at least the president’s staff) could stand in tension with liberal Protestant clergy’s longstanding self-image as American Christianity’s progressive, modernist avant-garde. Sanguine about their influence in Washington but committed to their positioning as American Christianity’s progressive wing, NCC leadership

---

<sup>124</sup> Press Release, 4/1/1970. PHS NCC Administration Files Box 9 Folder 1.

<sup>125</sup> Jill K. Gill, *Embattled Ecumenism: The National Council of Churches, the Vietnam War, and the Trails of the Protestant Left* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2011).

went to the White House in the late 1960s to advocate against the Vietnam War and found that their recommendations were now falling on deaf ears. In 1969, NCC leadership were stunned when, in contrast to LBJ and his Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Richard Nixon ignored their policy recommendations completely, sending Secretary of State William Rogers to vent his frustration that the NCC's first priority wasn't selling their constituency on Nixon's agenda.<sup>126</sup> Left out in the cold by the new White House, and with its patriotism and Cold War credentials placed in question, the NCC set about reconsidering its place in American public life. On Vietnam, the council regrouped in 1972 organizing the "An Ecumenical Witness" conference to try and exert a new kind of influence by offering moral guidance to the public, rather than wielding influence in D.C..<sup>127</sup> Between 1969 and 1972, the council was also considering what role it might play in the burgeoning environmental movement.

The mainline efforts that coalesced into ECAP after Earth Day in 1970 were developed out of this same conundrum on what the NCC's public role and influences should look like. Ultimately, Earth Day's imagery of an overpopulated planet in crisis helped guide the organization's environmental programming in a direction of crisis management. The major environmental task force announced by the council's pre-Earth Day press release had in fact

---

<sup>126</sup> The meeting with Rogers is described in detail in Gill, *Embattled Ecumenism*, 246. For context, it's also worth noting that more than any president before him, Nixon knew he could count on Billy Graham to do what the NCC wouldn't, sell the American public on Nixon's agenda in Vietnam. When Nixon was serving in Eisenhower's administration, Graham had more or less pledged that he would help sell his agenda in Vietnam and that he hoped the agenda would be an interventionist one. Ever the Cold Warrior, Graham's commitment to selling war to his evangelical audience likely cast the NCC in a much less favorable light by comparison. Daniel Daniel K. Williams, *God's Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 28.

<sup>127</sup> This is Jill Gill's central argument. After decades of influence in Washington, in the late 1960s the "NCC faced a hostile White House, had its patriotism questioned, and found it harder to access information." As a result, it undertook an "extensive, devoted, and costly effort to make a witness against the Vietnam War" after which "for the next three decades, the NCC continued to struggle amid shrinking resources, to self-evaluate and restructure, to fend off conservative attacks and to try to shape a prophetic ecumenical witness on social justice and peace issues." Gill, *Embattled Ecumenism*, 10, 355.

been organizing itself for several years, the result of a merger between a new Environmental Stewardship Team at NCC organizing a major conference on environmental issues set for 1970 and a Church World Service affiliated group in the process of planning a national conference to communicate the urgency of “world-wide population pressures.”<sup>128</sup> In their shared focus on conferences, the groups’ ambitions aligned with the NCC’s overall direction at this time, recognizing its waning influence in Washington and turning instead toward a position as prophetic witness, offering its constituent denominations guidance for study and action in response to the world’s crises.

The NCC’s Environmental Stewardship Team was actually conceived in 1967, when the Stewardship Section of NCC’s Division of Christian Life decided to make its mission inclusive of ecology issues. From the start, their messaging focused on the marriage of traditional conservation concerns and the crisis-talk of the 1960s, with members of the new Environmental Stewardship Team writing about “crisis situations in urban and rural areas which, unless checked and reversed, can bring disaster to human, animal, and plant life, as well as diminish the vast natural resources of our planet and its atmosphere.”<sup>129</sup> Echoing Rachel Carson, organizers spoke of their concern that pesticides and supersonic jets would spoil air and water quality and that “the freedom to enjoy wilderness areas and uncluttered landscapes is rapidly becoming a memory of our parents’ generation. In short, it is quite evident that we have already seriously distorted the purpose of God’s creation.”<sup>130</sup> Viewing pollution—and even mere “cluttering”—of wilderness areas as a distortion of God’s purpose for creation, and framing it as a crisis of disastrous

---

<sup>128</sup> “The Action Project on Human Survival and Quality of Life: A Brief History,” March 3, 1970. PHS NCC Office of Administration, box 9, folder 1.

<sup>129</sup> Nordan C. Murphy, “Environmental Stewardship” Program Proposal, 10/16/68. PHS NCC Christian Life and Mission Records, Box 8 Folder 9.

<sup>130</sup> Proposal for Environmental Stewardship Conference, 9/16/69. PHS NCC Christian Life and Mission Records, Box 8 Folder 9. Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962.



proportions, the NCC's earliest discussions reflected a postwar impulse to focus on the threat to the "open space" to which the suburban white middle class had been promised access, something that had echoes in Carson, but was not a major focus of the post-Earth Day environmental movement's emphasis on planetary issues.<sup>131</sup> In response to this sense of crisis, the Environmental Stewardship Team proposed a course of action "to interpret the meaning of continued environmental abuse to available audiences through every channel available to the Christian community."<sup>132</sup> In this way, the new team was clear in its course of action: take on the position of prophetic witness and offer its constituency a moral vision on environmental issues. Their next practical step, as proposed to the council's Division of Christian Life in the fall of 1969, was to plan a national conference where their vision might be communicated to a wider audience. Focusing on the production of interior dispositions adequate for facing planetary crisis, the Environmental Stewardship Team proposed to provide "existential exposure" to environmental issues, the committee planned to hold a "Floating Conference" on the Hudson or some other waterway, with the entire event taking place on a touring boat that could move the group through polluted waterways.<sup>133</sup>

By the time the Environmental Stewardship Team had submitted its conference proposal to Jon Regier at the NCC Division of Christian Life and Mission, he had caught wind of a similar conference being planned by a loose network of mainline bureaucrats affiliated with Church

---

<sup>131</sup> On this postwar suburban influence on modern environmentalism, see: Adam Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside: Suburban Sprawl and the Rise of American Environmentalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>132</sup> Nordan C. Murphy, "Environmental Stewardship" Program Proposal, 10/16/68. PHS NCC Christian Life and Mission Records, Box 8 Folder 9.

<sup>133</sup> "A First Step: An Existential Conference on Environmental Stewardship" PHS NCC Christian Life and Mission Box 60 Folder 16. The role of the "existential" on the new left is well documented, starting with Doug Rossinow, *The Politics of Authenticity: Liberalism, Christianity, and the New Left in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), who writes that...

World Service's population control program.<sup>134</sup> Regier was supportive of the Environmental Stewardship Team's conference proposal, but wrote back suggesting they reach out to the population network and consider how they might relate to one another.<sup>135</sup> In January of 1970, as the environmental decade dawned, the two groups met and voted to merge their conferences into one, to be organized by the renamed "Ecology Action" team, co-chaired by Rodney Shaw of the population committee and Franklin Jensen of the environmental stewardship team.

While Jensen's Environmental Stewardship Team was focused primarily on matters of pollution and conservation, especially insofar as they constituted a crisis for wilderness and open spaces in the U.S., his new co-chair, Rodney Shaw, and the other church bureaucrats planning this conference on "population pressures" were much more focused on the Ehrlich-style notion of a global crisis of overpopulation. Shaw (1918-2006) had come to mainline environmental organizing by way of the population control movement in the first place, where he, like the NCC in general, had been focused on exerting influence in Washington. He was raised and educated in Arkansas before a stint in the chaplaincy in World War II took him from the area. After the war, he attended seminary at Garrett Biblical Institute in Illinois and began a career in the Methodist clergy in Wisconsin. As planetary consciousness spread in the 1960s, Shaw sought a role on the Methodist Board of Social Concern where, like many others at the time, he began focusing his work on the twin threats of nuclear proliferation and the world population crisis. By the end of the decade, Shaw had relocated to Washington D.C., where he founded the Population Institute in 1969 and successfully lobbied for the creation of the U.S. Commission on Population Growth and the American Future, which Nixon signed into law in 1972.

---

<sup>134</sup> Don C. Shaw, "A Population Primer." PHS NCC Christian Life and Mission Box 8 Folder 9.

<sup>135</sup> Jon Regier to Don Shaw, 10/15/69. PHS NCC Christian Life and Mission Box 8 Folder 9.



*Figure 5 - Rodney Shaw (1918-2006)*

At their first meeting, the group outlined three goals: “To bring into effective action the forces of the American religious populace to safeguard human survival and to increase the quality of life on this planet;” “To turn on the man in the pew to change his life style as a Christian witness;” and “To issue a positive affirmation on birth control.”<sup>136</sup> These goals were to be carried out through a major conference under the title “Human Survival and Quality of Life,” to be held in October 1970. Combining questions of pollution and population into crisis-talk about “human survival” on planet Earth, the group agreed to center their efforts on mobilizing their constituencies to provide Christian witness, while also affirming the need to tame population growth. They, like Ehrlich, had incorporated ideas about environmental damage and the image of spaceship Earth into their overarching Malthusian anxieties about population. At one committee

---

<sup>136</sup> Minutes, Environmental Stewardship Action Team, 1/21/70. PHS NCC Christian Life and Mission Box 60 Folder 16.

meeting, for example, someone opened the meeting by reading a quote from Ehrlich's book, where he stated that "Mankind itself may stand on the brink of extinction; in its death throes it could take with it most of the other passengers of spaceship Earth"<sup>137</sup>

With their focus on providing Christian witness on planetary crisis, these early efforts seemed to align with NCC's overall reimagining of its role in the American public underway at the turn of the decade. This also seemed to parallel the political scientist Robert Booth Fowler's influential study of Protestant environmentalism, which focused on the NCC and mainline denominations' fondness for "adopting agendas."<sup>138</sup> And this was indeed a central means by which mainline denominations engaged the environment around this time. The United Methodist Board of Christian Social Concerns adopted a statement in 1969 declaring, "insofar as the church is committed to man's becoming more fully human she cannot justifiably remain indifferent to his ravaging of nature," and calling on the church "to awaken and alert an apathetic public to the seriousness of the present ecological crisis."<sup>139</sup> The American Lutheran Church, for example, published a pamphlet on *The Environmental Crisis* in 1970, declaring that "not only in its word but also in its deeds the whole of Christ's Church should be in the forefront of those who care and act in the environmental crisis."<sup>140</sup> The United Presbyterian Church declared in 1971 that it "commits itself to participate in the preservation and rehabilitation of the household of man in nature and to seek shalom (wholeness) which requires an equitable, hospitable environmental for all life and envisions a revitalized human community."<sup>141</sup> As Fowler suggests, throughout the

---

<sup>137</sup> "Agenda and minutes," October 2, 1970. PHS NCC Christian Life and Mission Records, box 8 folder 8.

<sup>138</sup> Robert Booth Fowler, *The Greening of Protestant Thought*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995, 15.

<sup>139</sup> "Environmental Stewardship Resolution," PHS NCC Christian Life and Mission Box 60 Folder 16.

<sup>140</sup> Quoted in Charles H. Yapple, "The Christian Church and Environmental Education: A Study of Involvement in the United States," Ph.D. Dissertation (College of Environmental Science and Forestry, State University of New York, Syracuse, 1982), 279.

<sup>141</sup> Quoted in Yapple, "The Christian Church and Environmental Education," 282.

entirety of the environmental decade, mainline churches and the NCC made use of the “environmental statement” again and again, with little sign of actual concrete action. And indeed, this critique could certainly be levied at the Environmental Stewardship Team’s initial planning in 1968 and 1969. One lengthy paper offering “Analysis and Action Proposals” addressing “The Changing Environment: Does the Church Have a Major Responsibility?” set forth “Development of Statement on These Issues” as its first action item, with further action items focused on disseminating that statement to church constituencies through educational material.<sup>142</sup>

But, as the planning proceeded, they would begin to think more about potential models for mobilization they hoped would garner practical environmental action among their constituencies. Their vision would be to draw on the methods of civil rights organizers in order to create a wide network of people engaged in collective activism, direct action, and policy advocacy. But, as ECAP unfolded, organized within an intensifying world of planetary crisis-talk, their efforts would experience the same drift toward temporary, ad hoc responses and emphasis on internal, personal growth. Eventually, the result would be an embrace of lifestyle religion as a kind of inward crisis management practice directly reliant on neoliberalism’s vision of seamless global markets.

---

<sup>142</sup> David Graham and Robert Theobald, “The Changing Environment: Does the Church Have a Major Responsibility?” 10/2/69. PHS NCC Christian Life and Mission box 8, folder 9.

# - 2 -

## ACTION

In April 1970, the organizers of the first Earth Day looked to herald a new—or at least renewed—environmental movement, inspired both by the social movements and the planetary consciousness that had characterized the second half of the previous decade. On top of the 20 million who joined events the day-of, some estimated that the event led to the formation of 4,000 new university and community based environmental groups, along with 10,000 more student groups in elementary and secondary schools.<sup>1</sup> But the actual nature of this new environmental politics was uncertain. A younger generation of leftist activists who had cut their teeth on anti-war protests, SDS meetings, and sit-ins at campus administration buildings hoped their methods of direct action would become the order of the day. In fact, they had already begun pushing the environmental movement in this direction. Only two months before the first Earth Day, UC Santa Barbra students burned a Bank of America building. A *Ramparts* special issue on ecology

---

<sup>1</sup> “National Conference on Environmental Action,” GCAH General Welfare/Church and Society Records, 1443-4:04.

later declared that “the students who burned the Bank of America in Santa Barbara may have done more towards saving the environment than all the Teach-ins put together.”<sup>2</sup> Just up the coast at UC San Jose on Earth Day itself, students bought a brand new 1970 Ford Maverick and buried it near campus.<sup>3</sup>

Soon after Earth Day that April, mainstream Protestant church leaders of both evangelical and mainline persuasions set out to mobilize their congregations, hoping to stir up their planetary consciousness and get them to embrace environmental policy aims for the sake of planet Earth. With inchoate concerns about global overpopulation, air and water pollution, energy shortages, and crop failures all added to the menu of planetary concern, older forms of environmentalism centered on wilderness conservation were becoming less relevant.<sup>4</sup> For mainstream Protestant church leaders, the question remained open: could Christian environmentalism gain momentum, and if so, would it take the form of the radical movement politics ascendant in the previous decade, or might it look like something else entirely?

At the dawn of the 1970s, many Protestant leaders were envisioning the former. The watchword was “action,” evoking the calls to direct action that pervaded the social movements of the 1960s and envisioning church-based environmental mobilization centered on collective activism and advocacy. Less than three months after Earth Day, Rodney Shaw, a Methodist minister who came to the environmental movement by way of late-1960s population panic, helped organize a national Environmental Action Conference outside of Detroit. Ahead of the

---

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Stephanie LeMeneger, *Living Oil: Petroleum Culture in the American Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 28.

<sup>3</sup> LeMeneger, *Living Oil*, 26.

<sup>4</sup> Historians of environmentalism have generally periodized “modern environmentalism” as beginning in 1962 with the landmark publication of Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*. See, for example, Hal K. Rothman, *The Greening of a Nation? Environmentalism in the U.S. since 1945* (Orlando: Harcourt Brace, 1998); Adam Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside: Suburban Sprawl and the Rise of American Environmentalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

conference itself, Shaw circulated a memo that laid out the reasoning behind the event: “The environmental movement must now make the transition to an action phase. We are determined that the tremendous energy and concern demonstrated by millions of people on April 22<sup>nd</sup> should not be allowed to dissipate.”<sup>5</sup>

Thanks to a donation from the Alliance for Labor Action, the conference was held at United Auto Workers facilities near Onaway, Michigan. With opening remarks from the presidents of both the UAW and the Teamsters, the location and speakers both reflected this hoped-for action phase of environmentalism, deeply embedded in the spirit of collectivism that had pervaded the labor and social movements of previous decades. At the conference, participants could choose between a dozen workshops that reflected this same emphasis on political and social action for the environment, with breakout sessions on “Environmental Action and the Labor Movement,” “Ecology and the Pentagon,” “Environmental Action and the Urban Poor Communities,” “Corporate Responsibility,” and “Lobbying for Environmental Quality.” Clearly, the conference hoped to herald a new phase in the environmental movement that moved far beyond questions of conserving wilderness and instead looked to both vulnerable communities and powerful institutions as sites of action. Acting on behalf of the Methodist Church in the immediate wake of Earth Day, Rodney Shaw hoped to help organize a Christian environmental movement centered on direct action. In the years that followed, he and other mainline leaders would try to organize a national Ecology Church Action Project through the National Council of Churches.

---

<sup>5</sup> “National Conference on Environmental Action,” GCAH General Welfare/Church and Society Records, 1443-4:04. Emphasis in original.



### **Introducing Action**

As the new decade began, crisis-talk about the planet prompted a cadre of both mainline and evangelical leaders to consider what Christian environmentalism could look like. To many of them, their churches bore unique responsibility because of their aspirational identification as the nation's moral guides. In fact, letters from secular environmentalists hoping for religious involvement raised this possibility explicitly, and many U.S. Protestant leaders would have jumped at the opportunity to reassert their moral authority after it had been questioned so thoroughly in the previous decade. In fact, many in the broader environmental movement—itsself expanding rapidly during these years—expressed hope that religious organizations might help provide the movement with a more articulated moral and ethical basis, as well as frustration that churches had not done so yet. At the 1971 annual meeting of the environmental non-profit Friends of the Earth, itself only in its third year of existence, attendees devoted the entire discussion period to the question of church involvement in the movement. Writing to a colleague at the National Council of Churches, one attendee reported, “the mood of the group was cynicism of a quite deep nature—caused apparently, by an equally powerful wish that religion and the church would come forward and lead the theological—or really philosophical and ethical—basis for the ecology movement.” Still in its infancy, Friends of the Earth had won some early victories, such as its successful campaign against the development of the supersonic transport airplane. Participants at the annual meeting opined that they had been unable to provide positive alternatives for the things they were critiquing. What positive vision of community or society might they advocate for among the workers who lost their jobs as a result of their victory over the transport plane project? “To sum up, FOE and Co. are crying out for

theological/philosophical underpinning—and are cynically despairing that the church and religion can or will provide it.”<sup>6</sup>

Between 1970 and 1974, two specific networks—one mainline and one evangelical—looked to seize upon this opportunity and mobilize their churchgoing constituencies to take social and political action for the sake of the planet. Within the mainline, a loose network of denominational bureaucrats with connections to the National Council of Churches organized an Ecology Church Action Project (ECAP) in 1970. Among evangelicals, Ronald Sider, an Anabaptist historian and writer, organized a network called Evangelicals for Social Action (ESA), which focused on a wider set of social issues all nonetheless guided by crisis-talk about the planet as evangelical Christians worried about frequent news reports of fossil fuel scarcity, crop failure, and starvation around the world.<sup>7</sup> At the start of the decade, both groups placed a central emphasis on the word “action,” including the word in the names of their organizations, and using it as an organizing principle for the type of environmentalism they advocated for. Focusing their message on the theme of action, the protest movements of the 1960s loomed large. Dreaming of marches, demonstrations, sit-ins, and long lists of demands, ECAP and ESA organizers looked to create national movements of Christian environmentalists taking their care for Creation to the streets and the statehouse.

---

<sup>6</sup> John Clarke to Dave Poindexter, “Religion and the Church at Friends of the Earth Annual Meeting,” April 27, 1971. GCAH General Welfare/Church and Society Records, 1443-4-1:01.

<sup>7</sup> David Swartz provides a detailed recounting of the Evangelicals for Social Action’s 1973 and 1974 Thanksgiving Workshops along with brief biographies of many of the network’s key figures. For a lengthier treatment of Sider’s career specifically, see also Brantley Gasaway’s *Progressive Evangelicals*. Both monographs concern themselves with the progressive potential of this network and why it didn’t become as influential as it initially aspired. I am more concerned with Sider and ESA’s specific mode of thinking about planetary crisis and their pioneering message of lifestyle choice as a way of dealing with Americans’ implication in it. David Swartz, *Moral Minority: The Evangelical Left in an Age of Conservatism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2012); Brantley Gasaway, *Progressive Evangelicals and the Pursuit of Social Justice* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

Though neither ECAP nor ESA are exactly well-known, the narrative that follows will be familiar in certain ways. Historians of the mainline have long spoken of the seven sisters clergy's enthusiasm for social and political movements, aspiring to serve as a kind of progressive intelligentsia, an avant-garde dragging their congregations forward into a more inclusive and sustainable future.<sup>8</sup> For some historians, these avant-garde aspirations created distance between mainline clergy and their more conservative congregations, ultimately serving as a primary cause of their denominations' declining demographics and waning public influence.<sup>9</sup> More recently, historians of evangelicalism have begun to account for this brief energy around what they variously call "progressive evangelicalism" or the "evangelical left," arguing that while the groups showed potential for shaping evangelical politics before the party lines hardened in 1980, the coalitions broke apart over disagreements about race and gender as well as whether an embrace of anti-war, pro-civil rights, and environmental politics would be too much of an accommodation of theological and social liberalism.<sup>10</sup> Taken together, these scholars suggest that neither mainline nor evangelical constituencies were very receptive to their denominational bureaucrats' attempts at incorporating new models of political engagement and activism. Viewed in a vacuum, the stories of ECAP and ESA roughly align with this notion. Between 1970 and 1974, environmentally committed clergy were indeed unable to mobilize their constituencies into radical action around the issue. These interpretations, however, look primarily toward internal

---

<sup>8</sup> Elesha Coffman, *The Christian Century and the Rise of the Protestant Mainline* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>9</sup> David Hollinger, *After Cloven Tongues of Fire: Protestant Liberalism in Modern American History* (Princeton, NJ: University Press, 2013). Jill K. Gill, *Embattled Ecumenism: The National Council of Churches, the Vietnam War, and the Trials of the Protestant Left* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2011).

<sup>10</sup> See: Swartz, *Moral Minority*; Gasaway, *Progressive Evangelicals*; David Kirkpatrick, *A Gospel for the Poor: Global Social Christianity and the Latin American Evangelical Left* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019).

disagreements within the movements to explain the outcomes, an approach that fails to explain why mainline and evangelical environmentalism followed such similar paths during this period.

This chapter places the stories of ECAP and ESA alongside one another in search of larger patterns that explain why “environmental action” largely failed to get off the ground in these church bodies. In so doing, I suggest that, like with the rise of crisis-talk about the planet in general, parallels between mainline and evangelical efforts at mobilizing environmental action should draw our attention to the shaping power of the political economy in religious thought and practice. At the dawn of the 1970s, mainstream Protestants felt haunted by the long crisis of capitalism—its continuous depletion of labor and resources in search of profit—with a hopeful vision of collective action for the sake of the planet. But, neoliberal political reason, with its emphasis on individual economic choices over against collective democratic politics combined with the logic of crisis-talk to make this an uphill battle.<sup>11</sup> Mainstream Protestants of both varieties saw their environmental mobilization efforts follow a similar course across these years. More than the internal theological debates that for many historians differentiate evangelicals and mainliners, I argue for the importance of attending to the way both groups worked from similar material positions in the political economy, attempting to mobilize their constituencies in the same moment that neoliberalism was coming to fruition.<sup>12</sup>

### **The Ecology Church Action Project**

As the environmental decade dawned, the two mainline projects that had emerged at NCC out of late-1960s crisis-talk about the planet combined in order to make a more concerted effort at organizing mainline environmental action. The two groups—the Environmental

---

<sup>11</sup> Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (New York: Zone Books, 2015).

<sup>12</sup> David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Judith Stein, *Pivotal Decade: How the United States Traded Factories for Finance in the Seventies* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011).

Stewardship Team and the Population Conference Committee—set to work planning a national conference to “explore the theological and ethical meanings for the churches of the population/environment crisis,” in hopes of mobilizing mainline churchgoers into environmental action. According to the committee’s proposal documents drafted in February and March of 1970, their hope was that a national conference would “confront individual Christians with their personal responsibility.”<sup>13</sup> This echoed earlier documents that had shied away from direct institutional involvement in environmental action and instead favored the model of prophetic witness through conferences, educational materials, and position statements.<sup>14</sup> By the start of April 1970, the conference had been given a date, an executive committee, and an official announcement in an NCC press release. In this way, the group’s proposed conference reflected NCC’s crisis style at the time, offering prophetic witness to constituent denominations that they hoped would guide churchgoers’ own inward reflections on the crisis at hand.

Contrasting with this emphasis on “prophetic witness” common in NCC projects at the time, the March 1970 proposal document closed with a second, more audacious action item. Compared to their pages-long conference proposal, the committee stated this second goal much more briefly and with far less detail about how it might be carried it out: “The target date of June 30, 1971 has been established for establishing community action teams in sixty major centers

---

<sup>13</sup> “NCCC Strategy Conference and Action Project on Human Survival and Quality of Life,” PHS NCC Administrative Files box 9 folder 1.

<sup>14</sup> David Graham and Robert Theobald’s 1969 paper on the church’s role in the environmental movement, for example, had stated in no uncertain terms that the church’s role would be to provide a “world view” that gave meaning to ideas and actions coming out of the movement, and nothing more. And in meeting minutes from 1968, a member of ECAP’s predecessor, the Action Team on Environmental Stewardship, stated that they had avoided planning specific actions “because of a fear of socialism.” David Graham and Robert Theobald, “The Changing Environment: Does the Church Have a Major Responsibility? Analysis and Action Proposals,” October 2, 1969; Action Team on Environmental Stewardship, “Notes on a Conversation,” September 23, 1968, PHS NCC Christian Life and Mission box 8 folder 9.

across the country.”<sup>15</sup> Here, the NCC environmental action team had set out an ambitious, action-oriented goal that contrasted sharply with later critiques that all Protestant environmental groups did was make policy statements.<sup>16</sup> What their vision of a nationwide network of “action teams” would actually do was still unclear in March, but as they began meeting more frequently throughout 1970, the new environmental action team made an ambitious effort at carrying it out.

The merger of the NCC’s stewardship and population teams brought new faces into the fold who, over the next twelve months, worked to connect their ecumenical network’s environmental anxieties with models of concrete community action drawn from the movement politics of the previous decade. While many among National Council of Churches leadership were backing away from the idea that they could exert power by influencing decision-makers in Washington after being left out in the cold by the Nixon Administration, Shaw’s Population Institute was still working toward a major victory in the creation of a U.S. Commission on Population Growth. And through his work on the United Methodist Board of Social Concern, 1970 also saw him connecting with Environmental Action, Inc., the national group that had coalesced through the organization of Earth Day, to co-sponsor a conference focused on collective organizing and policy advocacy for the sake of the planet.

Shaw was elected co-chair of the NCC’s new Ecology Action Project in early 1970, and within a month, he convinced his fellow committee members to hire a full-time executive director in Kay Vickers Shannon, who had been working with Shaw’s Population Institute in DC. Leveraging his position with the United Methodist Church, Shaw saw to it that his denomination cover Shannon’s salary for the foreseeable future. He also orchestrated a ten-

---

<sup>15</sup> “NCCC Strategy Conference and Action Project on Human Survival and Quality of Life,” PHS NCC Administrative Files box 9 folder 1.

<sup>16</sup> Robert Booth Fowler made this critique in his survey of green Protestant thought. Fowler, *The Greening of Protestant Thought*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 15.

thousand dollar donation from his own Population Institute that allowed Shannon to begin organizing regional action groups.<sup>17</sup> With a new executive director and a formalized executive committee, the project took on the punchier name Ecology Church Action Project (ECAP), and while still making plans for an October conference on Human Survival and Quality Life, began to expand its focus to pursue the more ambitious goal of creating a nationwide network of local action groups.



*Figure 1 - ECAP Logo (1970)*

Born and raised in upstate New York, Kay Vickers Shannon (1935-2018) came to ECAP by way of Washington D.C., where she had spent the 1960s bouncing between liberal political causes. Starting as assistant to a prominent nuclear disarmament advocate, she went on to work for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the Poor People's Campaign in DC before landing at Rodney Shaw's Population Institute, where in early 1970 she was helping plan a

---

<sup>17</sup> Franklin Jensen and Rodney Shaw to Sponsoring Committee, February 18, 1970, PHS NCC Christian Life and Mission Records box 60 folder 16; Kay Shannon to Executive Committee, Undated; and, Shannon, "ECAP OFFICE EXPENSES TO DATE: March 1970 to October 1, 1970;" PHS NCC Administrative Files box 9 folder 1.

separate population-ecology conference.<sup>18</sup> When Shaw hired her as executive director in February, she relocated to New York City, temporarily leaving her three children in the D.C. area, to fulfill the role. Although she herself admitted that she lacked knowledge or experience with church bureaucracies, her intelligence impressed the committee, who noted that she immediately began participating in the day's discussion after being introduced at the February meeting.<sup>19</sup> Between her sharpness in conversation and her bona fides in organizing progressive political causes, the committee was immediately convinced that her qualifications made up for her lack of experience in church bureaucracy.

Under Rodney Shaw and Kay Shannon's leadership, ECAP's focus began to shift from a national conference aimed at providing Christian witness into a concerted effort to transmit the direct action, movement-oriented tactics of labor, civil rights, and anti-war struggles to the mainline's environmental organizing. ECAP's March meeting already reflected a shift in tenor, from focusing on Christian witness to discussing how the input at the conference could "get to the real revolutionary changes," avoiding mere band-aids and instead developing an "ethical and theological counter-culture," pointing to a recent public event feature counterculture icons Barry Commoner and Buckminster Fuller as the speakers for an example of what makes an excellent conference. In light of America's imperial ascendancy since World War II and the pollution brought about by its military-industrial complex, the group pondered how to be more militant about such topics while dealing with possible resistance to a more radical approach. Shirley Greene, who had been with the Environmental Stewardship Team since 1967, reminded the group that liberal political causes tend to avoid dealing with actual relationships of power:

---

<sup>18</sup> "Katherine Vickers," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, October 19, 2018; Kay Shannon to Executive Committee, Undated, PHS NCC Administrative Files box 9 folder 1.

<sup>19</sup> Jensen and Shaw to Sponsoring Committee, February 18, 1970.



I lived through the War on Poverty. It was great until somebody discovered poverty has something to do with power. We have the same problem here. Everybody is opposed to pollution and over-population. When it is discovered that basic human greed is involved, that it is cheaper to be dirty, we are going to have trouble.<sup>20</sup>

Others reflected on the “power structure’s” tendency to pay lip service to issues like the environment, without ever offering any material support or willingness to change. One committee member pointed to the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago to flag the fact that politicians and other powerful people have been known to get behind violent subjugation of resistance movements when those groups place actual demands on them. Clearly, the group was beginning to consider a more radical, action-based orientation. Meeting within weeks of the first Earth Day, at a time of unprecedented nationwide enthusiasm for the environmental movement, and with new money and staff flowing into a project supported widely by the NCC and leaders at its constituent denominations, the group felt enthusiastic about this new vision of nationwide mobilization of mainline Protestants into concrete, even radical, environmental action, even as their hopes were tempered by the way similar efforts had struggled when running up against issues of power.

Despite the executive committee’s commitment to this vision of mobilization, the question remained: what exactly would that environmental action look like, and how would they organize it? For a time, the group had discussed the major event they were planning for that fall as a “strategy conference” that could serve as a jumping off point “to mobilize community action teams...who will in turn mobilize their churches and communities to deal with the most urgent needs in their respective localities.”<sup>21</sup> However, by May, in part because one of the key

---

<sup>20</sup> Minutes, Action Project on Human Survival and Quality of Life Sponsoring Committee, March 2, 1970. PHS NCC Christian Life and Mission box 60 folder 16.

<sup>21</sup> Excerpt from Minutes of Program Cabinet Meeting of April 1, 1970. PHS NCC Christian Life and Mission box 60 folder 16

organizers from the original environmental stewardship team had fallen severely ill, but also because of their growing desire to focus on local action projects, ECAP cancelled the fall conference completely and turned its focus entirely to local action projects.

Here, Kay Shannon began exerting her own voice and vision more and more. Having worked throughout the 1960s with Black civil rights leaders in Washington, Shannon brought with her an awareness of the way planetary crisis-talk could carry anti-Black messaging. Given concerns that the group's emphasis on population control had eugenicist or genocidal undertones when directed at communities of color, Shannon suggested that, at least temporarily, ECAP should only conduct population control outreach toward wealthy white communities. Though this appeared a good faith response to critiques coming from communities of color, Shannon still spoke with a measure of condescension, writing that "as the smaller, darker communities resolve their hang-ups with the issue and request the Project's advice, we then supply that information to them." Even if her decision to place population control outreach to communities of color seemed more diplomatic than an honest reckoning with the critique, Shannon nonetheless brought fresh perspective to ECAP with her own insistence that ecology should be seen as "the missing link in the funding path from the war movement people to the poor and civil rights people." For her, ECAP was ultimately a chance to funnel mainline churchgoers' concerns into issues facing Black Americans, such as pollution, sanitation, and housing, while also emphasizing "interdependence on each other—rural and city, black and white, wealthy and poor" through ecological thinking.<sup>22</sup> The NCC stewardship team's earlier emphasis on the pollution of open spaces and the conservation of wilderness areas had been subject to criticism for choosing a cop-out issue rather than facing up the pressing issues of racism, imperialism, and poverty. As

---

<sup>22</sup> Kay Shannon, "Report to the Sponsoring Committee," May 20, 1970. PHS NCC Christian Life and Mission box 60 folder 16.

executive director, Shannon was insistent that with the right approach and rhetoric, ecology could be much more than a cop out, and could become a way of building solidarity and dealing with racism, poverty, pollution and much else as part of an interwoven system of power.

### **Communi-Action**

Shifting their energies toward this goal of mobilizing regional action teams, Shannon and the ECAP committee went in search of successful examples to model their efforts on. In their research, they came across a recent project in the Twin Cities known as “Communi-Action.” The program had begun when the local Catholic Archdiocese asked a local educational consulting firm named George Nelson Associates to design a program on race and poverty for local Catholics. Held in the summer of 1969, the pilot program set forth the basic format that Communi-Action events in the Twin Cities would follow from then on: a six-week series of small-group meetings focusing on games, roleplay, and film to expose churchgoers to local issues, with task assignments between each meeting requiring participants to take concrete action.

Archdiocesan leaders, participants, and the consulting firm all felt that the pilot program was a success. Participant evaluations showed major shifts in perspective on race and poverty in the Twin Cities, and many had become involved in local non-profits as a result. Given the pilot program’s successes, George Nelson Associates partnered with the Twin Cities Council of Churches to conduct a vastly expanded version during Lent 1970. For six weeks in February and March of that year, over 5000 people in the Twin Cities participated in the first full Communi-Action program.<sup>23</sup>

---

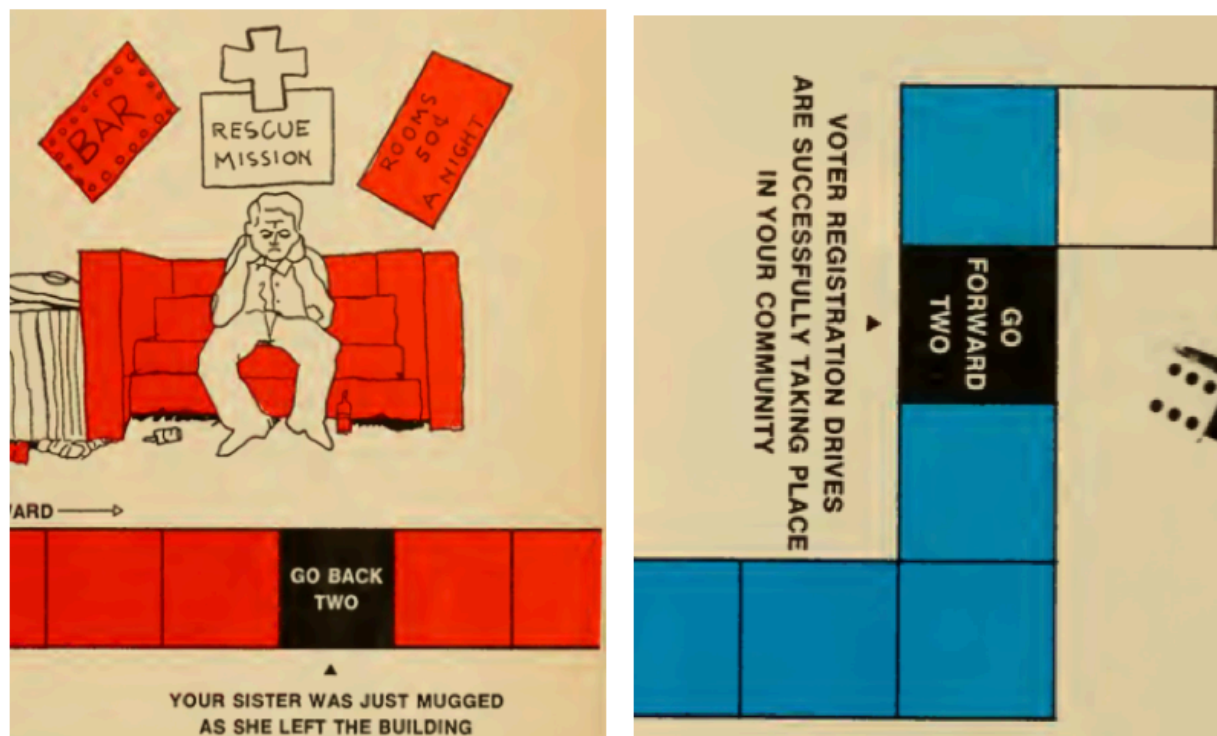
<sup>23</sup> Loretta Girzaitis, “Seize the Times!” *Together*, July 1971; Zona Burke, C.S.J., “Communi-Action for the 70’s,” May 1, 1970, GCAH General Welfare/Church and Society Records, 1443-4-1:02.

With Communi-Action's emphasis on moving churchgoers quickly through education about an issue into concrete action, ECAP had found its model. In June 1970, they invited the curriculum's main designer, Gene Sylvestre, to travel to New York and explore how it might translate to an ecology project. In Sylvestre's telling, the central goal of the program was to "deliver people that are action-oriented." To do so, the program focused on educational tools that could be covered quickly and translated easily into specific actions. Sylvestre had found, for example, that assigning articles to read could hinder the action-orientation because discussions didn't move quickly enough into concrete next steps. Instead, his curriculum focused on activities like role-play or board games (fig. 2). One favorite board game of the Communi-Action program came to them by way of NCC's own Friendship Press. Dignity, as it was known, moved players through various scenarios said to authentically reflect the experience of poverty. Players might go back two spaces because they landed on a spot that read "Your Sister Was Just Mugged As She Left the Building" or another that said "A Policeman Stops You On the Corner." For Communi-Action's purposes of producing an "action orientation" in its participants, Dignity was especially useful because the spaces that rewarded players with an extra move or two gave specific examples of actions that might combat poverty and racism, such as "A food company agrees with Operation Breadbasket to hire 30 black employees at the plant" or "Voter registration drives are successfully taking place in your community."<sup>24</sup> Sylvestre reported that participant evaluation had viewed these as extremely successful, with one participant reporting that "Nothing could have helped us see how we could change things like this did."<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> Loretta Girzaitis, "Seize the Times!" *Together*, July 1971.

<sup>25</sup> Minutes of the General Structuring Meeting June 30, 1970. PHS NCC Administrative Files box 9 folder 1.



*Figure 2 - Images taken from the "Dignity" gameboard*

According to Sylvestre, the single most important aspect of his curriculum came in the form of “task assignments.” In his words, “this tool has been the heart of any program GNA has had and is the only one which seems to work consistently with people.” Each week, participants were given between 20 and 30 task assignment to work through that might include attempting to live on the equivalent of welfare income for a week or calling local hospitals to figure out which emergency rooms will admit patients who can’t pay and which ones will not.

Overall, Sylvestre and his mainline cosponsors hope was that the program would see greater involvement in concrete actions to combat socioeconomic problems in the Twin Cities. Sylvestre reported to ECAP that his evaluation data had shown that a majority of participants were still involved in some non-profit or church-based effort to curb poverty and racial inequality in their community, many of their own making. One magazine story about the

program reported on a participant who started coordinating transportation for people without cars to the Y community center, while another group restored a home to prevent an eviction. Several other Communi-Action alumni created a community hotline that offered referrals to social services, emergency shelters, and other needed resources. The article went on to list a host of further examples:

Some suburban women volunteered as Head Start program aides. A businessman personally helped five young black men get their first decent-paying jobs. A group canvased their neighborhood for lonely, single, senior citizens to offer them both friendship and any needed help. A teacher and his wife adopted two American Indian children.<sup>26</sup>

The specific action outcomes of Sylvestre's program could run the gamut from direct, material aid in the form of eviction prevention to a paternalistic noblesse-oblige in the form of targeted adoption of indigenous minors.<sup>27</sup> But in any case, if ECAP had been looking for a model of community mobilization that would result in concrete action, here it was. In fact, Sylvestre wasn't short on ideas for how his Communi-Action model would translate to ecology, suggesting that his environmental curriculum would be full of practice task assignments, from measuring air pollution levels in different neighborhoods to organizing a fair for environmentally friendly products at one's church.

Given the Ecology Church Action Project's interest in an action orientation for its environmental mobilization, it comes as no surprise that the executive committee jumped at the opportunity to have Sylvestre adapt his Communi-Action program to the subject of ecology.

Only one major caveat came up, which was that the NCC version would like to see more

---

<sup>26</sup> Loretta Girzaitis, "Seize the Times!" *Together*, July 1971, 34.

<sup>27</sup> On the history of adopting indigenous minors, see: Margaret D. Jacobs, "Maternal Colonialism: White Women and Indigenous Child Removal In the American West and Australia, 1880-1940," *Western Historical Quarterly* 36:4 (Dec 2005), 453-476.

emphasis on electoral politics and policy advocacy. Sylvestre admitted that the model had focused primarily on involvement in non-profit or church-based causes but had done little in the way of advocating for specific politicians or policies. Given their experiences working with Congress, the White House, and civil rights leadership, Shaw and Shannon expressed hope that Sylvestre could add direct political involvement to his list of task assignments in the proposed environmental curriculum.

With that caveat in place, the group agreed to begin working with Sylvestre on an ecology version of Communi-Action. Rodney Shaw was confident that foundation money would roll in as the project developed, and again loosened the purse strings to offer twelve-thousand dollars from his own Population Institute to hire Sylvestre's consulting services. Tentatively, the group planned to conduct a pilot program in the Twin Cities sometime in early 1971 and then roll it out in five other major metropolitan areas later in the year.

To further pursue their ambitious goal of nationwide mobilization, Kay Shannon was also authorized to use ECAP funds to visit other ecology programs around the country in search of other mobilization models. For the remainder of 1970, Shannon kept busy conducting research with Sylvestre and GNA for the upcoming Communi-Action program, interspersed with trips to other ecology action projects around the country. In September, she traveled to Southern California where she reported learning about alternatives to the internal combustion engine, connecting with public health and medical professionals who were studying the bodily effects of pollution, dining at a natural foods restaurant adorned with environmental signage, and visiting an eco-commune in Santa Barbara. Later that month, she coordinated an outing for herself and some committee members to the Oceanhill/Brownsville area of Brooklyn where the group learned about urban ecology and reflected on ways in which "pollution and exploitation of

human and natural resources can never be segregated.” A few weeks later, the executive committee met and appeared optimistic on ECAP’s development under Shannon’s leadership. Given what they had seen on their recent outing, they discussed the possibility of opening an urban ecology center in Brooklyn, where they would advocate against pollution and in favor of family planning—a proposal that recalled some of the eugenicist undercurrents of the population control ideology that brought some committee members to the group. In any case, the committee seemed optimistic about ECAP’s growth into a project that could mobilize concrete, church-based ecology action nationwide, whether that amounted to population control efforts in Brooklyn, ecology fares at Twin Cities churches, or making policy demands in statehouses and on Capitol Hill. At the end of September, Shannon even drew up a list of position descriptions for future ECAP hires that would include researchers, communications staff, and others, expanding the project into a fully staffed outfit rather than just Shannon and her personal assistant. Rodney Shaw had used his connections to fund most everything ECAP had done to this point, but he was confident that as it developed, he would be able to “go to some of the foundations for some seed money to finance the Project.”<sup>28</sup>

In the fall of 1970, then, riding the wave of post-Earth Day enthusiasm and exploring connections between ecology and the movements for peace and racial equality of the 1960s, the NCC’s vision for church-based environmentalism was all about action. The exact ideologies of its leadership varied, from Kay Shannon’s insistence that ecology and anti-racist work should go hand-in-hand and Shirley Greene’s dreams of more radical confrontations with power to Rodney Shaw and others’ fixation on a Paul Ehrlich-inspired push for population control. Although scholars have later assessed Christian environmentalism in the 1970s as a limited effort at

---

<sup>28</sup> Minutes of the General Structuring Meeting, June 30, 1970. PHS NCC Christian Life and Mission box 60 folder 16.



producing eco-theology rebuttals of Lynn White Jr. or adopting position statements that affirm their basic assent to the environmental movement, ECAP reveals a more complicated story, reflecting post-Earth Day energies that centered on the keyword “action” in the push for environmental mobilization in mainstream Protestant churches.<sup>29</sup>

### **Seize the Times?**

By the end of 1970, the year of so much nationwide enthusiasm for environmental action, ECAP found itself in troubled waters. On December 28th, with the start date of their Twin Cities pilot program rapidly approaching, the NCC Financial Department mailed Gene Sylvestre a six-thousand-dollar advance, money procured once again by Rodney Shaw from the United Methodist Church. Only five days later, the president of George Nelson Associates wrote back informing Shaw that Gene Sylvestre had left the firm. After several phone calls to GNA staff and Twin Cities church leadership, Shaw learned that Sylvestre had been placing copyrights on GNA materials in his name, and had taken the ECAP Communi-Action training tool he had been developing with Kay Shannon with him to start a new firm named Gene Sylvestre Associates. Unbeknownst to ECAP leadership, Sylvestre had been rubbing Twin Cities mainline clergy the wrong way for some time. Some local clergy had recently accused him of misallocating a grant from the Lutheran church meant to establish a program for racial minorities and using the money for his own personal gain. According to a local clergyman who had helped with the Twin Cities Communi-Action program on racism, Sylvestre had recently reached a “non-speaking impasse” with at least one minister on the local leadership team and was in legal hot water on multiple fronts over his questionable copyrighting practices.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> Fowler, *The Greening of Protestant Thought*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995),

<sup>30</sup> Rodney Shaw, “Notes from Conversation with Leo Baldwin,” February 8, 1971; and Shaw, “Telephone Conversation with Ed Wallenbweber by R. Shaw,” February 10, 1971. GCAH Ecology Church Action Project, 1444-3-8:19.

The news of Sylvestre's issues came at an already difficult moment for ECAP. In mid-November, the executive committee had outlined major plans to expand throughout 1971 before adjourning for the holidays, with plans to meet again in mid-January. In the intervening weeks, the group began to recognize that Rodney Shaw's hoped-for foundation grants were not rolling in. In October, Shannon and Sylvestre had drafted a proposal for a grant in excess of twenty-thousand dollars, and by the end of the year it was clear that the money was not coming through. Shaw's denomination could cover the advance due to GNA, but given Sylvestre's departure, that little bit of money in their coffers ended up going to a firm that no longer even held the copyright for the curriculum ECAP was paying for. The project was in dire straits financially.

With the future of ECAP in serious doubt, Shaw and the executive committee took drastic action. At a January 1971 planning meeting, just a few weeks after Sylvestre had departed with their environmental action curriculum in hand, Shaw and three other male committee members unceremoniously fired Kay Shannon and shut down ECAP. The executive committee had spent the morning with Shannon, listening to a presentation on yet another community action model, this one based in DC. Shaw then abruptly adjourned the meeting for lunch and informed Shannon that he and the other three male committee members would be meeting without her in the afternoon and that she should await further updates. At some point in the afternoon, Shaw called her into a conference room where he informed her that the committee had placed ECAP on standby and terminated her position. To justify her firing, Shaw cited her lack of experience with church bureaucracies, saying that she had proven unqualified for the job at hand and laying the blame on her for ECAP's failure to leverage funding from the mainline denominations.

Kay Shannon was indignant. She drafted a seven-page letter protesting the decision, detailing the unethical and irregular nature of her dismissal, and defending ECAP's recent direction. Central to Shannon's protest was the odd fact that she and the sole other female member of the executive committee were not privy to the afternoon meeting that ended with Shannon fired and ECAP shut down. In Shannon's retelling, "Instead of conferring with me, four of you have retrenched chauvinistically into an old pattern that Christians are today being called to change—the pattern of changing a situation without consider [sic] all facts and nuances nor the ramifications of your actions on the program focus as well as on the personnel you had the courage to hire, but not back up." In her view, Shaw had unfairly laid all the blame for ECAP's financial troubles on her shoulders, despite her and another committee member's repeated suggestions that they explore more creative, grassroots fundraising approaches. Shannon specifically had proposed raising funds through local church efforts, selling biodegradable soap and collecting empty glass bottles, but the suggestions consistently fell on deaf ears because, "Rodney has said this is unnecessary as the money could come in bigger from foundations." Shannon went on to describe her sense that ECAP was just about to come out of the wilderness, having gained national recognition and placing some important public events on the docket, even beyond the Twin Cities pilot program.<sup>31</sup>

In the end, Kay Shannon's lengthy plea that she be allowed to see the Ecology Church Action Project through to fruition fell on deaf ears. Fortunately, her seven-page letter did make some difference in her fate. In the missive, she also pointed out that she had only recently begun the process of moving her three children to New York with her and the fact that she had only been given 30 days to find new work was putting her family in a precarious financial position.

---

<sup>31</sup> Kay Shannon to Executive Committee, Undated, PHS NCC Administrative Files box 9 folder 1.

As she noted in her missive, Rodney Shaw's friend and collaborator on population concerns, David Poindexter, had recently been given a 90-day grace period to find new work to support his family when laid off from the NCC Communications office. This part of the letter did seem to convince the committee that her dismissal had been too harsh. They agreed to provide some unemployment benefits until she found replacement income. Beyond that, Shannon graciously attended meetings through the start of March when ECAP was officially shut down. Though she continued working on a variety of activist causes after her time at NCC, ECAP appears to have been both her first and last foray into church-based organizing.<sup>32</sup>

Ironically, just as ECAP went on standby, many of its dreams were becoming a reality. Kay Shannon was aware of this at the time of her firing, writing that though "we have had a number of difficulties in developing ECAP...it appears now that the worst is over—we have a full time dedicated secretary, we have made ourselves known so nationally that we are looked to as a growing focal point for church involvement in helping to alleviate our ecology crises, and various national groups within denominations are contacting us to offer their support."<sup>33</sup> Between February and April, as ECAP was being shut down, several events suggested that Shannon's assessment was accurate. Her organizing work was only just starting to pay off when Shaw and the executive committee decided to give up on the project.

Throughout 1970, Shannon had been using her position at ECAP to support advocacy efforts against a proposed project in Virginia's Marble Valley. The Virginia Electric and Power Company (VEPCO) had applied for a license to construct a major damming project on a tributary of the James River a few miles west of Staunton, Virginia. Its environmental impact

---

<sup>32</sup> ECAP Executive Committee Minutes, February 22, 1971, PHS NCC Christian Life and Mission Records box 60 folder 16; "Katherine Vickers," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, October 19, 2018..

<sup>33</sup> Kay Shannon to Executive Committee, Undated.

statement revealed that the project could lead to widespread damage to the water table, and thanks in large part to pressure from Shannon and ECAP, VEPCO ultimately withdrew its petition. A month after Shaw and colleagues fired her and put ECAP on hold, a letter arrived at the NCC offices on Riverside Drive, addressed to Shannon. The note, from an attorney with the Natural Resources Defense Council, praised ECAP's advocacy against the proposed dam in Virginia. Not knowing that Shannon had been fired, the attorney wrote to thank her for providing a "sound, well-developed moral and philosophical basis" for the campaign. "You may become the most important vehicle for the development of the basic philosophy," he concluded.<sup>34</sup> Given the recent decision to shut the project down, what could have been a sign of things to come—a first foray into direct advocacy against the environmental harms of a major power company—instead served as a hint at what had been lost with Shannon's dismissal.

"It will work but it is taking longer, I submit, than had been bargained for," Shannon had written in her appeal against Shaw's termination of the program and her position. "I, in the meantime have been developing 'long-range' contacts which are NOW yielding results."<sup>35</sup> News of VEPCO's withdrawal from Marble Valley caused at least a few others to make similar appeals to the executive committee. Three days after the Natural Resources Defense Council letter had arrived, ECAP committee and staff reconvened for a February meeting, where "various members of ECAP staff reported victory in Marble Valley, Virginia." "Though unpublicized, ECAP has been given a great deal of credit for the withdrawal," the meeting minutes recounted. Hopeful that ECAP might one day come back, two attendees besides Shannon "urged the committee to consider the strength of the victory over the next few months of temporary recess in relation to

---

<sup>34</sup> Richard M. Hall to Kay Shannon, February 19, 1971. GCAH Ecology Church Action Project – Revival 1970-1971.

<sup>35</sup> Kay Shannon to Executive Committee, Undated.

future ECAP programs.”<sup>36</sup> Like Shannon’s, their appeals fell on deaf ears, and despite some brief meetings in the fall of 1971 about a possible revival, ECAP’s temporary recess turned out to be a permanent one.

The Natural Resources Defense Council’s expression of optimism about the future of ECAP under Shannon’s leadership wasn’t the only correspondence to arrive at Riverside Dr. after her firing. The executive committee member who served as ECAP’s caretaker while it sat in limbo that spring reported being overwhelmed by inquiries from mainline clergy and churchgoers looking for ways to get involved in environmental action, what he called a “continual stream of local churches writing for suggestions regarding ecology programs.” Despite ECAP’s standby status, it was mentioned in *Look* magazine that May. In the immediate aftermath of that write-up, ECAP’s caretaker received nearly 350 inquiries about church-based environmental action. And before her firing, Shannon had also been working with a prominent environmental ethicist, John B. Cobb Jr. of Claremont Theological Union, to circulate a questionnaire on environmental beliefs to major Christian theologians around the country. In the months after ECAP was shut down, the NCC reported receiving around 280 responses to the questionnaire Shannon had distributed.

Meanwhile, although ECAP was officially shut down on a national level, the existing partnerships and organizations already in place for Communi-Action programs in the Twin Cities meant that the planned ecology program could go ahead that spring, offering an even more detailed glimpse at the kind of national programming ECAP had hoped to develop later that year. The series kicked off with a TV special on March 1st, surveying humanity’s impact on the physical environment. Afterward, around 2,000 Twin Cities churchgoers participated in the new

---

<sup>36</sup> ECAP Executive Committee Minutes, February 22, 1971.

ecology curriculum, salvaged by Gene Sylvestre's collaborator Richard Byrd and entitled *Seize the Times*. Gene Sylvestre's trademark "task assignments" showed up once again, now called "discovery tasks," and participants reported having to "count the number of paper products they use in one week and consider whether they could use substitutes," as well as participating in an "environmental pornography" display where they gathered the "dirtiest pictures" they could find showing current environmental conditions.<sup>37</sup>

These discovery tasks suggest a thematic shift in the project's sought after "action-orientation." In Twin Cities Communi-Action's curricula on race and poverty from 1969 and 1970, many had become involved in direct, collective interventions in the precarious lives of their neighbors. ECAP had hoped to draw on that in its ecological mobilization, and even add to a set of national and international policy goals on top of that. In the end, the ecological version of Communi-Action had honed in on more personal, individualized set of actions based on each participant's lifestyle choices. One participant reported afterward, "my husband just won't buy a thing that comes in aerosol cans—no hair spray, no deodorants, no insecticides, no oven spray! He says the propellant in the spray cans coats the lungs, clogs the pores, harms the eyes, and the chemicals can't be disposed by the body. So I clean with liquids and soaps." This woman's reflections on the action steps she and her husband undertook as a result of the series resonated with the overall thrust of the curriculum, at least according to one reporter, who wrote, "the last of the six sessions is designed to help individuals examine their life-styles, to determine personal goals and priorities."<sup>38</sup> Turning inward, participants looked to discipline themselves, paring away the excesses of the postwar consumer culture in favor of more intentional consumer choices for the sake of the planet.

---

<sup>37</sup> "Area action program launches 2nd round," *The Minneapolis Star*, March 4, 1971.

<sup>38</sup> Loretta Girzaitis, "Seize the Times!"

Writing about the development of demography and population control as a core feature of postcolonial management, historian Michelle Murphy has argued that “neoliberal governmentality is not a mere retraction or deregulation of activity but a highly selective rearrangement of the terms, attentions, and *inattentions* of governance.”<sup>39</sup> In many ways, this gets at the core of various Protestant environmentalist responses to global capitalism’s injurious effects on people and planet as mainstream Protestants organized their efforts around intensive kinds of attention toward the conditions of planetary crisis. Murphy emphasizes inattention, in the form of what she calls tactical ignorance of the injuries that result from opening the world to capital. And as they completed these practices of attention in the form of discovery tasks meant to help them catalog the environmental impact of their daily lives, they were enacting a simultaneous practice of inattention by framing ecological problems as crises to be managed, rather than considering the long crisis of capitalism behind each successive upheaval in its continual practice of leaving old labor and resource pools behind while opening up the next ones.

Participants in these Protestant environmental programs developed increasingly complex accountings of the economic interconnections that linked their own material circumstances and economic choices with the social and environmental ills of the postcolonial world. As they shifted their emphasis away from collective political action and toward consumer choice, their attention and inattention helped them manage their relationship to the neoliberal political economy as it rose to prominence at the start of the decade. As their chosen methods of response trended toward the promise of consumer choice through task assignments like swapping reusable items for paper products or cleaning the house with liquid soap instead of aerosol sprays, they learned to see themselves as rational economic actors who could exert agency most powerfully

---

<sup>39</sup> Michelle Murphy, *The Economization of Life* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 89. Emphasis in original.



through their activities in the marketplace. As political theorist Wendy Brown has argued, neoliberalism recasts political problems as “individual problems with market solutions” and encourages human beings to think of themselves as *homo oeconomicus*, “an intensely constructed and governed bit of human capital tasked with improving and leveraging its competitive positioning and with enhancing its (monetary and nonmonetary) portfolio value across all of its endeavors and venues.”<sup>40</sup> For Communi-Action participants, that human capital could be enhanced and deployed for the sake ecological change, which meant intensive attention and discipline around their individual consumer habits and economic choices so to tug on the right market levers to ameliorate the political economy’s most injurious effects. In this way, participants encountered compelling neoliberal market discipline as they learned to see their range of choices for environmental action in market terms.

In the end, despite the last-minute withdrawal of national support from the NCC and the departure of Gene Sylvestre with most of the curricular materials he had been preparing, Twin Cities Communi-Action’s new ecology curriculum proved popular enough to warrant several further iterations. With its shift in focus toward consumer behavior, in contrast to the social and political action of the anti-racist curriculum that preceded it, the “Seize the Times” program introduced its participants to a fitting model of environmental practice for the dawning neoliberal decade. While on a national level, ECAP had been shuttered before it even began, the Twin Cities version of the project was offered two more times, once immediately after the first round ended in mid-April of 1971, and then again that autumn.

So, if in the Spring of 1971, the Ecology Action series was successful enough in the Twin Cities to warrant offering an immediate second round and the now-shuttered ECAP offices

---

<sup>40</sup> Wendy Brown, “American Nightmare: Neoliberalism, Neoconservatism, and De-democratization,” *Political Theory* 34:6 (December 2006): 703. Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 10.

reported being flooded with inquiries about ecology projects, why did ECAP fail? Looking at the project's records, two possible explanations jump from the page. First and foremost, Rodney Shaw carried a certain naivete about being able to count on "foundation money" for the ecology project. Members of the planning committee like Shirley Greene had warned months prior that if the project were to really undertake kinds of direct action and policy advocacy that hit businesses like VEPCO where it hurts, corporate backers would of course withdraw support or even retaliate. And this was precisely the kind of ecology action some of the committee members were dreaming of, with their aspirations stated in one curriculum proposal to be the church's "avant-garde," and elsewhere identifying themselves as the "theological counter-culture." Shaw seemed to misapprehend how corporate foundations would view ecology action, given that his population control efforts had enjoyed generous backing from the contraceptive industry.<sup>41</sup>

Kay Shannon and Shirley Greene had expressed hopes of mobilizing mainline churchgoers into radical action, envisioning a network of action groups following Shannon's lead in directly challenging the expansion of powerful energy companies like VEPCO. "Action—relate to Nader's Raiders," Greene had suggested at one early planning meeting, "get the church people on the picket line."<sup>42</sup> Despite Rodney Shaw's optimism that they would do otherwise, corporate backers were understandably unenthused about the prospect of funding ECAP. In this way, the more radical edge of environmental mobilization, the "revolutionary, theological counterculture" that some dreamed of, was predictably disciplined and limited by the fact that corporate foundations could simply withdraw support if something seemed likely to challenge their power.

---

<sup>41</sup> John Clarke to Dave Poindexter, "Religion and the Church at Friends of the Earth Annual Meeting," April 27, 1971. GCAH General Welfare/Church and Society Records, 1443-4-1:01.

<sup>42</sup> "Discussion at ECAP 'revival' meeting in New York on September 17, 1971," September 20, 1971. GCAH Ecology Church Action Project – Revival 1970-1971.

In addition to this first, overt driver of ECAP's failure in the form of withdrawn financial backing, a second, more subtle trend was at play at the level of people's imaginations. Crisis-talk about the planet, with its two-fold logic of turning inward to cultivate individual dispositions to feel sheltered from the chaos outside, and then turning outward to engage in ad hoc crisis management, helped redirect people's political energies toward the personal, rather than the structural. In this context, people's attention shifted toward the personal changes they could make to embody their pious concern for God's Creation. By focusing on their own consumer choices, they might put themselves in good stead with God as well as a planet that seemed so out of control and chaotic. This was the effect of crisis-talk, as the political economy began withdrawing more and more investment from the public square, referring again and again to the civil rights leaders' demands for desegregated public spaces as "the crisis in the nation," and looking upon images of starving, desperate, rioting people in the decolonizing world as a "population crisis" and, later, a "world food crisis."

As the American political economy began making its shift toward neoliberalism, selling the message of free markets and free trade through a new political reasoning based on individual economic actors rather than collective interest groups, many churchgoers, including Gene Sylvestre himself, found themselves looking for ways to act on a personal level, to make the appropriate consumer choices that would signify and enact their own commitments to the planet. As David Harvey writes, neoliberalism's legitimacy hinges upon its claims to protect "liberty of consumer choice, not only with respect to particular products but also with respect to lifestyles, modes of expression and a wide range of cultural practices."<sup>43</sup> In the postwar U.S., this promise of individual choice has been most saliently mediated through practices of consumption.

---

<sup>43</sup> Harvey, *Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 42.

Though it was never her central focus, toward the end of her tenure, Kay Shannon found herself flooded with requests for guidelines on environmentally responsible lifestyle choices. “We often hear people saying ‘we must change our style of life if we are to survive,’” she wrote in a report on ECAP activities.<sup>44</sup> For her part, Shannon didn’t seem to see it primarily as an issue of individual consumption. In response to requests for information on lifestyle, she wrote that “ECAP staff is compiling data on various emerging life styles—both private and business—such as new ways to utilize church camps ecologically (organic gardens), new methods of incorporating different age and diverse personality groups in a common transportation, printing, and telephone pool.”<sup>45</sup> As she responded to requests for lifestyle-oriented action steps, her sense of the term in 1970 focused on questions of the day-to-day behaviors of socioeconomic groups, rather than the highly symbolic and individuated usage of “lifestyle choice” that would rise to prominence in American culture as the decade wore on.. Even so, the demand for information on lifestyle reflected the way their mainline public was asking a question of personal decision making, framing things in terms of how “a life” relates to a planet in crisis, a logic that reroute environmental action away from the possibility of collectives coming together and placing demands on the powerful, and toward questions of individual economic choice.

### **Taking Action in a Neoliberal Climate**

In the Spring of 1970, even as Rodney Shaw and Kay Shannon were beginning their push for an action-orientated mobilization of the mainline, NCC messaging already suggested a tension between calls for collective action and the more individuated approach that gradually appeared in the ECAP curriculum. In the weeks prior to the inaugural Earth Day, the NCC issued

---

<sup>44</sup> Shannon, “ECAP Office Activites to Date,” 10/01/1970, GCAH General Welfare/Church and Society Records, 1443-8-3:19.

<sup>45</sup> Shannon, “ECAP Office Activites to Date,” 10/01/1970.

a press release encouraging its constituents to observe “Environment Sunday” in preparation for the national event. Further down the page, the release announced the planned national conference on “Human Survival and Quality of Life” to be held later that year. Even as the conference’s organizers (Rodney Shaw among them) sought to tie the conference to a national mobilization of local action teams, quotations from their intended keynote speaker already suggested a drift from collective thinking toward an emphasis on individual attitudes and personal choice. “The Church boldly proclaims that ‘the Earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof,’ but her actions give little credence to this affirmation,” the keynote speaker wrote, first implying a concern that Christians in a collective sense undertake action that better align with biblical theologies of creation care and stewardship. But then, as Baer went on, he revealed a more personal emphasis: “Christians will *personally* need to demonstrate a new attitude towards natural resources and material possessions through a life style which refuses to measure value mainly in consumptive and quantitative terms.”<sup>46</sup> Here, in a single press conference announcing major ecological undertakings for the mainline denominations after Earth Day, “action” and “life style” appeared as two poles in their thinking: on the one hand, leaders were considering how to get “the Church,” conceived as a collective body of Christians, to take action, and on the other, the outcome of those considerations drifted toward questions of personal attitudes and economic choices.

Between 1970 and 1974, as mainline and evangelical environmentalists attempted to mobilize networks around the concept of “action” inspired by the social movements of the previous decade, their emphasis on collectives was already swimming upstream as the neoliberal political economy and attendant social and cultural forms took shape. In other words, neoliberal

---

<sup>46</sup> National Council of Churches Press Release, 4/1/1970, PHS NCC Administrative Files box 9 folder 1. Emphasis mine.

political reason's emphasis on individual economic choices was helping break apart collectives in order to insulate capitalist expansion from political pressure. Those collectives included the labor unions that had been empowered by the New Deal's National Labor Relations Act, the recognition of shared interests and solidarity among working-class and middle-class Americans produced by New Deal welfare and consumer protections, the work of civil rights organizers to overturn Jim Crow racial capitalism, and importantly for the context of "planetary crisis," the efforts of decolonized nations to expand democratic self-determination and resist new forms of economic imperialism.<sup>47</sup> Such forms of collective action that could place checks on capitalist expansion and accumulation were the primary targets of neoliberalization. Through the 1970s, economists and policymakers again and again used the recurrent fiscal recessions of those years to curb pro-union and pro-welfare policies and establish supports instead for monetary and financial speculation as well as overseas efforts to open decolonized areas to the free flow of capital through enforced austerity measures or even violent coups as in the events in Chile in 1973.<sup>48</sup> In this precise political and economic moment, mainstream Protestants found that their own visions of collective mobilization were failing to get off the ground. Whereas a more

---

<sup>47</sup> On general support for "collectives" in the New Deal era through labor and consumer protections, see: Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990) and *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2004). On the civil rights Movement as a fight against racial capitalism and the 1970s New Right as an effort to roll back civil rights victories through the rhetoric of free enterprise and big business, see: Jacqueline Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *The Journal of American History* 91:4 (March 2005). Hall enumerates the economic practices of racial capitalism in the Jim Crow South: "Pursued by an industrial and agricultural oligarchy to aggrandize themselves and forward a particular development strategy for the region, those practices involved low taxes, minimal investment in human capital, the separation and political immobilization of the black and white southern poor, the exploitation of non-unionized, undereducated black and white labor, and the patriarchal control of families and local institutions" (Hall, 1243). On neoliberalism as a reaction to decolonization, see Quinn Slobodian, *Globalists: The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018).

<sup>48</sup> Harvey, *Brief History of Neoliberalism*; Stein, *Pivotal Decade*.

market-friendly version of environmentalism, based on consumer choice, was beginning to emerge.

The appearance of the word “lifestyle” in the NCC’s early 1970 press release signaled a central means by which mainstream Protestant environmentalism helped mediate the transition to environmental action in a neoliberal climate, pulling people out of collective thinking that sought to challenge fossil capital and industrial expansion in a moment of capitalist globalization, and enticing them to think with the market, focusing on the way they sheltered, clothed, and fed themselves, reimagining certain consumer goods—aerosol sprays or natural foods—as objects of planetary concern, commodified so they might circulate through global markets without friction. The concept of “lifestyle” itself has its origins in early-twentieth-century social science, beginning with Max Weber who in the 1910s began developing the concept of *Stände* (referring to social status or social power), arguing that status groups develop unique “styles of life” that members will adhere to in order to obtain social standing.<sup>49</sup> For Weber, the term had a decidedly collective and social orientation that resonates in Kay Shannon’s usage within ECAP to refer to group decisions at church retreat centers or in office environments.

In contrast with Weber’s usage, the term “lifestyle” was first used in reference to individual choices, tastes, and practices about a decade later in the writings of social psychologist Alfred Adler. Writing in English in the late 1920s, Adler drew on Weber’s German writings about “style of life” to coin the neologism “lifestyle,” which he used to describe the choices and activities that linked an individual’s identity with their social environment. In Adler’s system of Individual Psychology, surveying a patient’s lifestyle choices could help a psychologist identify

---

<sup>49</sup> Maureen E. Ryan, *Lifestyle Media in American Culture: Gender, Class, and the Politics of Ordinarity* (New York: Routledge, 2018). David Bell and Joanne Hollows, “Towards a History of Lifestyle,” in Bell and Hollows, ed. *Historicizing Lifestyle: Mediating Taste, Consumption, and Identity from the 1900s to the 1970s* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate 2006), 6.

the roots of specific behaviors within their previous experiences and environments.<sup>50</sup> While for Weber, style of life was something that unified status groups, in Adler's writings, lifestyle was what made an individual unique. Even so, as media studies scholar Maureen Ryan writes, "life style in both cases is a principle of difference: it differentiates *between* people or groups even as it unifies them."<sup>51</sup> In this sense, the neologism took on a somewhat stable meaning that persists into the present, referring to a set of choices (behavioral, consumptive, stylistic) that link people to their environment while distinguishing them from others, whether those choices are undertaken by an individual or a group.

The term remained in academic obscurity until the 1950s when a resurgence in public interest in Max Weber (thanks largely to Talcott Parsons' English translations of his works) helped bring the expression "style of life" and the neologism "lifestyle" into the English lexicon.<sup>52</sup> Though still somewhat rare in 1970 when it appeared in the NCC press release about Environment Sunday, it had begun appearing in print media thanks to two communities who had taken an interest in social science as a way of understanding the expansion of publicly visible subcultures in the 1960s: journalists and marketers. In terms of the former, Maureen Ryan writes, "the idea of lifestyle was mobilized in press discourses as an explanatory framework for a cluster of increasingly visible 'others' in American culture: gays and lesbians, African Americans, and countercultural youth."<sup>53</sup>

And just as the term began appearing sporadically in printed discussions of these newly visible (and often worrying) others, marketing researchers began to think that these new kinds of social and cultural differentiation could become a boon for their manufacturing and retail clients

---

<sup>50</sup> Alfred Adler, translated by W. Béran Wolfe, *Understanding Human Nature* (New York: Greenberg, 1930).

<sup>51</sup> Ryan, *Lifestyle Media in American Culture*, 18.

<sup>52</sup> Ryan, *Lifestyle Media in American Culture*, 36.

<sup>53</sup> Ryan, *Lifestyle Media in American Culture*, 32.



in the consumer sector. In 1963, the American Marketing Association arranged a “Task Force on Life Styles,” which conducted research into “life style marketing” with hopes of developing market segmentation techniques that could encourage these newly distinct social groups to view consumer goods as a means of expressing their distinctive identities.<sup>54</sup> As Black Americans, the gay and lesbian community, and the hippie-inflected counterculture became increasingly visible as organized collectives seeking to change American society, marketing researchers were watching them closely, studying their every move in hopes of linking each group’s sense of identity and distinction with a specially designed range of consumer goods. As the historian Lizabeth Cohen writes, market segmentation served as a crucial device for breaking apart the freshly integrated public, by encouraging differentiated groups to retreat into private acts of consumption, and political culture soon followed with political candidates like Richard Nixon embracing the notion of “segmentation” to carve out individual voting blocks and discourage class solidarity and collectivism that would have seen his candidacy defeated.<sup>55</sup>

This was the context into which NCC’s planned keynote speaker on ecology called for Christians to embrace “a life style” that could “demonstrate a new attitude towards natural resources and material possessions” in early 1970. The term’s earliest appearance in print media in the 1960s occurred in journalistic accounts of newly visible forms of difference, and this usage likely informed Baer’s vision of “Christians” as “the Church,” a collective body that could demonstrate something distinctive about themselves through their style of life. In early 1970, this

---

<sup>54</sup> Stephen A. Greyser, editor. *Toward Scientific Marketing: Proceedings of the Winter Conference of the American Marketing Association (December 27-28, 1963, Boston)*. (Chicago, IL: American Marketing Association, 1964).

<sup>55</sup> Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers’ Republic*, 340. Jefferson Cowie has also argued persuasively that Nixon intentionally played on racial difference to construct a “white working class identity” to prevent the possibility of collective, cross-racial class solidarity. Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin’ Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: The New Press, 2010), 165.

did not necessarily mean the breaking apart of collectives that characterized the rest of the decade. But in their annual meetings and trade publications, marketers were already hard at work figuring out how to encourage Americans to think about their sense of distinction and uniqueness in terms of consumption in order to segment markets and sell more goods. The seeds of a fragmented public were being planted.

As mainline and evangelical environmentalists attempted to mobilize their constituencies into action against the planetary crises that concerned them, “lifestyle” was appearing in mass media more and more, enticing them to channel their desire to act in response to the planet in crisis through the realm of personal consumer choice. This vision aligns with the overall goals of the neoliberal project, which Kathryn Lofton argues, encourages “a way of seeing the self in the world as a calculatingly sovereign person enfolded in systems of power, class, and experience through the selection of particular goods and services.”<sup>56</sup> The NCC opened the environmental decade with a press release that pointed to both “action” and “lifestyle” in the response it was

---

<sup>56</sup> Lofton, *Consuming Religion* (Chicago: University Press, 2017), 9.

To be clear, historians of consumption has established beyond doubt that the use of consumption to signify status, identity, and distinction long predates neoliberalism. In the postwar era of rapid decolonization, however, the longstanding practice of “consumption as meaning” takes on new importance when wedded to individual liberty and autonomy specifically because it is expedient for the political project of breaking apart publics and collectives. In fact, the historiography of consumption clearly shows a distinctively collective edge to most of the consumer politics that took place in the first half of the twentieth century.

Moreover, rather than just focus on “consumption as meaning,” I am focusing here on free market reason, which entices people to imagine that their purchases and consumptive habits have transformative effects on the planet. Your purchasing power is said to be measurable, quantifiable, traceable, thanks to the trusty machinations of the Invisible Hand. Taken together, neoliberal consumption promises my subjects a kind of seamless, unfettered agency in their goals of changing the world, as long as they embrace individual market action as the proper channel for accomplishing them.

On the historiography of consumption that shows that “consumption as meaning” is not new to neoliberalism, see: T.J. Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York: Basic Books 1994); Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture* (Chicago: University Press, 1981); Kristin Hoganson, *Consumers’ Imperium: The Global Production of American Domesticity, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007). On the collective nature of consumer politics in the first half of the twentieth century, see: Meg Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics: Economic Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton, NJ: University Press, 2004); Cohen, *Consumers’ Republic*.

imagining to planetary crisis. Lifestyle, as a concept, is deeply connected to the neoliberal project to insulate markets from democratic pressures, specifically by undermining collective action. Negotiating the tension between action and lifestyle, the Ecology Church Action Project, Evangelicals for Social Action, and the subsequent forms of environmental organizing that emerged in their wake offer a glimpse into a quotidian experience of market discipline: a kind of lived neoliberalism that shaped the way mainstream Protestants managed their relationship with a global political and economic project through their environmental thought and practice.

In this way, religion is a site of convergence between the postwar neoliberal project to open the planet up for capital's insatiable drive for resource extraction, labor exploitation, and profit accumulation, and the emergence of individual market reason. Mainstream Protestant environmentalists negotiated their relationship to those shifts in both political economy and political reason through their response to crisis-talk about the planet in the 1970s. Indeed, American Christianity has time and again served to mediate and legitimate American capitalism's voracious search for cheap and exploitable labor, whether that be in practices of social control and moral discipline in the manufacturing and shipping facilities of post-Market Revolution Rochester, or spiritual visions of white slave-owning virtue in the slave markets of the antebellum south, or in the shift away from Providential understandings of happenstance to explain the often risky wage labor that replaced enslavement.<sup>57</sup>

Noting the way religion serves as a social process for negotiating this relationship to capitalist power need not appeal to the often-deterministic formulation of "base and

---

<sup>57</sup> These examples come from: Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837*, (New York: Hill and Wang [1978] 2004); Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999); Jonathan Levy, *Freaks of Fortune: The Emerging World of Capitalism and Risk in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012).

superstructure.”<sup>58</sup> Borrowing from Stuart Hall’s influential treatment of popular culture, we might say instead that religion is never a simply deterministic expression of “forms which are superimposed on and over” people by existing regimes of power, neither is it a mode of resistance to power. Rather, it is “the ground on which the transformations are worked.”<sup>59</sup> Mainstream Protestant environmental religion unfolded as an uneven process rather than as a pre-determined cultural or social formation. Participants engaged in constant negotiation through which, in religion theorist Kathryn Lofton’s words, “distinctions are named, sociality is explained, and relationship to power (natural and supernatural) is managed.”<sup>60</sup> How would mainstream Protestants come to see themselves as distinct from other Americans, and from peoples of the decolonized world, in their relationship to American hegemony, and how would they respond to planetary crisis through a sense of relation to the divine, the planet, and other humans?<sup>61</sup>

---

<sup>58</sup> For a rough outline of base-superstructure in Marxist thinking, see: Stuart Hall, “Rethinking the Base and Superstructure,” in Lawrence Grossberg and Jennifer Daryl Slack, editors, *Cultural Studies 1983* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 74-96. See also: Bethany Moreton, “The Soul of Neoliberalism,” *Social Text* 25, no. 3 (92) (2007): 103-123.

<sup>59</sup> Stuart Hall, “Notes on Deconstructing the Popular,” in Raphael Samuel, ed., *People’s History and Socialist Theory*, 288.

<sup>60</sup> Kathryn Lofton, “Why Religion Is Hard For Historians (and How It Can Be Easier),” *Modern American History* 3 (2020), 16.

<sup>61</sup> Bethany Moreton’s study of religion, Wal-Mart, and the globalization of free enterprise is especially instructive here. Moreton chronicles Wal-Mart’s incredibly successful use of the “Christian family” as a moral language justifying the expansion of the service economy and low-wage, non-union work, first in the United States and eventually throughout Latin America in relation to the campaign for the North American Free Trade Agreement. For many, the rural Sunbelt’s embrace of “free enterprise” over against their own material interests in the form of wages and benefits has often been read as a kind of “false consciousness” among those workers who moved within the world of family values and Christian service in Wal-Mart stores. Instead, Moreton unravels the making of Christian free enterprise to show it to be an “unstable compound, the product in part of impressive agglomerations of power and money. But it was also the progeny of pragmatic needs, of idealistic hope in redemption, and of the elevation of service from its devalued position in the broader culture.” With this assemblage of capitalist power, material need, metaphysical hope, and ideologies of family and service, Wal-Mart workers were participants, rather than mere passive recipients, in the ongoing formation of American Christianity which is perhaps best understood as, again quoting Kathryn Lofton, “a relationship of power in which individuals confirm their identities not through its acceptance, but through its negotiated reproduction.” Ultimately, Moreton shows the way white, middle-class, American Christianity reproduced itself through a

Rather than a pre-determined production of false consciousness by way of a neoliberal superstructure, mainstream Protestant environmentalists of both mainline and evangelical varieties negotiated their relation to a shifting, often chaotic, and often violent global order whose vicissitudes involved widespread environmental devastation as populations grew, natural resources were polluted and depleted, and deforestation brought on massive droughts and famines. Fixing their attention on these planetary crises, they first envisioned forms of radical, collective action to combat state and corporate power. But they did so in an inchoate political economy that was offering the symbolically powerful possibility of consumer lifestyle choice instead.

### **Progressive Evangelicals in an Age of Hunger**

While ECAP's sole focus during its existence from 1970 to 1972 was environmental mobilization, the evangelicals who began organizing around the theme of "social action" between 1973 and 1975 gathered to express a more overarching sense of social concern about the state of world events. Their first official document, the "Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern," enumerated a list of issues, all of which reflected a need for evangelical social action in the 1970s. The document took aim at a range of social concerns, including poverty, racism, materialism, and the military-industrial complex. Although environmental issues came up on multiple occasions at these annual meetings, their originating declaration attended more

---

negotiation of relationships of power that mediated the expansion of neoliberal economics throughout the Western hemisphere as Wal-Mart management helped spread service economy values in the very countries where the U.S. was attempting to secure NAFTA.

According to Moreton, if the Washington Consensus had provided the institutional and structural "hardware of economic restructuring" in the region, Wal-Mart's mission to train Latin American managers in the American Christian service ethos created "a web of relationships between people and institutions that shadowed the Washington Consensus—a private-sector 'Bentonville Consensus,' a software of globalization. Through a Walton Family Foundation program, this human network bridged the transition from the last Cold War proxy battles to the new frontier of hemispheric free trade in the 1990s. Bethany Moreton. *To Serve God and Wal-Mart: The Making of Christian Free Enterprise* (Cambridge, MA: University of Harvard Press, 2009), 224; Lofton "Why Religion Is Hard For Historians," 15.

often to the haunting statistics of resource allocation and mass starvation that came to dominate the national news in 1973 and 1974. Commonly referred to as the world food crisis, this was the dominant motif in the progressive evangelical crisis-talk about the planet, out of which would grow some of the most visible and influential calls for lifestyle religion across the rest of the decade. Emerging amid news of famine, crop failure, and teeming overpopulated masses in the decolonized world, lifestyle religion—a pious, intensive management of consumer choices, said to have real power in the world through the workings of the free market—would eventually eclipse action as the dominant form of mainstream Protestant environmentalism.

In the declaration, concern about world hunger came up in an acknowledgement of the United States' involvement “in the imbalance and injustice of international trade and development. Before God and a billion hungry neighbors, we must rethink our values regarding our present standard of living and promote a more just acquisition and distribution of the world's resources.”<sup>62</sup> On top of the population panic that had prevailed since late the 1960s, major oil shortages resulting from the Arab Oil Embargo along with forecasts of massive droughts and starvation in 1973 and 1974 caused a spike in concern about the world in crisis, concerns that were given a concrete, material edge as American wages stagnated and consumer prices spiked as a result of inflation.<sup>63</sup>

These feelings of planetary crisis circulated widely in the American media, which helped produce a sense of urgency and immediacy even among those who were themselves largely

---

<sup>62</sup> “The Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern,” 1973. Full text of the declaration is available at: [https://www.livedtheology.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/chicago\\_declaration.pdf](https://www.livedtheology.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/chicago_declaration.pdf).

<sup>63</sup> On the cultural anxieties produced as a result of stagflation and the energy crisis in the 1970s, see Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: The New Press, 2010), 213–59.

unaffected by the widespread food and energy shortages. A mainline position paper commissioned by the NCC in response to the crises of 1973 and 1974 stated as much:

The technology of news, images and transportation give this picture of massive transition a sense of immediacy not possible even for St. Paul, the seer, or any of his contemporaries. The cliché of the global village is too true for comfort. We are visible neighbors to each other whether we live in Harlem or Calcutta. The disparities between the haves and have-nots can no longer be kept secret. Their visibility compounds the discontent of the poor and frightens the affluent.<sup>64</sup>

Despite their well-known theological differences with the mainline, the evangelical leaders organizing annual conferences on social action filed this paper away among their planning materials for upcoming conference themes, suggesting the way both groups experienced similar kinds of planetary consciousness—and anxiety—in reaction to the increasingly immediate and pressing signs of massive inequality around the globe. As the NCC position paper implied, mass media's expansion had combined with globalization to give the sense of crisis a global scale among the American middle-class Protestants watching from afar. The chairperson of one Protestant antihunger campaign articulated precisely this sensibility in 1974 after attending a U.N. sponsored conference on the world food crisis in Rome, writing, "Can we watch millions die in color on television and ever again find our divine humanity? ... How will we respond to the colloquy of calamity that confronts us now?"<sup>65</sup> The precarity of the decolonizing world, encountered with growing regularity through ubiquitous mass media, was no longer some distant reality. It felt like a "colloquy of calamity," immediate and pressing. Occupying the imaginations of evangelicals and mainliners alike, planetary crisis came to feel like a direct confrontation, demanding an urgent response.

---

<sup>64</sup> Jorge Lara-Braud and Harold Schalchthausen, "Theological Position Paper for Church World Service," 1975. BGEA ESA Papers box 4 folder 5.

<sup>65</sup> Patricia Young, "Report from Rome: The World Food Conference," *Church and Society* 65, no. 4 (April 1975), 57.

Across the first half of the decade, anxieties about global crisis and affluent America's role in it shifted from the ecological talk of Earth Day to a discourse around world hunger, which grew especially prominent in mainstream Protestant discussions of social concern and social action. This was not a departure from environmental consciousness, but rather a kind of recalibration focused on the shared fate of humanity and the planet as natural resources in the decolonized world were depleted for the sake of affluence and power elsewhere. *The Christian Century* opened the decade with a special issue on ecological crisis, which it explicitly defined as a combination of "pollution and poverty," both equally, "products of [Americans'] failure."<sup>66</sup> Between 1971 and 1974, the situation in the decolonized world worsened, giving rise to the specific language of a "world food crisis." A special report in the Presbyterian journal *Church and Society* explained the basic details of the situation:

[I]n 1971 and 1972 unfavorable weather conditions in many parts of the world led, for the first time, to a reduction of four percent in the world production of wheat, legumes and rice on that of the previous year. Bulk purchase by deficit countries sent food prices rocketing and reduced world grain stocks to...enough for thirty-seven days supply.<sup>67</sup>

In 1973 and 1974, bad weather continued and food prices rose accordingly, in part because of the existing food shortages and in part because of the concurrent oil embargo, causing the situation to worsen so that, according to the *Church and Society* report, "disaster is on our doorstep."<sup>68</sup> National reporting on the crisis intensified as time went on, especially after the United Nations decided to sponsor an emergency conference on the subject in Rome in the fall of '74. The nightly news in particular gave a sense of immediacy and urgency to the crisis, unfolding live on TV sets. As one NBC reporter put it, "only a year or so ago, hardly anybody talked about the

---

<sup>66</sup> Ian Barbour, "An Ecological Ethic," *The Christian Century* 87, no. 40 (October 7, 1970), 1181.

<sup>67</sup> Jonathan Power and Dr. Anne-Marie Hollenstein, "The World Food Crisis," *Church and Society* 65, no. 4 (March–April 1975), 8.

<sup>68</sup> Power and Hollenstein, "The World Food Crisis," 9



world running out of food. But because this conference has been reported fully on television and radio and in newspapers and magazines all over the world, billions of people who never gave it a thought have begun to think about it.”<sup>69</sup> As the world food crisis came to occupy the minds of many, the Evangelicals for Social Action’s concern for “a billion hungry neighbors” fit seamlessly into a new kind of ecological concern and planetary consciousness haunted by anxieties about a world in crisis as the precarity of decolonized nations raised questions about the stability of life on Earth.

### **Evangelicals for Social Action**

The leaders behind Evangelicals for Social Action began planning their first conference in the Spring of 1973, right as the reports of a world food crisis were gaining steam. The conferences’ chief organizer, was Ronald Sider (1939 - ), an Anabaptist church historian who was at the time leading Messiah College’s satellite campus in urban Philadelphia (fig. 3). Born in rural Ontario, Sider grew up in a tight-knit community of Brethren in Christ, a Swiss-German Anabaptist denomination known as much for its evangelical piety as its commitment to nonconformity. In the 1960s, Sider moved to the U.S. to start graduate work in Reformation history under Jaroslav Pelikan at Yale University, which led him to a teaching post at Messiah College’s new urban campus near Temple University. It was at Messiah’s satellite campus where Sider developed his trademark combination of Anabaptist nonconformism and passionate concern for issues of world hunger and inequality, a shift in his interests that brought him into connection with other politically liberal evangelicals in 1972 as part of Evangelicals for

---

<sup>69</sup> John Chancellor, “World Food Conference,” NBC Evening News, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, November 15, 1974, <https://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/broadcasts/474135>. See also Harry Reasoner, “World Food Conference,” ABC Evening News, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, November 14, 1974, <https://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/broadcasts/29170>; Charles Kuralt, “World Hunger / India,” CBS Evening News, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, November 05, 1974, <https://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/broadcasts/232198>.

McGovern. Although McGovern failed to replace Nixon in the White House and the 1972 presidential campaigns proved that many of American evangelicalism's luminaries were, like Billy Graham, still loyal to Nixon despite his rough edges, Sider was buoyed by the number of like-minded volunteers he met in the Evangelicals for McGovern push and hoped to channel that energy into a lasting network of progressive evangelicals.<sup>70</sup>

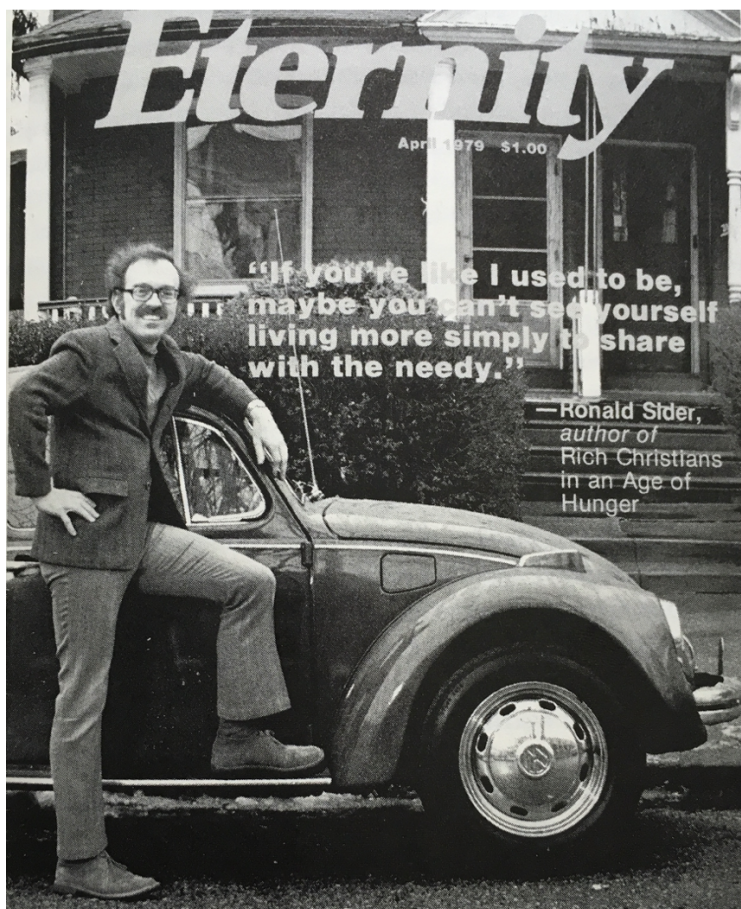


Figure 3 - Ron Sider on the cover of Eternity Magazine, 1979.

In early 1973, looking to build on the network that had emerged through the McGovern push in the previous year, Sider started planning a major gathering of “socially concerned”

<sup>70</sup> On Sider's background, see: Swartz, *Moral Minority*, 153-169. On Evangelicals for McGovern, see: Mark A. Lempke, *My Brother's Keeper: George McGovern and Progressive Christianity* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2017). Graham's close relationship with Nixon is well-documented. See, for example: Daniel K. Williams, *God's Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 99.

evangelicals to take place that fall. He hoped to gather a racially- and gender-diverse group of like-minded evangelicals to produce a manifesto and call to action on the social concerns raised by affluent America's effects on the postwar world. Sider's organizing efforts culminated in a gathering of 51 evangelical leaders in Chicago for what became known as the first Thanksgiving Workshop of Evangelical Social Concern.<sup>71</sup>

As with the NCC's Ecology Church Action Project, Sider and his collaborators hoped to strike a balance between consciousness-raising and concrete action steps, which they planned to convey through the manifesto attendees would write together. But even more so than in the original gatherings of the ECAP committee, the symbolic power of "lifestyle" hung over the workshop from the start. As participants arrived at the conference site, the accommodations themselves communicated Sider and his co-organizers' interest in the way stylistic choices could communicate something powerful about their new network. Although multiple organizers were affiliated with Wheaton College, the planners chose not to gather at the evangelical institution's idyllic suburban campus, a common setting for gatherings of evangelical leaders. Instead, they gathered at the downtown YMCA hotel in an intentional gesture, meant to signal both their connection to evangelical social reformers of the late nineteenth century and their preference for simple, austere accommodations. The symbolism was not lost on Marlin Van Elderen, an attendee who fondly recalled the "splendid squalor of Chicago's Wabash YMCA Hotel," a site befitting of the workshop leader, who Van Elderen noted hailed from "Messiah's little satellite

---

<sup>71</sup> Unlike the NCC's Ecology Church Action Project, which has remained largely undiscussed by historians, the ESA's Thanksgiving Workshops have been narrated in rich detail, which is why my recounting here is more abrupt than the prior sections' treatment of ECAP. For detailed background on several organizers as well as a very capable retelling of the workshop events themselves, see David Swartz, *Moral Minority*. For further treatments of Sider and other ESA organizers, see: Molly Worthen, *Apostles of Reason: The Crisis of Authority in American Evangelicalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 177-197; and Brantley Gasaway, *Progressive Evangelicals and the Pursuit of Social Justice* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

campus at Temple University in the heart of Philadelphia's ghetto."<sup>72</sup> From the moment they walked into the workshop, attendees like Van Elderen could sense that the organizers' choices about where to gather, where to lodge, and what to eat were charged with symbolic power, helping communicate their sense of distinctiveness in American society.

Sider and many co-organizers' Anabaptist backgrounds likely contributed to the way lifestyle loomed so large here from the start. Among Brethren and Mennonites, the ethic of simplicity—meant to shape how one dressed, what one ate, what one bought, where one lived, and so on—bore more than a passing resemblance to the newer concept of lifestyle choice. On top of that, other prominent figures in this new network of Evangelicals for Social Action, like Jim Wallis of *Sojourners* and John Alexander of *The Other Side*, had themselves first become concerned with issues like imperialism, war, inequality, and racism through their participation in the New Left, the counterculture, and other radical movements of the 1960s that had first given rise to popular usage of the term "lifestyle." Before becoming a public figure on the evangelical left, Jim Wallis had spent time organizing with Students for a Democratic Society, and his reputation as a participant in "the violent anarchy of campus radicalism" preceded him at the workshop.<sup>73</sup> Thanks to experiences with both the traditional Anabaptist communities of their childhoods and the radical New Left organizations of their college years, many were familiar with the way one's clothing, one's diet, one's hair style, and much else, could become a powerful embodiment of distinctiveness and values.

Despite the group's stated aim of focusing on concrete social action, the organizers' connection to the concept of lifestyle meant that the term arose again and again at the 1973

---

<sup>72</sup> Marlin J. Van Elderen, "Won't You Please Come to Chicago? (We Can Change the World...)," *The Reformed Journal*, January 1975, 20-21.

<sup>73</sup> Marlin J. Van Elderen, "Won't You Please Come to Chicago? (We Can Change the World...)," 21.

workshop as participants worked toward a shared statement of evangelical social concern. As the group thought through its concerns with American society's connections to the many crises wracking the planet, they were deeply vexed by the way materialism and affluence had helped Christians like them buy into systems of oppression. In a proposal for a graduated tithe system to help simplify lifestyles and reallocate finances to social justice efforts, one participant complained that "the standard of living is the god of Western man and the adman is its prophet," and "we Christians need to make some dramatic, concrete moves to escape the creeping materialism that seeps into our minds via the diabolically clever commercials. We have been brainwashed to believe that bigger houses, larger businesses, and more luxurious gadgets are worthy goals in life."<sup>74</sup> If white middle-class materialism was one cause of, in the words of the final Declaration, "misplaced trust of the nation in economic and military might," then perhaps lifestyle change could serve as a concrete action item in its own right.

Discussing the problems that had occasioned the workshop—racism, economic imperialism, nationalism, and sexism—the question of how concern, action, and lifestyle would relate to one another was very much in flux, up for negotiation as the workshop went on. In the words of various attendees, lifestyle took on new and shifting meanings as the group tried to work out the way consumption and economic practices could relate to their concerns about the state of the planet. One possibility, raised by Jim Wallis and jotted down by a notetaker, was that lifestyle might primarily serve as a way of unifying their network, creating a consistent identity and set of commitments across their group. In Wallis's words, "our lifestyle [is] generally not determined by our spiritual condition—our faith has to be integrated into our life style."<sup>75</sup> A formal "group considering Life Styles" submitted an action proposal that was first of all hopeful

---

<sup>74</sup> "A Modest Proposal for Western Christians: The Graduated Tithe," BGEA ESA Papers box 1 folder 8.

<sup>75</sup> "Suggestions for Specific Action," BGEA ESA Papers box 1 folder 8.

that “a new lifestyle, especially in the area of economic discipleship, will come about when people see their loneliness and alienation and feel the need to come together in community.”<sup>76</sup> In the views of Wallis and the group proposal document, lifestyle change had the potential to forge stronger group bonds and deeper connections to a shared faith, a view of lifestyle that echoes Max Weber’s usage of “style of life” as well as the 1960s’ print media’s practice of describing countercultural distinctiveness in such terms.<sup>77</sup>

The “Group Considering Life Styles” went on to suggest that lifestyle could also serve as the starting point for concrete action, insofar as it allowed communities to share and reallocate their financial resources to support social action in their communities. Lifestyle choices might do more than just create group identity. Perhaps it could also offer a foundation for organizing more collective forms of direct action and advocacy. This vision was stated most clearly in an action proposal submitted by James Robert Ross, a campus minister based in Charleston, Illinois. Ross’s proposal, entitled “Transportation, Technology, and Environment,” made the group’s most explicit connections between their stated concern with militarism, world hunger, and racism on the one hand, and the ecological crisis on the other. Elsewhere, in an exposition on the final declaration produced at the workshop, Ross expressed his view. “We believe our security comes through our materialism, our wealth, our Gross National product,” he wrote. “So we despoil our environment and neglect the quality of man’s spirit in order to expand our materialistic self-indulgence.”<sup>78</sup> Ross’s specific proposal related to transportation technology, pointing out that America’s reliance on the automobile was causing heavy pollution and also hurting poor and urban communities through the incentive to build highways and cut public transit. His action

---

<sup>76</sup> “Action Proposals From the group considering Life Styles,” BGEA ESA Papers box 1 folder 8.

<sup>77</sup> Ryan, *Lifestyle Media in American Culture*, 18.

<sup>78</sup> James Robert Ross, “The Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern: An Exposition,” BGEA, ESA Papers box 2 folder 11.

proposal combined lifestyle choice with policy advocacy, calling on evangelicals to come together and “publicly affirm their refusal to purchase or rent automobiles with engines larger than 275 cubic inches. This group would in turn become active in the forefront of political agitation to accomplish the objectives [of environmental regulation] stated above.”<sup>79</sup>

After a lively discussion of the various action proposals the breakout groups had drawn up over the weekend, the plenary body struggled to agree on a declaration. As David Swartz has detailed, the group was wracked by disagreements as Black participants pointed out a misplaced triumphalism in light of ongoing realities of racism, women in attendance pointed out a lack of gender inclusivity in most drafts, and Anabaptists in attendance felt that the statement lacked clear enough criticism of American imperialism.<sup>80</sup> In the end, though many action items were discussed at the 1973 workshop, the final document, known as the Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern, focused exclusively on sketching out some broadly shared social concerns (racism, economic imperialism, nationalism, and sexism) and completely excluded concrete action items.<sup>81</sup> As it turned out, envisioning and agreeing on exactly what “action” should look like proved quite complicated. Just as Rodney Shaw and Kay Shannon discovered when they sought foundation funding for the mainline Ecology Church Action Project’s plans to challenge both state and industry, the collective action approaches that characterized the labor and social movements of the 1960s inevitably came into conflict with existing forms of power. Whether it was John Robert Ross’s vision of collective agitation against the automobile, or the Anabaptist contingent’s failed proposal to condemn the U.S. backed coup in Chile that had taken place two months prior, certain ideas for collective action ran up against the neoliberal project’s

---

<sup>79</sup> James Robert Ross, Action Proposal on “Transportation, Technology, and Environment,” BGEA, ESA Papers box 1 folder 8.

<sup>80</sup> On these conflicts, see Swartz, *Moral Minority*, 179-180.

<sup>81</sup> “Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern,” 1973.

recent efforts at opening the world up to unfettered capital and industrial expansion. Better to simply register “concern” about neoliberalism’s violent effects on humans and their environment without naming their source or taking action against it.

Despite signing the declaration unanimously, many of the 52 workshop participants felt nonplussed by the final version. Having seen the messy negotiation process for themselves, several complained publicly about the fact that the compromise positions taken in the final document lacked concrete calls to action. Writing in the *Christian Standard* three months after the event, James Robert Ross, the campus minister who had proposed concrete, collective action against the automobile industry, said, “I hoped that we might specify more concretely the sort of social action demanded of a contemporary disciple of Jesus. I am suspicious of talk without action, of words without hands and feet.”<sup>82</sup> Marlin van Elderlin reflected in early 1975 that at that first meeting, “The prevalence of the coalition model meant that one need not agree on particulars of execution to sign the declaration. The stress on consciousness-raising meant that the objection that words are easy and action hard would not count against the declaration.” Some outside observers likewise took issue with the declaration’s broad list of social concerns without a plan for responding to them; according to Van Elderlin, one evangelical writer not in attendance had declared that although he agreed with most of its points, he would not sign the declaration because it “was woefully weak on specific suggestions about what do about the social abuses against which it inveighed.”<sup>83</sup>

Despite complaints from those who witnessed the negotiations up close, the workshop and declaration were widely celebrated, garnering national press coverage in places like the

---

<sup>82</sup> James Robert Ross, “A report on the Chicago Thanksgiving workshop: Evangelicals for Social Concern,” *The Christian Standard* 2/3/74, 98.

<sup>83</sup> Van Elderlin, “Wont You Come to Chicago?”



*Washington Post* and *Chicago Tribune*. Several national evangelical figures, including Senator Mark Hatfield of Oregon and the prominent Wheaton College-based philosopher Arthur Holmes, wrote in to have their names added.<sup>84</sup> Ron Sider, buoyed by this enthusiastic response, made plans for a second Thanksgiving Workshop that he hoped would respond to the lack of concrete action items by focusing exclusively on developing “specific proposals for implementing the Chicago Declaration.” To do so, Sider delineated six topics and assigned a group of participants to each one, tasked with bringing a draft action proposal to the workshop, revising it over the course of the weekend, and bringing it for a vote on the last day. The six action areas were laid out as, “consciousness raising, women, lifestyle, education and research, politics, and black-related issues.”<sup>85</sup>

In 1974, then, Sider elevated lifestyle to the same level as “women” and “black-related issues.” Given its selection as one of the six areas warranting an action proposal, lifestyle was, of course, once again a major point of discussion in 1974 as the evangelical leaders gathered at the Chicago Y to try and work out the relationship between concern, action, and lifestyle over a second long weekend. The lifestyle caucus’s discussions suggest that the meaning of the word was beginning to coalesce around neoliberal market logics more and more. Although in 1973 Jim Wallis and others had used the term as a way of thinking about habits and behaviors that could foster a deeper connection with one’s religious beliefs as well as one’s coreligionists, in 1974 the conversation was dominated by questions of consumer goods, household income, and fundraising. Among the action proposals the lifestyle caucus brought to the group was a call for evangelicals to refuse income above \$8000 for a family of four, to reallocate significant amounts of money to evangelical non-profits, to give up eating meat at least a couple days a week, and to

---

<sup>84</sup> Press coverage and additional signatories are listed in Swartz, *Moral Minority*, 181-182.

<sup>85</sup> Van Elderlin, “Wont You Come to Chicago?”

stop purchasing fertilizer.<sup>86</sup> With these proposals, “evangelical social action,” which had begun as a kind of Christian adaptation of progressive protest movements and political campaigns, was reimagined in terms of individual economic behaviors. In the discourse of the 1974 gathering, participants were learning to view themselves as *homo oeconomicus*, helping them reimagine collective political problems as individual ones with market solutions.<sup>87</sup>

According to multiple reports, the proposals of the economic lifestyle caucus were the most hotly contested in the closing plenary session. One major fault line developed between young, single attendees to whom a fixed maximum income seemed feasible, and married attendees with financially-dependent children who bristled at the idea that young, single attendees fresh off college campuses could possibly determine how much money a family of four would need. One participant scribbled in the margins of the economic lifestyle proposal that the \$8,000 fixed income was “idyllic romanticism that avoids the realities of modern life.”<sup>88</sup> Another fault line grew again between Anabaptist and Reformed participants, with the former predisposed to embrace “voluntary simplicity” and the latter more committed to the idea that individual wealth could afford opportunities to influence society for the better.

In the end, the group agreed on a less stringent “Commitment of Economic Responsibility” that removed the most direct challenges to individual wealth while still communicating new market logics for social action. This final proposal document reflected the interweaving of concern for the environment and the hungry in an overarching planetary consciousness, to which the drafters proposed an intensely personal course of market action: “I will seek to follow the example, teachings, and guidance of Jesus Christ in all my decision about

---

<sup>86</sup> “Proposals For Action,” 6.

<sup>87</sup> Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 10; Brown, “American Nightmare,” 703.

<sup>88</sup> “Proposals For Action,” 6. BGEA ESA Papers Box 2 Folder 15

personal possessions and consumptions” and “commit myself to live a life of creative simplicity and ecological responsibility, continually evaluating my standard of living in relation to my genuine needs and those of others.”<sup>89</sup> Within neoliberal political reason, subjects are tasked with intensely governing themselves as pieces of human capital, echoing these evangelicals’ commitment to “continual evaluation” of their economic choices<sup>90</sup> Typical of the Workshops’ struggles to agree on collective action that would actually challenge structures or systemic status quos, the “commitment of economic responsibility” then transitioned into vagaries when it came to actual policy: “I commit to bringing about a more just global society” and “to be able to make critical or costly decisions for human good.”<sup>91</sup> With the group unable to agree on specific collective actions that could challenge harmful political and economic patterns, they instead advocated fully individuated practices of consumer lifestyle.

This commitment to economic responsibility pointed reflected a transition from an earlier, Weberian use of the term lifestyle to refer to behaviors and choices that made social groups distinct, into the use of the term that advertisers had begun circulating in the early 1970s to refer to market behavior. Two of the concrete suggestions that came out of the 1974 workshop spoke directly to this. Participants were “urged to stop using fertilizer on non-food stuffs” because “fertilizer being used on U.S. lawns, golf courses, and roses could be used to grow rice in India.” And elsewhere, participants were advised to cease eating meat at least one day a week because meat production uses up grain that might be used to feed hungry mouths elsewhere on the planet.<sup>92</sup> This market discipline enticed the American consumer to understand their purchases as an exercise of power, thanks to the free market’s omnipotent and trustworthy workings. Stop

---

<sup>89</sup> “Commitment of Economic Responsibility,” BGEA ESA Papers Box 2 Folder 15.

<sup>90</sup> Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 10.

<sup>91</sup> “Commitment of Economic Responsibility,” BGEA ESA Papers box 2 folder 15.

<sup>92</sup> “Commitment of Economic Responsibility.”

buying fertilizer for your lawn, and suddenly, thanks to the invisible hand's faithful tugging at the supply chains and networks of exchange that had surrounded the planet, there would be more fertilizer available for use on rice farms in South Asia. Under neoliberalism, with its dream of seamlessly interwoven global markets, the fragile planet floating cold and alone through space might become safe and warm once it was hemmed in and held tight by the threads of finance and exchange now enfolding it.

The lifestyle caucus's vision of a world seamlessly interconnected by capital so that a Christian need only make a consumer choice to bring about positive change on the other side of the planet did not go uncontested at the workshop. One participant wondered whether such consumer behaviors would really benefit hungry mouths in the so-called Third World, or if it would just have the benefit of reducing inflation in the domestic economy.<sup>93</sup> Even so, the Commitment of Economic Responsibility had planted some important seeds, especially for Ronald Sider, who had set out in 1973 to develop a course of action for evangelicals concerned about the state of a planet in crisis. As he discovered in the crucible of two hotly debated workshops in the Wabash Avenue Y, his evangelical network was nowhere near agreement on whether their vaguely imagined social action should antagonize existing power structures. With the two workshops' exploration of lifestyle change, however, he had discovered a theme that enjoyed broader appeal, especially when focusing on personal expression and creativity in the consumer marketplace.

Here, some of the first building blocks of lifestyle religion were being laid. Religion refers to those processes through which people negotiate relation, distinction, and value, and where they manage their relationship to power. By focusing on one's relationship with consumer

---

<sup>93</sup> "Proposals For Action," 9. BGEA ESA Papers box 2 folder 15

goods—meatless meals and the fertilizer on their lawns—lifestyle religion became a way of not enacting what is distinct about oneself, how one is bound to others, and how one participates in, aligns with, or tries to alter existing forms of power, all with, upon, and within one’s own body. As Kathryn Lofton writes, “whatever else religion might be, it is a way of describing structures by which we are bound or connected to one another. Religion is therefore also a way of describing structures by which we distinguish ourselves from others, often by uniting around things that claim universal interest.”<sup>94</sup> With lifestyle religion, the world of consumer goods is on offer as place of acceptance and denial as the Christian freely navigates commodities whose flows through the global market provide dreams of a virtuous consumer, embodying and enacting their religious commitments, and a trail of grateful workers, whose lives are transformed by a somehow suddenly available bag of grain or bucket of fertilizer.

Even as they sowed these fruitful seeds of lifestyle religion, Sider’s Thanksgiving Workshops were dying out. So many of the 117 participants walked away disappointed with the second Thanksgiving workshop that it ended up being the last. Sider did hold a third workshop over Labor Day weekend in 1975, but enthusiasm and participation plummeted, making it the last of the Evangelical Social Concern workshops.

In trying to understand why a project that got so much positive press and garnered such praise from major evangelical figures ended up falling apart after just two years, church historian David Swartz points to the rise of identity politics as the major culprit, writing ruefully that “the heightened salience of identity, while offering inspiration to women, African Americans, Anabaptists, and Reformed evangelicals, sapped the broader evangelical left of the fragile sense of purpose that came out of the first Thanksgiving Workshop.”<sup>95</sup> Swartz’s analysis reflects a

---

<sup>94</sup> Lofton, *Consuming Religion*, 5

<sup>95</sup> Swartz, *Moral Minority*, 189.

wider trend among historians, who blame the resistance movements of the 1960s for their own failure. Eschewing material analysis, these scholars overlook the glaring fact that the fragmentation of collectives is a primary objective of the neoliberal project in its quest to ensure the free flow of capital in the postwar world.<sup>96</sup> Stated plainly, this approach blames the disempowered for their failure to overcome the powerful, despite the ways people in power can be observed consciously attempting to fragment collectives in order to preserve their own positions.<sup>97</sup>

Looking at it on a practical level, the 1974 workshop's failure can perhaps most accurately be seen as stemming from its attempt to kill two birds with one stone. First, it hoped to enumerate a set of concrete action steps by splitting the group into six distinct caucuses tasked with creating specific action proposals. And second, it hoped simultaneously to resolve the previous year's conflicts over racist and sexist aspects of the document by reserving two of those six caucuses for the discussion of issues of race and gender respectively.<sup>98</sup> The practical outcome, of course, was that Black participants and all other female participants were de facto excluded from weighing in on such things as politics, consciousness-raising, education and research, and economic lifestyle.

---

<sup>96</sup> For one of the more influential examples of this argument, see: Daniel T. Rodgers, *Age of Fracture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), esp. chapters 4 and 5. In Rodgers' rendering, activists' insistence on pushing past the stable, classic binaries of "black and white" and "male and female" into more nuanced or complex considerations of intersectionality was central to the fracturing of collectives that occurred in the 1970s and 1980s. This runs in contradistinction to labor historians who have shown, compellingly, that differences of identity do not inherently preclude solidarity. Cohen, *Making a New Deal*; Cowie, *Stayin' Alive*.

<sup>97</sup> Owners of capital have cultivated and circulated the idea that differences of identity preclude collectives and shared interests for centuries. Barbara Fields has argued that this practice is at the very root of racialization. Historians of the 1970s like Jefferson Cowie have shown were undertaken consciously by figures like Richard Nixon, who actively sought to convince working-class whites that they had more shared interest with wealthy whites than they did with working-class people of color. Fields, "Ideology and Race in American History," in *Region, Race, and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward*, Ed. J. Morgan Kousser and James M. McPherson, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 143-177.

<sup>98</sup> Stephen Mott and Wesley Roberts, "A report on the second Thanksgiving Workshop," BGEA ESA Papers box 3 folder 13.

When the time came to present the various caucuses' proposals, each group was allotted fifteen minutes of discussion. Disagreements over questions of personal income and wealth took up enough space that almost no time was left for the women's caucus to present its findings.<sup>99</sup> Despite the original Thanksgiving Workshop's vision of a diverse coalition weighing in on issues of social concern, the economic lifestyle caucus, like the caucuses on politics, consciousness-raising, and education and research, was largely a group of white men, thanks to the creation of separate caucuses for women and African Americans. Among the white men who deliberated over economic lifestyle, a central breakdown emerged over whether Christian lifestyle choice needed to result in a rejection or abdication of existing forms of power. The reason the lifestyle caucus needed so much time for discussion, in the words of one participant, came over disagreements among leadership on how to wield and share power, writing, "Traditional Anabaptists puzzled over the uses of power and the apparent readiness of those of a more Calvinistic persuasion to reach for its levers."<sup>100</sup>

Though this has been described by participants and, later, historians as a disagreement in political theology between Anabaptist and Reformed attendees, viewed from another angle, the breakdown that largely crowded out the women's caucus might better be seen as a question of whether powerful white men were willing to give up their power. While some read the breakdown as an issue of minoritized identity groups asking for too much, they were also being crowded out by powerful white men working to prevent the redistribution of their power.

As with the story of the mainline's failed Ecology Church Action Project, Ron Sider's workshops on evangelical social concern struggled most when they ran up against questions of wealth and power and whether either should be redistributed. And once again, the task of

---

<sup>99</sup> Rufus Jones to Pamela Cole, December 11, 1974. BGEA ESA Papers box 2 folder 18.

<sup>100</sup> Van Elderin, "Won't you Please Come to Chicago?"

developing shared courses of action that could challenge the structures of racism, imperialism, nationalism, and sexism through collective activism proved too much for Sider's network of progressive evangelicals. As an alternative, lifestyle religion had shown promise as an appealing way of helping affluent Americans respond to their concerns about planetary crisis, especially when it could be framed as a set of personal consumer choices, rather than a rigid demand to redistribute wealth and power. Luckily, Sider was almost immediately gifted with an opportunity to bring his message of lifestyle religion to an even wider network of evangelicals in the form of a Billy Graham-led missionary conference in 1974 had chosen to insert its own controversial call for lifestyle change in its landmark Lausanne Covenant on World Evangelization.

### **Conclusion**

For Ron Sider's Workshops on Evangelical Social Concern, as well as the NCC's Ecology Church Action Project, the prospect of collective action proved tenuous once they ran up against the prospect of antagonizing existing forms of power. In both cases, the notion of lifestyle, as a new, individuated, consumer-oriented form of environmental action, arose at just the right time, offering a compelling replacement that provided constituents with a way to respond to their planetary concerns without having to deal with the messy matter of power and wealth redistribution. Returning to ECAP, just as its attempts at national mobilization drew to a close, the concept of lifestyle was rising to even greater prominence, charged with much more symbolic energy and power. This shift was designed in part as an effort to capitalize on changes underway in the American political economy, as the emergent neoliberal consensus began fragmenting social groups into smaller and smaller segments. As firms looked to the practice of market segmentation as their next frontier in the American consumer economy, marketers seized upon the word lifestyle and invested it with symbolic salience. Within the rhetoric of the



American Marketing Association, filtering its way into culture through countless advertisements and articles, lifestyle came to refer to the outward expression, and symbolic embodiment, of one's distinct identity through consumer choice.<sup>101</sup>

The ascent of lifestyle's symbolic power was fully underway as Rodney Shaw and others considered their next steps for mainline environmentalism. Among the mainline bureaucrats who had helped steer ECAP in 1970 and early 1971, David Poindexter, Shaw's friend and colleague in the population control movement, was most plugged into media and marketing culture thanks to his work with the Population Communication Center. In April of 1971, he forwarded a letter he had received from a correspondent of his at Friends of the Earth. Just like the letter of thanks from the Natural Resource Defense Council in February or the hundreds of inquiries about ECAP that arrived in May, this was yet another expression of enthusiasm for ECAP's future that arrived a little too late. Even so, Poindexter sensed that the note would be of interest to Rodney Shaw, to whom he forwarded it, scrawling across the top, "R.S. - This is a significant report on FOE attitudes re: the church. - D.P." Like others at the time, the letter made mention of the role the church could play in guiding the public into specific lifestyle choices, reading "more generally," FOE lacked "a more definite style of life to replace the things we're criticizing and trying to defeat," something he thought a group like ECAP might resolve by providing a "religious-moral basis" to the movement.<sup>102</sup>

But even as secular environmentalists pleaded with these denominational leaders to stay connected to the movement, ECAP's initial dreams of action-oriented environmentalism were fading. If they were to forge forward in their quest to produce a viable, mobilized network of

---

<sup>101</sup> Stephen A. Greyser, editor. *Toward Scientific Marketing*; William D. Wells, editor. *Life Style and Psychographics* (Chicago, IL: American Marketing Association, 1974).

<sup>102</sup> John Clarke to Dave Poindexter, "Religion and the Church at Friends of the Earth Annual Meeting," April 27, 1971.

church-going environmentalists, they would need to reframe Christian environmentalism in new terms. On this front, Clarke of FOE passed along a bit of advice from an advertising copywriter. The adman had been trying his hand at writing ads on environmental issues, and found himself wondering if the focus on specific policy issues and environmental problems, such as Gene Sylvestre's task assignments to go out and measure air pollution, or Kay Shannon's efforts to advocate against water table damage in the Shenandoah Valley, would ever be enough to garner significant public buy-in. Instead, the adman suspected that something else would be needed to motivate public involvement. His idea was to produce "more general, ethical ads," which he hoped could "turn around basic beliefs about life." Rodney Shaw underlined and bracketed these comments, signaling his own reflection on this idea: perhaps ECAP had been too focused on issues, organizing its message of environmental consciousness and mobilization in ways that paralleled the left-leaning social movements that were increasingly repellant to an aging white constituency. Perhaps a message focused on people's own, inward gaze toward their own ethics, choices, and lifestyles would be more compelling. And as it turned out, the new advertising technique of lifestyle marketing would play a central role in the NCC's path forward.<sup>103</sup>

At the start of the 1970s, as both mainline and evangelical Protestants became increasingly aware of the crises of the decolonized world, organizers in both groups were hopeful of deploying the models of direct action pioneered in the 1960s to mobilize their denominations into collective activism to safeguard the future of humanity and planet Earth. In the span of four years, two parallel networks were created in hopes of mobilizing collective action, and both networks followed a remarkably similar path. They found that their dreams of collective direct action were met with opposition from those invested in existing power

---

<sup>103</sup> John Clarke to Dave Poindexter, "Religion and the Church at Friends of the Earth Annual Meeting," April 27, 1971.

structures, and that their constituencies were often more interested in the possibility of finding personal, quotidian acts that would allow them to embody and signify their commitment and concern in market-friendly ways, rather than coming into conflict with capital itself. For both groups, the solution turned out to come from a neologism, “lifestyle,” that had recently entered the American lexicon thanks to journalists and marketers trying to make sense of, and profit from, new forms of social and cultural diversity as the mass culture of the 1950s broke apart into growing numbers of sub- and counter-cultures. As the neoliberal project gained steam, its message of trustworthy free markets that could provide solutions to any number of social and environmental problems helped entice Americans to imagine that their lifestyles could hold the key to changing the world, through the seamless connection between their consumer choices and the economic status of various corners of the world, now all interconnected by neoliberalism’s worldwide expansion of goods and finance. This was the beginning of lifestyle religion, a compelling new way to negotiate categories of relation, distinction, value, and power through quotidian personal choices in the consumer marketplace. In the years that followed, new projects headed up by former ECAP and ESA leadership would help circulate this lifestyle religion on a national level, helping it dominate conversations about environmental problems by the end of the decade.

# - 3 -

## LIFESTYLE

Just four months before Ron Sider's second Thanksgiving Workshop, with its anointing of "economic lifestyle" as a topic worthy of a dedicated caucus alongside issues like race and gender, a much larger evangelical network held its first major gathering in Lausanne, Switzerland at the urging of evangelical superstar Billy Graham. Both events occurred under the dark cloud of the world food crisis, which by 1974 had replaced the population crisis as the focal point of American Protestant anxiety about the state of the planet. And, like Sider's Thanksgiving Workshop that fall, the Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization's declaration, known as the "Lausanne Covenant," embraced lifestyle in response to world hunger, the latest object of 1970s crisis-talk about the planet. "All of us are shocked by the poverty of millions, and disturbed by the injustices which cause it," the covenant declared. "Those of us who live in affluent circumstances accept our duty to develop a simple lifestyle in order to contribute

generously to both relief and evangelism.”<sup>1</sup> With these two sentences, the evangelical gathering that *Time* magazine called “possibly the widest-ranging meeting of Christians ever held,” signaled its assent to the basic contours of lifestyle religion. Anxious about their connection to planetary problems, they looked to their own individual economic choices as the proper solution.<sup>2</sup>

So, just as Sider’s Thanksgiving Workshops were beginning to lose steam in 1974, a much larger network emerged, expressing its own interest in the promise of lifestyle. Sponsored by the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, the Lausanne Congress brought together 2,700 evangelical leaders, hailing from 150 nations including many in the decolonized world.<sup>3</sup> This was a key moment in American evangelicals’ decades-long effort to step onto the world, in part by trying to replace the mainline missionaries who had withdrawn from many parts of the world in the interwar years. With Lausanne, evangelicals hoped to position themselves as God’s new chosen missionaries, committed to bringing the Gospel to the far corners of the planet.<sup>4</sup> And, given its broad attendance and generally positive press, the Congress’s organizers decided to create a continuation committee to help sustain the network in the form of the “Lausanne Movement” that, in the years that followed, ensured a steady flow of consultations and publications on issues raised in the covenant.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> John Stott, *The Lausanne Covenant: Complete Text with Study Guide* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2012), 38.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in David R. Swartz, *Moral Minority: The Evangelical Left in an Age of Conservatism* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 123.

<sup>3</sup> For a detailed account of the Congress, see: David C. Kirkpatrick, *A Gospel for the Poor: Global Social Christianity and the Latin American Left* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), 15-32. See also: Swartz, *Moral Minority*, 113-134.

<sup>4</sup> On the decline of mainline missions, see: William R. Hutchison, *Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1987). On the evangelical aspiration of replacing the mainline in this role, see: Melani McAllister, *The Kingdom of God Has No Borders: A Global History of American Evangelicals* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

<sup>5</sup> On the history of the Lausanne Movement see: McAllister, *The Kingdom of God Has No Borders*, 85-102.

The Lausanne Movement's energetic drive to establish itself as a leader in the global missionary movement was tempered by the complications of doing so in an era of rapid decolonization and nascent forms of postcolonial governmentality and economic imperialism. The idea of "simple lifestyle" ultimately became a centerpiece in attempts to work out these complications. According to the covenant's chief architect, John Stott, the appearance of "simple lifestyle" in the document was the result of controversy rather than consensus. In a later exposition on the covenant, Stott wrote, "Perhaps no expression in the covenant caused more anxious thought in would-be signatories at Lausanne than this. What does it mean for the affluent to develop a simple style of living?"<sup>6</sup> After the extensive debates that occurred around the notion at the original Congress, Stott was interested in further exploration of lifestyle religion as it related to world evangelicalism, hopeful that it could factor prominently in the series of consultations and occasional papers carried out by the continuation committee throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Given his own enthusiasm for lifestyle religion, Ron Sider quickly connected with Stott about this possibility, and ultimately taking the lead in planning of a series of events on simple lifestyle for the Lausanne Movement, culminating in an international consultation on simple lifestyle in 1980.

But here within Lausanne's network, as Sider's message of lifestyle change got closer to the centers of power and sources of financial backing in the neo-evangelical world, the Anabaptist lifestyle expert found his message taken up by powerbrokers who hoped its practice could palliate calls for America to relinquish and redistribute its power. When it appeared in 1974, the final form of the Lausanne Covenant already reflected that controversy, taking clear caution in its lifestyle thinking. While it acknowledged that the affluent bear some connection to

---

<sup>6</sup> John R.W. Stott, *The Lausanne Covenant: An Exposition and Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, 1975), 39.

injustices around the planet, nowhere did it admit that anything should be combatted, reversed, or changed. This contrasted with earlier formulations of lifestyle religion. In the first half of the decade, the Ecology Church Action Project and Thanksgiving Workshop's Action Proposals had hoped that consumer choice could leverage the laws of supply and demand to reduce harm caused by things like aerosol sprays or synthetic fertilizers. According to the Lausanne Covenant, lifestyle choice wouldn't necessarily have to alter existing economic patterns at all. Instead, they envisioned an embrace of simple lifestyle in order to free up capital on a microeconomic level, within each Christian household, so they could donate more money to the twin causes of evangelism and relief.

That these terms—evangelism and relief—appeared in the covenant's sentences on simple lifestyle was befitting of the way the subject had become charged with the deepest controversies of the congress. Much has been written in recent years on the Lausanne Congress and the attempt of an insurgent group led by South American theologians René Padilla and Samuel Escobar to synthesize U.S. evangelicals' passion for church growth with a deeper commitment to relieving poverty and injustice around the world. As the story goes, American evangelical leaders like Billy Graham went to Lausanne in 1974 counting on a global evangelical consensus around the importance of "world evangelization." To their surprise, they found their vision challenged by evangelical luminaries of the decolonizing world, who formed a "radical discipleship" group that met each night and coordinated a broad call for greater emphasis on the problem of social justice. Though the tension between these two visions was never fully resolved, the texts and networks formed as a result of the 1974 congress reflected a shifting

dynamic in global evangelicalism: Graham and other white American evangelicals could no longer be the sole proprietors of the evangelical movement's identity and objectives.<sup>7</sup>

In the years that followed, the covenant's two sentences on the necessity of "simple lifestyle" became pivotal in ongoing attempts to reconcile the two poles—Billy Graham's fixation on church growth on the one hand, and Padilla and Escobar's calls for an integral mission on the other. Soon after the 1974 covenant was published, Stott and other Lausanne committee members began considering an international consultation on the issue of Christian lifestyle, hoping it could serve as a salve for the ongoing disagreements between Grahamite defenders of the American way of life and postcolonial advocates of international economic reforms to place checks on western capital. "I believe that the continuing dialogue [on simple lifestyle] will replace the now-dead issue of evangelism vs. social action," wrote World Vision director Stanley Mooneyham in a letter to Sider about the importance of his lifestyle efforts.<sup>8</sup>

In her account of the Lausanne Movement, Melani McAllister takes the lifestyle consultation, with its inherent criticism of western affluence, as an indication of the "dispersed nature of the movement." A closer look at the archive reveals that Stott, Mooneyham, and even Graham himself were directly involved in the consultation and its outcomes, working to produce a brand of lifestyle religion that steered away from economic critiques in favor a more apolitical kind of consumer piety.<sup>9</sup> In 1977, Stott and Sider began corresponding about the possibility of a leadership role for Sider in planning the international consultation. Sider, the ever-prolific advocate of lifestyle change, was enthused, even if he was yet to understand the deep controversies embedded in Stott and other committee members' interest in the notion. Whether

---

<sup>7</sup> McAllister, *The Kingdom of God Has No Borders*; Kirkpatrick, *A Gospel for the Poor*; Swartz, *Moral Minority*.

<sup>8</sup> Mooneyham to Sider, 3/15/78. BGEA Lausanne Papers, box 49, folder 11.

<sup>9</sup> McAllister, *The Kingdom of God Has No Borders*, 98.



or not he anticipated it at the outset, within the Lausanne network Sider's lifestyle religion found itself wrapped up in debates about the merits of free market capitalism, communist socialism, and the reformist, Global South-led New International Economic Order.

In this chapter, I argue that the circulation of Christian lifestyle thinking among middle-class white Protestants in the U.S. ultimately mediated a neoliberal view of the world that was at the time working to overcome calls from economists in the Global South for sweeping reforms that would grant decolonized nations democratic influence over the international political economy. Focusing first on the National Council of Churches' reboot of their failed Ecology Church Action Project in the form of "World Hunger Education/Action Together" or WHEAT, I trace the way lifestyle thinking allowed for the cultivation of deep investment in market logics at the level of day-to-day lived experience. Then, returning to the story of Ron Sider's collaboration with the Lausanne Movement to arrange an international consultation on Christian lifestyle, I show how those deep investments in market logics were deployed to diminish competing economic visions for the planet, whether that be out-and-out socialism, or the more reformist New International Economic Order. Broadly speaking, the contours of lifestyle religion and the means of its circulation among American Protestants reveal the way neoliberalism's ideological merits were mediated at the level of lived experience. In other words, I offer a description of lived neoliberalism, one that accounts for the ways a new political and economic order is mediated, experienced, and ultimately given legitimacy and permanence, in quotidian, on-the-ground fashion.<sup>10</sup> Lived neoliberalism featured lifestyle prominently, proving it could serve as a powerful source of legitimacy for the neoliberal project.

---

<sup>10</sup> With "lived neoliberalism," I mean not only to trace the mediation of neoliberalism on a quotidian scale, but also to show a potential path forward for "lived religion" approach, criticized often in recent years for focusing too much on meaning-making subjects rather than structures, constructions, productions of religion that

### **Lifestyle between Neoliberalism and the NIEO**

1970 was the year middle-class American Protestants embraced planetary consciousness and began worrying about the fragile spaceship Earth. In 1974, if media reports were to be believed, planetary crisis was beginning to arrive at their own doorsteps. Between 1945 and 1970, mainstream Protestants had become accustomed to a share of the spoils as their country's economic hegemony saw continuous growth. Starting in the late 1960s, their television sets broadcast frequent signs of suffering from across the decolonizing world into their living rooms, but the crises still felt somewhat distant at the start of the decade. In 1974, things felt different. The Arab oil embargo, stagnating wages, and inflating consumer prices raised new questions about scarcity and limits at home. On top of all this, reports began appearing across American media of a "world food crisis." Two years of media reports on population bombs, spiking petroleum prices, and bad weather, according to a special report on the crisis in *Time* magazine, had turned postwar optimism to despair, "as hunger and famine began ravaging hundreds of millions of the poorest citizens in at least 40 nations."<sup>11</sup>

In 1970 and 1971, the Ecology Church Action Project's move away from collective political action was suggestive of an initial drift toward neoliberal political reason in the form of fragmenting collectives and the reorientation of activist thinking around individual consumer choice. By 1974, the neoliberal project's retrenchment of class power and creation of new modes of postcolonial governmentality was fully underway. Starting in 1971 with the breakdown of the

---

happen in relation to modernities, empires, states, and so on. These criticisms are valid. But I suggest that, when approached in a slightly different way, the study of material culture, material practices, day-to-day discourses and rituals, can illuminate the meeting point between human experience and the forms of power that construct, govern, and discipline it. With "lived neoliberalism," I'm suggesting specifically that interaction with the political economy is one of the best places for us to observe a modern imaginaries of a disenchanted, secularized planet where the old supernatural forces no longer govern material things, but where neoliberal rules of exchange, monetary policy, and so on promise an enticing kind of interconnectivity and agency that can occur through the omnipotent and omnipresent market.

<sup>11</sup> Special Section, "World Food Crisis," *Time*, November 11, 1974, 66.

Breton-Woods Monetary system and the floating of world currencies, the new nation-states of the so-called Third World were newly open to market discipline from private investors who could freely move money around to incentivize structural adjustment and punish states who weren't market-friendly enough.<sup>12</sup> And just a year prior, the U.S. had sent a major opening salvo in the fight to open the postcolonial world to capital when it backed the bloody coup of Salvador Allende's socialist regime in Chile. Soon, University of Chicago economists were hard at work writing the first constitution modeled explicitly on neoliberal ideas for the newly installed Chilean regime.<sup>13</sup>

Throughout the decade, the neoliberal project sought legitimacy through a particular vision of the world based on market forces and rational economic actors. "The 1970s staged a stark confrontation of world economic imaginaries," writes historian Quinn Slobodian, in which neoliberal theorists directly contested demands coming out of the Global South for a New International Economic Order (NIEO) by insisting on legal frameworks said to "preserve conditions of predictability and stability for individual economic actors."<sup>14</sup> In contrast to the neoliberal project being pursued by western politicians and economists alike, the NIEO's 1974 framing document called for an internationalist model of redistribution as redress for the fact that decolonized areas had produced most of the wealth that the U.S. and Western Europe now held.<sup>15</sup>

Across the 1970s, the students of Frederic Hayek overcame the NIEO through their work with

---

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, the set of punitive capital moves and IMF-enforced structural adjustments that began in the mid-1970s in Jamaica in retaliation for NIEO-advocate Norman Manley's taxation of bauxite profits in order to expand the country's social-democratic safety net. Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking After Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019), 171-172.

<sup>13</sup> Historian Quinn Slobodian summarizes that, once the IMF ceased controlling capital movements, "New investments flows were available to nations worldwide, but capital flight could be punitive if foreign investors disapproved of costly policies like building domestic welfare states through higher taxation." Slobodian, *Globalists: The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 241.

<sup>14</sup> Slobodian, *Globalists*, 23.

<sup>15</sup> On the NIEO, see Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire*.

the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, ultimately seeing their political and economic ideology embraced by heads of state like Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan at the end of the decade.

As David Harvey suggests, much of neoliberalism's legitimacy hinges on its stated commitment to the "liberty of consumer choice, not only with respect to particular products but also with respect to lifestyles, modes of expression, and a wide range of cultural practices."<sup>16</sup> Within the neoliberal ideology of free markets, consumer choice became a compelling means of embodying one's expressive individuality. So, in the middle of the decade, as mainstream Protestants were again searching for a way to respond to their fears of a planet in crisis, many looked to the inchoate notion of lifestyle, closely connected to the logic of free, expressive consumer choice that could change the world through stable and predictable market behavior. Beginning in 1974, mainline bureaucrats at the NCC rebooted the community action model they had explored earlier in the decade in form of ECAP. The new iteration, World Hunger Education/Action Together, fully embraced the notion of lifestyle in its renewed attempts to mobilize a national network of local action groups. Two years later, the Anabaptist lifestyle advocate Ronald Sider mobilized a parallel network among the evangelicals of the Lausanne Movement.

Their worries about planetary crises of ecology, food, population, energy, and so on emerged concurrently with the neoliberal project's use of those same crises to enforce structural adjustment and market discipline on the countries most affected. In other words, mainline efforts with WHEAT and evangelical ones at Lausanne came in the very immediate wake of economic transformations that helped both groups conceive of their connection to these crises in terms of

---

<sup>16</sup> Harvey, *Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 42.

globalizing markets with predictable paths through their pious consumer choices. In the process, lifestyle religion emerged as a site of negotiation within the decade's competition between world economic imaginaries at the level of quotidian, lived experience among many white, middle-class Protestants. The most common effect of all this was to blunt mainstream Protestants' own attempts at environmental mobilization, militating against their earlier ambitions for broad, structural change for the sake of a secure planetary future. But by the end of the decade, the conversation about lifestyle religion had become more than an internal debate among mainline and evangelical churchgoers. In Ron Sider's efforts to bring the message to a wider international audience in 1980, he found his message of lifestyle religion wrapped up in the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association's defense of free enterprise against growing calls for a New International Economic Order.

### **World Hunger as Ecology**

In 1974, the House Committee on Agriculture published a report called *Malthus and America*, renewing overpopulation worries in relation to new signs of scarcity generated by the OPEC oil embargo and the growing world food crisis. "Building quietly and ominously these days is a voice that will rock the world in our lifetime, and that voice articulates the world food and people equation," read the report. "And it is to our blessed land of abundance from across the threshold of scarcity that this voice cries."<sup>17</sup>

A few months later in December of 1974, in the immediate wake of a high-profile U.N. Food Conference in Rome, NCC bureaucrats and mainline denominational leadership gathered for what became known as the Graymoor Conference "to develop an intensive coordinated Protestant effort to combat world hunger." The group agreed to convene an ongoing Task Force

---

<sup>17</sup> Committee on Agriculture, *Malthus and America: A Report About Food and People* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1974), 14-15.

on World Hunger to coordinate denominational responses to the crisis, with its first meetings held in early 1975.<sup>18</sup> The new task force was initially chaired by James Cogswell, a Presbyterian minister and former missionary, whose preaching reflected the planetary consciousness of the day, speaking of Earth as a “spaceship,” and saying that “we cannot isolate ourselves from whole nations and peoples, for we are bound together with them in an increasingly interrelated planet.” With the World Hunger Task Force, Cogswell looked to mobilize the mainline to educate themselves on their bond with the rest of spaceship Earth and then gather in covenant groups that would commit to acting accordingly, leveraging their interconnectedness to relieve the “‘have not’ nations,” since, as passengers on a spaceship, a people “sink or swim together.”<sup>19</sup>

And as it looked for a model of church mobilization, Cogswell’s Task Force included several members who could draw from the experience of ECAP for ideas. Among the dozen mainline bureaucrats who made up the initial task force, three had played a central role in trying to get ECAP’s national mobilization efforts off the ground a few years earlier. On the task force sat Dieter Hessel and Shirley Greene, Methodist and UCC ministers respectively. Greene, of course, had been one of the primary proponents of a direct-action orientation within ECAP, calling at one stage for the development of a church-based “Nader’s Raiders” who could hit the picket line to fight for ecology issues. He had also rightly predicted the way their aspirations of ecology action would struggle once they ran up against corporate interests. Hessel, a Methodist minister and longtime member of NCC’s environmental stewardship efforts would ultimately chair WHEAT during the period of its most fervent activity. Rounding out the roster of ECAP alumni, the World Hunger Task Force also included Charles Lutz, a Lutheran minister and

---

<sup>18</sup> Jim Cogswell, “Report to the NCC Governing Board,” March 4-6, 1975. NCC Task Force on World Hunger, Records, box 1, folder “TFWH – Report to the Governing Board.”

<sup>19</sup> Jim Cogswell, “Food and Thanksgiving,” *Journal for Preachers* (Advent 1978), 9.

ECAP committee member based in the Twin Cities, the only area where ECAP's model of community mobilization had actually been tried.<sup>20</sup>

After a few months of planning meetings and discussions, Shirley Greene reported that the task force agreed to produce "two emerging structures," a Theological/Ethical Studies Project, and a program of Hunger Education/Action Mobilization.<sup>21</sup> The former, spearheaded by Greene, planned to engage academics and other religious professionals in intellectual work on planetary crises while the latter would work to mobilize a much larger network of mainline churchgoers in actions that might alleviate them. In the summer of 1975, Greene wrote a formal proposal for his Theological/Ethical Studies Project, listing a plan for groups who would study the importance of "respect for the Earth and stewardship of the soil" as well as groups that would consider questions of "economic growth on a finite planet" and "population growth on a finite planet."<sup>22</sup> In Greene's vision for theological/ethical studies, it is clear that he and his colleagues saw no discontinuity between their earlier programming on the population and ecology crises and their new concern with the world food crisis. For twenty-first century readers, a task force on world hunger may not immediately jump out as an environmental program, but for Greene, Hessel, and others, the world food crisis fit neatly within their haunting sense that spaceship Earth was on a crash course with disaster.

As with the task force on world hunger's other projects, Greene's theological and ethical studies embraced the promise of lifestyle religion. In the fall of 1975, the task force approved a

---

<sup>20</sup> "World Hunger Task Force Meeting, Feb. 18-19, 1975." PHS NCC Task Force on World Hunger Records, box 1, folder "Task Force on World Hunger, Feb. 18-19."

<sup>21</sup> Shirley Greene, "Reflections on Ecumenical Structure for World Hunger," May 1975. PHS NCC Task Force on World Hunger "WHEAT" Records, box 1, folder "Admin. Committee."

<sup>22</sup> Shirley Greene, "A Proposal for Theological/Ethical Studies on World Hunger," June 10, 1975. PHS NCC Task Force on World Hunger Records, box 1, folder "Members."

proposal to organize a nationwide network of study groups focused on seven topic areas.<sup>23</sup> As with many efforts to mobilize people in response to planetary crisis at this time, the theological and ethical studies steering committee was almost immediately urged to consider the promise of lifestyle once it had formally announced its plans to form study groups. In a letter to a steering committee member in 1976, a prospective participant from the United Presbyterian Church wrote that, though “[w]e have all been appreciative of the projected 7 theological studies to be undertaken relating to World Hunger. There does seem to be one lack...That is the area of lifestyle.” In his role in the United Presbyterian denomination, the writer had encountered widespread demand for materials on lifestyle, noting that “[w]e are not only getting lots of calls for a theological exposition of the issue, but pleas for specific programmatic approaches and action guidelines.”<sup>24</sup> With their theological and ethical studies program, along with their planned structure for a more widespread mobilization of churchgoers, Hessel, Greene, and the rest of the Task Force on World Hunger sought to meet both kinds of demand.

Fortunately for Greene and Hessel, Bill Gibson, the leader of an Eco-Justice Task Force housed in the Centre for Religion, Ethics and Social Policy in Ithaca, NY had already proposed a pilot group on lifestyle exploration earlier that month.<sup>25</sup> Unsurprisingly, given his roots in an eco-justice task force, Gibson’s approach to the question of lifestyle as a response to the world food crisis was very clearly embedded in a set of environmental concerns. Writing to the study group members in August, Gibson recommended a 1972 chapter written by John Cobb, the Christian environmental ethicist who had collaborated with Kay Shannon and ECAP before her

---

<sup>23</sup> Milo Thornberry to Steering Committee, Theological Studies Consortium on World Hunger, February 9, 1976. PHS NCC Task Force on World Hunger Records, box 2, folder “Theological/Ethical Studies.”

<sup>24</sup> Bill Duval to Jorge Lara-Braud, May 27, 1976. PHS NCC Task Force on World Hunger Records, box 2, folder “Theological/Ethical Studies.”

<sup>25</sup> Bill Gibson, “A Proposal for Pilot Groups on Lifestyle Exploration,” May 5, 1976. PHS NCC Task Force on World Hunger Records, box 2, folder “Theological/Ethical Studies.”



firing in 1971. Titled “A Style of Life for the Survival of Life,” the chapter recommended a set of daily choices for Christians that would enact what he called “ecological asceticism.”<sup>26</sup>

By November 1976, the Task Force on World Hunger had convened a nationwide network of study groups on world hunger, what it was calling by then a Theological/Ethical Studies Consortium. That fall and winter, they received formal papers from each study group that NCC’s Friendship Press published as a Dieter Hessel edited volume called *Beyond Survival* in 1977. Printed alongside pieces on agribusiness, population, and food and energy, Gibson’s essay, “The Lifestyle of Christian Faithfulness,” affirmed the environmental sensibilities of mainline world hunger mobilization.<sup>27</sup>

With its many chapters focused on policy concerns, the task force’s edited volume also spoke to an ambivalence about the idea that lifestyle choices could change the world on their own through the simple exercise of purchasing power. This was reflected in Gibson’s own essay on lifestyle, where he wrote, “[w]e cannot expect redistribution ever to be achieved simply through voluntary lifestyle changes.” Instead, according to Gibson, lifestyle change should be paired with a certain level of political involvement to try and alter existing structures causing so much ecological and economic distress. But Gibson equivocated on this point. “We are not insisting that everybody proceed by doing the most obvious political things,” he wrote. “Not everyone feels called to respond in these ways to the need for social change.” Here, Gibson suggested that individual choices to alter consumption patterns could have power on their own, even if they won’t automatically alter redistribution patterns: “To opt out of consumerism...subverts a system that depends upon a mass addiction to excessive

---

<sup>26</sup> Bill Gibson to the Theological-Ethical Study Team on Lifestyle, August 30, 1976. PHS NCC Task Force on World Hunger Records, box 2, folder “Theological/Ethical Studies.”

<sup>27</sup> Dieter Hessel, editor, *Beyond Survival: Bread and Justice in Christian Perspective* (New York: Friendship Press, 1977).

consumption.” Although with their theological and ethical study groups, the NCC’s Task Force on World Hunger had focused primarily on the importance of policy and structural change, their final document affirmed the power of individuated lifestyle change as well.<sup>28</sup>

Often the case with purely intellectual projects, the task force’s theological and ethical study groups had little discernible impact on the NCC’s mainline constituency. At the end of the decade, as new leadership conducted evaluations and summaries of the task force’s work, the *Beyond Survival* edited volume was rarely mentioned. Through their work with the task force, Dieter Hessel and Shirley Greene’s real impact would come through the second “emerging structure” they had planned: a nationwide mobilization effort with echoes of the ECAP study-action model where the contours of a truly individuated lifestyle religion would be hammered out and circulated among thousands of mainline churchgoers nationwide.

### **World Hunger Education/Action Together**

As chair of the NCC’s world hunger efforts in 1975 and 1976, Dieter Hessel focused most of the task force’s attention on a nationwide mobilization of mainline churchgoers. After a few months of planning meetings and discussion, the task force agreed on a national program to create a network of local action groups nationwide, going by the name WHEAT, or World Hunger Education/Action Together and garnering official sponsorship from thirteen national denominations affiliated with the NCC.<sup>29</sup> Earlier in the decade, Hessel, Greene, and others’ efforts to engage their constituents in environmental action had failed, and some had begun to wonder whether their earlier policy agendas and collective action items had failed to gain

---

<sup>28</sup> William H. Gibson, “The Lifestyle of Christian Faithfulness,” reprinted in Michael Schut, editor, *Simpler Living, Compassionate Life: A Christian Perspective* (Denver, CO: Living the Good News, 1999), 134-135.

<sup>29</sup> Colleen Shannon-Thornberry, “Forward” to “An Evaluation of the WHEAT Covenant Fellowship,” March 9, 1978. PHS NCC Task Force on World Hunger Records, box 2, folder “Contact Person List – Enabling Events.”

traction because they lacked a connection to day-to-day personal experiences that might help them garner more lasting buy-in. At their initial gathering in December 1974, leaders had circulated a public call for religious engagement on the food crisis, which suggested that “by tying personal actions of austerity and sharing to public policy objectives we seek to shape a response to the food crisis which is both equal to the magnitude of the need we face and solidly grounded in public support.”<sup>30</sup> This vision reflected the task force’s awareness of rising interest in “personal actions” that might help churchgoers personally embody and thus resolve their sense of concern for happenings on the other side of the planet to which they were beginning to feel such haunting connections. In this context, the group agreed that an emphasis on personal actions of austerity helped create a sense of connection to those objectives among denominational constituencies, hopefully resulting in more solid public support for their policy aims. This emphasis was reflected in Jim Cogswell’s earliest mentions of WHEAT, in a spring 1975 report to NCC’s governing board. Under the heading of “Analyzing Systemic Causes and Affecting Life Style,” Cogswell spoke of

a plan for “Ecumenical World Hunger Education/Action Mobilization.” The plan calls for the mobilizing of at least one million Americans who will commit themselves to (a) specific changes in their consumption patterns; (b) participation in a systemic educational program on world hunger and its causes; (c) engagement in efforts to combat hunger in their own communities and to advocate responsible change in U.S. policies related to world hunger.<sup>31</sup>

So, as they began outlining their plans for WHEAT in early 1975, the task force members clearly still felt that public policy objectives were needed to achieve change equal to the magnitude of the crisis. But, their vision of mobilization reflected a sense that such calls for structural change

---

<sup>30</sup> James Rausch, Hengry Siegman, Clare Randall, “Statement on the Global Food Crisis.” PHS NCC Task Force on World Hunger Records, box 1, folder “Work Session on World Hunger.”

<sup>31</sup> Cogswell, “Report to the NCC Governing Board.”

might be received best when couched in an emphasis on personal actions such as lifestyle change.

In order to coordinate the WHEAT rollout, the World Hunger Task Force hired a Methodist minister and former missionary to Taiwan, Milo Thornberry (1937-2017). Four years earlier, the organizing committee had chosen a political and non-profit organizer with very little background in the mainline church, namely Kay Vickers Shannon. This time around, Milo Thornberry could boast a lifetime of familiarity with it, having been raised in part by his retired minister grandfather, and sensing a pastor's calling for himself at the age of seventeen. After attending seminary at the Perkins School of Theology in Dallas, Thornberry and his young family pursued missionary work in Taiwan beginning in 1965. There, he and his partner Judith were arrested and deported in the spring of 1971 for their involvement in the Taiwanese nationalist movement. They were the first American missionaries to be expelled from the island by the Republic of China, which had controlled Taiwan since 1945 (fig. 1). Among other things, the missionary couple had helped coordinate the escape of a prominent nationalist, Peng Ming-min, from the island in 1968, after Peng had spent four years languishing under house arrest for his leadership in the movement. Although their role in the Taiwanese nationalist's escape was never discovered, they were forced to leave three years later after their wider involvement in the nationalist movement came to light.<sup>32</sup> Arriving back in the United States in the 1971 with his missionary career cut short, Thornberry took a job at NCC coordinating mainline work in China. Around the time that, in Thornberry's words, "hunger emerged as the 'new crisis' in late 1974 in the popular media," he transitioned to a new role as coordinator for hunger concerns with the NCC's newly formed world hunger task force, where he oversaw the design and national rollout

---

<sup>32</sup> Milo L. Thornberry, *Fireproof Moth: A Missionary in Taiwan's White Terror* (Boiling Springs, PA: Sunberry Press, 2011); "Dr. Milo Lancaster Thornberry," *Bend Bulletin*, March 16, 2017.

of WHEAT. Under his leadership, the program placed an even deeper emphasis on lifestyle change than its predecessor ECAP.<sup>33</sup>



*Figure 1 - Judith and Milo Thornberry (1971)*

In the spring of 1976, Thornberry and Hessel asked their constituent denominations to organize a series of regional “enabling events” to help mobilize a national network of WHEAT “covenant fellowships” in response to the world food crisis. As might be expected given overlaps between the two executive committees, the initiative ultimately looked a lot like ECAP: Across the country, small groups were to form and then follow a series of learning exercises to better understand their connection with the rest of the planet. Then, in their words, the groups would

---

<sup>33</sup> Milo Thornberry, “The Churches and World Hunger,” *Christianity and Crisis* 35:1, February 3, 1975, 12.

covenant to a specific course of action as a response. In ECAP's Communi-Action model a few years earlier, task assignments were eclectic and might range from collective actions like organizing an emergency hotline to a more individualized consumer practice, such as taking a household inventory of aerosol pollutants. With WHEAT, covenant groups were told to focus especially on lifestyle choice as a first step in helping the interconnected planet-in-crisis.

To guide those local events through this model of encountering planetary interconnectedness and then covenanting to personal changes as a response, Thornberry and Hessel collaborated on an "enabler's manual" that provided a curriculum for each enabling event.<sup>34</sup> With the enabler's manual, the pair pursued the task force's goals of tying "personal actions of austerity" to public policy objectives through a greater emphasis on lifestyle change, inviting constituents to think of their relationship to planetary crises in terms of their own, day-to-day consumer choices. To be sure, the curriculum was not exclusively based on lifestyle change. Instead, it outlined five steps: "intensive study, local involvement, public policy advocacy, financial support of hunger programs, and responsible consumption," with the latter referring to its embrace of lifestyle thinking.<sup>35</sup> However, in various published materials, and in the recorded outcomes of the enabling events and covenant groups themselves, lifestyle came to the fore as the centerpiece of WHEAT's vision of religious action.

While Thornberry co-authored the guide's introduction with Dieter Hessel, he took the lead on writing the chapter on lifestyle. Despite warning that a "simpler lifestyle is not a panacea" and shouldn't be seen as a "substitute for political action," Thornberry nonetheless wrote of the process as "an act of faith" and "solidarity," that could help "[break] the hold consumerism has on us" even as it "[redirected] production away from the satisfaction of

---

<sup>34</sup> Dieter Hessel, editor, *Enabler's Manual for WHEAT* PHS NCC Communications Records, box 13.

<sup>35</sup> Colleen Shannon-Thornberry, "Forward" to "An Evaluation of the WHEAT Covenant Fellowship."

artificially created wants towards the supply of goods and services that meet genuine social needs.”<sup>36</sup> Here was the way to embody one’s planetary concern, by interacting with commodities. What followed were multiple pages of intense focus on individual consumer choice: reducing food waste, purchasing dried beans and legumes instead of meat, buying fresh rather than processed foods, carpooling, taking public transit and walking, and getting in touch with a new non-profit, Alternatives, Inc. to get resources for celebrating birthdays and holidays in a simple fashion. These guidelines were presented as the fifth and final step in WHEAT’s model of mobilization, and Thornberry made it clear that they were best seen as a kind of culmination of all the steps that had come before it, including education, local involvement, policy advocacy, and financial giving. “What we have been talking about in the earlier sections of this *Manual*,” he wrote, “is all a part of changing our lifestyles.”<sup>37</sup> According to Thornberry, then, the entire five-step WHEAT covenant was best understood as a lifestyle change, a way to refine one’s relation to consumer capitalism and embody concern for its worst effects on the planet.

In the curriculum itself, this central emphasis on lifestyle was still tempered by a set of policy aims. “Reduced consumption among the affluent by itself does not automatically make more goods available for those who are hungry,” Thornberry wrote at another stage. “To achieve that goal we must also be successful in our efforts at changing public policy at local, national and international levels.”<sup>38</sup> As with Hessel’s edited volume on theology and ethics, Thornberry and his co-authors were ambivalent about questions of lifestyle change’s practical effects through the workings of the market. Lifestyle wasn’t a panacea, and yet, two pages prior, Thornberry had

---

<sup>36</sup> Milo Thornberry, “Lifestyle Change,” *Enabler’s Manual for WHEAT*. PHS NCC Communications Records, box 13, folder “WHEAT,” 37.

<sup>37</sup> Thornberry, “Lifestyle Change,” 37.

<sup>38</sup> Thornberry, “Lifestyle Change,” 39.

said lifestyle change would “redirect production.” Either way, he was clearly aware of the compelling nature of the practice at the level of lived religious experience. In his view, middle-class American churchgoers lived under “bondage to consumerism” amid mass media reports of scarcity elsewhere.<sup>39</sup> Whether lifestyle change could immediately alter the food supply on the other side of the planet was less clear, but at the very least it could provide freedom and liberation to mainline churchgoers encumbered by the weight of their affluence on a fragile planet.

With the enabler’s guide in hand, Thornberry worked with local churches to organize 42 regional events across the country in 1976 and 1977, in congregational sites ranging from Southern California and Scottsdale, Arizona, to locales in Pennsylvania and New Hampshire. Typically hosted at denominational conference centers or within congregations with adequate meeting space, each regional enabling event drew participants from various mainline groups in the area with the ambition of equipping them to take the message of World Hunger Education and Action Together back to their own local churches. Looking back on the effort at the end of 1977, Shirley Greene estimated that the initiative had “covered virtually all sections of the U.S.,” having trained over 2000 regional enablers and recorded over 11,000 members in covenant fellowships.<sup>40</sup> ECAP had aspired to national mobilization but gave up after complications surrounding their Twin Cities pilot program. By contrast, WHEAT successfully put together a series of enabling events that helped circulate the message of lifestyle change for the sake of the planet across the mainline.

---

<sup>39</sup> Thornberry, “Lifestyle Change,” 37.

<sup>40</sup> “Report from Shirley Greene on the Present Status of WHEAT and Plans for 1978.” PHS NCC Communications Records, box 54.



At the enabling events, WHEAT covenanters were introduced to a weeks-long process of lifestyle transformation that involved itemized tracking of all consumption and detailed calculations of the supply chains behind each good. The process called for a focused examination of one's economic position, bringing one's consumer choices to the fore as an intensive register through which to consider the environmental crises produced by capitalism's now global reach. Among the many steps for changing one's lifestyle, WHEAT participants were told to "take a major consumer item which is commonly used in your household," listing "coffee, bananas, cocoa, pineapples and oil" as some possible choices. Having chosen a household commodity, next they should,

Try to find answers to the following questions about it: What countries supplied the raw materials and the labor? How did the extraction of raw materials and the manufacture of this item benefit these nations? How do these benefits compare with the benefits enjoyed by the countries in which the economic enterprises are owned? What are the conditions of life and labor for the people who live in the countries involved in the manufacture of this product? What, if anything, has the United States contributed to these conditions?<sup>41</sup>

After an intense process of personal inventory and analysis, including important questions about labor conditions and resource extraction—and despite yet another disclaimer that "reducing consumption is not an end in itself and should be worked at in the larger context of dealing with the problem of hunger"—the guide went on to recommend a range of concrete practices to be adopted over the period of the month in service of changing one's consumer choices.

Although the specific practices advocated by the curriculum included guidelines for transportation, luxury items, household maintenance, and holiday and birthday celebrations, the question of food consumption was the only one that warranted several pages of discussion. Beginning with a suggestion that participants "learn how dried beans and peas (legumes) and other grains can be combined as alternative sources for protein," Thornberry emphasized that "a

---

<sup>41</sup> Thornberry, "Lifestyle Change," 38.

reduction of our consumption of meat can reduce our country's high grain consumption."<sup>42</sup> With this, Thornberry and WHEAT joined a chorus of voices extending far beyond the mainline churches who, in the 1970s, began advocating for reduced meat consumption—or total vegetarianism—as a way of freeing up grain supplies for hungry people on the other side of the world. This call was perhaps most closely associated with Francis Moore Lappé, whose best-1971 cookbook, *Diet for a Small Planet*, comprised long sections of highly technical protein replacement tables and strict vegetarian recipes that advocated personal dietary transformation for the sake of a planet whose fragility and limitations were becoming more and more apparent. Thornberry listed Lappé's cookbook as a key resource for WHEAT participants at the end of his chapter on lifestyle change, while clearly echoing Lappé's stated sense of personal alienation caused by the highly industrialized and commercialized food system in his language of the "bondage of consumerism." The prevalence of beef in American supermarkets, based on what Lappé called "Steak religion," had made Americans into greedy overconsumers with undue influence on global food supplies and land use, but it also made them into conformist automatons. For Lappé, even though her argument for a vegetarian diet was based on highly rationalized descriptions of the links between animal protein and land use, it was also personal: "the appeal to me has been more to my feeling than my rationality." In language that echoed both the 1960s desire for authenticity over against alienation and the American religious tradition of conversion narratives, she wrote,

Previously, when I went to a supermarket, I felt at the mercy of our advertising culture. My tastes were manipulated...But as I gained the understanding...in this book, I found that I *was* making choices, choices based on real knowledge about food and about the effect on the Earth.<sup>43</sup>

---

<sup>42</sup> Thornberry, "Lifestyle Change," 40.

<sup>43</sup> Francis Moore Lappé, *Diet for a Small Planet* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1971), xiv. Emphasis in original.

As the historian Daniel Sack observes, this was as much a “morality tract” as it was a set of “arcane protein tables and recipes.”<sup>44</sup> In this sense, *Diet for a Small Planet* offered an early prototype for applying the notion that cultural change was the first step in making larger societal transformations.<sup>45</sup> Where Lappé had applied it specifically to the correction of “Steak religion,” Thornberry and other advocates of lifestyle change used it as a centerpiece of mainline religious practice in response to planetary crisis. In so doing, they expanded that logic to include a wide range of consumer practices to be intensively inventoried and transformed over multiple months in order to free oneself from bondage and embrace a new lived experience of responsible consumption that might just help uplift collapsing ecosystems and starving villages a world away.

With lifestyle change, WHEAT covenanters were trained to intensely govern their own lives, embracing their economic agency as a central means of changing the world.<sup>46</sup> Following Quinn Slobodian, we might best understand the 1970s as a period shaped by competing economic imaginaries—on the one hand, neoliberalism, which sought to reimagine the world as encircled, connected, and united by a ubiquitous free market that transcended and even superseded the modern project of democratic nation-states; and on the other, the New International Economic Order, which called for recognition of responsibility, culpability, and the need for new, more expansive, democratic structures to ensure just and sustainable resource distribution.<sup>47</sup> WHEAT’s official curriculum clearly reflected a group of people caught up in the

---

<sup>44</sup> Daniel Sack, *Whitebread Protestants: Food and Religion in American Culture* (New York: Palgrave, 2000), 199.

<sup>45</sup> Doug Rossinow calls this a new left “article of faith,” while making clear that this emphasis on cultural change was not initially focused on consumption, even if brands like Whole Foods would pick it up in the afterglow of the new left’s moment. Rossinow, *The Politics of Authenticity: Liberalism, Christianity, and the New Left in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 221.

<sup>46</sup> Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism’s Stealth Revolution* (Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books, 2015), 10.

<sup>47</sup> Slobodian, *Globalists*, 23.

middle of these competing visions. Thornberry and his colleagues were committed to the idea that the nation-states of North America and Western Europe were responsible for the planetary crises of the 1970s, making calls for policy changes that might alter that pattern. And yet, they were also deeply invested in the idea that lifestyle change could be an indispensable act of faith that might transform the world through the magic of the free market—altering production patterns, freeing up fertilizer and grain, and so on. The curriculum ultimately reads like a kind of internal struggle, vacillating between the tantalizing possibility that quotidian lifestyle choices might have transformative, liberatory potential and the sobering realization that this would likely never be enough.

Caught between competing imaginaries, WHEAT participants were invited to think of their consumer choices as a transformative act of faith, even if just on a personal level. This could help them manage their relation to capitalism's power imbalances by aspiring to personal freedom from the sinful weight of affluent overconsumption. Through lifestyle religion, they were learning to map the self in terms of capital, in terms of consumer choice, in terms of expenditures, deficits, surpluses, and so on. Looking more closely at the word's broader usage during these years helps excavate the assembled social, cultural, and economic resonances as mainstream Protestants deployed the concept as a response to planetary crisis. If the notion of "lifestyle" had its origins in the field of social psychology before being taken up by the popular press to make sense of the rise of distinctive subcultures, by the mid 1970s it was beginning to circulate more widely in the hands of advertisers who hoped to map the self as a node in networks of exchange, training consumers to intimately interweave their senses of identity, agency, and belonging with the consumer goods that entered and adorned their bodies, their households, and their daily lives.

### **Lifestyle between the Self and the Planet**

Though the neologism “lifestyle” was first popularized by print journalists looking for a way to describe the new tastes and distinctions among the late-1960s subcultures, it saw its most widespread circulation in the mid-1970s. Among American advertisers looking for new markets and forms of demand, lifestyle was an especially promising conceptual frame for tightly linking consumer goods with a person’s sense of self.<sup>48</sup> While its initial usage in the print media focused on describing individuals who seemed odd, radical, or non-conformist, in the hands of advertisers it soon came to deploy a similar kind of distinction, now encouraging all consumers to employ their day-to-day economic choices in the consumer market place as a way of elaborating and embodying their distinctive sense of who they are, what they value, and how they relate to the planet—or in other words, how to practice lifestyle religion.

The immediate context for the American Marketing Association’s embrace of “lifestyle” was a stagnating mass market for consumer goods. In the early 1970s, the newly prominent place of subcultural identity groups offered advertisers a way to segment that mass and generate demand for more specialized products. Postwar America’s steady economic growth, paired with consistent investment in the suburban heteronormative nuclear family through infrastructure and entitlement spending had allowed the consumer economy to flourish. However, beginning with the fiscal crisis of 1970, many firms sensed a coming stagnation in wage growth, challenging consumers to keep up with inflating prices. Always searching for new avenues for capital accumulation, companies and their advertisers looked to changes taking place in American

---

<sup>48</sup> Maureen Ryan summarizes this well when she writes, “Life style became an advertising strategy that appealed to consumers on the level of identity formation. Print advertisements were among the first media texts to address mainstream consumers as embodying lifestyle, which marked them as distinctive in a positive sense: tasteful, discerning, and upwardly mobile.” Ryan, *Lifestyle Media in American Culture: Gender, Class, and the Politics of Ordinarity* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 32.

culture and discovered a promising path forward for breaking open and expanding the saturated and stagnating mass market. This path forward became known as market segmentation: a way for capital to respond to the emerging social movements of the era—civil rights, women’s liberation, the counterculture—by reimagining them as market segments and developing consumer goods to sell to each.<sup>49</sup>

Given the way the neologism’s circulation expanded from journalistic descriptions of countercultures to national advertising campaigns for cars and cigarettes, historians of the new left are right to point out the way its aspirations of deeply meaningful and transformational cultural authenticity became the foundation for advertisers’ new map of the self vis-à-vis the world.<sup>50</sup> “The new left had shaped the cold war search for authenticity into a hope for a revolutionary way of life, a natural, holistic, life-affirming culture,” writes historian Doug Rossinow. “Yet in the end, the new left achieved instead a holistic consumer society...a softened social experience for themselves, not a transformed society.”<sup>51</sup> So, where student leaders in the Students for a Democratic Society movement were making statements about their rebellious, outsider nature by showing up at a national convention in denim, advertisers were framing that relationship—between a human and their jeans—in terms of lifestyle, suggesting that these outsiders were doing so thanks to the “Levi Lifestyle,” as one *New York Times* article put it in 1972.<sup>52</sup> In the mid-1970s, firms were hard at work to bring consumption and identity politics into

---

<sup>49</sup> On market segmentation, see Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers’ Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2004), 292-344.

<sup>50</sup> On links between the new left, counterculture, and consumer capitalism, see: Rossinow, *Politics of Authenticity*; Joshua Clark Davis, *From Headshops to Whole Foods: The Rise and Fall of Activist Entrepreneurs* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017).

<sup>51</sup> Rossinow, *Politics of Authenticity*, 295.

<sup>52</sup> Milton Moskowitz, “The Levi Lifestyle,” *New York Times* August 6, 1972. Rossinow, *Politics of Authenticity*, 161. It’s worth noting that this white middle-class valorization of being on the “outside” of things was not exclusive to the left. On the “romance of the outsider’s” appeal to conservatives as well, see: Grace Hale, *A Nation of Outsiders: How the White Middle Class Fell In Love with Rebellion in Postwar America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 132-159.

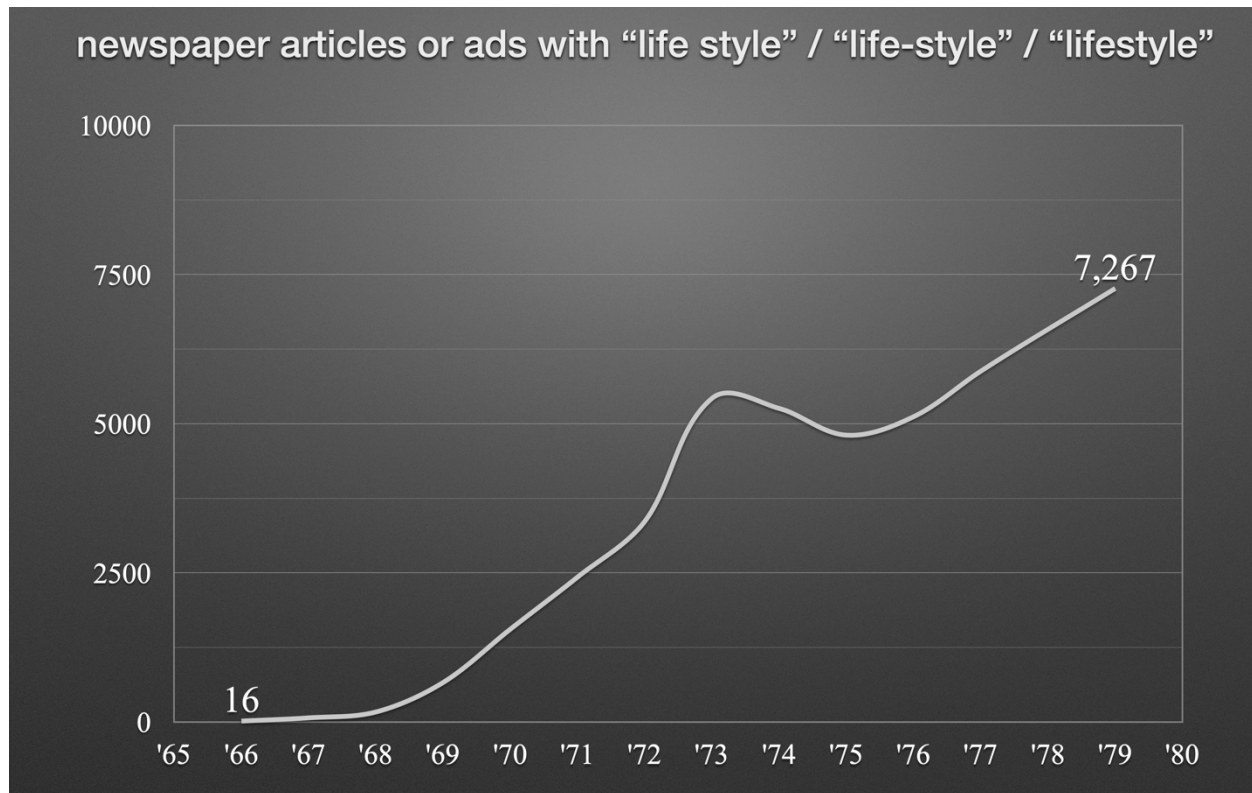
harmony, supporting forms of consumer market segmentation rooted in the counterculture's emphasis on authentic lifestyles. In this vein, Lizabeth Cohen argues that market segmentation "lent marketplace recognition to social and cultural divisions among Americans, making 'countercultures' and 'identity politics' more complex joint products of grassroots mobilization and marketers' ambitions than is often acknowledged."<sup>53</sup> Similarly, mainline and evangelical organizers' efforts to shepherd their constituents' planetary consciousness and concern toward ecology action tended to run through the channel of consumer choice, bringing them into a kind of partnership with advertisers to help develop lifestyle thinking precisely through the kind of complex, joint production Cohen describes.

The marketing professionals who worked to circulate this new concept for the sake of connecting subcultural identities with their warehouses of consumer goods were tremendously successful, ultimately making "lifestyle" a staple of the American lexicon. As one member of the American Marketing Association rightly predicted in 1963, "It is through the intensive study of market segments...defined in life style terms, that firms are likely to find new areas of marketing opportunity."<sup>54</sup> At that time, the word lifestyle was only appearing in newspapers a handful of times each year. Out of all the newspapers held digitally in the ProQuest database, lifestyle (and the variants "life style" and "life-style") only appeared 16 times in 1966. However, in the early and mid 1970s, advertisers began working in earnest to incorporate the language into their ad copy, resulting in incredible growth in the word's usage. From sixteen occurrences in 1966, the word ballooned to over 3000 uses for the first time in 1972, and by the end of the decade in 1979, it appeared in these now archived newspapers over 7,000 times (fig. 2).

---

<sup>53</sup> Cohen, *Consumers' Republic*, 309.

<sup>54</sup> Eugene J. Kelley, "Discussion," in Stephen A. Greyser, editor, *Toward Scientific Marketing: Proceedings of the Winter Conference of the American Marketing Association* (Chicago, IL: American Marketing Association, 1964), 168.



*Figure 2 - Occurrences of "lifestyle" and variants between 1965 and 1980*

This story of lifestyle's adoption and circulation by marketers across the U.S. begins at an annual meeting in Chicago in 1963. Looking for ways to produce demand for their firms' consumer products, the American Marketing Association called for a task force on lifestyle to study and present research on the potential uses of the concept for marketing. In the professional conversations that followed—both at the 1963 annual meeting and later in various edited volumes and trade journals—these marketing researchers were often very explicit about the way they hoped to develop a schematic for mapping a person's values, relations, sense of difference, and connection to the rest of the planet along the axes of specific consumer goods and market exchanges. Sidney Levy, a marketing professor at Northwestern's Kellogg School, spoke of lifestyle as a central means through which people symbolize and embody their identity to themselves and others. According to Levy, the broader symbolic mosaic that is a person's



lifestyle is made up of what “we can describe as sub-symbols: the things—objects, activities—that are used to play out this general symbolic meaning and to embody it.”<sup>55</sup> For Levy’s purposes, this meant that consumer choice could carry deep semiotic potential:

Buyers see objects and events...as vying certain potentialities. These potentialities are scanned, screened, and processed for their symbolic suitability, not only because the products can provide some specific results, but because they become incorporated into the life style of the person.<sup>56</sup>

Rather than simply mark off subcultures, lifestyle could help cast consumer objects and experiences as central mediators of one’s distinct understanding of the self, curated as sub-symbols of the whole of a person’s lifestyle.

Throughout the 1970s, this lifestyle-based market segmentation extended to many categories of consumer goods. Perhaps most famously, marketers began developing advertisements that associated products such as Kool cigarettes with the “Black lifestyle.” During these years, the same kind of segmented marketing became common in many sectors, from cars to clothes and beauty products to beer and cigarettes. Each ad was meant to help consumers, who “scanned, screened, and processed [objects] for their symbolic suitability,” imagine their identity as organized by a coherent “lifestyle” that represented their positive distinctiveness and, crucially, included whatever product was on display.<sup>57</sup>

The most well-known examples of lifestyle marketing focused on distinctiveness, such as the differentiation between beer brands associated with the white working-class lifestyle or the upwardly mobile professional lifestyle. But the distinctiveness of various products was less important than the sense of distinctiveness produced within each consumer group, meaning that at times, a single product could successfully be connected with different lifestyle groups through

---

<sup>55</sup> Sidney J. Levy, “Symbolism and Lifestyle,” in Greyser, ed. *Toward Scientific Marketing*, 145.

<sup>56</sup> Levy, “Symbolism and Lifestyle,” 148.

<sup>57</sup> Levy, “Symbolism and Lifestyle,” 148; Cohen, *Consumers’ Republic*, 327-331.

the circulation of different ads. One marketing professional, writing for an edited volume on *Life Style and Psychographics* in 1974, exemplified this approach. She described developing, “two advertisements directed at different segments but selling the same product, one, that reads ‘for the woman who doesn’t want to squeeze her way of life into a miniskirt’ for traditionalist, conservative lifestyles, and another ‘the only thing square about Lamberton is the label’ for the ‘fashion conscious’ lifestyle.”<sup>58</sup> The task wasn’t necessarily to produce differentiated products for each group, so much as it was to help each person understand their whole self in terms of a specific lifestyle, and see this potential purchase as an integral part of it. In the words of one marketing professional writing in the mid 1970s, “life style segmentation can generate identifiable whole persons rather than isolated fragments.”<sup>59</sup> Ultimately, the practitioners of lifestyle marketing—or, psychographics as they sometimes called it—primarily aimed to encourage the consumer to identify in their consumer choices a whole self, made discrete and coherent by a unified lifestyle.

A specific advertisement could be used, then, to help define and circumscribe a particular identity, while creating a suggested use by the consumer to do much the same: consume that product in a symbolic, embodied expression of that identity. Gender was often a key category for the work of divvying up populations into lifestyle segments, and one marketing researcher reported in the mid-1970s on the success of a campaign to help consumers really see their gender, and then see how it’s linked to a particular product:

The resulting campaign was built around the imagery of the sea to dramatize the adventure of one of the last frontiers. The focus of the new campaign was on the ‘life style’ of the men of the sea—men who lived their lives with gusto and who enjoyed a

---

<sup>58</sup> Ruth Ziff, “The Role of Psychographics in the Development of Advertising Strategy and Copy,” in William D. Wells, editor, *Lifestyle and Psychographics* (Chicago, IL: American Marketing Association, 1974): 153.

<sup>59</sup> Joseph T. Plummer, “The Concept and Application of Life Style Segmentation,” *Journal of Marketing*, January 1974, 35.

“gusto brew.” It was felt that the target consumer, regardless of his everyday role, could identify with these men, their life style, and the beer.<sup>60</sup>

With lifestyle, marketers could home in on people’s sense of who they are, and how they’re connected to the world, and make a claim that a particular consumer choice would help them affirm that at the site of their bodies, by donning a skirt or drinking a beer.

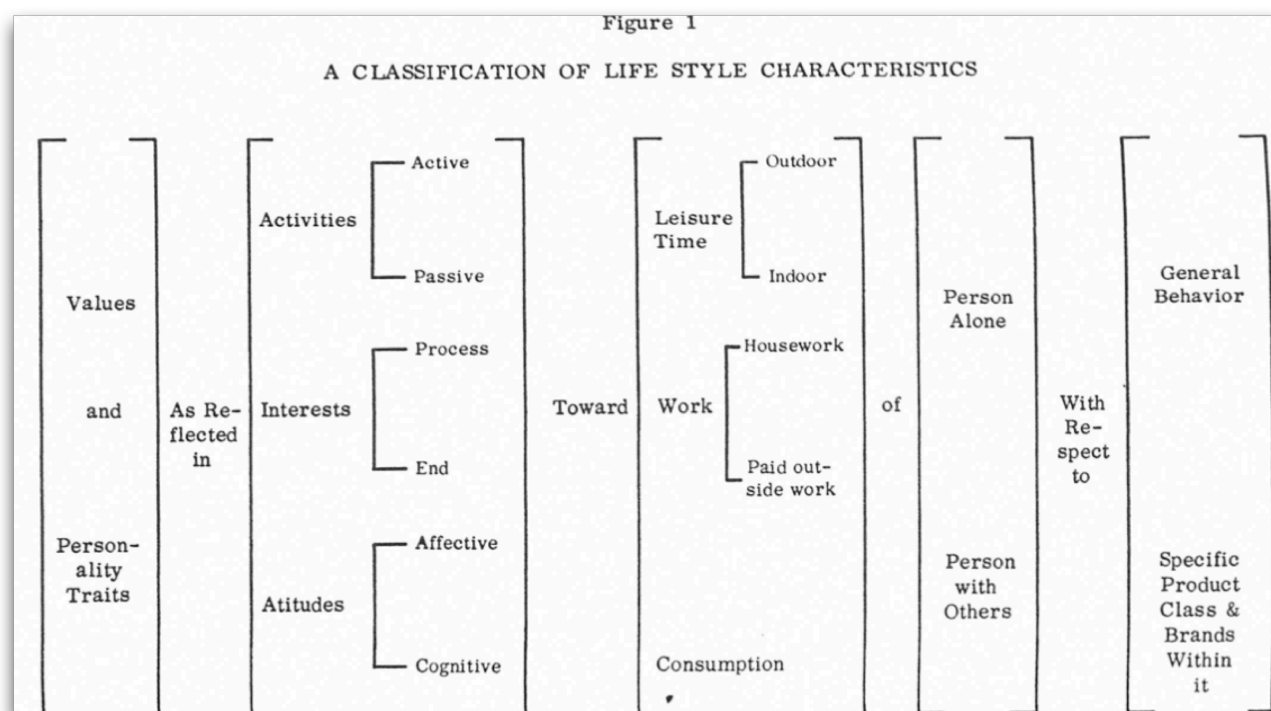


Figure 3 - Classification of Life Style Characteristics (Wind & Green, 1974).

In their work of tightly linking consumer goods with a person’s identity, these advertisers were mapping out new models for how the self relates to the world, using lifestyle as the organizing concept of these schematics. At times, this was literal, as in the case of Yoram Wind and Paul Green’s article, “Some Conceptual, Measurement, and Analytical Problems in Lifestyle Research” from William Wells’s 1974 edited volume on *Lifestyle and Psychographics*. In their

<sup>60</sup> Joseph T. Plummer, “Applications of Life Style Research to the Creation of Advertising Campaigns,” in Wells, ed., *Life Style and Psychographics*, 165.

article, Wind and Green called for the development of “an explicit life style model” that enumerated the key aspects of a lifestyle as well as its relation to other variables—behaviors, relationships, and so on.<sup>61</sup> In service of this goal, the authors developed their own map (fig. 3) that could help visualize how each person could be seen as the meeting point between their values on one side and a consumer product on the other. The map outlines 5 columns, with “person” (either “alone” or “with others”) one side nestled next to their choice: “general behavior” and “consumer behavior,” or in the words of the map, “specific product class and brands within it.” On the other side sat three columns of identity, flowing into one another to suggest that each person holds certain values and personality traits that are reflected in their activities and interests, ultimately informing choices they make about their leisure time, their work, and their consumption. The self stands as intermediary, a meeting point between the various aspects of their identity and the products they choose to consume. Though somewhat hard to read, the map ends up outlining the way advertisers were conceiving of the human person, shaped by values, attitudes, and activity, encountering (or, behaving) in the world, exercising their agency through two categories, general behavior and consumption of products.

In this framing, lifestyle becomes a method for connecting all of the internal complexities of the self with the world outside through participation in the consumer marketplace. In their relationship with the products, they put in and on their bodies, consumers can express their whole selves through a particular lifestyle—a rugged working man, verified by a can of beer, or a busy, working woman on the go, affirmed by her new skirt. And in this same moment that advertisers were circulating the concept of lifestyle, evangelical and mainline Protestants were searching for some way of “acting” in response to the planetary crises of the day. Lifestyle could

---

<sup>61</sup> Yoram Wind and Paul Green, “Some Conceptual, Measurement, and Analytical Problems in Lifestyle Research,” in Wells, ed., *Life Style and Psychographics*, 121.

be a way to experience oneself as whole, integrated, and morally consistent through carefully selected acts of consumption that linked a person's values with the material objects they purchased.

In this mapping of the self in relation to the world outside, through the channels of market exchange, the neoliberal imaginary offered a tantalizing proposition: their consumer choices could make a difference in the world. By incorporating lifestyle into their own models for mobilizing church-based action in response to the planetary crises of the 1970s, mainstream Protestants envisioned a set of practices that could seamlessly link person and planet through their quotidian consumer choices. Though the food they put in their stomachs, the clothes they placed on their bodies, the means through they moved through the world, and the objects with which they adorned their homes, they experienced a kind of lived neoliberalism in which their own bodies, their religious desires for the world, and the stark realities of a suffering planet, were interwoven by the free market.

### **“More Significant Was the Sense of Liberation”**

For the thousands of mainline churchgoers who came together to form WHEAT covenant groups, the notion that their lifestyle choices might make a difference proved deeply compelling. In Dieter Hessel and Milo Thornberry's official curriculum, talk of lifestyle drifted toward the idea that those choices could have major effects on the planetary crisis through the workings of the free market, even if they inserted disclaimers at several points expressing uncertainty about that idea. WHEAT—and as we'll see, Sider's Lausanne Consultations—seemed to be saying, that though they realized on a technical level there were reasons to doubt whether or not simplified lifestyles actually did anything in the world, they felt like they did. And that feeling

was itself liberating. It helped ease their anxieties about the planetary crises of the present and what they mean for the future.

The Reverend William Creevey, a speaker at one of Thornberry and Hessel's local enabling events in Sacramento, California stated this most plainly. The event took place over a weekend in March of 1976, where Creevey, a minister at Sacramento's Westminster Presbyterian Church, gave two impassioned talks on the significance of lifestyle change. Creevey had spent time "in a global community with Third World Christians" during a sabbatical in Switzerland, and he reported being in awe at "their sense of meaning, clarity of life and vitality as Christians." Expressing "grief for our ignorance, our naiveté, our enslavement to our silly possessions," Creevey called upon the forty-four attendees to guide their home congregations through lifestyle changes that would help them emulate the meaningful lives of poor Christians in the Global South.<sup>62</sup> According to the Presbyterian minister, the importance of lifestyle change was to be found first and foremost in its transformational effect on the soul of affluent Christians. Like Thornberry had done in the WHEAT curriculum on lifestyle change, Creevey invoked the language of slavery ("bondage," "enslavement," and later, "liberation") to encourage WHEAT enablers to draw a tenuous equivalency between their dissatisfaction with middle-class life and the decolonizing world's need for liberation.

For Creevey, lifestyle change promised a mutual experience of liberation, offered simultaneously to hungry people in the so-called Third World and to affluent Americans whose consumer choices could give, or take away, natural resources on the other side of the planet. Among other things, Creevey listed the promise of "Liberation from disease. Liberation from

---

<sup>62</sup> Mary Huenink, "WHEAT Hunger Task Force Training, March 12, 13, 1976," PHS NCC Task Force on World Hunger Records, box 2, folder "Questionnaire."

greed. Liberation from old patterns. Liberation from guilt.”<sup>63</sup> Yes, freeing up resources to be directed to the poor was a celebratory outcome as well, but Creevey was just as invested in liberation for the affluent. Describing lifestyle changes undertaken by his congregation, Creevey declared that, “The sacrificial lifestyles of the covenanters produced results in a 500% increase in giving to One Great Hour of Sharing, but more significant was the sense of liberation!”<sup>64</sup> By simplifying their lifestyles, affluent American Christians might finally be liberated from the bondage of their affluence.

For Creevey, much of the problem was a deep feeling of helplessness for the mainline’s comfortable bourgeoisie. He hoped that lifestyle religion could liberate them from their feeling of alienation in light of the distended bellies and weary eyes flashing on their TV screens, which he had tired of seeing. Here is where lifestyle change could make a difference, according to Creevey.

It is just at the point where I recognize that there seems little or nothing that I can do, or perhaps anybody can do, to correct the tragic injustice of food and resource distribution in the world today—I say it is at that point that God calls me to faithfulness, to do what is appropriate for a person of faith and love no matter what the outcome. And in that moment, at that point, in your faithfulness and mine, the rule of Christ finds expression and the kingdom grows.<sup>65</sup>

In this way, the affluent Christian’s responsibility for lifestyle change extended from their liberal subjectivity. As self-reliant individuals operating in the free market, Christians needed to make a choice for self-reliance and personal growth by focusing on their own consumer choices: “We each determine and are responsible for our own behavior, our own thought patterns, our own

---

<sup>63</sup> William Creevey, “Whose Hunger? PHS NCC Task Force on World Hunger Records, box 2, folder “Questionnaire.”

<sup>64</sup> Huenink, “WHEAT Hunger Task Force Training, March 12, 13, 1976.”

<sup>65</sup> Creevey, “Whose Hunger?”

relationships to each other and to the world and its resources.”<sup>66</sup> Though the exact workings of the interconnected global system were at times nebulous, the interconnections were now doubtless, so that each self-owning, autonomous subject needed to take responsibility for their own economic agency and govern it intensely. “You and I are each cells in the global systems,” declared Creevey in a statement of the then pervasive sense of planetary interconnectedness. “Are you a healthy cell? A cooperating one? A ravenous one? A life-giving cell? An alienated one?”<sup>67</sup>

To help circulate the promise of lifestyle religion throughout the region of Northern California and Nevada, the forty-four attendees were given materials, including the WHEAT Covenant, to distribute to their constituent groups. Another speaker walked through options for spreading the message in local churches. These included several recommendations for encouraging lifestyle change, such as a “Crisis in the Kitchen” series, an introduction to the *Diet for a Small Planet* cookbook, and a “Lenten School of Christian Living” where congregants would receive a “simple meal, low meat, low sugar, soup, etc.” before being taken through a series of workshops on population, production, and consumption patterns.<sup>68</sup> Updating Thornberry and Hessel on follow-up efforts throughout their region in the remainder of 1976, Creevey’s Presbyterian colleague Bryce Little reported widespread buy-in from denominational offices and ecumenical agencies, with the 44 participants at the March enabling event in Sacramento working to organize WHEAT efforts in Northern California, Nevada, Oregon, and

---

<sup>66</sup> William Creevey, “The Parable of the Leaven and the Global Food Crisis,” PHS NCC Task Force on World Hunger Records, box 2, folder “Questionnaire.”

<sup>67</sup> Creevey, “The Parable of the Leaven and the Global Food Crisis.”

<sup>68</sup> Ervin G. Roorda, “Fremont Presbyterian Church – Sacramento – Responds to the Hunger Issue (A Local Church Model),” March 12-13, 1976, PHS NCC Task Force on World Hunger Records, box 2, folder “Questionnaire.”



Idaho.<sup>69</sup> In this way, the Sacramento event followed the basic template for WHEAT mobilization, something that was repeated three dozen more times across the country.

Though William Creevey was clearly sanguine about the liberatory potential of lifestyle religion, many remained ambivalent on the question of its power to change things on its own. Ultimately, the advocates of lifestyle change in these mainline networks shared this ambivalence on whether the change was more “expression” of commitment to larger structural change, or itself transformative thanks to market devices. Admonitions that lifestyle change would never be a panacea were just as common as amazing statistics about the thousands of pounds of grain that individual consumer choices could free up. In their stated aims, WHEAT organizers like Thornberry incorporated this new language in order to garner more personal commitments to their policy agendas. There may be positive reverberations through the market itself, but regulations and protections would be required to restrict capital’s worst effects and ensure greater distributive justice. For local voices like William Creevey in Sacramento, however, the potential liberation of the affluent Christian from the bonds of overweight overconsumption was the single most significant outcome for him and his congregation.

Overall, as the WHEAT covenants circulated throughout the nation, Hessel and Thornberry’s policy agenda resonated far less than the new moral language of lifestyle. By leveraging their status as neoliberal subjects, this language promised to make sense of the affluent Christian’s implication in relationships of power by offering a sense of liberation from the moral weight of American capitalism’s global spoils. In the spring of 1977, a little over a year after he had begun circulating guidebooks to denominations and local covenant groups, Thornberry ordered a survey of 1,890 members of covenant groups, “to determine what, if any,

---

<sup>69</sup> Bryce Little, “Questionnaire on Regional Followup and Planning,” PHS NCC Task Force on World Hunger Records, box 2, folder “Questionnaire.”

direct lifestyle changes among covenanters were attributable to the program.” The survey found “a rather privatized approach to the issue.” Overall, respondents expressed very little interest in the program’s units on structural change or policy advocacy, whereas “the theme of consumption patterns was evident throughout the data.” “A conclusion one can reach about the signers,” wrote the survey’s compiler, “is that they have made some life pattern changes. These may be more personalized than the program developers had hoped for but they may be significant.”<sup>70</sup>

After WHEAT’s regional rollout through the NCC’s denominational networks, the ecumenical body’s task force on world hunger began to phase out its direct involvement in regional groups. From the start, their hope had been to introduce a viable, workable approach to responding to planetary crisis, and then let it take on a life of its own inside the denominations. To that end, Thornberry, who had brought with him the language of lifestyle, began to transition out of work with the NCC toward the end of 1978, reporting that he and his new wife—Presbyterian hunger coordinator and NCC task force member Colleen Shannon-Thornberry—would be relocating to the Atlanta area. There, he planned to begin working full-time as executive director of a non-profit organization dedicated entirely to the message of lifestyle religion, Alternatives, Inc..<sup>71</sup> With Alternatives, he would spend over a decade providing ongoing resources for Protestant denominations, who would continue to advocate for lifestyle change in light of ongoing anxieties about poverty, population growth, resource scarcity, and eventually, climate change.

Looking at the NCC’s environmental efforts in the 1970s as a whole, at the beginning of the decade, the mainline organizers at the helm of ECAP were hopeful that direct action and

---

<sup>70</sup> Douglas Johnson, “An Evaluation of the WHEAT Covenant Fellowship,” PHS NCC Task Force on World Hunger Records, box 2, folder: “Contact Person List – Enabling Events.”

<sup>71</sup> Milo Shannon-Thornberry to Coordinating Council for Hunger Concerns, December 22, 1978. PHS NCC Communications Records, box 13.

policy advocacy could characterize the church's response to the planetary crises of a globalizing capitalism. With their first attempt at ecology action in 1970 and 1971, they found little support. In the four years between ECAP's failure and the start of WHEAT in 1975, the notion of lifestyle circulated more widely in the U.S. media. Searching for a way to build a personal connection between their constituents and these planetary issues, the mainline leaders behind WHEAT seized upon it as an organizing discourse for the environmental changes they sought. Though they hoped this might merely connect their constituents with more collective policy agendas, by the end of the decade, the outcome proved to be a deeply individuated form of environmental politics, one rooted primarily in consumer choice.

Even if Thornberry and others hoped the emphasis on personal consumer choice would be a mere connecting point for their constituents, leading to more collective projects of policy advocacy and direct involvement in environmental concerns, with the word lifestyle, neoliberal market discipline already had its foot in the door. Through the enabling events, with their intense instruction on how to manage and govern one's consumer lifestyle, mainline Protestants across the country were invited to think of themselves as *homo oeconomicus*, linked to the rest of the planet through coterminous flows of spirit and capital. Consumer choices promised to let them embody concern, guarding against fears of implication in capitalist violence while protecting their newly refined affluence from more radical acts of redistribution.

### **Lived Neoliberalism**

The post-war world, especially in the 1970s, created a haunting sense of connection to far away realities, to which "lifestyle choices" were ultimately posed as a response.<sup>72</sup> As postwar

---

<sup>72</sup> In this way, I view the 1970s as bearing some similarity to the nineteenth-century period between the Market Revolution and the Civil War. John Modern describes this period as one characterized by a "haunting resonance of far away forces," language which I am borrowing here. Modern, *Secularism in Antebellum America* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

economic growth slowed in the face of deindustrialization and fossil fuel shortages, white middle-class Americans simultaneously watched the most violent effects of their country's imperial expansion on their increasingly ubiquitous TV screens, while feeling the effects of stagflation in their own daily lives. As William Creevey had put it in his sermon at a local WHEAT conference in 1976, he had been shown enough "picture of distended bellies and hollow eyes superimposed against the taken-for-granted excesses of our own life style...to last for a lifetime."<sup>73</sup> This haunting sense of hollow eyes, floating like a specter above their affluent lifestyles was made materially resonant as the U.S. middle class faced its first real recession in decades. Writing about this situation 1978, one of Thornberry's new colleagues at Alternatives, Inc. identified the situation in just this way: "the inflationary pressure on purchasing power, the energy crisis and public awareness of the depletion of natural resources have made a record number of people apprehensive about their lifestyle."<sup>74</sup> Mediated and material forces swirled around them, haunting them with an unwelcome sense of precarity for their comfortable status on a fragile planet.

One source of this haunted feeling was neoliberal capitalism's world economic imaginary, with its vision of ubiquitous markets encircling the planet and connecting every person and place. This promise of connection to the other side of the globe was a double-edged sword. On the one hand, these distant connections could serve as haunting, constant reminders of the connection between the material conditions of U.S. white middle class life and the world's poor, making news of a famine or a bread riot worrying not just because of a basic reaction to human suffering or ecological damage, but also because of what it could mean for the future of

---

<sup>73</sup> Creevey, "Whose Hunger?"

<sup>74</sup> Bob Kochtitzky to Early Barftoot, January 15, 1978. GCAH Records of the Division of Human Relations and Economics 1439-2-5:02.

the planet, and for the future of the white middle-class life that served as a central rhetorical justification for U.S.'s postwar imperial adventures.

But on the other hand, this vision of distant connections held the promise of transformative agency through economic action. Don't like something going on in the world? Use your purchasing power to change it. If the neoliberal imaginary was to be believed, then one's lifestyle choices could serve as a powerful form of religious agency, channeling God's will through supply chains and networks of exchange to palliate planetary crises. Or, even when conceding that when the numbers get crunched, less meat here doesn't always mean more grain over there, at the very least, environmentally-minded lifestyle choices could help exorcise the haunting sense of one's direct implication in the suffering world.<sup>75</sup>

Rendered in terms of "haunting," the 1970s look a lot like other moments of capitalist restructuring or expansion in the way that American Protestants seemed constantly aware of far away forces—the population bomb, the world food crisis, the oil embargo, stagflation, the cold war, nuclear proliferation, and so on. Like the decades between the Market Revolution and the Civil War, the 1970s represents another moment in which Protestants deliberated in earnest over how they should understand agency in a modern, secular world where everything feels so compellingly and precariously connected. Experienced within a secular metaphysics, these

---

<sup>75</sup> Through the language of "haunting," I want to think with John Modern's formulation of modernity as a situation in which people are haunted by the material resonance of far away forces, thinking in particular about the material resonance of globalizing capitalism. As Modern writes, this sense of haunting ironically secured secularism's metaphysics. Reactions to it tended to foreclose any possible challenge to secularism's core principles:

As Francis Wayland suggested at mid-century, such foreclosure was inevitable. 'I am built railroad fashion,' wrote Wayland... 'I can go forwards, and if necessary back; but I can't go sideways.' The experience of haunting, in other words, rather than introduce discontinuity into one's being, often fueled the repetition of sovereignty, uninterrupted and in control.

Modern's study focuses on a number of hauntings through which "spirit laws" were secured, solidifying distinctions between natural and supernatural, enchanted and disenchanted, religious and secular. Modern, *Secularism in Antebellum America*, 44.

material resonances and hauntings become involved in the social production of laws, categories, and distinctions that organize the self in relation to the world. In the 1850s, John Modern notes a drive to develop laws and theories that can show “that whatever faculties exist inside are not only shared by all but applicable to every nook and cranny of the world.”<sup>76</sup> Given the apparent trustworthiness of these discoveries, modern subjects were encouraged to focus on self-cultivation, on developing their own faculties through a kind of scientific rigor, given the faith they could place in the fact that these same rules applied to “every nook and cranny of the world.” The result was “a style of liberal piety that allowed individuals to establish their own volition within a metaphysical scheme (and a social environment) of de facto relationality.”<sup>77</sup> The material resonance of far away forces can be haunting, stirring up anxieties about one’s place in the world, but once a convincing enough schema of sturdy laws and principles are in place, those relations create space for the liberal subject to cultivate their individual piety and agency in a sensible and predictable world of relation.

In the 1970s, as American Protestants were newly anxious about the strange agencies aswirl in this succession of “planetary crises,” they again set out in search of rules, laws, scientific claims about the world that could settle their nerves under the security of some certain sovereignty. And here, the Mont-Pelerin Society economists who were hard at work selling the promise of the invisible hand and the free market were happy to oblige, as were the advertisers working to link particular commodities with distinctive identities through the discourse of lifestyle. Seemingly trustworthy (as trustworthy as phrenology seemed in 1850, and perhaps as worthy of debunking), the neoliberal economic imaginary argued for its own kind of sovereignty, through its claims about microeconomics, free markets, and so on. As Bethany Moreton

---

<sup>76</sup> Modern, *Secularism in Antebellum America* 147.

<sup>77</sup> Modern, *Secularism in Antebellum America* 171.

recounts, the claim that these new laws were scientific, transcending human activity and guaranteeing certain causes and effects, was perhaps made most vividly in the 1958 educational video, “I, Pencil,” which circulated widely on television in 1980 thanks to Milton Friedman’s *Free to Choose* series. “Have faith that free men and women will respond to the Invisible Hand. This faith will be confirmed,” declared the pencil, speaking in the first-person. “I, Pencil, seemingly simple though I am, offer the miracle of my creation as testimony that this is a practical faith, as practical as the sun, the rain, a cedar tree, the good earth.”<sup>78</sup> As with the new metaphysical laws being developed in the 1850s, here in the 1970s and 1980s, the promise of markets was sold as equally scientific, equally solid, permanent, and trustworthy. What this means, then, is that Protestant Christians can embrace a liberal piety focused on their own self-cultivation, or, returning to Modern, “a metaphysical scheme (and a social environment) of de facto relationality.”<sup>79</sup> You are haunted by far away forces, yes, but only because of the sovereign market that is connecting you all through your microeconomic agency. Cultivate yourself through your day-to-day life as *homo oeconomicus*, as rational actor, and the market will connect your volition to the wider world.

The practices of lifestyle religion in the 1970s reveal the way religion is disciplined, governed, and produced at the level of lived experience through day-to-day interaction with the political economy. People interact with state power and are disciplined into forms of subjectivity and sociality that align with it on a daily basis through their relationship with the political economy. Here, the study of lived religion can shed light on the ways that American religion in

---

<sup>78</sup> Bethany Moreton, *To Serve God and Wal-Mart: The Making of Christian Free Enterprise* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 193-196.

<sup>79</sup> Modern, *Secularism in Antebellum America*, 171.

general—and mainstream, majority white Protestantism in particular—has been produced in relation to the state.<sup>80</sup>

Whether participating in ECAP, WHEAT, or an iteration of Ron Sider’s evangelical lifestyle groups, the practitioners of lifestyle religion in the 1970s were certainly engaged in a critique of consumerism as a central cause of the crises of overpopulation, environmental collapse, and world hunger that were putting the planet at risk. But even so, they were training themselves to view the market as the proper channel for their agency, for their desire to act in response to the planetary crises of their time. With lifestyle religion, they would come to do so primarily through individual consumption. When Thornberry suggested to WHEAT participants that lifestyle change could “redirect production,” he appealed to the magic of the invisible hand to lend a sense of real power to lifestyle change. In turn, WHEAT covenanters undertook intensive, daily examination of their consumer habits, their diets, their clothes, and so on. They developed a kind of liberal piety within modern secularism as devotees simultaneously turn to practices of self-cultivation, while trusting the sovereign principles of the market to work out the relationship between their pious consumption and the problems on the other side of the world.<sup>81</sup>

And this lived religious experience of neoliberalism had consequences beyond the mainstream Protestant circles that deliberated over them, especially in the way it plugged liberal

---

<sup>80</sup> Although Modern’s identification of the production of supposedly trustworthy laws as a way of managing the resonance of far away forces is central to my understanding of the 1970s, I should note that his project was largely limited to the level of discourse as it unfolded in print networks in particular, having very little to say about state power or political economy. So while I am drawing parallels to his description of modernity and the way religion is delineated in spaces of modern haunting, I also seek here to add a more direct sense of how this delineation occurs in quotidian relation to a given political economy, neoliberal or otherwise.

<sup>81</sup> Though writing outside the context of religious studies, U.S. historian Thomas Haskell diagnosed what Modern has called a haunting resonance of far away forces in his own writing on the period between the Market Revolution and the Civil War. According to Haskell, capitalism produces a “cognitive style” or “recipe” wherein market actors sense their connection to other people in far away places. Thomas L. Haskell, “Capitalism and the Origins of the Humanitarian Sensibility,” Parts 1 & 2, *The American Historical Review*, vol 90, nos. 2 & 3 (1985).



environmental piety into a project of neo-coloniality. As those same neoliberal visionaries at the helm of the Mount Pellerin society, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and similar organizations sold their message of economic laws and free market principles, they did so in competition with decolonial redistributionary projects like the New International Economic Order and international communism. This was nowhere more apparent than in the story of the International Lifestyle Consultation, where the NIEO became a major point of disagreement in evangelical deliberations over the power and meaning of lifestyle choice.

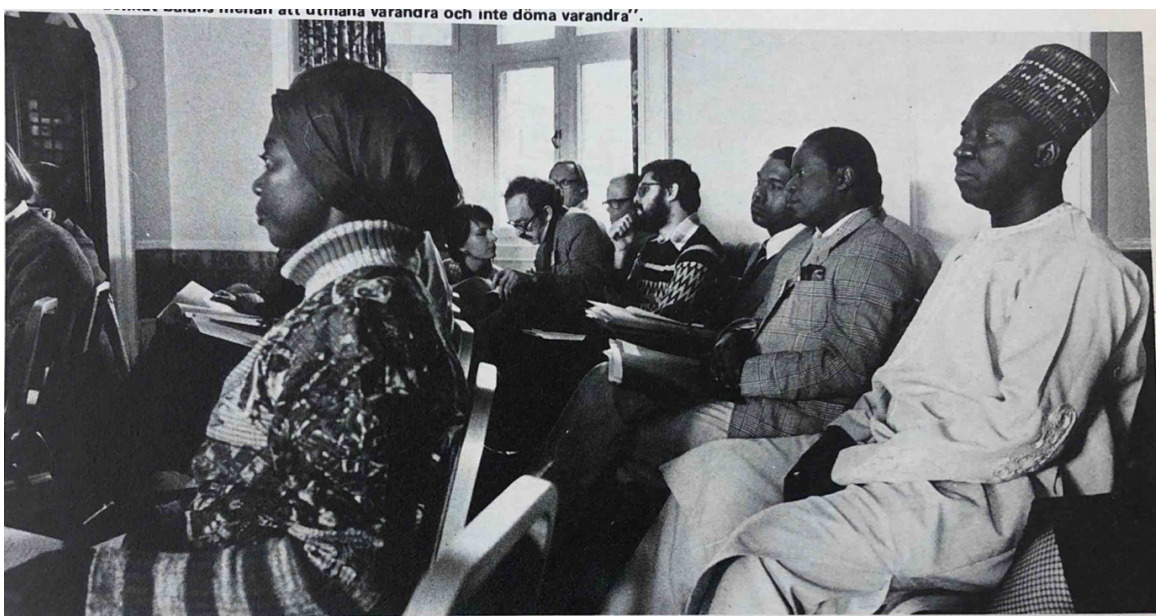
### **Consultation on Simple Lifestyle**

As NCC's WHEAT was winding down in the late 1970s, Ron Sider and his evangelical allies in the Lausanne Network were hard at work planning an International Consultation on Simple Lifestyle to be held in London, England in 1980. The consultation, of course, was inspired by those two sentences from the 1974 Lausanne Covenant, that, in the words of its architect John Stott, "caused more anxious thought in would-be signatories" than any others: "All of us are shocked by the poverty of millions, and disturbed by the injustices which cause it. Those of us who live in affluent circumstances accept our duty to develop a simple lifestyle in order to contribute generously to both relief and evangelism."<sup>82</sup> Planning began in mid 1977, when John Stott and Ron Sider, American evangelicalism's most prominent advocate of simple living, began correspondence about developing an international program on Christian lifestyle. Eventually, the project evolved to include two years of local group meetings, which took place in 15 countries, as well as three major regional gatherings in Ireland, the United States, and India throughout 1979.

---

<sup>82</sup> Stott, *The Lausanne Covenant: An Exposition and Commentary*, 39.

Sider's organization of local consultations reporting on lifestyle religion ultimately culminated in the International Consultation on Simple Lifestyle, a plenary meeting in London in 1980, which involved 85 evangelical leaders hailing from North and South America, Western Europe, sub-Saharan Africa, and South and East Asia (fig. 4). During the four-day consultation, evangelical church historians and theologians presented backgrounds on the biblical and historical basis for simple lifestyle, and evangelicals identified as experts in simple lifestyles offered testimonies and gave practical advice for cultivating a lifestyle of simplicity.



*Figure 4 - Sider (center) at the 1980 Consultation*

The end result of Sider's consultation series was a statement of commitment to simple lifestyle. "Jesus still calls some people (perhaps even us) to follow him in a lifestyle of total, voluntary poverty," declared the statement.<sup>83</sup> The consultation goers had drafted the statement with plans to circulate it as the fifth Lausanne Occasional Paper, the organization's term for major official publications, such as its widely read 1974 Lausanne Covenant. If, as Sider

<sup>83</sup> "The Commitment," in Ronald J. Sider, editor, *Lifestyle in the Eighties: An Evangelical Commitment to Simple Lifestyle* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1982), 14, 16.

expected, the commitment to simple lifestyle being developed in his consultations appeared as the fifth major Lausanne paper in the summer of 1980, it would be able to make a major splash at future Lausanne gatherings and throughout the evangelical world in general.

But Stott and other evangelical leader's hopes for lifestyle—that it would provide an apolitical alternative to Global South calls for social justice—meant that the process of circulating Sider's message to wider Lausanne circles came up against significant challenges. In planning a series of consultations on the topic, John Stott and other Lausanne leaders wondered whether this notion of Christian lifestyle help resolve the tension between evangelism and social justice that had pervaded their 1974 Congress. As with the mainline's ECAP and WHEAT, “lifestyle” served as a useful concept for American evangelicals whose growing awareness of global poverty troubled them, but who were ambivalent about the question of underlying structures—American neocolonialism, global capitalism—that folks like Padilla and Escobar at Lausanne 1974 identified as their root cause.

By focusing on their consumer lifestyles, the American and British evangelicals in the Lausanne network could cultivate a pious personal relationship with global capitalism, while leaving the worst effects of that system intact. Embracing “lifestyle” as a new technique for changing the world through religious action, American evangelicals joined with their mainline counterparts in circulating a market subjectivity that could allow for modes of religiosity that did not impede the global expansion of unregulated markets. Rather than interfere with the U.S.'s postwar imperial projects, they simply invited American Christians to focus on their own individual choices, in lieu of collectively addressing structural issues.

### Lifestyle's Potential

Like Milo Thornberry at WHEAT, Sider and other evangelicals found lifestyle a fitting concept as they searched for a response to planetary crisis. In its use in popular press and advertisements, “lifestyle” helped link identity formation with consumer choice, making one’s day-to-day engagements with the marketplace a central mediator of difference and distinction between individuals and social groups.<sup>84</sup> Sider himself was aware of the way the term could help organize groups and identities, using it to call for a new kind of Christian subculture. Writing in a 1979 “Simple Lifestyle Newsletter” in the lead up to his consultation, Sider expressed dismay that “for too long, the Church has unquestioningly mirrored the values of the affluent culture in which it found itself,” while expressing hope that his movement for lifestyle religion was “sounding an increasingly vocal call for the Church to see itself as an active subculture, a movement of people willing to move against the tide of their respective societies when necessary.”<sup>85</sup>

When, in the 1970s, widespread reports of overpopulation, environmental collapse, and mass starvation made many American Christians eager to respond, lifestyle provided a compelling and immediate set of practices that could link their day-to-day lives with these issues. Ron Sider’s teachings on simple lifestyle, then, appealed to many on this basis. Though his teachings on simple lifestyle made a first public appearance in his 1973 and 1974 Thanksgiving

---

<sup>84</sup> Maureen Ryan makes just this observation, noting that lifestyle consumption “helped realign people into new social identities” amid 1970s neoliberal restructuring that was eroding the bonds of labor unions and other traditional affiliations. Ryan, *Lifestyle Media in American Culture*, 33.

<sup>85</sup> Sider, “Simple Lifestyle Newsletter,” September 1979. BGEA Lausanne Papers, box 144 folder 12.

Workshops, it was not until the publication of his 1977 best-seller, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, that his ideas reached a national audience of evangelicals.<sup>86</sup>

Moving beyond the general emphasis on identity formation found within the broader milieu of lifestyle media, Sider echoed his mainline counterpart Milo Thornberry by striking a delicate balance between the suggestion that Christian lifestyle choices could bring about real change in the world and the acknowledgment of economic questions about how well that really worked. In a chapter dedicated to the subject of structural change, Sider wrote that “eating less beef or even becoming a vegetarian will not necessarily feed one starving child...[U]nless one also changes public policy, the primary effect of merely reducing one’s meat consumption may simply be to enable the Russians to buy more grain at a cheaper price next year.”<sup>87</sup> In this sense, as evangelicalism’s most prominent advocate of lifestyle religion in 1977, Sider was by no means committed to the laws of the invisible hand. In fact, Sider even spared a page to criticize U.S. leaders for undermining support for the New International Economic Order, that postcolonial vision for sweeping reforms and regulations that would be the subject of much debate and contestation in the Lausanne lifestyle consultation in 1980.<sup>88</sup>

Despite these doubts about the power of lifestyle religion to bring about predictable and just redistributions, Sider devoted much of *Rich Christians* to the question of lifestyle change. Reflecting the logic of crisis-talk that shaped both mainline and evangelical Protestants throughout the decade, Sider’s interest in lifestyle was informed by a sense that it could help affluent Christians develop subjectivities better equipped to deal with the chaos of the world.

---

<sup>86</sup> For a detailed history of *Rich Christians*, including critical responses and later editions, see: Brantley W. Gasaway, *Progressive Evangelicals and the Pursuit of Social Justice* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 200-234.

<sup>87</sup> Ron Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger: A Biblical Study* (New York: Paulist Press, 1977), 204-205.

<sup>88</sup> Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, 56.

Like Presbyterian minister and WHEAT enabler William Creevey who had spoken of enslavement and bondage to consumerism, Sider was simultaneously worried about “inner, agonizing distress” and “external, structural injustice.”<sup>89</sup> Writing about one family that had adopted a simple lifestyle, Sider promised, like William Creevey in his sermon at a WHEAT event the year before, a form of liberation for the affluent. Sider wrote that “Walt and Ginny have survived the dramatic transition and love the change!” And went on to quote them saying, “We are beginning to feel liberated.”<sup>90</sup> Lifestyle religion could certainly relieve the former, even if other policy changes might be needed to help lifestyle religion treat the latter.

And even if Sider acknowledged that altering consumption patterns could never bring about predictable redistribution without a related set of structural changes, throughout the book, Sider spoke frequently of American consumer demand, hopeful that lifestyle choices could help alter it. Writing about coffee, for example, Sider connected poor labor conditions to western lifestyle choices: “Why do Juan and 350,000 other coffee workers in El Salvador continue to suffer? One reason is that rich North Americans and Europeans want cheap coffee.”<sup>91</sup> Similarly, on the question of meat consumption, he noted, “Mexico might have decided to adopt a different development strategy (using people rather than machines) that would have provided food for the masses rather than beef for export. But our desire for beef encouraged a different pattern.”<sup>92</sup> Even if the specific economic impacts of shifting demand through consumer choice were a bit unpredictable, Sider remained committed to the importance of lifestyle.

Sider’s commitment to lifestyle religion aligned nicely with the particular reforms he championed. To be sure, he had briefly implied support for the NIEO, with its call for new,

---

<sup>89</sup> Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, 49.

<sup>90</sup> Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, 180.

<sup>91</sup> Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, 147.

<sup>92</sup> Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, 159.

supranational democratic structures that could place limits on capital expansion, as he stressed the need to pair lifestyle choices with structural change. But most of the specific policies he called for were generally oriented toward the globalization of markets, which would in turn give North American consumer choices that kind of power. Sider called for “a far more sweeping elimination of tariff barriers” to facilitate international trade between developing and developed nations, with the hope that reduced trade barriers, increased trade preferences, and commodity agreements might help developing nations bring their goods directly to western consumers.<sup>93</sup> In this scenario, lifestyle religion might truly begin to have the kind of economic agency that many desired for it, helping American Christians make pious choices in the market that ensured a just distribution of resources through their purchasing power. If in 1977, then, Sider wasn’t entirely convinced of the predictability of market laws and the direct, economic power of lifestyle religion, he nonetheless aspired to it.

For Sider, lifestyle religion was especially important because of his fearful sense that bread riots and other forms of unrest in the decolonizing world might soon spill over to North America. He opened *Rich Christians* with one such scenario, writing:

In angry desperation, [the Prime Minister of India has] reaches a ghastly decision. If the affluent will not share their abundance and wealth voluntarily, then she will attempt nuclear persuasion. Indian agents are poised to plant nuclear bombs in the harbors of Boston and New York. Millions of U.S. citizens will become unwilling hostages! ... But she still hesitates. The United States may call the bluff...Terrible retaliation might follow. But she is desperate. The top secret order is given...<sup>94</sup>

This fearful melodrama reflected an undercurrent in Sider’s lifestyle religion, directly revealing the way lifestyle was meant to prevent the malcontent of uneven distribution in the decolonizing world from boiling over onto American shores. Through lifestyle choices, Sider hoped, rich

---

<sup>93</sup> Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, 212-213.

<sup>94</sup> Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, 15-16.

Christians could simultaneously leverage the free market to palliate the worst effects of their country's neocolonial economic expansion, while also softening their fears of growing anti-American animus and the possibility of violent unrest spilling onto their shores. Sider went on to quote the economist Robert Heilbrunner, who sounded the alarm,

that some nuclear capability will be in the hands of the major underdeveloped nations certainly within the next few decades and perhaps much sooner...I will suggest that it may be used as an instrument of blackmail to force the developed world to undertake a massive transfer of wealth to the poverty-stricken world...Wars of redistribution may be the only way by which the poor nations can hope to remedy their condition.<sup>95</sup>

For Sider and others, simple lifestyle held the promise of freeing up just enough resources, and demonstrating just enough restraint and responsibility to the world, to bring order to what were, apparently in their minds chaotic and potentially violent, nation-states in the Global South.

### **Planning for Lifestyle Change**

During the six years of planning leading to the 1980 consultation and its 1982 follow-up publications, correspondence from Billy Graham, John Stott, and other key leaders in the Lausanne Movement suggests that Graham, Stott, and their collaborators were attracted to the notion of Christian lifestyle precisely because it set the political implications of Padilla and Escobar's critique of the West aside in favor of something entirely non-controversial: individual consumer choice. Initially, Sider had chosen lifestyle as a way of aligning a five-centuries old Anabaptist Ethic of "simplicity" with his own critiques of Western economic structures, linking a believers' refusal to participate in these unjust structures and his overarching plan of altering those structures themselves. By 1982, however, his efforts to spread this message had been counteracted, disciplined, and contained within a stricter emphasis on the consumer behavior as the primary means of reacting to global injustice.

---

<sup>95</sup> Heilbrunner, quoted in Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, 21.



Throughout the planning process, the directors of World Vision, the Lausanne Committee, and the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA) continually expressed their concern about a creeping “anti-capitalistic” and “anti-Western” bias in the lifestyle consultation programming, threatening to withdraw financial support if those biases weren’t kept in check. Although the reason for their concern was often unstated, Sider’s favorable position toward the NIEO and his choice to invite the same Global South evangelicals who had created a social justice-oriented insurgency at the 1974 Congress were likely cause for alarm. To provide travel and lodging for the 85 participants flown in from around the world, on top of operational costs related to staff and materials, Sider ended up needing around \$30,000 to conduct the event. Around 2/3rds of that would need to come from two sources of evangelical funding: World Vision and the Lausanne Committee itself.<sup>96</sup> From his position as president of World Vision, Stanley Mooneyham wrote to Sider multiple times in the spring of 1978 attempting to steer him away from connecting lifestyle too directly to structural changes or economic critiques. Carbon-copying Billy Graham as well as John Stott, Mooneyham warned Sider that it looked like he was attempting “to expand the scope of the consultation beyond what was authorized.”<sup>97</sup> Instead, Mooneyham insisted in multiple missives that Sider focus on “the importance of accenting the evangelism aspect of the conference. This emphasis must begin now as you are in the planning stages in order for it to be evident in the conference that evangelism is our first and basic motivation for the simple lifestyle.”<sup>98</sup>

In early 1978, Stott and Mooneyham both threatened to withdraw financial backing if Sider allowed the events drift toward critiques of the free enterprise system or of America’s role

---

<sup>96</sup> “International Consultation on Simple Lifestyle Final Financial Statement,” BGCA Lausanne Records box 36, folder 6.

<sup>97</sup> Stanley Mooneyham to Ronald Sider, March 15, 1978, BGCA Stott Papers box 590, folder 11.

<sup>98</sup> Stanley Mooneyham to Ronald Sider, April 28, 1978, BGCA Lausanne Records box 36 folder 4.

in the world. For his part, John Stott left no room for interpretation on the fact that Lausanne financial backing depended on this, writing, “obviously LCWE’s joint sponsorship depends on your Committee’s acceptance of these guidelines.”<sup>99</sup> Mooneyham, Stott, and Lausanne chairman Leighton Ford hoped that a strict emphasis on evangelism would keep the consultation from straying too far into the murky waters of anti-capitalist and anti-Western sentiment.

In addition to demanding a central emphasis on evangelism, Stott’s letter had also asked Sider to draw a clearer distinction between “personal ethics and the problems of the politico-economic order” saying that “(fears were expressed lest the consultation is biased towards one political system, and makes naïve economic pronouncements by people who are evidently ignorant of such things!”<sup>100</sup> In his follow-up letter, Stott put it even more directly, warning Sider, “Strong hesitations about the Consultation were expressed by some LCWE members, as you know, because they feared that it would be slanted towards left-wing politics without an adequate expression of ‘Free Market economy’ views.”<sup>101</sup> Perhaps this was a result of the fact that, as Stott noted in another letter to Sider, some of the publicity materials “seem to confuse ‘wealth’ and ‘oppression’ as if they were the same.”<sup>102</sup>

Even as Sider offered reassurances to Stott and Mooneyham, concerns over a potentially anti-capitalist undertone at an official Lausanne event reached the upper echelons of neo-evangelical influence. Billy Graham, who had spearheaded Lausanne in the first place as a coming-out party for his respectable brand of neo-evangelism on the world stage, took a keen interest in Sider’s planned follow-up event. Writing to Stott in the spring of 1978, Graham made it clear that he supported the committee’s efforts to keep the consultation from bias against free

---

<sup>99</sup> John Stott to Ronald Sider, May 22, 1978, BGCA Lausanne Records box 36 folder 4.

<sup>100</sup> Stott to Sider, January 22, 1978.

<sup>101</sup> Stott to Sider, May 22, 1978.

<sup>102</sup> John Stott to Ronald Sider, March 16, 1979. BGCA Lausanne Records box 36 folder 36.

enterprise. Carbon-copied on Mooneyham's letters to Sider, and reporting that the Lausanne chairman Leighton Ford had passed along Stott's contributions, Billy Graham wrote to John Stott in the spring of 1978 to express his covert support for the direction he and Mooneyham had offered Sider.<sup>103</sup> Though throughout the entire planning process he remained in the background of the lifestyle consultation, Billy Graham made clear that he was very interested in the proceedings, ultimately stepping into the publication process in 1980 to help directly shape Lausanne's message of lifestyle religion.

Taking their cues from Graham and his closest allies in the BGEA, Lausanne chairman Leighton Ford, Wheaton College president Hudson Armerding, and other key figures in the neo-evangelical establishment all conspired to discipline Sider's lifestyle religion into an apolitical alternative to calls earlier for political action for the sake of the planet. In the spring of 1978, Alan Emery Jr., the new president of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, agreed to attend a planning committee meeting for Sider's upcoming lifestyle consultations. Emery was appalled by the anti-western and anti-capitalist biases he noticed on the committee, writing in a letter marked CONFIDENTIAL to Lausanne chairman Leighton Ford, "what seems rather incongruous to me is the chief vehicle for the support of the ongoing committee is viewed to be trusts and foundations which were founded, established and funded by the free enterprise system—when the free enterprise system seems to be the chief target of the Simple Lifestyle Consultation Committee."<sup>104</sup> Stott replied to Emery, marked CONFIDENTIAL as well, to express his agreement with Emery's "fears about imbalance and economic amateurishness," and that "generalisations about free enterprise and a Free Market economy are always bound to be

---

<sup>103</sup> Billy Graham to John Stott, March 7, 1978, BGCA John Stott Papers box 590, folder 11.

<sup>104</sup> Alan Emery to Leighton Ford, March 14, 1978. BGCA John Stott Papers box 590 Folder 11.

absurdly simplistic.”<sup>105</sup> Clearly, behind the scenes, the most powerful figures in the neo-evangelical network were hard at work trying to shape Sider’s lifestyle religion into something that aligned with the free market economic vision they so valued.



*Figure 5 - Hudson Armerding and Billy Graham*

Having received the first CONFIDENTIAL letter from the BGEA president, Leighton Ford also passed word of these concerns along to Wheaton President Hudson Armerding (fig. 5). Armerding anticipated that Sider and Stott might contact him and his friend Waldron Scott, General Secretary of the World Evangelical Fellowship, to ask for suggestions on speakers to

---

<sup>105</sup> John Stott to Alan Emery, May 22, 1976. BGCA John Stott Papers box 590 folder 11.

balance what they worried was becoming a slate of anti-imperialist speakers including some high-profile insurgents from 1974. Armerding wrote to Scott to let him know. In the letter, he said he had been informed that the planning meetings had begun to focus on “political and social change in Western culture.” An unnamed participant (presumably the BGEA’s Emery) had “perceived of himself as the only one who seemed to be at all in favor of a non-Socialist economy.” Armerding, figuring he and Scott would likely be contacted to consult on the matter, wanted to get on the same page with him about recommending “individuals who are more capitalist than socialist” if they were asked for suggestions.<sup>106</sup> Scott agreed, writing soon after to Sider urging him to include more representatives that would “reflect a more capitalistic commitment.”<sup>107</sup>

Wayne Bragg, a Wheaton professor who had recently founded the evangelical college’s new international development certificate program, joined the executive committee soon after its formation in early 1978. This put him in hot water once his boss Hudson Armerding caught wind of Billy Graham and his evangelistic association president’s concerns. In April of 1978, Armerding caught Bragg in a hallway on campus and confronted him about the “anti-capitalistic tenor of the [executive committee] meeting.” Bragg quickly wrote to Armerding to reassure him that “there was no such generalized atmosphere.”<sup>108</sup> This apparently wasn’t enough to assuage the influential college president, as Sider felt the need to clear up this “modest misunderstanding between brothers.”<sup>109</sup> In Sider’s letter, he reported that the executive committee “definitely did *not* want the Consultation on Simple Lifestyle to switch its focus and become a consultation on the

---

<sup>106</sup> Hudson Armerding to Waldron Scott, March 23, 1978. BGCA Lausanne Records box 36 folder 27.

<sup>107</sup> Waldron Scott to Ronald Sider, May 25, 1978. BGCA Lausanne Records box 36 folder 27.

<sup>108</sup> Wayne Bragg to Hudson Armerding, April 7, 1978. BGCA Lausanne Records box 36 folder 36.

<sup>109</sup> Ronald Sider to Armerding et. al., June 6, 1978. BGCA Lausanne Records box 36 folder 36.

relative merits of different economic systems.”<sup>110</sup> Although the executive committee admittedly included one democratic socialist, Sider promised that the consultation itself would not head in that direction, a potentiality that powerful evangelical leaders like Billy Graham, Hudson Armerding, and Stanley Mooneyham were keen to avoid.

Along with threats of withdrawn funding that Mooneyham, Stott, and Emery repeatedly directed at Sider during this time, Emery and Graham were also able to undermine the Consultation’s influence simply by withdrawing their own direct support. One of Sider’s co-organizers, Horace Fenton, had expressed to Sider his sense that the Consultation would need to “crack into the evangelical establishment,” brainstorming some ideas for getting folks from the BGEA, National Association of Evangelicals, or Intervarsity more involved.<sup>111</sup> Sider chose to focus on Ruth Graham, Billy’s spouse, as a potential key figure on the planning committee. Unbeknownst to him, his strategy for persuading Ruth Graham to join the committee was hamstrung from the beginning. His idea was to go through Allan Emery, to whom he wrote in March of 1978, to ask if he “might be willing to drop her a note...and encourage her to participate in the committee.”<sup>112</sup> Emery wrote back expressing his hesitancy to do so, while keeping his cards close about the confidential note, he had sent to Lausanne leadership only two weeks prior to raise questions about Sider’s plans. Ruth Graham responded cordially, noting in a letter to Sider that her husband Billy had “pounced” on *Rich Christians* and “said it was really thought-provoking.” She reported some reservations, however, saying that she “had signed the Lausanne Declaration with my fingers crossed simply because of the omission of one little letter. R. If only he had said a simpler lifestyle.” Even so, she initially expressed willingness to join the

---

<sup>110</sup> Sider to Armerding et. al., June 6, 1978. Emphasis in original.

<sup>111</sup> Horace Fenton to Mark Cerbone, February 24, 1979. BGCA Lausanne Records box 36 folder 44.

<sup>112</sup> Ronald Sider to Allan Emery, March 30, 1978. BGCA Lausanne Records box 36 folder 44.

planning committee, mentioning that “this is something that [Billy] has told me he would like me to do,” before eventually writing to Sider that she needed to withdraw from the event completely because she “had absolutely no peace whatever about the situation.”<sup>113</sup>

### **Lifestyle Religion**

Stott, Ford, and other evangelical leaders hoped that Sider would help develop a form of lifestyle religion that would assuage, rather than further ignite, anti-western and anti-free enterprise sentiments. In the three-year planning process leading up to the 1980 consultation, Sider ultimately helped cultivate this, especially in the United States, by planning a series of local groups and consultations to experiment with simple lifestyle. To define it directly, lifestyle religion centers on the pious, daily practice of intensive management of consumer choice. In so doing, it looks to simultaneously cultivate virtue in the face of what practitioners view as an American culture of gluttonous and greedy overconsumption, while also envisioning the possibility of real, material power over planetary affairs through the workings of the invisible hand. Two key features—the cultivation of individual piety and the exercise of agency through economic activity—converge at the site of consumption. When between 1977 and 1979, Ron Sider called for the formation of local groups to explore the question of simple lifestyle, he got dozens of reports from all around North America of local lifestyle groups experiencing these two things.

Many focused primarily on the way simple lifestyle could help them cultivate a sense of piety and virtue through consumer practices that, in wider society, were said to embody gluttonous and greedy overconsumption. As an example, Art and Peggy Gish of Ohio were

---

<sup>113</sup> Ruth Graham to Ronald Sider, July 27, 1978; Ruth Graham to Ronald Sider, March 13, 1979. BGCA Lausanne Records box 36 folder 44.

invited to share their experiences with simple lifestyle at the U.S. Consultation. They laid out their thinking behind simple lifestyle, as well as the intensity of their experience with it:

This means for us to seek concretely to identify our lives with the poor, to live simply, to consume less of the world's resources, to rely on more renewable sources of energy, and to work for social justice...Our lifestyle has meant a lot of extra work...It has taken a fair amount of time to come to decisions on how much cheese and meat to eat, how much we use automobiles, and how our concern for the poor should relate to how we earn the little money we need.<sup>114</sup>

As the Gish family's testimony suggests, lifestyle change could be intense, but as Dennis Wood of Washington D.C. described it, it could also be an experience of spiritual transformation. Wood reported that,

Going all the way in living a simple life dedicated to bringing about God's Kingdom requires a commitment of our very lives—time, energy, and money—that exhausts our own resources to the point that we are clearly at risk in terms of the “security” of the world and have no ready recourse to an easier or more secure lifestyle without “looking back” (Luke 9:62).

For Wood, simple lifestyle was a total transformation of his existence, separating him from the security of American affluence and placing his daily existence fully in God's hands. “We often think about all of this with fear and trembling,” he wrote. “In our more lucid moments, however, we realize that God has never failed us; nor, we believe, will he ever fail to provide exactly what we need.”<sup>115</sup>

The founders of an intentional community, Patchwork Central in Evansville, Indiana, expressed a similar level of intensity in their devotion to lifestyle religion as part of their aspiration to what they called “eucharistic living” in contrast to the message of “advertisements in newspapers, magazines, billboards and on radio and television all call on us to consume more.”<sup>116</sup> According to Patchwork's community covenant, the group affirmed a simple lifestyle

---

<sup>114</sup> Art and Peggy Gish, “Our Pilgrimage in Simplicity,” BGCA Lausanne Records box 36 folder 42.

<sup>115</sup> Dennis Wood, “One Model of a Simplified Lifestyle,” BGCA Lausanne Records box 36 folder 42.

<sup>116</sup> Elaine Amerson, “Patchwork: A Joyful Mosaic,” BGCA Lausanne Records box 36 folder 42.



which, “frees us for more meaningful forms of life together.”<sup>117</sup> Amerson described the way simple lifestyle had changed her family’s lives, paired with continuous reminders of how her consumer choices distinguished her community from their image of conventional consumers:

The early efforts at simplifying our lives began with food: learning to cook and eat healthful meatless meals and to cut down on sugar and sweets. (Some of these efforts are humorous to recall: Lentil patties which looked like hamburgers were rejected by the children at first, but those days are now forgotten as they sometimes gobble two and ask for the third one!) Clothes became an issue which was not too difficult. (Living in San Francisco gives one a perspective which challenges both Paris’ and Wall Street’s dictums!) I soon came to enjoy shopping with others at second-hand stores and rummage sales. (It was difficult when the rest of the country caught on to these stores as ‘old’ clothes came back in style!<sup>118</sup>

In Amerson’s retelling, the conversion to lifestyle religion was a process of exploration and growth that had slowly transformed her and her family’s relationship to the political economy. According to her report on Patchwork Central, the result was “the fact that we are a biblical people, living joyfully and intensely—with less.”<sup>119</sup>

In lifestyle religion, many attempt to develop practices through which they might embody a stance of resistance to what they feel is a ubiquitous and meaningless consumer culture. And yet, in their intensive efforts to examine and measure every single consumer act, they nonetheless embrace the intensive governance of their position as *homo oeconomicus*, the default subject position of neoliberal political reason.<sup>120</sup> So, even when resisting a culture of consumption, they find themselves undertaking intense acts of consumer piety. As one member of a local lifestyle group reported to Sider in 1978, for example, he his resistance of consumer culture saw him spending his time at “a supermarket with a slide rule and a U.S. Department of Agriculture catalog of foods giving calories per round.” With his wife, he “devised a table that

---

<sup>117</sup> *Covenant of Patchwork Central*, BGCA Lausanne Records box 36 folder 42.

<sup>118</sup> Amerson, “Patchwork: A Joyful Mosaic.”

<sup>119</sup> Amerson, “Patchwork: A Joyful Mosaic.”

<sup>120</sup> Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 10.

consisted of twenty-five different foods, all of which gave more than a 100 calories per penny,” and then “decided that [they] ought to be able to live within that bracket.” That year, according to him, they “got by on 12.5 cents per meal per person.”<sup>121</sup> Another local devotee of lifestyle religion described a similar kind of measurable, formulaic approach to his place in the market: “A standard I have proposed is ‘functional necessity.’ Identify your function and ask what is basically necessary to carry out that function, and then tailor your life style to this...Bag it for lunch instead of eating out. Consider a self-imposed consumption tax. Identify ‘extra-type’ expenditures and then tax yourself a certain amount whenever you consume these items.”<sup>122</sup>

In lifestyle religion, this first characteristic—a sense that it can be a transformative practice of self-cultivation, a development of piety and virtue in light of an otherwise gluttonous consumer culture—is often paired with a second one: the promise that personal consumer behaviors, their intensive self-governance as rational actor, could be an expression of agency. Lifestyle religion is said to have a direct effect on the planet through the workings of the free market. Members of one of the local groups formed in preparation for the 1980 Consultation spoke directly to their sense that lifestyle religion would allow them to participate intentionally in neoliberalism’s globalizing free market, describing a close linkage between affluent consumers and the Global South:

As Christians in 1979, we must be aware of the global impact of every decision we make. What we do in our home may influence a family in another part of the world, either for better or worse. Our neighbors are not only those who live next door, but also those who are brought into our living rooms on T.V., who we read about in newspapers and magazines. We will come to understand this linkage better during the weekend and begin to work at peacemaking in the home.<sup>123</sup>

---

<sup>121</sup> Ralph Winter to Ronald Sider, December 27, 1979. BGCA Lausanne Records, box 36 folder 14.

<sup>122</sup> John Mason, *Eternity*, April 1979. BGCA Lausanne Records box 36 folder 15.

<sup>123</sup> “The Home, the Neighborhood, the World,” BGCA Lausanne Records box 36, Folder 15.

This follows Ron Sider's basic formulation in *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, where, despite his awareness of the need for structural change, centered his thinking on a sense in which lifestyle choices such as eating, "may at first glance seem very personal and private. But they are tightly interlocked with complex economic structures."<sup>124</sup> And it was something that his mainline counterparts at the National Council of Churches agreed with as well, according to their manual for local lifestyle events: "learn how dried beans and peas (legumes) and other grains can be combined as alternative sources for protein. Reduction of our consumption of meat can reduce our country's high grain consumption."<sup>125</sup> Here, then, the neoliberal project's "economic imaginary" to return to Quinn Slobodian's language, is fully embraced. Lifestyle religion enacts a vision of the world encircled by the free market which, through its trustworthy laws of supply and demand, will make predictable changes in every nook and cranny based on the North American consumer's pious lifestyle choices. It becomes a lived religion of neoliberalism. Individual economic choices, understood as a matter of Christian responsibility, encourage subject formation and conceptions of agency that fit seamlessly in the world of markets.

### **Lifestyle Resisted**

Many of the talks given at the 1980 international consultation in London reflected the twofold promise of lifestyle religion: liberation from the "bondage" of consumption paired with power to change the world through economic choices. The celebrity chef turned evangelical TV star Graham Kerr spoke similarly of his own transition from being "buried by money" to being "surprised by the pain that he had felt for the poor" through his embrace of a simple lifestyle.<sup>126</sup> The Scottish evangelist Gordon Strachan spoke of his decision to create a vegetarian café in the

---

<sup>124</sup> Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, 152.

<sup>125</sup> Thornberry, "Lifestyle Change," 40.

<sup>126</sup> Graham Kerr, "From Galloping Gourmet to Serving the Poor, in Sider, ed. *Lifestyle in the Eighties*, 176, 180.

Church of Scotland's arts center in Edinburgh. In the café, he committed to "only serve food which is consistent with our Christian faith i.e. food which benefits the health of the eater, the wealth of the grower, and the balance of world trade."<sup>127</sup> For Strachan, the benefits of lifestyle choices were clear, promising to bring balance through the free market's flows of supply and demand.

But, just as many of them had contested Lausanne '74's narrow focus on church growth as an attempt to leave American economic hegemony intact, many of the invited Global South representatives pushed back against the simple lifestyle consultation's basic terms. However, unlike the Radical Discipleship caucus, which represented an overt challenge to the 1974 Lausanne Congress's stated agenda, their critiques of the simple lifestyle discourse at this 1980 consultation tended to be more subtle. On the one hand, folks like Rene Padilla of Argentina and Vishal Mangalwadi of India were happy to see issues of inequality and oppression on the table, but on the other, the idea of using simple lifestyle to combat these issues raised serious questions. In the formal papers they prepared and delivered at the consultation, many speakers, especially those from the Global South, contested lifestyle religion's basic terms.

One major cause of critique was Sider and other affluent American's frequent use of the word "poverty" in reference to their own simple lifestyle choices, which they often referred to as "voluntary poverty." Their desire to maintain at least some positive valence for the word poverty was reflected in a telling annotation on an early draft of the meeting's statement of commitment to simple lifestyle. An early draft had read, "We affirm that poverty is an offense against the goodness of God." Apparently, the implication that all poverty was an offense to God troubled some, as the final version of the statement was revised to clarify that only *involuntary* poverty

---

<sup>127</sup> Gordon Strachan, "From Evangelist to Restaurateur," in Sider, ed. *Lifestyle in the Eighties*, 192.

was an offense. Presumably, this edit came from North American participants who wanted to protect the practice of “voluntary poverty” from critique.

Invited to give a paper on the “New Testament Perspectives on Simple Lifestyle,” Rene Padilla delivered instead a talk on the notion of poverty in relation to Jesus. Stating it plainly, Padilla wrote, “Whatever the motivation for [Jesus’] own poverty might have been, it is quite obvious that he did not intend to depict it as a positive value.”<sup>128</sup> Rather than focus on the voluntary poverty pursued through simple lifestyle, Padilla went on to frame the question of justice for the poor in terms of Jesus’ concern for the poor and his call to disciples to join him in that. Other speakers picked up this same critique, such as Vishal Mangalwadi of India, known for opening his home to unhoused neighbors. Mangalwadi opened his talk by stating that “our need in India is to create wealth and as such, what we need to do is to discover the dynamic of Christian theology which created wealth in the western world,” and stating later that God “fights for...the poor. But he is not a poor God. This God who is concerned for their poverty is a rich God.”<sup>129</sup> Of the speakers, Mangalwadi also stated most explicitly a concern that talk of voluntary poverty through simple lifestyle reflected an unwelcome intrusion of market logics into his own conception of Christian life. From the start of his talk, he stated plainly, “I don’t like our style of life...I do not like describing our lifestyles in economic terms such as a ‘simple lifestyle.’” Rather, he preferred to avoid economic language completely, stating, “Christian life is cross-bearing life, because it does not just lose us money, but privacy, time, emotional strength, and has even the potential of costing our lives.”<sup>130</sup> Ultimately, as he stated in a letter to Sider prior to the event, Sider’s intense focus on lifestyle choices still smelled of “the necessity of keeping up

---

<sup>128</sup> C. René Padilla, “New Testament Perspective on Simple Lifestyle,” in Sider, ed., *Lifestyle in the Eighties*, 56.

<sup>129</sup> Vishal Mangalwadi, “Cross Bearing in India,” in Sider, ed., *Lifestyle in the Eighties*, 167-168.

<sup>130</sup> Mangalwadi, “Cross Bearing in India,” 173.

with the Jones's," that classic statement of status anxiety to be resolved by conspicuous consumption.<sup>131</sup>

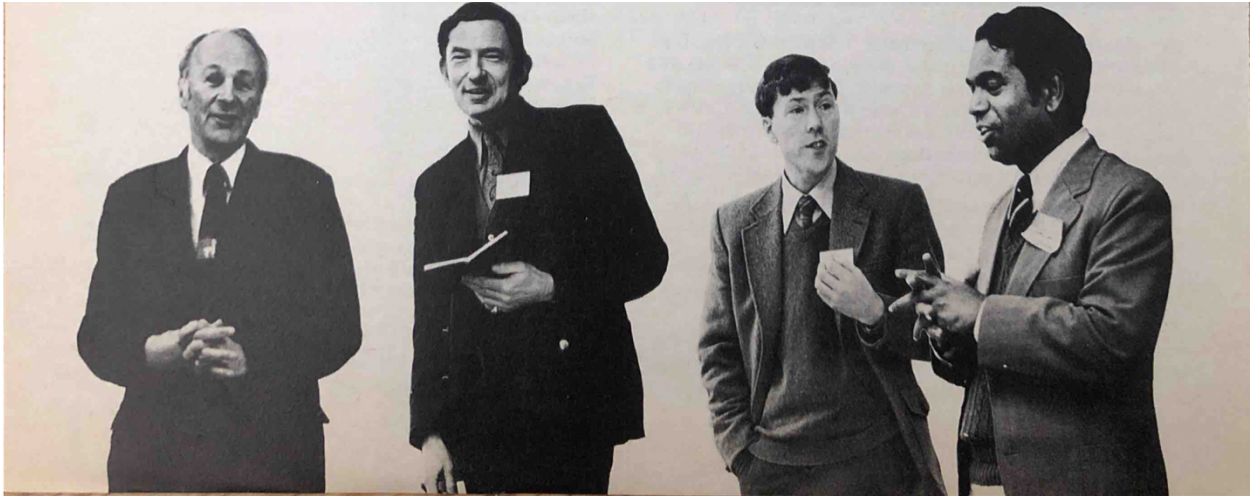
Among those who arrived at the consultation planning to resist Sider and his American evangelical allies' emphasis on consumer choice, many took up the banner of the New International Economic Order, a proposal from economists from the Global South to strengthen international democratic measures and regulate western capital. Cambridge economist Donald Hay stated support for the NIEO most explicitly (fig. 6). After walking the consultation attendees through the specific NIEO proposals, he concluded that several of these "give the most immediate prospects for effective action."<sup>132</sup> After Hay's paper, support for the NIEO, and other aspects of his talk, such as his criticism for Multi-National Corporations and calls for their regulation, were hotly debated throughout the consultation. Before his talk, the working draft for the consultation's statement of commitment to simple lifestyle didn't include mention of the NIEO, but thanks in large part to Hay's presentation, it was incorporated into the statement. This eventually became the most controversial issue as Lausanne leadership tried to decide what to do with Sider's brand of lifestyle religion, which, thanks to the voices of dissenters like Padilla, Mangalwadi, and Hay, had taken on a measure of the anti-free enterprise bias they had worked so hard to prevent.<sup>133</sup>

---

<sup>131</sup> Vishal Mangalwadi to Ronald Sider, February 27, 1979. BGCA Lausanne Records box 36 folder 14.

<sup>132</sup> Donald Hay, "The International Socio-Economic-Political Order and our Lifestyle," in Sider, ed., *Lifestyle in the Eighties*, 126.

<sup>133</sup> Stott referred to these subjects as being "much debated" in correspondence with Billy Graham. Stott to Graham, May 14, 1980. BGCA John Stott Papers box 590 folder 11.



*Figure 6 – (L - R): John Stott, David Watson, Donald Hay, and Vinay Samuel at Consultation*

### **An Evangelical Commitment to Simple Lifestyle**

The consultation participants spent much of their time working to produce a statement, the “Evangelical Commitment to Simple Lifestyle,” which they expected to become the basis of a Lausanne Occasional Paper, the movement’s category for official, authoritative documents. The third Lausanne Occasional Paper, John Stott’s exposition and commentary on the Lausanne Covenant, had been read widely in the Lausanne network, and Sider and colleagues expected that their lifestyle religion document would be in the same vein. They hoped it would be circulated as the movement’s fifth official paper, published in time to be distributed at Lausanne’s second official congress to be held in Pattaya, Thailand in the summer of 1980. The Lausanne Director of Communications, Stan Izon, wrote to Sider’s staff two months before the Consultation to give guidelines for the proposed publication, stating that they expected to have it published by May.

Predictably, the statement contained a lot of text on the importance of personal lifestyle with the group committing to the kind of intensive self-management that characterizes lifestyle religion. “[w]e determined to re-examine our income and expenditure, in order to manage on less and give away more,” the statement read.

We resolve to renounce waste and oppose extravagance in personal living, clothing and housing, travel and church buildings. We also accept the distinction between necessities and luxuries, creative hobbies and empty status symbols, modesty and vanity, occasional celebrations and normal routine, and between the service of God and slavery to fashion.<sup>134</sup>

This was an endorsement of the intense governance so central to lifestyle religion, as each person and household was expected to engage in “conscientious thought and decision” on where to draw the line between each of these things. It also reflected the commonplace metaphor of enslavement to refer to the experiences of affluent Christians living in the West.

However, thanks to the critical voice of speakers like Padilla, Mangalwadi, and Hay, who had basically refused the terms of debate and focused on economic structures rather than lifestyle choices, the statement then took a turn into multiple sections on issues of international development and governance. After a section on “International Development” that stated “the action of governments is essential,” the statement continued with a section on “Justice and Politics” that called on all Christians to “participate in the active struggle to create a just and responsible society,” concluding with a call for balance: “While personal commitment to change our lifestyle without political action to change systems of injustice lacks effectiveness, political action without personal commitment lacks integrity.”<sup>135</sup>

In these sections on development and justice, the statement made direct mention of the issues Donald Hay had introduced at the consultation: namely, the New International Economic Order and the role of multi-national corporations. In retrospect, the statement’s position on the NIEO and MNCs were fairly mild, but these would prove incredibly controversial among the evangelical establishment with whom Sider had struggled to stay in good graces. On the NIEO, the statement was quite non-committal, simply acknowledging that “the call for a New

---

<sup>134</sup> “Evangelical Commitment to Simple Lifestyle,” in Sider, ed., *Lifestyle in the Eighties*, 16.

<sup>135</sup> “An Evangelical Commitment to Simple Lifestyle,” 17-18.



International Economic Order expresses the justified frustration of the Third World,” without actually endorsing any of its positions.<sup>136</sup> Similarly, the criticism of multi-national corporations was rather mild, simply suggesting that “in many cases multi-national corporations reduce local initiative in the countries where they work, and tend to oppose any fundamental change in government,” a critique that in some ways still shifts the focus onto locals whose entrepreneurial spirit isn’t quite strong enough to compete with the power of a large corporation.<sup>137</sup>

Despite the relative mildness of these positions, Lausanne and BGEA leadership were immediately alarmed. They had, in fact, already wondered whether they should keep their promise to Sider and publish his consultation’s statement for these exact reasons. In mid-1979, Stott had written to Lausanne chairman Leighton Ford in the aftermath of the Allan Emery affair to process their growing concerns further. “You raise the question of publication. We are not, I think, committed to an LOP, and I can understand your anxiety for the name of LCWE,” wrote Stott. “If the Report is good and balanced, however, I personally would like it to be an LOP...I wonder if we could postpone this decision until we see the quality of the Report?”<sup>138</sup> The fate of Sider’s plans for a major commitment to lifestyle religion in evangelicalism’s biggest network hung in the balance, depending on whether he could make it apolitical enough. But Sider was blissfully unaware of these concerns, however, writing immediately after the Consultation in his Simple Lifestyle Newsletter that he was confident that his Consultation’s findings would become the next major LOP: “This paper will be number five of the L.O.P. series and should be available to the public before the end of the year.”<sup>139</sup> In a letter to Stott, director of communications Stan

---

<sup>136</sup> This reaction is reminiscent of establishment treatment of the Black Lives Matter movement, acknowledging that it expresses righteous frustration, while shying away from any of its specific positions.

<sup>137</sup> “An Evangelical Commitment to Simple Lifestyle,” 17.

<sup>138</sup> John Stott to Leighton Ford, June 6, 1979. BGCA Lausanne Records box 49 folder 11.

<sup>139</sup> “Final Newsletter,” May 1980. BGCA Lausanne Records box 39 folder 37.

Izon was also initially positive about the prospects, saying that he hoped to get the LOP “off the press and into the hands of the COWE participants prior to their departure to Thailand,” referring to the major upcoming Lausanne gathering in Pattaya.<sup>140</sup>

Somewhere in the immediate aftermath of the consultation, as the Commitment to Evangelical Simple Lifestyle started circulating in the press and in Lausanne’s own print network, leadership in the Lausanne Committee and the Billy Graham Evangelical Association began raising more direct questions about whether a statement that expressed sympathy for the NIEO and criticized western nations and their MNCs should be associated so directly with Lausanne. Izon, Lausanne’s director of communications, but working out of BGEA offices in Minnesota, had written to Stott on April 3rd expressing his confidence that the LOP would be out that summer. On May 16th, he wrote back to Stott to say his office had decided to hold up publication of LOP 5, citing two reasons: finances (mentioning all the money they had spent on subsidizing plane tickets for participants as a huge strain on their budget) and the writing quality of the report, which, to Izon and colleagues, did not present a “balanced picture.”<sup>141</sup>

Although the archive is not definitive on what caused this about-face, it is worth noting that Billy Graham, the single most influential figure in this network, wrote a letter on April 25, addressed to Stott, in which he said the commitment “greatly disturbed” him. Ever the Cold Warrior, Graham predictably took issue with the LOPs criticism of the West, bemoaning the statement’s indifference toward “the oil producing nations gouging the rest of the world...or the lack of freedom in the Eastern world.”<sup>142</sup> In what was probably a veiled critique of the NIEO, Graham also pointed out that “nor is there mention of the vast problems to a small country like

---

<sup>140</sup> Stan Izon to John Stott, April 3, 1980. BGCA Lausanne Records box 286 folder 8.

<sup>141</sup> Stan Izon to John Stott, May 16, 1980. BGCA John Stott Papers box 590 folder 11.

<sup>142</sup> Billy Graham to John Stott, April 25, 1980. BGCA John Stott Papers folder 11:4.

Jamaica when the multi-national corporations pull out,” referring to the Manley government’s attempts at creating domestic autonomy and social democracy in Jamaica, which had been seen by many NIEO advocates as a blueprint for their international proposals.<sup>143</sup> Like Alan Emery of the BGEA had done two years prior with his confidential letter to Lausanne chairman Leighton Ford, Graham preferred to remain behind the scenes on the issue, assuring Stott that he would “not express them publicly, but perhaps sometime we can chat about them.”<sup>144</sup> And though never made public, Graham’s disturbance at the text of the Commitment seems to have reverberated quickly throughout Lausanne’s leadership network, given how swiftly Izon at the BGEA offices put a stop to the Commitment’s immediate publication as an official Lausanne document and the plans to circulate it at the next major Lausanne event that summer.

Graham’s critiques were echoed elsewhere in published responses to the consultation, such as an article written by J.A.E. Vermaat on behalf of the Dutch Evangelical Broadcasting Corporation.<sup>145</sup> In Vermaat’s view, there was “too much ill thought out activism in the document,” echoing Graham and Ford’s concerns that “there is a strong tendency, not only in ecumenical circles but in evangelical circles as well, to condemn almost anything that is ‘Western’ and to ignore almost all other evils.” The writer took special umbrage with Sider’s criticism of the International Monetary Fund, which hadn’t made into the Commitment document itself, but had been publicized as part of Sider’s keynote address.<sup>146</sup> Vermaat wrote,

Often those political leaders who denounce the West and the IMF have destroyed their own national economies by nationalizing their industry, thus discouraging investments from within or from abroad. In Jamaica, the Manley administration has completely

---

<sup>143</sup> On the identification between the Manley government and the NIEO in general, see: Getachew, *Worldmaking After Empire*, 171-175.

<sup>144</sup> Graham to Stott, April 25, 1980.

<sup>145</sup> J.A.E. Vermaat to John Stott, June 11, 1980. BGCA Lausanne Records box 144 folder 12.

<sup>146</sup> Sider, “Living More Simply for Evangelism and Justice,” *Lifestyle in the Eighties*, 27.

demolished the national economy and is now trying to put the blame on others for the economic chaos.<sup>147</sup>

Just like Graham in his private letter, Vermaat pointed to Jamaica as proof of the NIEO's misguidance and the enduring value of western economic institutions like the IMF.

### **Lausanne Occasional Paper 20**

With the plans for immediate publication by Lausanne officially put on hold, Sider and Stott began considering how to regroup and bring something to publication within the Lausanne network. Given Stan Izon's initial optimism about the project, Sider had expected to publish it in the summer of 1980 so that it could be in the hands of all those attending the major Lausanne Congress in Pattaya, possibly making waves and leading to further discussion of the topic at what was the first official follow up event since the landmark 1974 Congress.

With this no longer an option, Sider and Stott turned instead to Alan Nichols, an Australian pastor and writer who had attended the Consultation in London and expressed interest in writing a commentary on the Commitment. Sider wrote to Nichols that June stating that he had revised his initial expectation that the paper would be out in time to make a splash at the Lausanne gathering in Pattaya.<sup>148</sup> At some point that summer, the pressure of organizing, speaking, writing about, and defending these consultations became too much for Sider, who wrote to Stott in October that he was experiencing "exhaustion and near-collapse," thinking it "wise to cut down," on his responsibilities.<sup>149</sup> After three years of intense pressure from powerful figures like Billy Graham, Hudson Armerding, Stanley Mooneyham, and Leighton Ford to prevent his vision of lifestyle religion from veering into something critical of western economic power, free markets, and multi-national corporations, Sider was too exhausted to continue.

---

<sup>147</sup> J.A.E. Vermaat, "Evangelicals and Social Ethics," BGCA Lausanne Records box 36 folder 26.

<sup>148</sup> Ronald Sider to Alan Nichols, June 11, 1980. BGCA John Stott Papers box 286 folder 8.

<sup>149</sup> John Stott to Ronald Sider, November 24, 1980. BGCA Lausanne Records box 36 folder 7.

Over the coming months, Stott became the key point person for the document, working with Nichols to re-write things in a way that could defend the statement from persistent criticisms about anti-western and anti-business bias. In response to Nichols's first draft, Stott wrote, "I want to suggest, if I may, that you re-read your [manuscript] through the eyes of our critics, of whom there have been a number." For Stott, given the way influential figures had intervened and delayed publication earlier that year, it was still a very real possibility that Lausanne would distance itself from the topic completely. "I really fear," he wrote, "that if we do not meet criticisms, LCWE may not be willing to authorize the publication of this MS as an LOP."<sup>150</sup>

To prevent this, Stott made many direct edits (to which Nichols responded in bemusement, "I have never been so edited in my life!") to respond to pressures from Lausanne leadership to bring the LOP more in line with their economic perspectives.<sup>151</sup> In the first place, he worked to distance the document from any kind of political or economic standpoint completely by inserting a qualifier early on "that we had too few expert economists at our Consultation." Even so, mentions of economic issues couldn't be removed entirely since this new version of was simply a commentary on the existing commitment, which itself mentioned the NIEO and MNCs directly. So, Stott edited Nichols's commentary to ensure even more vagueness and ambivalence toward both. With the NIEO, Nichols had initially written that "While the Consultation sympathized with the concern of some Christians to call for a New International Economic Order, the Consultation did not quite support that call," implying that there were a good number of actual NIEO sympathizers present.<sup>152</sup> Stott edited this to say,

---

<sup>150</sup> John Stott to Alan Nichols, November 24, 1980. BGCA Lausanne Records box 144 folder 12.

<sup>151</sup> Alan Nichols to John Stott, December 18, 1980. BGCA John Stott Papers box 590 folder 11.

<sup>152</sup> Alan Nichols, Draft of "An Evangelical Commitment to Simple Lifestyle: Exposition and Commentary," BGEA Lausanne Records box 36 folder 9.

“Though not everybody at the Consultation supported the call for a New International Economic Order, yet all saw that it expresses justified frustration of the Third World in the face of economic inequality,” removing that implication.<sup>153</sup>

On MNCs, Nichols had actually expanded on the Commitment’s mild criticism by stating that they cause,

substantial damage over which locals have had no control. For example, a number of multi-national corporations have been systematically clearing areas of Amazonia for short-term cultivation, regardless of warnings that this will affect the soil irreparably in the course of a few years. Others have deliberately moved toxic processes to less developed countries to avoid the more stringent pollution laws that have been enacted in more advanced countries.<sup>154</sup>

Stott wrote in the margins that this section “should be omitted,” with the discussion of MNCs instead maintaining a focus on how they “reduce local initiative,” that vaguely conservative criticism of local people living near MNC production sites that had shown up in the original commitment. On top of that, Stott elected to insert new praise for MNCs that had not been present at in the original commitment: “Not that we were blind to the positive benefits which MNCs have brought in some cases.” Elsewhere in the draft, Stott added more equivocation on the consultation’s initial endorsement of socio-political action and removed several occurrences of the word “activist,” which he said could be considered a pejorative term.<sup>155</sup>

Even with these major edits from Stott, which added further ambivalence about the original commitment’s already vague praise of the NIEO and political action, along with criticism of MNCs and western economic institutions, the next version of the draft circulated to Lausanne leadership in early 1981 still stirred up further controversy. For Leighton Ford, within

---

<sup>153</sup> Alan Nichols, *LOP 20: An Evangelical Commitment to Simple Lifestyle*, (Wheaton, IL: Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, 1980).

<sup>154</sup> Alan Nichols, Draft of “An Evangelical Commitment to Simple Lifestyle: Exposition and Commentary.”

<sup>155</sup> Stott, handwritten edits on: Alan Nichols, Draft of “An Evangelical Commitment to Simple Lifestyle: Exposition and Commentary.”

“There also appears to me at points to be a strong ideological bias against business in the free enterprise system,” wrote Lausanne chairman Leighton Ford in a letter to another Lausanne leader. Despite Stott’s many edits, Ford still wanted to “raise the question of whether LCWE should be involved in publishing a position which may possibly be one-sided and could well prove disruptive and divisive.”<sup>156</sup> In a lengthy missive to Stott, Ford reiterated his “major concerns” that the document had unduly elevated political action, taken a pronounced anti-Western bias. Ford was so disturbed by the commentary’s “direct or implied references to the West,” that he took the time to count them, finding over twenty that he considered pejorative. Ford’s lengthiest criticism of the LOP draft focused on what he saw as an “ambiguity of language” around support of the New International Economic Order and criticism of MNCs. Referring to his colleagues on the Lausanne Committee, Ford wrote that “this has been taken as a call for socialism...it has left room for those who wish to be critical to suggest that the statement implies a socialist or Marxist bias.”<sup>157</sup> Ultimately, wrote Ford, “I think I would probably find it difficult to associate with some sections of the statement and commentary unless there is some further editing,” which, as the chairman of the Lausanne Committee, implied what he had stated directly to Osei-Mensah: Unless the anti-western views were further edited, Sider’s lifestyle religion paper would simply not be published by Lausanne.<sup>158</sup>

At this stage, weary of asking for yet more rounds of revisions, Stott replied to Ford agreeing to remove several of the statements about the West. Beyond that, however, he defended his previous edits that had added praise for MNCs and further distanced the commentary from the NIEO (Incidentally, Ford had taken the call for a New International Economic Order to be an

---

<sup>156</sup> Leighton Ford to Timothy Osei-Mensah, January 13, 1981. BGCA Lausanne Records box 144 folder 12.

<sup>157</sup> Leighton Ford to John Stott, March 10, 1981, BGCA Lausanne Records box 36 folder 9.

<sup>158</sup> Leighton Ford to John Stott, March 10, 1981.

ambiguous and vague call for socialism, an interpretation that suggested he had never heard of the NIEO. Stott corrected him on this point, stating plainly in his reply that it “is an already accepted and understood expression. It is neither vague, nor a call to socialism.”<sup>159</sup>

Nichols wrote to Stott in April that he was no longer available to give time to the manuscript.<sup>160</sup> Stott asked Sider, who had stepped back from the process the previous fall, to make the final revisions on the LOP before moving forward with publication, saying that Nichols had accepted all of Ford’s criticisms and encouraging Sider to take them on board.<sup>161</sup> With an air of resignation, Sider wrote to Stott, copying Ford and the Consultation’s other critics at Lausanne to “confess to a fairly high level of (increasing) frustration at the fact that it is now well over a year from the Consultation and we still have not gotten the Lausanne Occasional Paper out.”<sup>162</sup> Nonetheless, Sider went ahead with the edits that Leighton Ford had demanded, before sending the final version to Stan Izon in July of 1981, well over a year past the initial target date for publication, and long after the Pattaya Lausanne Congress where Sider had hoped to make a splash with his model of lifestyle religion.

In the end, the official Lausanne document, “An Evangelical Commitment to Simple Lifestyle,” had been so edited and so delayed, that its appearance sometime around the new year in 1982 made very little splash at all. At one time, Sider and his correspondents had imagined it as the next major Lausanne paper, a follow up to the landmark Lausanne Covenant of 1974. Sider had expected to see 4,000 or 5,000 copies printed and distributed to evangelical leaders in Pattaya. Having been delayed so severely, it ended up being buried under the fifteen very minor statements on “Christian Witness” to various groups that came out of Pattaya, making the

---

<sup>159</sup> John Stott to Leighton Ford, April 2, 1981. BGCA Lausanne Records box 36 folder 9.

<sup>160</sup> Alan Nichols to John Stott, April 21, 1981. BGCA John Stott Papers box 590 folder 11.

<sup>161</sup> John Stott to Ronald Sider, April 24, 1981. BGCA Lausanne Records box 144 folder 12.

<sup>162</sup> Ronald Sider to John Stott, May 11, 1981. BGCA Lausanne Records box 144 folder 12.



twentieth, rather than the fifth, official Lausanne paper, at a time when the prestige and significance of the documents had been significantly watered down by more than dozen brief, minor statements. Given its lengthy editing process, the final document was full of ambiguity and equivocation, mentioning things like the NIEO or MNCs or the IMF, but refusing to pick a side on any of them. Instead, what came to the fore was its vision of lifestyle religion, intended by the evangelical establishment as an apolitical response to planetary crisis, rather than one connected to or embedded with larger political and economic projects, be they calls for structural change or redistribution.

### **Conclusion**

“The consultation went much beyond [its initial purpose] into larger economic and political concerns,” a shocked Leighton Ford had noted more than a year after the event. At one point, “personal changes are described as ‘empty gestures or self-indulgent tokens,’” seemingly undermining “the original focus on personal lifestyle.”<sup>163</sup> These were precisely the biases Ford, Graham, Mooneyham, and Armerding had been trying to keep in check for four years. But in the crucible of the consultation itself, like with the 1974 Lausanne Congress, critics of western economic discourse had been able to shift the outcome slightly, this time through subtle critiques of the basic terms of neoliberal subjectivity.

At one point, resisting the notion that simple lifestyle itself would bring about needed changes in the world, the consultation’s statement on simple lifestyle suggested that “only political action can bring fundamental structural change,” to which Ford responded, “it seems to me we may be falling into the error of putting too much reliance on political action.”<sup>164</sup> Here, we

---

<sup>163</sup> Ford to Stott, March 10, 1981.

<sup>164</sup> Ford to Stott, March 10, 1981.

see perhaps most obviously a statement endorsing neoliberal reason.<sup>165</sup> With their ongoing attempts to limit the consultation's emphasis on structures of oppression, Lausanne leaders revealed a desire to protect the wealthy from political challenge by reimagining the problem of global inequality in terms of consumer choice. Even so, the documents produced out of the Simple Lifestyle Consultation preserve a record of subtle consultation as voices like that of Vishal Mangalwadi rejected the extension of simple lifestyle's market framing onto his work of hospitality for the unhoused.

While Mangalwadi and others showed up at the consultation ready to address their misgivings, Bonnie Greene, editor of the Canadian arts magazine, *Vanguard*, declined Sider's invitation to participate in the consultation. After having spoken in favor of simple lifestyle many times herself, she had come to see big conferences like Sider's consultation as yet another "consumer item for progressive Christians." After describing the difficulty of arranging a large conference to a Caribbean friend of hers, the friend responded, "Now I understand why it is taking so long for North American Christians to respond to the cries of third world Christians. You still think like rich people in spite of your theology." Thinking like rich people, American advocates of simple lifestyle have often curved further inward, turning their sites of consumption into intense moments of self-fashioning in order to view themselves as responsible navigators of neoliberalism's ubiquitous markets, remaining passive in relation to the way those markets themselves can be structured to accumulate capital at the expense of the poor. Instead, they turn inward to ensure their own day-to-day experiences are freed of these moral injuries. Or in the closing words of Bonnie Greene's refusal to join the consultation, "I see passivity as people trot

---

<sup>165</sup> Wendy Brown, "American Nightmare: Neoliberalism, Neoconservatism, and De-democratization," *Political Theory* 34:6 (2006): 703

from one conference to the next to be flogged about their materialism and to leave with a sense of having paid their penance.”<sup>166</sup>

---

<sup>166</sup> Bonnie Greene to Ronald Sider and Horace Fenton, January 10, 1978. BGCA Lausanne Records box 36, folder 37.

## MARKET

A year after the end of World War II, Edna Ruth Byler travelled with her husband to Puerto Rico to visit a relief and development site organized by the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC). The MCC had been founded in 1920 to provide aid for Mennonites in the Soviet Union. In 1941, Byler's family relocated from Kansas, where her husband had been teaching at a small Mennonite college, to take on full-time work with the MCC, whose overseas programs were expanding rapidly as they tried to provide Civilian Public Service opportunities for draft-eligible pacifists. Settling near the MCC headquarters in Akron, Pennsylvania, Edna Byler initially took on work hosting the many young Mennonites passing through the facility in preparation for service placements, while her husband involved himself more directly in the international work, initially providing support for MCC workers in Europe.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> "Tribute to Edna Ruth Byler," *Gospel Herald* July 27, 1976, 582.

After World War II, in reaction to a new international political economy characterized by worldwide rapid decolonization linked with continued inequities as western nation-states worked to maintain their hegemony, many North American Mennonites began requesting that the MCC organize short-term placements in these economically depressed areas.<sup>2</sup> In 1946, when Byler's husband was asked to visit a service site in Puerto Rico, she chose to join him after his many trips to visit MCC sites in Europe had proven "trying" for the couple.<sup>3</sup> On this trip, Byler recalled, the "wives of MCC workers took me into a locked room and showed me a display of needlework. The lovely pieces of fine embroidery had been made in tiny huts on the steep mountain sides by the poor women of the countryside."<sup>4</sup> The Mennonite women asked Byler to take samples of the needlework back to the U.S. and try to sell them to help support the seamstresses. Byler hesitantly obliged, taking the samples with her but unsure what to do with them. Back in Pennsylvania, she received an invitation to speak at a sewing club about her trip. Not sure what would come of it, she brought the Puerto Rican needlework with her. To her pleasant surprise, demand for the products was overwhelming. In the years that followed, Byler continued accepting needlework and crafts from the various countries she traveled to with her husband and visiting women's clubs and congregations around the country to sell them to eager consumers (fig. 1).

---

<sup>2</sup> Steven M. Nolt, "Globalizing a Separate People: World Christianity and North American Mennonites, 1940-1990, *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 84 (October 2010), 502-504. 491.

<sup>3</sup> "Tribute to Edna Ruth Byler," 582.

<sup>4</sup> Esther Eby Glass "The MCC Needlework Lady," *Women's Activities Letter* 1964. MCC Self-Help Program Records, 1962-1972, box 1, folder 1/5.



*Figure 1 - Byler (left) displays products at Fairfield Mennonite Church*

Byler's program, what was initially dubbed the "Needlework and Crafts Project," emerged from her position as a mediating figure in the MCC's global network. As she travelled with her husband on short assignments, she became a node between two groups placing two different kinds of demands on her. On her travels to various parts of the developing world, Byler repeatedly encountered calls for more material support in relieving the poverty of indigenous people at MCC service sites. Back in the United States, she discovered a growing desire for a way to respond among those encountering near constant images of planetary problems on the nightly news and elsewhere. "We hear a lot today about world need," read an invitation to one of Byler's events, "and too often we suffer from the helpless feeling of wanting to help but not

knowing where or how to do this.”<sup>5</sup> Travelling the country with needlework and crafts made in the Global South, Byler provided American churchgoers a one-woman supply chain that, as a regional director described it years later, “allows buying with a purpose.”<sup>6</sup> Bringing a religious purpose into acts of consumption, the private religious desires of Byler and her consumers were given a public channel through the global market. In so doing, Byler had taken the first steps toward the creation of modern Fair Trade, a now ubiquitous term used to designate commodities whose production and consumption are said benefit, rather than harm, the planet and its people. Over the course of the 1960s and 1970s, her supply chain expanded to include a network of production sites, warehouses, and brick-and-mortar stores, a retail chain that is known today as Ten Thousand Villages, meaning that Byler is remembered as the creator of modern Fair Trade.

Emerging in the late 1940s and 1950s, Byler’s new supply chain coincided with a period of rapid expansion for the white middle-class, with the creation of suburbs and the nuclear family home as a symbolically charged focal point of what historian Lizabeth Cohen identifies as “a new postwar ideal of the purchaser as citizen who simultaneously fulfilled personal desire and civic obligation by consuming.”<sup>7</sup> This new role of purchaser as citizen was generally ascribed to women, for whom decisions about dress, décor, and diets became markers of responsibility and virtue. When Byler arrived back in Pennsylvania in 1947 with her first shipment of Puerto Rican needlework, unsure of how she might publicize her need to sell it, her religious project came into contact with this postwar consumer culture. In this way, the religious quality of the Fair Trade movement was shaped by the conditions and qualities of being public within this economic and

---

<sup>5</sup> Mrs. Shutt, “International Gift Festival Held in Fairfield, PA,” *MCC News Service*, November 21, 1969. MCC Self-Help Program Records, box 12, folder 12/6.

<sup>6</sup> E.C. Cressman, Self-Help Project (Ontario) Report, November 16, 1968. MCC Self-Help Program Records 1962-1972, box 1, folder 1/6.

<sup>7</sup> Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers’ Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), 119.

cultural moment. Fair Trade, in turn, helped provide an infrastructure for a consumer-based lifestyle religion that, as the neoliberal project expanded through the 1970s, came to discipline environmental and planetary concern into something that occurred through the market behaviors of nuclear families. As an infrastructure project, fair trade helped reroute political agency through the nuclear family's spheres of influence in the marketplace, the church, and the home, rather than within the diverse activist coalitions that had flourished in the 1960s.

In the early parts of the decade, mainstream Protestant leaders behind ECAP and ESA had hoped to channel their constituents' holy frustration into political advocacy and collective activism. Byler's fair-trade program provided an alternative much more befitting the lifestyle religion that was beginning to flourish in response to the world food crisis. With their consultations and conferences and sermons and presentations and official statements, the denominational bureaucrats and organizers behind ECAP, ESA, WHEAT, and Lausanne's lifestyle consultations had helped hammer out lifestyle religion's contours through debate about whether it was meant to lead to collective environmental action or to circumvent it. In the end, these deliberations had revealed a persistent trend toward an individuated, apolitical emphasis on consumer choices as the proper, market-oriented response to environmental concern. Byler's supply chain and several parallel projects would prove crucial for providing lasting networks to help circulate and solidify this brand of lifestyle religion.

Though it had been founded in 1946, Byler's fair-trade project began expanding beyond the church-sales out of the trunk of her car and into a network of mail-order catalogues and brick-and-mortar in the 1970s. Taking the emergence of lifestyle religion into account, MCC fair-trade's expansion that decade makes sense. Mainstream Protestants across the denominational spectrum were embracing the promise of lifestyle religion as a salve for their



planetary anxieties. But denominational statements and one-off conferences could only do so much. Ultimately, they needed an infrastructure that might help solidify these practices in their lives.

Projects like Byler's helped connect users through material culture and print networks to the daily practice of lifestyle religion. Her work represents one of several important religious projects that provided a lasting infrastructure for this brand of environmental religion to become a fixture in mainstream Protestantism. Alongside Byler's efforts, the Church World Service (CWS) developed a parallel supply chain known as SERRV, while mainline workers developed their own print network for lifestyle religion through Alternatives, Inc., a non-profit that provided a catalogue full of items and guidelines for lifestyle change. While financial backers and prominent leaders like Billy Graham and John Stott worked to ensure that lifestyle religion would be ideologically wedded to the promise of free markets and western economic power, rather than being associated with a critique of capitalism as some had hoped, projects like these provided a lasting material basis for the lived religious experience of neoliberalism (understood here as a project to extend American economic hegemony in the postwar world under the guise of free markets) among middle-class mainstream Protestants.

In this chapter, I trace the development of two important pieces of infrastructure for lifestyle religion: MCC and CWS's chains of fair-trade gift shops as well as the mainline non-profit Alternatives, Inc.'s lifestyle catalogues. In this context, I mean infrastructure literally, referring to the physical objects and spaces that provided a network for lifestyle religion's circulation as well as its lasting influence in North American environmental thought. All along, I have been trying to understand the way that lifestyle religion mediated the lived religious experience of neoliberalism, exerting market discipline on devotees who were trained to embrace

the promise of consumer-oriented environmental action.<sup>8</sup> Rather than just gesture broadly toward “neoliberal logics” or “neoliberal reason” as discursive forces that helped mediate shifts in the political economy at the level of culture, I look to material infrastructures that brought objects and humans into relation with one another and facilitated embodied experiences of these shifting conceptions of subjectivity, sociality, and agency within neoliberalism’s economic imaginary.

Writing about what he calls their “poetics,” anthropologist Brian Larkin’s argues that infrastructures “emerge out of and store within them forms of desire and fantasy.”<sup>9</sup> Insofar as religious communities concern themselves with dreams of the world, and insofar as, according to Kathryn Lofton, “the religious imagination is constantly, perhaps increasingly and inevitably, offering us dreams of the world based on our relationships with commodities,” the study of infrastructure projects might offer a clearer glimpse of how those dreams are produced, circulated, and enacted.<sup>10</sup> While infrastructure studies often focus on transportation, utilities, or energy, here I want to focus specifically on infrastructures of commerce and trade in order to trace the way the neoliberal project’s arrangements of power, its conceptions of sociality,

---

<sup>8</sup> I understand neoliberalism itself primarily as a concrete political and economic project. I am wary of vague or overdetermined references to neoliberalism as a consistent cultural, discursive, or ideological assemblage. Instead, I want to provide an account of one vector through which people learned to like neoliberalism, to embrace its economic imaginary, its fantastic stories about the free market’s omnipotence. Following Foucault, Wendy Brown calls attention to the role of “political reason” as a disciplinary force that trains people to think within markets. Tracking the infrastructures of lifestyle religion, I aim to show the way this discipline moves beyond discourse and occurs in sensuous, affective, and embodied registers through the circulation of things. Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism’s Stealth Revolution* (Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books, 2015).

<sup>9</sup> Brian Larkin, “The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 42, 2013, 329.

<sup>10</sup> Kathryn Lofton, *Consuming Religion* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 12.

My sense that, among other things, religion is concerned with “dreams of the world” also comes from this text: “whenever we see dreams of and for the world articulated, whenever we see those dreams organized into legible rituals, schematics, and habits, we glimpse the domain that the word religion describes” (3).

David Walker’s work in *Railroading Religion* is one recent example of the fruitfulness of studying how actual physical infrastructures (in this case, the transcontinental railroad) shape religion (its definition, its organization, its dreams for the future). Walker, *Railroading Religion: Mormons, Tourists, and the Corporate Spirit of the West* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019). See also: Isaiah Ellis, “Infrastructure between Anthropology, Geography, and Religious Studies,” in Katie Day and Elise M. Edwards, editors, *The Routledge Handbook of Religion and Cities* (New York: Routledge, 2021), 94-104.

relation, and agency, are carried and mediated by infrastructure. Print networks, supply chains, gift shops, and cookbooks produce embodied religious experiences of neoliberalism's economic imaginary.

In his introduction to Actor-network theory, Bruno Latour's writes, "It is always things—and I now mean this last word literally—which in practice, lend their 'steely' quality to the hapless 'society'." For Latour, the best possible definition of the "power of society" would be "some sort of summary for all the entities already mobilized to render asymmetries longer lasting."<sup>11</sup> Looking to the things that circulated in fair trade supply chains and simple living print networks, I argue that lifestyle religion mediates a lived, embodied engagement with the neoliberal political economy's vast system of asymmetric power, assembling free market discipline with coloniality and anti-blackness as well as the retrenchment of the heteronormative nuclear family and its attendant consumer marketplace, offered to subjects as the proper site for political agency in response to planetary problems.

### **The Market**

At its heart, lifestyle religion is rooted in the promise of markets: the claim that they can lend real-world power to a person's everyday economic choices. Whether capitalism can make good on that promise is another question. We might rightly wonder to what degree the "free market" is an ideological construction meant to justify certain arrangements of power and capital. But even so, with their dream of seamless, unfettered, liberating economic linkages,

---

<sup>11</sup> Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 68.

American capitalism's postwar advocates were themselves helping lay the groundwork for a lived religious practice of neoliberalism through the form of lifestyle choice.<sup>12</sup>

Fitting, then, that one of lifestyle religion's most prominent pieces of infrastructure was a literal supply chain linking producers from the Global South with consumers of Christian lifestyle in North America. In the immediate aftermath of World War II, two Christian agencies developed alternate networks of exchange in hopes of bringing relief to war-torn Europe and the so-called Third World through the purchase of goods that are today known as "fair trade." The first of these was developed by Edna Byler at the MCC. Beginning immediately after the war as a way to bring finances to needleworkers at a Christian relief and development site in Puerto Rico, in the 1970s, the MCC project developed into a national brand of brick-and-mortar gift shops initially called the Self-Help Program. The program's integrated supply chain linked producers, buyers, warehouses, store managers, and shoppers, marketing itself by the 1970s as a network that bestowed power on consumer lifestyle choices to change the world. Also in the immediate aftermath of World War II, Church of the Brethren workers involved with Church-World Service (CWS) developed a similar project, known as Sales Exchange for Refugee Rehabilitation and Vocation (SERRV). If, as political theorist Wendy Brown puts it, neoliberal

---

<sup>12</sup> In their desire to sell free market fundamentalism to North Americans and Western Europeans, some of the Vienna-, Virginia-, and Chicago-school economists behind the neoliberal had incredible success both in gaining the ear of the public through media appearances and gaining the ear of government officials through advising roles. Milton Friedman is the example par excellence, advising presidents on market fundamentals and explaining the idea of the invisible hand to children through animated film strips, so that by the 1980s and 1990s, Reagan, Clinton, and the Bushes alike were espousing market freedoms in the neoliberal idiom. The result was that, as David Harvey puts it, neoliberalism became "hegemonic as a mode of discourse. It has pervasive effects on ways of thought to the point where it has become incorporated into the common-sense way many of us interpret, live in, and understand the world." Or in Margaret Thatcher's slightly punchier version, quoted in Harvey: "Economics are the method, but the object is to change the soul." Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 3, 23.

My goal is to show the way lifestyle religion, as a response to the very planetary crises produced by the postwar political economy, *changed the soul* not just on a discursive plane, but also at the level of lived experience, subject formation, and bodily habitus.

political reason recasts collective political problems as individual ones with market solutions, the fair-trade movement spearheaded by MCC and CWS provided a readymade infrastructure for that shifting conception of agency for those who would seek to ameliorate planetary crisis, giving North Americans concerned about the state of the planet convenient access to a material culture of lifestyle religion in a gift shop on Main Street.<sup>13</sup>

As Byler repeatedly stated in interviews and correspondence, she was overwhelmed by demand for the products from the outset. She had tapped into an unexpectedly high demand for the experience of “buying with a purpose” that she was providing a network of largely white, middle-class churchwomen looking for a way of aligning their morally-charged role as postwar homemakers with their anxieties about crises wracking the postwar planet. Although she had initially planned to run the operation out of the trunk of her car, traveling to living rooms and churches, a kind of perfect encapsulation of the U.S.’s postwar suburban infrastructure, the overwhelming demand created a need for continual expansion and structural transformation. Between 1947 and 1953, working alone and without pay, Byler sold nearly \$30,000 in Puerto Rican needlework. In the meantime, she travelled with her husband to other MCC sites, in Hong Kong, Jordan, India, and elsewhere. At each site, MCC workers would persuade her to take samples of needlework or crafts back to the U.S., and the global supply chain that ran through her continued to expand rapidly.<sup>14</sup> During these early years, Byler continued receiving countless invitations to bring product samples to churches across the nation, which for a decade she tried to fill exclusively by packing her car full of samples and driving across country to each site.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> Wendy Brown, “American Nightmare: Neoliberalism, Neoconservatism, and De-democratization,” *Political Theory* 34:6 (2006): 703

<sup>14</sup> Glass, “The MCC Needlework Lady.”

<sup>15</sup> “MCC News Service, “Self-Help Emphasizes ‘Family to Family,’” February 16, 1968. MCC Needlework and Crafts Project Records, box 12, folder 12.

Eventually, when she could no longer keep up with countless requests to bring samples and take orders in person from churches or social clubs around the U.S, she created a catalogue and sample kit to distribute nationally and her project was officially incorporated into MCC under the name “Overseas Needlework and Crafts Project” in 1962.<sup>16</sup> After its incorporation into the MCC, the Needlework and Crafts project established branches in various cities where products were stored for distribution. This expansion helped meet demand, but within a few years, other denominations and relief agencies followed suit and by 1966, the MCC was worrying about competition in the overseas self-help crafts market.<sup>17</sup> Feeling that in many places, the market of Mennonite churchgoers was saturated but that the broader “market is almost unlimited,” staff began to encourage directors of the regional centers to look beyond their own denomination, optimistic that their philosophy was “recognized in all circles as a valid approach to the needs of the world.”<sup>18</sup> Meanwhile, MCC staff became actively engaged in pursuing new suppliers, even recommending products that would seem handmade and traditional in a particular country and thus sell well in the United States.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> *Overseas Needlework and Crafts Catalog*, 1962. MCC Self-Help Program Records, box 1, folder 1/1.

<sup>17</sup> “Overseas Needlework and Crafts Project Update,” 1966. MCC Self-Help Program Records, box 1, folder 1/4.

<sup>18</sup> Snyder to Freheim, “ITEMS TO BE SOLD IN THE NEW SELF-HELP CENTER,” May 14, 1970. MCC Self-Help Program Records 1962-1972, box 1, folder 1/9; Janet Yoder to Art Driedger, July 17, 1971. MCC Self-Help Program Records 1962-1972, box 1, folder 2/1.

<sup>19</sup> Edgard Stoesz, Handwritten note on Janet Yoder to Virginia Ranck, December 8, 1971. MCC Self-Help Program Records 1962-1972, box 1, folder 2/1.



*Figure 2 - An Early SHP Brick-and-Mortar Store*

As it continued to expand, the program was rebranded as “Self-Help Needlework and Crafts” and later, simply, the “Self-Help Program” (SHP).<sup>20</sup> In 1970, MCC opened a brick and mortar store near its headquarters to make items regularly available to consumers (fig. 2).<sup>21</sup> Byler retired that same year, but new leadership quickly established new stores in Bluffton, Ohio and Newton, Kansas, as well as a system for supplying third-party gift shops with Self-Help goods, so that from 1970 to 1974 sales nearly doubled.<sup>22</sup> By 1983, MCC fair trade counted 12 dedicated

<sup>20</sup> In the remainder of this chapter, unless referring specifically to name changing decisions, I call the organization by this name, “Self-Help Program” or SHP to avoid the confusion of its multiple name changes.

<sup>21</sup> Snyder to Freheim, “ITEMS TO BE SOLD IN THE NEW SELF-HELP CENTER.”

<sup>22</sup> MCC News Service, “New Director for Self-Help Program,” November 29, 1974. MCC Needlework and Crafts Project Records, box 1970-1979, folder 1974.

“global gift” shops and 64 more combined “global gift” and thrift stores.<sup>23</sup> In the ensuing decades, the global supply chain that had initially flowed through Byler alone continued to expand. Eventually, the program was renamed Ten Thousand Villages as it grew to over 150 brick and mortar stores across the United States and Canada and, according to one recent assessment, is now the largest individual fair trade organization in the world.<sup>24</sup> As demand on both sides of the supply chain pushed Byler and the MCC to expand the program into a full-fledged global supply chain, it would be shaped by its embeddedness in the U.S. consumer economy as well as its reliance on the globalization of market economies. In the decades after Byler began crisscrossing the country in her car full of needlework samples, engagement with the Mennonite cause of Fair Trade slowly turned into a quintessential consumer experience: going to a brick-and-mortar store to shop for attractive clothing, jewelry, and other consumer goods. But, in its connection to lifestyle religion, it would gain an added facet: reliant on the promise of expanding infrastructures for supply, demand, and exchange, this consumer experience was charged with the dream of planetary agency made possible by globalizing markets.

Just two years after Byler first connected Puerto Rican production with American consumption, a Church of the Brethren community in New Windsor, Maryland, responded similarly to the global economic environment of the late 1940s, this time in war-ravaged Europe. While Self-Help Crafts immediately sought goods from the Global South, connecting consumers to a discourse of virtuous simplicity through Third World cultural authenticity, SERRV began by importing wooden cuckoo clocks from Germany in 1949. Quickly, however, they too expanded

---

<sup>23</sup> “Thrift Shops,” 1983. MCC Self-Help Program Records, box 277, folder 170:36.

<sup>24</sup> Terry A. Wolfer and Katrina del Pilar, “Ten Thousand Villages: Partnering with Artisans to Overcome Poverty,” *Social Work and Christianity* 35:4 (2008) 449-472. 450.



into the Global South, developing their own network of craft distribution that spanned from the East Asia to the Middle East. Dubbed SERRV (Sale Exchange for Refugee Rehabilitation and Vocation), the program eventually became the official fair-trade program of Church World Service, the Protestant mainline's primary organization for global relief and development across these decades. Focusing less on building its own supply chain with dedicated producers, SERRV more often purchased goods from existing craft businesses, becoming a major purchaser and distributor of SHP produced crafts in its own right. SERRV also developed fewer of its own brick-and-mortar stores than Ten Thousand Villages, focusing instead on supplying goods for temporary events like church relief sales and Christmas bazaars (in 1983 it listed two brick-and-mortar stores, one in Johnstown, PA and one near its headquarters in New Windsor, MD). In so doing, SERRV successfully connected Church World Service's broad mainline constituency to fair trade consumption, so that by the 1990s, churchgoers across the mainline, from Baptists and Presbyterians to UCC, were proudly reporting their involvement in fair trade consumption through SERRV sales hosted in their congregations.<sup>25</sup>

These purchases, shoppers were often told, would have a direct and immediate impact on not only one's own distinctive sense of global responsibility, but also on the state of the developing nation where they were produced. If the purchase of a necklace produced in a sweatshop with unsustainably extracted minerals was understood to cause harm to the land and the human community in the region of its origin, so the purchase of hand-carved, wooden beads, advertised in the Self-Help Catalogue as "Job's Tears," was said to have an equal, but opposite,

---

<sup>25</sup> *SERRV News* (Spring 1975). MCC Self-Help Program Records, box 230, folder 137 98. For short historical overviews, see Sally Blundell, *No Nonsense Guide to Fair Trade*, (Oxford: New Internationalist, 2013): 27; and Antonella Viola, "Alternative Trading Associations," in Frederick F. Wherry and Juliet B. Schor, editors, *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Economics and Society* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2015), 98-100. Reports of involvement from Baptists, UCC, & PCUSA come from *American Baptist Quarterly* (Sep. 2001), *Prism* (Jan. 1999), and *Church & Society* (Spring 2006), respectively.

impact: a piece of jewelry whose purchase protected the environment as well as the livelihood of Haitian workers. In critiques of conventional consumption, and the proposed alternative of fair-trade shopping, the promise of the market as trusty transmitter of consumer agency was being sold to shoppers.<sup>26</sup>

Though these processes of ethical formation take place on the bodies and within the private homes of Self-Help consumers, they must not be considered as narrowly private or individualistic religious practices. Their salience came in the way they linked individual consumer acts to a much larger public. Whether the purchases indeed transformed the lives of poor producers, the consumers engaged in a kind of religious formation that obviated the typical distinction between private and public by tying their own bodies to the modern networks of exchange and mediation that created a sense of connectedness to their God's concern for poor people on the other side of the world.

With SHP and SERRV infrastructures in place, fair trade shoppers could practice lifestyle religion through purchases that place their bodies in the neoliberal project's most important public: the globalizing free market. This depends on the union of public and private through practices of consumption in the way the supply chain is said to build intimate connections between people's bodies on either side of the world. Production and consumption come to be understood as not only public economic processes that flow through networks of exchange, but also as sites of intimate connection, linking people on opposite sides of the globe. In the 1960s, SHP promotional articles framed fair-trade production and consumption explicitly in terms of these intimate experiences of global relation. "As she works, she is thinking 'Thank God for the woman in America who ordered this sweater, although she has never seen me,'" wrote one

---

<sup>26</sup> *Self-Help Catalog*, 1972. MCC Needlework and Crafts Project Records, box 12, folder 12-6.

promotional article imagining the inner-life of a fair-trade producer in 1964.<sup>27</sup> “The hand-carved salad bowl on your table not only adds elegance to your dining room,” declared another article in 1969, advertising a Haitian craft to fair-trade consumers, “but also links you with the destitute wood-carver in Haiti.”<sup>28</sup> Here, religious commitments do not reside in a static, differentiated sphere, as more conventional views of modern publics would have it.<sup>29</sup> Rather, they move fluidly through putatively secular networks to seek a change in the world by linking the embodied states of consumer and producer through the supply chain.

Writing about a Bible Society in the U.K., anthropologist Matthew Engelke observes that the market specifically troubles static views of sphere differentiation in modern publics through its engagement in publicity. “Questions of public religion,” he writes, “are also often questions of religion’s publicity, of its manifestations not in spaces and times of politics per se but rather in those of the market.”<sup>30</sup> The term publicity calls attention not to stable, autonomous spheres but rather to the dynamic and fluid movement of religion in spaces of overlap between public and private. Publicity serves as a channel or point of entry for religion into the postwar political economy’s vision of ubiquitous markets. After her 1947 encounter with Puerto Rican needlework, Byler “took samples with her, but she had no idea how she could begin publicizing

---

<sup>27</sup> Glass, “The MCC Needlework Lady.”

<sup>28</sup> Kathleen Froese, quoted in Elaine Penner, “Needlework and Handicraft Sales Boost Needy Families Incomes,” *MCC (Canada) News Service*, 1969. MCC Self-Help Program Records 1962-1972, box 1, folder 1/7.

<sup>29</sup> In José Casanova’s classic formulation, religions may function and even thrive in the modern public square when they comply with modern structural differentiation, understood primarily as the separation of religion from public matters that come under the purview of modern states: “a process of functional differentiation and emancipation of the secular spheres—primarily the state, the economy, and science—from the religious sphere and the concomitant differentiation and specialization of religion within its own newly found religious sphere.” This formulation conjures a static image of fully differentiated, autonomous spheres of economy, politics, scientific inquiry, and religions that interact with one another in public spaces voluntarily scrubbed of ideology in favor of a modern liberal consensus. Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 19, 233.

<sup>30</sup> Matthew Engelke, *God’s Agents: Biblical Publicity in Contemporary England*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2013), 60-61.

the project.”<sup>31</sup> As the MCC helped her develop publicity for fair-trade goods, a base of consumers expanded across North America, encouraged to imagine their religious agency moving fluidly through global networks of exchange. Byler’s project was “bringing Christianity to ‘the market place,’ as an event selling her products described the basic objective.”<sup>32</sup> Shaped by the consumer economy where it sought publicity, religious fair trade came to emphasize highly meaningful, individuated acts of consumption through which consumers might experience a sense of intimate connection to people threatened by planetary crisis on the other side of the world. In the words of the MCC’s 1964 promotional article, at sites of fair-trade consumption, consumers were “reaching out to touch the articles they receive as tenderly as though they were touching the hands that made them!”<sup>33</sup>

SHP and SERRV were deeply shaped by the specific conditions of being public at the time of their emergence around mid-century. To be sure, these projects were not the first examples of political consumerism in American history. The historian Thomas Haskell has suggested that modern capitalism everywhere produces a certain “cognitive style” and creates a “preoccupation with the remote consequences of [each individual’s] actions.”<sup>34</sup> Haskell’s description of capitalism’s cognitive style resonates with the French anthropologist Didier Fassin’s later but better known formulation of late twentieth-century humanitarianism arising from a “secular imaginary of communion and redemption [that] implies a sudden awareness of the fundamentally unequal human condition and an ethical necessity to not remain passive about

---

<sup>31</sup> Glass, “The MCC Needlework Lady.”

<sup>32</sup> “International Gift Festival Held in Fairfield, PA,” MCC News Service, November 21, 1969. MCC Needlework and Crafts Project Records, box 12, folder 12/6.

<sup>33</sup> Glass, “The MCC Needlework Lady.”

<sup>34</sup> Thomas L. Haskell, “Capitalism and the Origins of the Humanitarian Sensibility, Part 2,” *The American Historical Review* 90:3 (June 1985), 547-566. 561.

it.”<sup>35</sup> With Byler’s supply chain, as with Haskell’s cognitive style and Fassin’s humanitarian reason, newly global networks of mediation and exchange confront modern people with a sense of interconnection and shared responsibility, to which they often respond with consumer acts.

Both Haskell’s and Fassin’s formulations have played out in concrete examples throughout American history, as with the small group of abolitionists that established a movement strikingly similar to modern Fair Trade. Called “Free Produce,” participants in this antebellum movement committed to only consuming goods grown or produced by free labor.<sup>36</sup> Later, in the first half of the twentieth century, consumer movements became more widespread with the rise of what Lizabeth Cohen has termed the “citizen consumers of the New Deal and World II eras” who “put the market power of the consumer to work politically, not only to save a capitalist America in the midst of the Great Depression, but also to safeguard the rights of individual consumers and the larger ‘general good.’”<sup>37</sup> These examples provide useful comparisons to the NCP. Emerging within the conditions of modern capitalism, many of these historical moments of political consumerism, including SHP and SERRV’s, take their agendas into the public sphere on the basis of a market-driven sense of causal responsibility for the humanitarian crises they encountered within modernity’s expanding networks of exchange. The antebellum free produce movement, for example, frequently referred to consumer goods as “blood-stained” as a way of pointing to consumers’ implication in the violence of slavery, leading to Ralph Waldo Emerson’s tongue-in-cheek remark in an address celebrating the

---

<sup>35</sup> Didier Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011), xii.

<sup>36</sup> Carol Faulkner, “The Root of the Evil: Free Produce and Radical Antislavery, 1820-1860,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 27:3 (Fall 2007), 377-405. Lawrence B. Glickman, *Buying Power: A History of Consumer Activism in America* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

<sup>37</sup> Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers’ Republic*, 8. See also: Meg Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics: Economic Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

emancipation of enslaved persons in the British West Indies that “the sugar they raised was excellent: nobody tasted blood in it.”<sup>38</sup>

Even so, by attending to the “conditions and qualities of being public,” it is clear that SHP and SERRV made several important points of departure from earlier examples of political consumerism. First, from antebellum Free Produce societies to World War II boycotts, political consumerism had tended to arise as a form of political participation, attempting to engage or direct governmental decision-making either through assent or boycott. By contrast, Byler’s fair trade project operated largely outside policy debates, instead focusing exclusively on the causal power of its own market-based supply chain that could guarantee that “every piece of MCC needlework that an American woman buys puts food into a hungry child’s stomach, and eases the heartache of a poor mother.”<sup>39</sup> This is, of course, a feature of neoliberal discourse, where economics is supposed to be a kind of apolitical rational endeavor so that political problems get reimagined as market ones. At other times in history, the fact that economics are thoroughly political—they are organized by power and they help organize power—has been more readily recognized.

Second, earlier consumer movements, occurring within the political public square, were traditionally organized for fixed periods of time within voluntary political societies such as the Philadelphia Free Produce Society of the 1820s or the Philadelphia Housekeeper’s League of the 1910s. Boycotts are meant to be temporary, carried on until demands are met. In the case of fair trade, organizers seemed to recognize a newly permanent sense of global crisis associated with the incipient idea of a “Third World,” thus calling not for a temporary response but instead for

---

<sup>38</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Address on the Anniversary of Emancipation in the British West Indies,” in David Robins, editor, *The Political Emerson: Essential Writings on Politics and Social Reform* (Boston: Beacon 2004), 106.

<sup>39</sup> Glass, “The MCC Needlework Lady.”

permanent structures linking producers and consumers in light of the lasting political and economic asymmetries being preserved in the postwar world, with the promise of free trade and free markets as palliatives. Ultimately, then, because of the demand to create a new supply chain linking producers and consumers rather than the typical organization around supporting or boycotting an existing one, SHP and SERRV conformed to the shape and structure of its institutional environment: the global capitalist marketplace. In this sense, though the purposeful consumption Byler facilitated was not without its predecessors, as a form of modern religious practice, it was structured in an entirely new way. And, combined with the embodied register through which shoppers could practice lifestyle religion, its needlework and crafts could offer a kind of sensory, lived training in neoliberalism's market-based vision of the world.<sup>40</sup>

As these projects developed across the postwar decades and gained national prominence in the 1970s and 1980s, practices of lifestyle religion emerged apace. Placed on the body, or in the home, of consumers, these pieces of jewelry, this purse, this tea set produced conceptions of value, agency, and relation. Just like marketing professionals had hoped to cultivate in their own work on lifestyle advertising in the late 1960s and early 1970s, fair-trade goods offered a sense of distinction to the consumer: adorning their bodies and homes with these material things, they embody and inhabit their moral commitment to changing the planet as well as a deep, intimate sense of relation to God's people on the other side of the world. As catalogues, brick and mortar stores, and news features in magazines sprouted at the consumptive terminus of SHP and

---

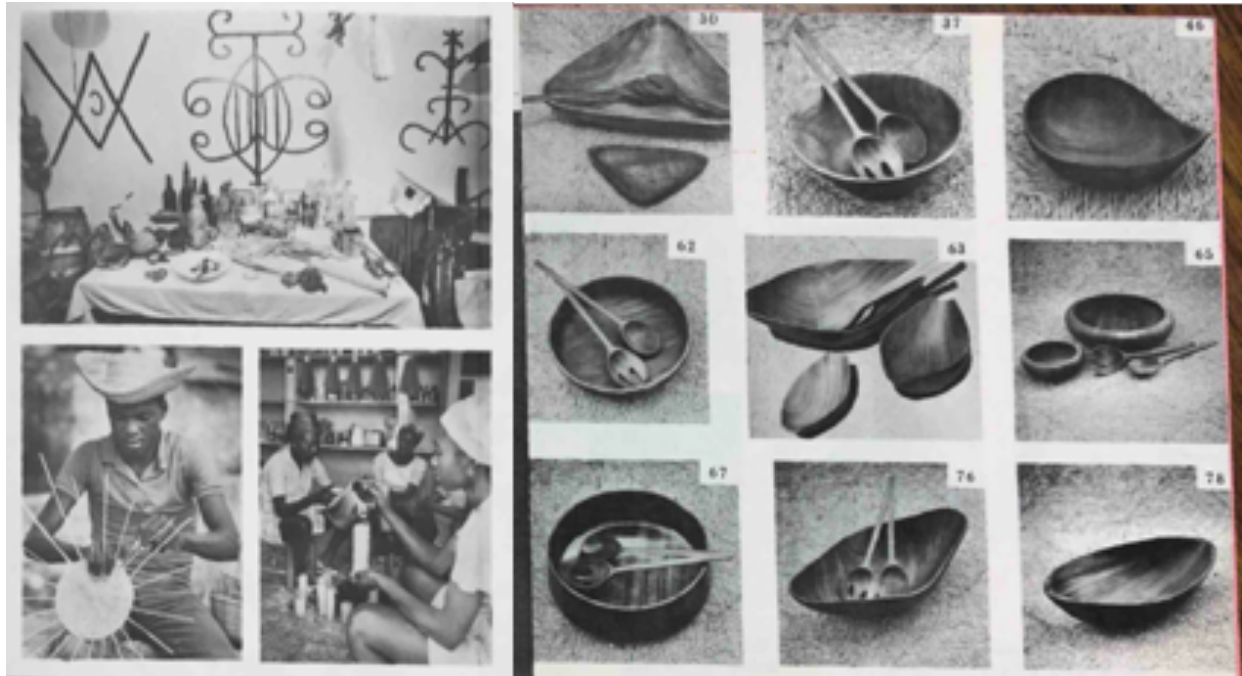
<sup>40</sup> Though I prefer the phrase "lifestyle religion" in this project, elsewhere, I have referred to these practices as "Protestant environmental spirituality" to emphasize the role of market-based institutions and infrastructures in shaping the religious practices and discourses that emerge. This follows Courtney Bender's suggestion that "we might understand spirituality as religion that is produced in secular institutions or settings." Rose, "'The World Food Crisis Is Not a Fad': The *More-with-Less* Cookbook and Protestant Environmental Spirituality," *Religion and American Culture* 29:2, 2019, 216-254; Courtney Bender, *The New Metaphysicals: Spirituality and the American Religious Imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 19.

SERRV's global supply chains, staff, marketers, and consumers alike helped construct a modern, public form of religiosity that conformed itself to those structures. Having moved through a global supply chain carefully overseen by compassionate Christian relief workers, these consumer objects mediated a feeling of agency in a market-based intervention in planetary crises, alongside a feeling of connection to individual producers, who had become a visual and rhetorical focal point of catalogues and news features on the project. Within the world of Self-Help Crafts and SERRV advertisements, catalogue copy, and store displays, the free market's promise was put into practice: consumers were said to be able to build concrete, seamless relations with producers, changing their material and spiritual situations, through the expanding infrastructure of supply chains and relationships of exchange.

### **Race-making in the Marketplace**

By examining fair trade's construction of a material infrastructure for a lived experience of neoliberalism in the form of lifestyle religion, we can see the way the network solidifies an assemblage of racialized and gendered power as part of neoliberalism's overall project to maintain colonial and capitalist power after the era of decolonization and civil rights. The network mediated a set of practices that provide material, sensory, embodied experiences of agency and virtue in the ambivalent setting of the postwar metropole surrounded by reports of a planet in crisis, embedding a vision of refined whiteness within the subject formation sought so eagerly by North American devotees of lifestyle religion.





*Figure 3 - Producer Catalog, 1973*

Self-Help Crafts marketing materials often focused on the sense that a single object could mediate these kinds of experiences as it traversed the global supply chain and ended up in the hands of a consumer. “The hand-carved salad bowl on your table not only adds elegance to your dining room,” one regional sales director declared in 1969, “but also links you with the destitute wood-carver in Haiti.”<sup>41</sup> Looking then, to a single bowl, it is possible to trace the way it moves through a fair-trade infrastructure to produce certain kinds of racialized subject formation befitting of neoliberal life. This bowl, unvarnished so it shows the marks of its handmade production and feels simple and rustic to the touch, was advertised in a catalogue of fair-trade products from Haiti throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s (fig. 3). This and other hand-carved wooden crafts appeared alongside images of rustic and simple, yet content and joyous Haitian life, promising to transmit these constructed qualities of true Haitianness to the white Protestant Christians who would buy them in religious gift shops and congregational Christmas

<sup>41</sup> Kathleen Froese, quoted in Elaine Penner, “Needlework and Handicraft Sales Boost Needy Families Incomes.”

bazaars across the United States. Only a few years earlier, Paul Leatherman, the Mennonite Central Committee's American director of rural development had helped curate and cultivate these commodities of Haitian authenticity by pushing for greater production of wooden crafts there, citing his sense that the needlework many Haitians were producing was not sufficiently different from the MCC's other sources. As he jotted on top of a memo sent to the MCC fair trade program's director in the early 1970s, "I'm discouraging needlework because I know you have good sources already. So in Haiti its wood & I'm still hoping we can get Paraguay cracking on leather. Brasil will need to do better than what I saw. Let's help em find it."<sup>42</sup>

Produced by a Haitian worker and shipped to a holiday sale at a mainline church somewhere in the U.S., the bowl winds up gift wrapped and under the Christmas tree of some white Protestant home, serving as the focal object in a ritual of gift-giving that, in its use of fair trade, seeks to contest the overconsumption of affluent America on its high holy day. Soon, this Haitian bowl appears on the dining table, perhaps now filled with some recipe drawn from the *More-with-Less* cookbook, the guide for globally-responsible eating published by the MCC in the mid-1970s and often shelved next to fair trade gifts at the organization's various retail stores. This moment of consumption is invested with conceptions of how the self, the divine, and the world might responsibly relate in an era of global trade. Consuming these foods drawn from African, Latin American, and Asian diets, served in handcrafted objects like Haitian wooden bowls, fair trade consumers seek out a religious relationship with a global supply chain at the site of their bodies, cultivating a simultaneously spiritual and material connection to Haitian producers. Invoking this link, fair-trade consumers fashion themselves as globally responsible,

---

<sup>42</sup> Janet Yoder to Virginia Henck, December 8, 1971. MCC Self-Help Program Records 1962-1972, box 1, Folder 2/1. Paul Leatherman to Nick Dyck, November 30, 1976. MCC Self-Help Program Records, box 242, folder 145/59.

undertaking an act of religious and racial formation that might free their whiteness of the weight of affluent overconsumption.

Looking at sites of production more closely for a moment, the archive contains a number of relief and development workers who helped construct racialized authenticity that would be transmitted by fair trade goods in the process of mediating a pious lifestyle choice for North American consumers. In addition to their basic desire to develop forms of exchange that could support the financial wellbeing of producers in the decolonizing world, we see also that another core task of these relief workers involved identifying and curating specific objects that could manifest Third World cultural authenticity to consumers. By cultural authenticity, I am thinking of the work of anthropology and folklore studies in first half of the twentieth century, especially associated with Franz Boas and his students, to replace hierarchical and evolutionary conceptions of culture with a cultural relativism that looked for intrinsic value within local sites, viewing the local as, in the cultural historian Karl Miller's words, "a distinct, circumscribed space that contained its own...culture." As cultural historians like Miller and Grace Hale have shown, this intellectual discourse quickly converged with commerce, facilitating the circulation of racialized, culturally-authentic objects for white middle-class consumption.<sup>43</sup>

As SERRV and SHP staff searched for new products to sell in their fair-trade shops, they often revealed a deep investment in the presentation of Global South racial and ethnic identities as traditional, exotic, distinctive, and dignified, while positioning themselves as the stakeholders with the most know-how and expertise on how to recover and sustain those culturally authentic identities. Correspondence between program directors and the MCC staff in producer countries

---

<sup>43</sup> Karl Hagstrom Miller. *Segregating Sound: Inventing Folk and Pop Music in the Age of Jim Crow*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 177. Grace Elizabeth Hale, *A Nation of Outsiders: How the White Middle Class Fell in Love with Rebellion in Postwar America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), especially 49-83.

frequently discussed the need to carefully alter the appearance of objects to make sure they fit into modern American aesthetics without compromising their ability to “tell the story of a country” as with the Israeli garments. This delicate balance was most often pursued through color selections, as with Jordanian needlework about which the SHP celebrated the use of “traditional Arab designs...as old as Abraham’s time,” but required that, “the women learned to adapt their work to shades...that blend with American décor.”<sup>44</sup>



*Figure 4 - From SERRV Newsletter (1975)*

In the materials that SERRV circulated to its mainline constituents, this orientation toward Asian, African, and Latin American cultures—the assumption of an inherent cultural authenticity coming from their connection to traditional or folk practices—was often made explicit (fig. 4). “Culturally, the term refers to the emergence of these... peoples from a long

---

<sup>44</sup> Glass, “The MCC Needlework Lady.”

period of colonial domination in which Western European culture was seen as the most ‘advanced and civilized’” a SERRV newsletter explained in a sidebar item titled, “What is the Third World?” “These peoples are now trying to rediscover their own past and to develop a pride in their own cultural heritage.” The language of “rediscovery” recalls the orientalist trope that framed Egypt or China as great civilizations that had long since gone to sleep, needing the help of Western intellect and understanding to awaken and recover. In its promotional materials, SERRV often articulated the way its fair-trade objects did just that, in the way they “reflect the life of the village people—working, dancing, making music.” SERRV could help curate a slice of culturally authentic folk life and then bringing it into the homes of fair-trade consumers.<sup>45</sup>

These economic relationships, which helped construct and sustain notions of racial and ethnic identity integral to these white Protestant rituals of self-fashioning, are different from older forms of colonialist orientalism, however, in the sense that they self-consciously participate in a process of post-war decolonization. Fair trade strives to create economic relationships that support and manage rapid decolonization, but in so doing, it helps mediate neocolonialism, which structures the global political economy around the position of America as economic hegemon. With fair trade consumption, religious and racial formation are added to the mix, helping construct new forms of global exchange that maintain the position of white American Christians as virtuous citizens of the world, operating benevolently within the hegemon to preserve the valued cultural authenticity of those outside it.

In order to construct the Third World cultural authenticity central to fair trade production and consumption, American managers of SHP and SERRV often rejected items that craftspeople had been making for years, telling them the objects did not seem adequately indigenous to that

---

<sup>45</sup> *SERRV News* (Spring 1975). SHP Box 230 Folder 137 98, 1974. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979).

country. American staff would then take it upon themselves to choose some new product that would seem authentically Haitian, Israeli, or Indian to American consumers. For example, after rejecting crafts submitted by Paraguayan craftspeople as not sufficiently unique, a Pennsylvania MCC staffer suggested leatherworking. Paraguayan agricultural workers in the Chaco region had experience with leatherwork for making saddles, but as Ten Thousand Villages staff put it, “Aside from the farm equipment, an urgent requirement was to inject other forms of leather products for sales. A feeling for being able to make something nice needed to be developed.”<sup>46</sup> To aid with this, staff sent the MCC worker in Paraguay a catalogue with examples of various leather items produced by American companies. The Paraguayans began producing wallets, belts, Bible covers, and more based on these American designs, and though years later, the missionary expressed dismay about her inability to truly indigenize the production among the craftspeople. These pieces of leather now available in American fair-trade shops were constructing an image of uniquely Paraguayan producer with whom American consumers could forge a transformative connection (fig. 5).



*Figure 5 - MCC Photo of Paraguayan Leatherwork*

<sup>46</sup> “Leather Work in Paraguay,” MCC Self-Help Program Records, box 238, folder 143/2.

The dismay of the MCC worker in Paraguay at the difficulty of “indigenizing” fair trade production points to another tension at these sites of production, as American fair-trade consumption depended not only on a commodified form of cultural authenticity but also upon notions of the producer’s inherent virtue, imagined as content and joyful in their lives of simplicity and hard work. Returning to Haiti, as MCC workers sought to manage the production of the wooden bowls and other tableware, they often complained that actual Haitian culture differed significantly from the commodified simplicity sought after in fair trade consumption. In one observer’s assessment in 1976, “Haitians do not understand why things must be straight; why they may not be cracked or have holes in them. They don’t understand the loaded shelves at home, competing with other products for the buyer’s dollar. Haitians use things no matter how cracked or crooked they are. Nothing gets thrown away; it is used for something.”<sup>47</sup> Here, Haitian producers’ desire to reduce wastefulness and develop responsible uses of these goods needs to be disciplined into the handcrafted excellence expected of fair-trade consumers, so to transmit a constructed sense of authenticity and simplicity for consumers.

In the minds of fair-trade managers, these realities verified the need for American expertise in curating the actually authentic, the actually virtuous simplicity, leaving to one side those aspects of an indigenous culture that did not fit the mold. As one MCC staffer observed during a 1976 visit to the production site, the Haitian craft co-op “is operating in somewhat typical Haitian fashion and has become somewhat corrupt and exploitive. It seems to us that MCC had been helping to Haitianize an American institution. It instead is becoming Haitian throughout including business practices and decisions which seem so typical of the general Haitian culture.” This quotation, perhaps more than any other in the archive, suggests the

---

<sup>47</sup> Doreen A. Snyder, “What Self-Help Means to the Haitian Family,” June 1976. MCC Self-Help Program Records, box 242, folder 145/56.

tensions at play. “It seems to us that MCC had been helping to Haitianize an American institution. It instead is becoming Haitian throughout.”<sup>48</sup> That same year, an MCC worker in Haiti wrote about her experiences, expressing frustration that “some employed men [in Haiti] use the money to acquire status for themselves in the community by buying ‘cool’ clothes...”<sup>49</sup> Fair-trade participants hoped to ameliorate the planetary crises taking place in the Global South. But they did through forms of publicity that focused centrally on a one-dimensional construction of people in the decolonizing Global South at times romanticizing their poverty. Cool clothes or other status objects were cause for concern among MCC workers because they might damage producers’ image as the content and hard-working craftsman, hand-carving wooden bowls in simple clothes and rustic spaces, as pictured the SHP’s 1973 catalogue. Amid this tension, MCC workers in Haiti worked to construct a Haitian authenticity in commodity form.

Along with the range of other international goods available in Ten Thousand Villages and SERRV stores, these objects of global intimacy carried the virtue of contended simplicity that were in turn deployed in processes of embodied religious and racial formation at sites of North American consumption.<sup>50</sup> MCC workers deliberated over Haitian virtue and Paraguayan authenticity in their effort to produce a material culture of lifestyle religion. Shipped to warehouses and gift shops across North America, Christian consumers could then incorporate their quotidian economic choices into their own pursuit of a responsible lifestyle in the postwar

---

<sup>48</sup> Paul Leatherman, “Haiti Trip Report,” October 1976. MCC Self-Help Program Records, box 242, folder 145/56.

<sup>49</sup> Doreen A. Snyder, “What Self-Help Means to the Haitian Family.”

<sup>50</sup> My reading of fair-trade material culture in terms of “global intimacy” is influenced by Hillary Kaell’s work on Christian globalism in the child sponsorship movement. “Mid-century sponsors incorporated the supposed particularity of one child’s race or nation into a framework for an intimate form of immensity,” writes Kaell. The affective, intimate relations produced by technologies of globalism depend upon “structurally reinforced binaries between Christian/heathen, white/black, West/rest.” Fair-trade similarly depends on a sense of intimate connection through binary relations, built in this case into the very structure of market exchange. Kaell, *Christian Globalism at Home: Child Sponsorship in the United States* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020), 102, 104.



world of planetary crisis. Turning, then, to the sites of consumption on the other end of the supply chain, these fair-trade objects wound up adorning the shelves, tables, and bodies of American consumers. Here, the Haitian bowls, Brazilian placemats, and Paraguayan leather belts were framed as authentic materializations of an intensely constructed set of “Third World” virtues like simplicity and contentment. Through their day-to-day physical contact with consumers, these things mediated embodied connection to a global network of religious and economic exchange. Consumers’ could transform their affluent whiteness, weighed down by America’s culture of overconsumption, into an imagined state of lean, self-disciplined global responsibility.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Self-Help Crafts and SERRV’s steady flow of catalogues, newsletters, and other marketing devices helped associate these carefully curated objects with the embodied religious experience of consumers. As a constructed “Third World” authenticity traversed fair-trade supply chains in commodity form, the organizations’ advertisements, interviews, and feature stories consistently articulated the possibility of transformative personal connection with producers as consumers came into contact with things they made. According to one store manager in 1969, as shoppers pick up the objects and hold them in their hands, they do so with such tenderness that it’s like “they are touching the hands that made them.”<sup>51</sup> Text often accompanied the goods, affirming a sense that the character of producers and sites of production could be physically inlaid in the things they made. “The materials tell the climatic story of a country. Jerusalem is fairly cold at times, therefore the material is somewhat of a heavy quality,” reported an SHP product-buyer in Palestine in 1968. “The material appears that it speaks for the appearance of the women, rugged, artistic.”<sup>52</sup> By

---

<sup>51</sup> Glass, “The MCC Needlework Lady.”

<sup>52</sup> Margaret E. Cressman to Mrs. David Kanagy, 2/5/1968 (SHP Records 1962-1972, Box 1, Folder 1/6).

wearing the Israeli garment, the consumer adorns herself with a material that not only alters the producer's material conditions, but physically places her artistic and rugged qualities upon the consumer's own body. The connection was figured as not merely symbolic but materially present through the garment itself, as well as the physical networks of exchange through which the garment traversed. Both ends of the network, producer and consumer, are imagined in intimate contact through the material object itself.

Focusing on specific fair-trade objects like Haitian bowls or Israeli garments allows two lines of analysis to proceed in tension with another. First, the physical form of each fair-trade object—the texture of the wood, its rustic and handmade look and feel, the carvings on its surface communicating its provenance in a foreign, presumably authentic culture—mediate conceptions of distinction, relation, and value to those who circulate and consume them. These material features help to condition its interactions with the consumer, materializing that consumer's connection to this network of exchange in specific ways. Usually in domestic spaces, the often white, middle-class, Protestant consumer can see, feel, touch the markings of “hand-madeness,” imagining the presence of authentic simplicity in suburban homes that might otherwise inspire ambivalence toward comfort and affluence in times of planetary crisis.

Fair trade's intense focus on sites of production, however, requires attention to much broader material relations beyond the notions inlaid in the physical touch of consumers and commodities. And so, these questions about material culture should be asked alongside a second set of concerns: the global, networks of human and non-human actors whose relations manifest in that object, conditioning the religious experience of the humans that come into contact with it. In fair trade, an infrastructure is laid out for lifestyle religion, with work sites, warehouses, and brick and mortar stores through which objects can be produced, circulated, consumed. Traveling

along this infrastructure, the objects carry with them a poetics of the market, promising that when North American consumers make a pious purchase, when they embrace the right lifestyle choices, something good happens to the planet.

### The Poetics of the Market

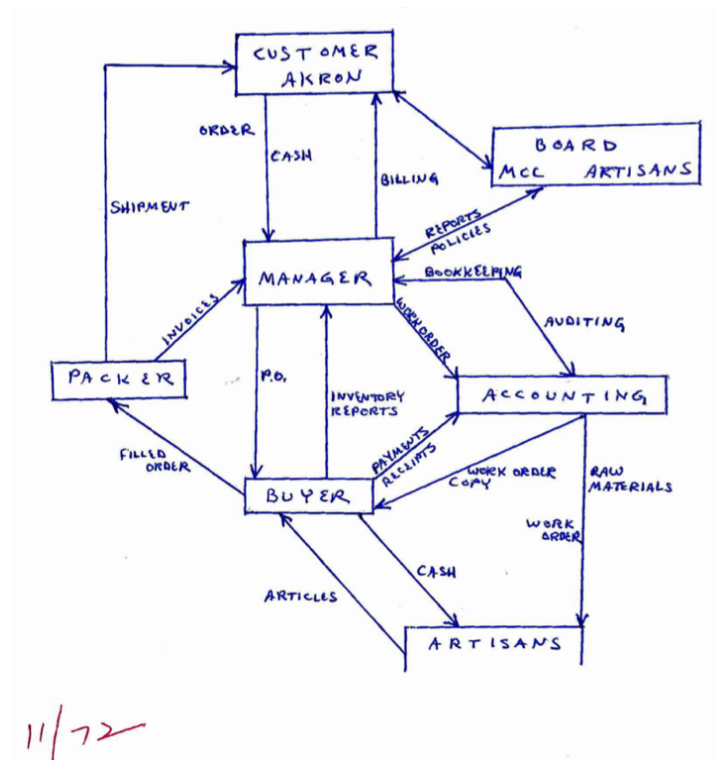


Figure 6 - Self-Help Crafts Supply Chain, 1972

In building a global supply chain that could mediate the exchange of goods inscribed with romanticized “Third World” poverty, SHP and SERRV produced an infrastructure that could manage and maintain racialized asymmetries. Affluent white Protestants can access objects that help them embody a sense of responsibility within their ambivalent affluence. Haitian or Paraguayan or Palestinian producers can earn more for their work as long as they don’t buy designer jeans or otherwise lose their connection to the rustic simplicity so central to fair trade aesthetics. And all the while, consumers learn through this infrastructure to see their purchases as

a predictable expression of their agency through the practice of lifestyle religion, change the world through acts of consumption that reverberate throughout the supply chain (fig. 6).

To speak of “infrastructure” is to call attention to the way the print networks, supply chains, fair-trade gift shops, household goods, catalogues, cookbooks, and environmentally-responsible meals had been assembled to provide a lasting material basis for lifestyle religion by the late 1970s. Attending to the production of these infrastructures offers a window into the way relationships of power are preserved, or given “steely quality,” as Bruno Latour would have it, through the circulation and presence of material things. “Things do not “determine” human culture so much as prompt it, enabling forms of practice, feeling, and thought that would be impossible without their physical presences,” writes historian of religious material culture Sonia Hazard. “Human agency remains part of the picture, but it ought to be understood as entangled with the agency of materiality.”<sup>53</sup> What relations, what asymmetries, are assembled and mediated by an infrastructure of things, these bowls, these garments, these catalogues, these meals, that circulate in the network of lifestyle religion?

Roads—that quintessential infrastructural form so central to America’s suburban expansion—offer a valuable case in point for thinking about the poetics of infrastructure, to return to Brian Larkin’s phrase. Larkin writes that roads, “encode the dreams of individuals and societies and are vehicles whereby those fantasies are transmitted and made emotionally real.”<sup>54</sup> Likewise writing about roads, religion scholar Isaiah Ellis notes, “as roads interface between individual bodies and the body politic, they constitute a material performance of modernity and collective identity, marking certain “moods” or dispositions toward the social.”<sup>55</sup> In this, the

---

<sup>53</sup> Sonia Hazard, “Thing,” *Early American Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 16:4 (2018), 794.

<sup>54</sup> Larkin, “Poetics of Infrastructure.” 333.

<sup>55</sup> Ellis, “Infrastructure between Anthropology, Geography, and Religious Studies.” 97.

actual material qualities matter. Focusing on studies of imperial infrastructure in Dutch Indonesia, Larkin points out that “the materials of infrastructure—the hardness of the road, the intensity of its blackness, its smooth finish—produces sensorial and political experiences.”<sup>56</sup>

In a classic essay, Latour tracks “chains of delegation” where it’s possible to observe the whole gradient of human and nonhuman actors who are delegated some kind of agency or disciplinary power in an infrastructure. Specifically referring to various technologies for slowing drivers down on a given road, he traces it thusly: “Depending on where we stand along this chain of delegation, we get classic moral human beings endowed with self-respect and able to speak and obey laws, or we get stubborn and efficient machines and mechanisms,” such as speedbumps, a “radical, nonfigurative solution” that make it “impossible for us not to slow down, or else we break our suspension.”<sup>57</sup> At different points along the way, infrastructures can be delegated to transmit or preserve some kind of power or agency. “Left to its own devices, a power relationship that mobilizes nothing but social skills would be limited to very short-lived, transient interactions,” Latour states elsewhere. “It’s precisely because it’s so difficult to maintain asymmetries, to durably entrench power relations, to enforce inequalities, that so much work is being constantly devoted in shifting the weak and fast-decaying ties to *other types* of links.”<sup>58</sup> Here, he means non-human actors, those points along the chain of delegation where direct human agency fades into the background and some seemingly neutral thing can shore up a relation.

---

<sup>56</sup> Larkin, “Poetics of Infrastructure.” 337.

<sup>57</sup> Latour, “Where are the missing masses? The sociology of a few mundane artifacts,” in W.E. Bijker and J. Law, editors, *Shaping Technology/Building Society: Studies in Sociotechnical Change*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 243

<sup>58</sup> Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 66. Emphasis in original.

Including infrastructure in the study of religion specifically offers a fruitful line of inquiry for tracking the way religion is produced and shaped in relationship with the political economy, often through the decisions of managerial bureaucracies.<sup>59</sup> By observing the construction of supply chains, just like the roads that connect them, scholars of religion and infrastructure can observe the way that actual material things lend a steely quality to power relationships as they “encode the dreams of individuals and societies and are the vehicles whereby those fantasies are transmitted and made emotionally real.”<sup>60</sup> Attending to the rustic qualities of a Haitian wooden bowl, or the warmth provided by an Israeli blanket, helps reveal the way these things circulate as part of an infrastructure that helps preserve certain asymmetries. Lifestyle religion occurs at the site of consumption, reliant on the convergence of multiple registers of power: first, the infrastructure carries relationships of exchange, contingent upon the producers’ authentic life of rustic simplicity; second, it circulates racialized narratives, inscribed onto the goods themselves through catalogue design, promotional writing, and store design; and finally, it transmits the promise of markets to transform the material and spiritual state of producer and consumer alike.

By the 1970s, SHP and SERRV were just two of several Protestant denominational projects helping respond to persistent calls for concrete ways to practice lifestyle religion. Self-

---

<sup>59</sup> Scholar of religion David Walker’s work on railroads in Utah offers a useful case in point. Walker traces the bureaucratic and managerial practices that helped determine the status of Mormonism as an American religion. Decisions about expanding railroad infrastructure that based on geography, commerce, and politics carried with them mainline Protestant dreams of breaking Mormonism’s economic monopoly in Utah. But in the end, managerial decisions about railroad routes through Utah altered the course of these religious contestations, solidifying Mormonism’s place on the American landscape. Railroad company and federal officials agreed that the transcontinental railroad would meet at Promontory Summit with their official junction favoring Mormon economic dominance. On their own, beliefs, theses, and ideas about religion had limited power given “the limits of popular rhetoric, the ethereality of governmental policies, and the realities of industrial influences and business concerns.” If railroad boosters had hoped to create new, mainline Protestant economic centers in Utah, the infrastructure that took shape instead positioned Mormonism as a mainstay religion of the West, cementing its status as an American religion. Walker, *Railroading Religion*. 44.

<sup>60</sup> Larkin, “Poetics of Infrastructure.” 333.

Help Crafts and SERRV are instructive cases insofar as their managerial projects built literal material infrastructures with production sites, warehouses, and brick and mortar shops that could mediate a material culture for lifestyle religion, encoded with a racialized sense of colonial difference and global intimacy. Important as well were the print networks utilized by Alternatives, Inc. and others, which helped structure lifestyle religion in a way that, thanks to the content of their texts, worked to enfold the church, the family, and the body into a daily experience of lived neoliberalism and its promise of liberated and liberatory markets.

### **Alternatives, Inc.**

In late-1977, after his successful stint as staff coordinator for the NCC Coordinating Committee on Hunger Concerns and its signature national program WHEAT, Milo Thornberry transitioned out of full-time work in the New York City NCC offices in order to focus on supporting Alternatives, Inc., a mainline-funded nonprofit whose sole focus was lifestyle change. Under Thornberry's leadership, WHEAT had successfully engaged a nationwide network of churchgoers into covenant groups who, as a 1977 survey showed, were primarily interested in lifestyle. By then, his curriculum had been used to train around 2,000 enablers who had in turn organized over 10,000 mainline churchgoers into covenant fellowships.<sup>61</sup>

Thornberry, of course, was one of many leaders who expressed ambivalence about lifestyle's merits if practiced in a vacuum. "Reduced consumption among the affluent by itself does not automatically make more goods available for those who are hungry," he had declared in the WHEAT curriculum. "To achieve that goal we must also be successful in our efforts at changing public policy at local, national and international levels."<sup>62</sup> Given Alternatives Inc.'s

---

<sup>61</sup> "Report from Shirley Greene on the Present Status of WHEAT and Plans for 1978." PHS NCC Communications Records, box 54.

<sup>62</sup> Milo Thornberry, *Enabler's Manual for WHEAT*, 39. PHS NCC Communications Records, box 13, folder "WHEAT."

exclusive focus on lifestyle choices, with his transition from WHEAT to the non-profit, Thornberry seemed to signal his own conversion to the gospel of lifestyle religion. Relocating to the Atlanta area, Thornberry joined Alternatives first as a board member in 1977 and then as its new executive director in 1980. Reflecting on the move in 2002, Thornberry wrote that, as an NCC staff person, he had seen some denominational buy-in to the importance of relief work as well as policy efforts. “What I didn't see was any serious effort to make the lifestyle connections between affluence and poverty,” he continued. “I didn't see it until I saw the work Bob Kochtitzky had begun in Alternatives. From that time on, I saw lifestyle as one of the necessary components in addressing the massive problems of hunger and poverty.”<sup>63</sup>

Looking at their mainline Protestant constituency in 1978, Thornberry and Alternatives founder Bob Kochtitzky (1928-2016) sensed a need for widely available print resources on the specific, concrete practices of lifestyle change. WHEAT had led thousands of churchgoers into lifestyle covenant groups, producing widespread interest in lifestyle religion among those denominations as well. In a 1978 proposal for funds from the United Methodist Church, Kochtitzky, who had led Alternatives from Washington, DC for most of the 1970s but had returned to his native Mississippi and was in the process of handing leadership over to Thornberry, wrote, “I have been told by reliable sources that there is a shortage of concrete ways for church members to implement lifestyle alteration, one of the responses called for in the WHEAT manual.”<sup>64</sup> By leaving WHEAT for Alternatives, Thornberry hoped to help provide concrete ways to practice lifestyle religion, ultimately overseeing the expansion of a nationwide

---

<sup>63</sup> Milo Thornberry, “Why Celebrations?,” July, 2002.  
<https://simpleliving.startlogic.com/indexoth.php?place=what.php>.

<sup>64</sup> Bob Kochtitzky to Earl Barfoot, January 15, 1978. GCAH Records of the Division of Human Relations and Economics, 1439-2-5:02.



print network that could provide a material presence of lifestyle guides in churchgoers' homes and congregations.<sup>65</sup>

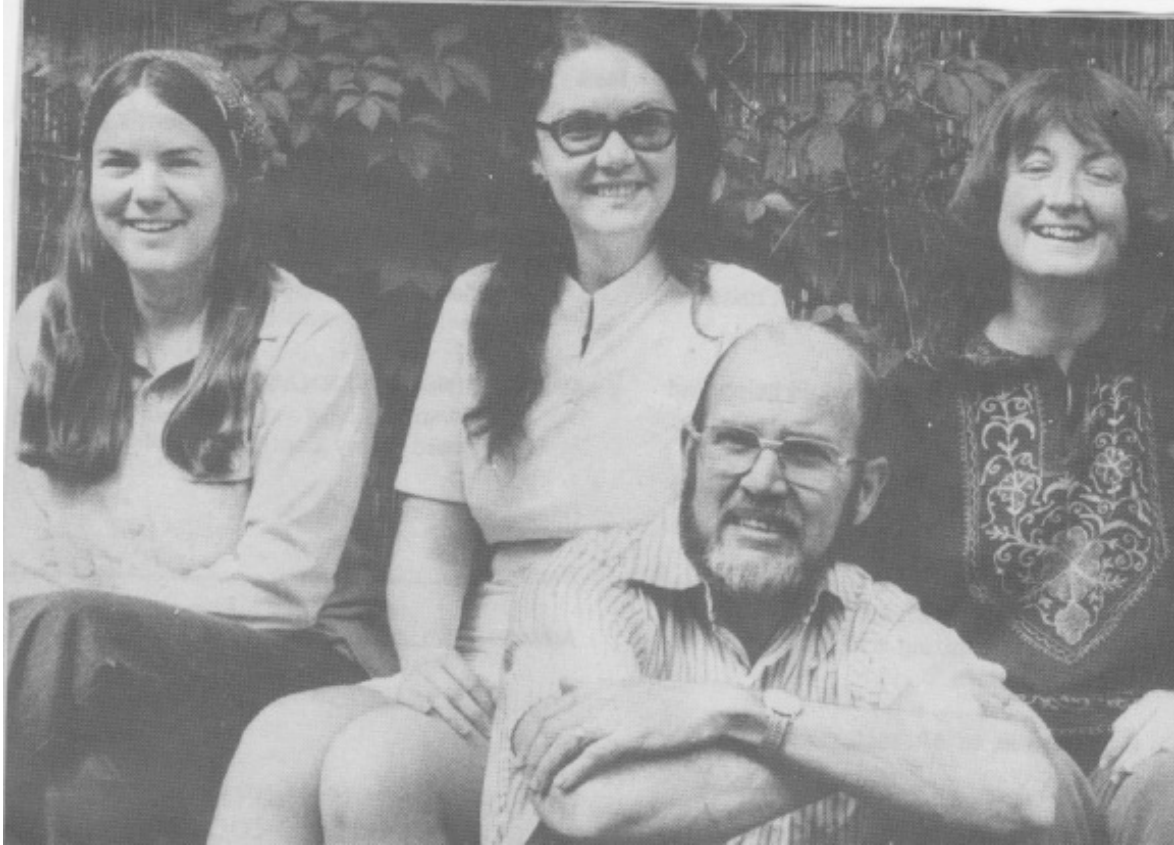
At its heart, Alternatives was an effort at putting lifestyle religion in print.

The organization was known primarily for its "Alternate Celebration Catalogues." Founder Bob Kochtitzky compiled the first catalogue in 1972, before formally incorporating Alternatives Inc. as a non-profit organization the following year (fig. 7). A Methodist layman, Kochtitzky spent most of the 1960s in Mississippi. In Jackson, he directed Layman Overseas Service, a United Methodist organization he had founded to help encourage short-term relief and development placements for lay Methodists in the decolonizing world. Living in an intense hotbed of civil rights activism, he also became involved in antiracist work. After several Black churches in the area were burned by the Ku Klux Klan, he created a fundraising group to help rebuild them. After word spread that his Jackson-area home had become a hub for antiracist work, it too was fire-bombed by the Klan in 1967. Undeterred, Kochtitzky continued supporting civil rights efforts through 1968, when he attended that year's Democratic National Convention in Chicago as part of Fannie Lou Hamer's Freedom Democratic Party delegation.<sup>66</sup>

---

<sup>65</sup> While the centrality of print in North American religion is widely recognized, I'm particularly interested in works that look beyond print as a neutral intermediary of ideas, and instead understand texts as material things whose circulation and use produce affective and embodied experience as well as relationships of economic exchange. See: Pamela Klassen and Kathryn Lofton, "Material Witnesses," in Mia Lövheim, editor, *Media, Religion and Gender: Key Issues and New Challenges* (New York: Routledge, 2013): 114-140; David Morgan, *Protestants and Pictures: Religion, Visual Culture, and the Age of American Mass Production* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Paul Gutjahr, *An American Bible: A History of the Good Book in the United States, 1777-1880* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999); Candy Gunther Brown, *The Word in the World: Evangelical Writing, Publishing, and Reading in America, 1789-1880* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Matthew S. Hedstrom, *The Rise of Liberal Religion: Book Culture and American Spirituality in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Matthew Engelke, *God's Agents*; Daniel Vaca, *Evangelicals Incorporated: Books and the Business of Religion in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019).

<sup>66</sup> Leonard Van Slyke, "Oral History Interview with T.W. Lewis," *Galloway United Methodist Church Oral History Project*, 2016.; Jerry Mitchell, "Operation Shoestring created in tragedies' wake," *Clarion Ledger* June 4, 2016; Kay Mills, *This Little Light of Mine: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer*, (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2007), 231.



*Figure 7 - Bob Kochtitzky (front) with Alternatives staff and catalogue contributors, (L-R) Jean Foggo, Beth Fannon, and Amy Henkel, 1974*

By the early 1970s, Kochtitzky, like many of his contemporaries, became increasingly concerned about planetary crisis. News reports of pollution, overpopulation, and natural resource shortages circulated widely as North America's white middle-class were feeling the pinch of inflation and wage stagnation for the first time since the 1930s. As he observed later in the decade, "the inflationary pressure on purchasing power, the energy crisis, and public awareness of the depletion of natural resources have made a record number of people apprehensive about their lifestyle."<sup>67</sup> In the meantime, he had relocated his Layman Overseas Service to Baltimore in 1969 and by 1972 moved again to Washington, DC.<sup>68</sup> With growing time and distance from the

<sup>67</sup> Bob Kochtitzky to Earl Barfoot, January 15, 1978.

<sup>68</sup> Bob and Kay Kochtitzky to John Peoples Jr., June 4, 1970. MDL Jackson State University Collection; Bob Kochtitzky, "Historical Note," 1993. <https://simpleliving.startlogic.com/indexoth.php?place=what.php>.

fires of the Mississippi freedom movement, Kochtitzky found himself alight with a newfound “anger toward corporations and individuals who were prostituting society’s soul by exploiting all our celebrations for profit and privilege.”<sup>69</sup> Hoping to provide a resource for those who wanted to change their lifestyles in order to escape the grasp of consumer culture that left them feeling implicated in planetary crisis, he conceived of a catalogue that would provide people with ideas and resources for lifestyle change.

With his anger toward consumer culture and his sense of widespread demand for a resource on practical alternatives, Kochtitzky compiled a listing of suggestions for lifestyle change, alongside information on “people- and Earth-oriented organizations” to which readers could donate any funds they had freed up through their simplified lifestyle choices.<sup>70</sup> This initial edition in 1972 was distinctively do-it-yourself. As Kochtitzky recalled, “At the beginning, I had no staff, worked out of my home in Washington, DC and financed the first printing of the *Alternative Christmas Catalogue* with \$2,500 contributed by friends back home in Jackson, Mississippi.” To his surprise, within two years, 19,000 copies of his original run of 20,000 had been purchased.<sup>71</sup> Self-published and lacking any formal marketing plan, the catalogue benefited from a 1973 *New York Times* article that instructed readers to write Kochtitzky with \$1.24 to receive what it called a “catalogue of ideas,” full of “make-it-yourself” suggestions for “gifts that don’t use up the Earth.”<sup>72</sup>

Rather than offer a conventional mail-order service, the Alternatives Catalogue simply provided suggestions for how families might celebrate Christmas and other major holidays

---

<sup>69</sup> Kochtitsky, “Historical Note.”

<sup>70</sup> Gerald Gold, “Seeking Alternative Gifts? Here’s a Catalogue of Ideas,” *New York Times*, November 28, 1973.

<sup>71</sup> Milo Thornberry, “Introduction,” *The Alternate Celebrations Catalogue* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1982), 14.

<sup>72</sup> Gold, “Seeking Alternative Gifts?”

without relying so heavily on consumer goods. The first, 60-page edition in 1972 garnered such a response that he chose to publish further editions that incorporated the various testimonials and suggestions he received from lifestyle devotees. Incorporating a growing number of personal stories and ideas from the users in his print network, each successive edition of the catalogue was a bit longer than the last. The result was an evolving document that, across five editions and multiple names, was replete with ideas, testimonials, advertisements, and resources for making simple lifestyle choices that promised to make birthdays, weddings, funerals, and major holidays more meaningful, while reducing their impact on the planet (fig. 8).



Figure 8 - Alternates Catalogue Covers, Editions 1-3

Branded as a catalogue but lacking the mail-order system of conventional commercial publications that most often carry the name, Kochtitzky clearly based his Alternates catalogue on a defining document of the counterculture, the *Whole Earth Catalog*, published between 1968 and 1972. Like Kochtitzky, the *Whole Earth Catalog*'s compiler Stewart Brand had sensed the emergence of a nationwide community of people rejecting what they believed was a meaningless life of mass culture conformity in favor of creative alternatives through an embrace of do-it-yourself communal living. Inspired by traditional mail order catalogues that had helped unite

rural homesteaders, Brand conceived of a document that would help link “his friends ‘starting their own civilization hither and yon in the sticks.’”<sup>73</sup> In 1968, Brand published the first edition of *Whole Earth Catalog*, which offered an eclectic range of tools, from potters’ wheels to plans for geodesic domes (with, just like the Alternatives catalogues that followed it, none of its recommended products available for mail order).

The historian Fred Turner has referred to the *Whole Earth Catalog* as a “network forum,” a term he uses to capture its material presence as “a place where members of these communities came together, exchanged ideas and legitimacy, and in the process synthesized new intellectual frameworks and new social networks.”<sup>74</sup> Similarly, Kochtitzky’s catalogue grew and evolved based on the responses and input of his readership. Kochtitzky’s second edition was enlarged from its initial 60 pages “to 128 pages with the ideas that poured in response to the first catalogue.”<sup>75</sup> This practice continued throughout the organization’s history, so that the fourth edition, released in 1978, included 250 pages to make room for anecdotes and ideas from readers.<sup>76</sup> These submissions ranged from that of Mrs. Charles Jackson of New Jersey, who said she had taken to marking her children’s birthday by simply relieving them of their daily chores, in contrast to the typical “orgy of parties and presents” that others expect; to a new Palm Sunday practice from Marion Ellis in New Hampshire who “developed a twenty-first-century tradition that seems fitting for ‘preparing the way of the Lord.’ We always spend Palm Sunday afternoon in a big trash pick-up on our section of the country road.”<sup>77</sup> In Walla Walla, Washington, a

---

<sup>73</sup> Brand, quoted in Fred Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 70.

<sup>74</sup> Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture*, 72.

<sup>75</sup> Thornberry, “Introduction,” 12.

<sup>76</sup> Marjorie Hyer, “‘Alternatives’ Would Restore the Humanity of Christmas,” *Washington Post*, December 22, 1978.

<sup>77</sup> *Alternate Celebrations Catalogue*, 20, 62.

couple wrote in with an idea for spreading the message of lifestyle religion in their neighborhood, reporting that on Halloween, they:

were inspired by some of the ideas in your Catalogue and came up with a new way of celebrating Halloween—for us, at least. The general greed for ‘goodies’ of most trick-or-treaters has bothered us for a number of years...we printed copies of this statement and put them in each child’s goodie bag: ‘Dear trick-or-treater: We are giving 5 cents to UNICEF for every child who comes trick-or-treating to our home.’<sup>78</sup>

Given the way Kochtitzky, Thornberry, and their collaborators at Alternatives, Inc. worked to incorporate various suggestions and testimonials from their readers between 1974 and 1982 to help sustain a network of Christians committed to lifestyle change, the Alternatives Catalogue fits well within Turner’s notion of “network forum,” providing a material basis for a trans-local network, or, in other words, an infrastructure.

While the *Whole Earth Catalog* was certainly innovative in its use of the catalogue format, the sense in which a text could help constitute a network was by no means unfamiliar to American Protestants, who have long relied on the material lives of texts to sustain an often intimate sense of community across time and space.<sup>79</sup> As David Morgan has noted, for many American Christians, “the print network was more than a means of distributing information. It was a way of doing Christian good. More than communication, it was a formation of Evangelical community.”<sup>80</sup> Expanding globally, the material presence of print was “believed able to produce action at a distance,” physically instantiating “emotional attachments” over vast distances. “Paper bore the breath of God and the warm presence of a far-flung community of saints.”<sup>81</sup>

---

<sup>78</sup> Thornberry, *Alternative Celebrations Catalogue*, 71-72.

<sup>79</sup> Klassen and Lofton, “Material Witnesses”; Morgan, *Protestants and Pictures*; Gutjahr, *An American Bible*; Brown, *The Word in the World*; Hedstrom, *The Rise of Liberal Religion*; Engelke, *God’s Agents*; Vaca, *Evangelicals Incorporated*.

<sup>80</sup> David Morgan, *The Forge of Vision: A Visual History of Modern Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015), 127.

<sup>81</sup> Morgan, *Forge of Vision*, 127, 134.

Morgan and other scholars such as John Modern and Pamela Klassen have focused on print as a missionary technology that materially connected Christians on far-flung frontiers or field sites. To their compilers, the Alternatives catalogues as physical texts seemed to carry a similar promise. Just like Stewart Brand's hope that the *Whole Earth Catalog* could link people in the counterculture who were building a new civilization "hither and yon in the sticks," with their own catalogue, Kochtitzky and Thornberry hoped to produce a nationwide community "born of a sense of alienation from the land, and a fear that our world is well on the way to committing ecological suicide."<sup>82</sup> Sent out into a wasteland of meaningless and alienating consumption, the catalogue could bring people across the country into a network centered on lifestyle change.

In addition to the many suggestions and testimonials added to the text with each new addition, the catalogue's compilers pointed to resources beyond its own publications helping readers place themselves in a network of lifestyle religion that reached far beyond Alternatives' own print circulation. The fifth edition from 1982, for example, included an eight-page feature on the merits of "Third World Shops," noting that they are relatively rare, aside from "a few groups like SERRV, Mennonite Central Committee, and similar humanitarian groups."<sup>83</sup> And, eventually, the organization itself would adopt five "life standards" as a framing device for the whole project of Alternatives, a framework developed by Doris Janzen Longacre, the Mennonite behind the *More-with-Less* cookbook, another central text in lifestyle religion.<sup>84</sup> Alternatives, then, positioned itself as a central node in a burgeoning network of lifestyle religion that enfolded SHP, SERRV, and *More-with-Less* in order to provide material infrastructure for the promise of lifestyle choice as a response to planetary crises.

---

<sup>82</sup> Thornberry, "Introduction," *Alternative Celebrations Catalogue*, 11.

<sup>83</sup> Jim Goetsch, "Third World Shops," *Alternate Celebrations Catalogue*, 172.

<sup>84</sup> Carolyn Pogue, *Treasury of Celebrations* (British Columbia: Wood Lake Publishing, 1996), 10.





*Figure 9 - Thornberry (left) with Alternatives staff in Forest Park, GA*

By the time Milo Thornberry (fig. 9) took over as executive director in 1980, Alternatives had published four editions of its catalogue with over 100,000 copies in circulation.<sup>85</sup> Although the ideas listed in the catalogue itself did not amount to a mail order service, by 1974 Alternatives was also offering a “Book Service,” with a number of additional resources available to readers who requested them. For the first five years, much of this had been self-funded through Kochtitzky’s initial investment and eventually by reader payments for catalogues and books. In 1977 and 1978, Kochtitzky helped secure grants from his own United Methodist

---

<sup>85</sup> Thornberry, “Introduction,” *Alternative Celebrations Catalogue*, 12.



denomination as well as several other mainline bodies.<sup>86</sup> In fact, the two Methodists, Thornberry and Kochtitzky, were successful enough at securing funding from their denomination that in 1980, Lou Knowles, Thornberry's replacement at NCC's Hunger Concerns council, reported that the UMC had decided to stop "providing grant funding for hunger work for the next four years," choosing instead to cooperate directly with Alternatives in support of their expanding Christmas campaigns.<sup>87</sup>

At the end of the decade, Thornberry officially became executive director, relocating the organization's main offices to the Atlanta area. Under Thornberry's leadership, Alternatives soon expanded its outreach materials while continuing to focus on holidays as a site of contestation between consumerism and simple lifestyles. In 1977, during the interim period between Kochtitzky and Thornberry's leadership, an Alternatives board member in Bloomington, Indiana, contracted a class at Indiana University to produce an animated film strip on consumerism and Christmas. The organization followed up with a 1978 "study/action guide" in the model of NCC's ECAP and WHEAT organizing from earlier in the decade.<sup>88</sup> Then, under Thornberry's leadership starting in 1980, they began distributing an annual Christmas campaign to congregations titled "Whose Birthday Is It, Anyway?" According to Thornberry in 1982, these campaigns alone had reached over 3,000 congregations nationwide.<sup>89</sup> By the 1990s, historian Leigh Eric Schmidt reported that the "Whose Birthday Is It, Anyway?" campaign booklets were reaching 150,000 to 200,000 congregations annually.<sup>90</sup>

---

<sup>86</sup> Earl Barfoot, "Advanced Special Program Consent Form 1977-1980," February 2, 1978. GCAH Records of the Division of Human Relations and Economics, 1439-2-5:02.

<sup>87</sup> Coordinating Council for Hunger Concerns, "Minutes," October 7-8, 1980. PHS NCC Communications Records, box 13.

<sup>88</sup> Eugenia Smith-Durland, *Voluntary Simplicity Study/Action Guide* (Bloomington, IN: Alternatives, 1978).

<sup>89</sup> Thornberry, *Alternate Celebrations Catalogue*. 16.

<sup>90</sup> Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Consumer Rites: The Buying and Selling of American Holidays* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997) 189-190.

Taken together, Alternatives texts helped provide an important print infrastructure for lifestyle religion. Ironically, as print commodities, these mediators of lifestyle religion embodied a tension, as lifestyle religion's practitioners consumed them as an expression of their ambivalence toward consumerism itself. Print is a perfect object for this kind of material culture, since its contents can argue against meaningless consumerism even as they are consumed, helping obscure the ambivalence of lifestyle religion as a commodity form. In a study of evangelical book culture, for example, scholar of religion Daniel Vaca has shown that, "more than other commodities, books appeal to the ideal that consumption derives not from corporate manipulation of consumers and markets but instead from the object's quality and its alignment with consumers' authentic interests, convictions, or needs."<sup>91</sup> Lifestyle religionists are, by nature, suspicious of commodities that might coax them into a passive stance toward consumer culture, but print objects like the Alternatives catalogues carry a very explicit textual meaning that invites a specific kind of individuated engagement that might allow the consumer to maintain a sense of authenticity despite their ambivalence toward consumption in general.

### Conclusion

In the immediate aftermath of World War II, the MCC's Edna Ruth Byler and her counterparts at CWS's SERRV had unknowingly begun laying the groundwork for lifestyle religion. Decades later, as the two supply chains were expanding to include warehouses and brick-and-mortar stores, Alternatives, Inc. began adapting the *Whole Earth Catalog*'s network-forum to provide a print object specifically aimed at constituting a national network for lifestyle religion's devotees. At SHP and SERRV, the market is salient and visible, offering consumers to envision the material power of their consumer choices to transform their own lives, as well as

---

<sup>91</sup> Daniel Vaca, *Evangelicals Incorporated*. 14.

lives on the other side of the planet. By contrast, the Alternatives catalogues' status as consumer objects could at times fade into the background. In this way, SHP, SERRV, and Alternatives offered flexible infrastructures for lifestyle religion, linking public and private through market flows, at times made visible to affirm the market-based power of lifestyle choice to change the planet through relations of global intimacy, and at times less visible, to affirm that sense that lifestyle religion provides a more meaningful and pious alternative to conventional consumption.

These infrastructures helped reroute mainstream Protestant environmental concern out of the streets and off the picket lines, where social and political concern had been acted upon in the 1960s, and where programs like ECAP and ESA had hoped to channel their constituencies' planetary consciousness in the first half of the 1970s. Taken together, Self-Help, SERRV, and the Alternatives catalogues gave these rerouted energies a new terminus: the suburban, nuclear family home. In the second half of the 1970s, joined by the *More-with-Less* cookbook, arguably the most significant lifestyle religion text of the decade, these projects laid the groundwork for a lasting form of religious environmentalism that left behind the vision of collective organizing and direct action that had first energized mainstream Protestant environmentalism at the beginning of the decade in favor of market-based activities that focused on the exercise of consumer piety, which promised to transform nuclear family households and, ultimately, the bodies within it.

# - 5 -

## FAMILY

At a picnic with friends in the summer of 1974, Doris Janzen Longacre was worrying, like many Americans at the time, about the “world food crisis.” As the picnickers wondered aloud what could be done, someone suggested that “[m]aybe it was time for a new Mennonite cookbook.”<sup>1</sup> The idea caught Longacre’s ear, and, by September, she had submitted proposals to her denomination’s relief and development agency, the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), and its publishing house, Herald Press, to help her bring the new cookbook to fruition. A year and a half later, she published *More-with-Less*, which brought together more than five hundred recipes, drawn from both international cuisine and traditional Mennonite cooking. Recipes for African groundnut stew and Indian curry, submitted by MCC workers living around the world, appeared alongside Old Order Mennonite fare like scrapple and roggenbrot. A single page

---

<sup>1</sup> Doris Janzen Longacre, “Exploratory Outline for Cookbook Proposal,” July 1974. MCC box 258, folder 156/20.

featured recipes from missionaries in Zambia and Brazil next to a mashed potato recipe known to fill “hungry Pennsylvania Dutch stomachs.”<sup>2</sup>

At face value, the eclectic mix of recipes could seem random, but Longacre drew them together toward a single end: to “provide every North American household with a way of responding to the needs of a hungry world.”<sup>3</sup> In the early 1970s, news reports of a world food crisis haunted the planetary consciousness of many North Americans. Christian institutions across the denominational spectrum called their constituents to act and, as Longacre put it, “people [were] responding with a kind of holy frustration. ‘We want to use less,’ they say, ‘How do we begin?’”<sup>4</sup> *More-with-Less*, she hoped, would provide the practical steps they sought, providing a compelling guide for linking body, home, and market through the dietary practices of lifestyle religion.

When the cookbook hit shelves in April 1976, the Mennonite Herald Press hoped sales might eventually exceed 75,000. To their surprise, *More-with-Less* was a runaway success. Reviewed in the *Los Angeles Times* and *Chicago Tribune* and promoted by the official outlets of large mainline denominations as well as evangelical print, the cookbook eventually sold more than 850,000 copies.<sup>5</sup> Taking the emergence of lifestyle religion into account, *More-with-Less*’s runaway success makes sense. What Herald Press hadn’t anticipated when predicting its sales numbers was the growing demand for practical ways to structure their lifestyle religion among mainstream Protestants experiencing planetary concern.

---

<sup>2</sup> Doris Janzen Longacre, *More-with-Less* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1976), 233.

<sup>3</sup> Jack C. Scott to CROP offices, Spring 1974. Herald Press *More-with-Less* marketing files.

<sup>4</sup> Longacre, *More-with-Less*, 6.

<sup>5</sup> MennoMedia (formerly Herald Press) reported 851,000 copies in print as of December 2016. Author personal correspondence with MennoMedia.

*More-with-Less* offered its users a richly embodied mode of practicing of lifestyle religion through dietary change. Like the Alternatives catalogues, the physical cookbook itself served as a material focal point providing lifestyle religion with yet another infrastructure for circulation and lasting influence.<sup>6</sup> Judging from the words of *More-with-Less*'s most vocal devotees, the cookbook mediated an embodied pious relationship to the planet in crisis. Within the home, the material object of the book bore the physical marks of committed, consistent lifestyle religion. Take, for example, letters sent to Herald Press to mark *More-with-Less*'s twenty-fifth anniversary. References to torn or tattered front and back covers were among the most common comments, with devotees focusing consistently on the book itself as materially central in their lifestyle religion. One woman refused to use a new copy her mother had given her after seeing the original's "tattered, loose and stained pages." The cookbook user preferred to "depend on my 'old friend.' As I turn the pages, the spots and stains and drips and smears continue to inform me about the value of a particular recipe. I call it my 'scratch and sniff' cookbook." The book had "helped to shape [her] worldview" and to "realize for Christians, even the simple act of cooking a meal can be a testimony to faithfulness."<sup>7</sup> The material object of the book, with its smells, stains, and tatters, bore the marks of the exact kind of individuated, embodied experience of global responsibility that Longacre's audience sought in lifestyle religion.

Published in 1976, just as mainline leaders like Milo Thornberry were preaching the power of lifestyle changes through their WHEAT mobilization and evangelicals like Ron Sider were calling on local groups to explore simple lifestyle, *More-with-Less* joined with SHP,

---

<sup>6</sup> Here, I am thinking with David Morgan's theory of "focal objects" that serve as nodal points through which religionists encounter the agency of complex actor-networks. Morgan, "The Ecology of Images: Seeing and the Study of Religion," *Religion and Society* 5 (2014), 83–105.

<sup>7</sup> Email to Herald Press, May 13, 2000. Herald Press *More-with-Less* 25th anniversary edition editor's file.

SERRV, and Alternatives to help build a lasting infrastructure for lifestyle religion, helping reroute mainstream Protestant environmentalism into the domestic space of suburban homes and ultimately, the bodies within them.

This chapter focuses on the emergence of the family as a focal point in lifestyle religion. In the pages of the Alternatives catalogues as well as the *More-with-Less* cookbook, mainstream Protestant environmentalists were told to channel their desire to act for the sake of the planet through the nuclear family. Through the *More-with-Less* cookbook's dietary guidelines, alongside Alternatives' ideas for responsible Christmas and birthday celebrations and SHP and SERRV's promise of global intimacy through wooden bowls on kitchen tables, these domestic spaces were said to offer lifestyle religion's practitioners the experience of embodied transformation. If crisis-talk contains a logic of internalization as mainstream Protestants turned inward to consider their affects and dispositions in the face of planetary crisis, in the pages of *More-with-Less* and other lifestyle texts, that internalization becomes a material one. The everyday practice of lifestyle religion in the nuclear family home was understood to produce virtuous white bodies whose pious acts of consumption traverse the globalizing free market, doing just enough to prevent environmental catastrophe without challenging the postwar political economy's organization of power.

### **The Family**

According to Milo Thornberry, Alternatives' signature focus on "celebrations" was designed as an accessible way to introduce total lifestyle change through a focus on these "ritualized interruptions in the continuum of daily life which remind us who we are." In Thornberry's words in the 1982 edition of the catalogue, from the beginning, Alternatives' "aim was to change the whole of our lives," but it found that "celebrations are important points of

beginning changes in the way we live.” In this way, alternative celebrations could help the organization meet one of its founding goals, “to motivate individuals and families to reduce or eliminate their consumer purchases for celebrations and to donate that money to people- and Earth-oriented projects.”<sup>8</sup>

Beyond their usefulness as “starting points,” these celebrations, which the catalogues divided into two categories—rites of passage (birthdays, weddings, funerals) and holidays (chief among them Christmas)—were suggestive of an intensive focus on the nuclear family home as the proper site of lifestyle change. After the front matter, Thornberry’s 1982 catalogue opened with suggestions for births, birthdays, and weddings, the constitutive events of nuclear family life. And suggestions for Christmas as well as birthdays focused especially on the question of alternative gifts parents might give their children (alongside a couple of pages of kid-submitted handmade gift ideas we well).

According to Thornberry in his catalogue’s closing essay, the household would be a central building block in the “alternative future” created by “the people in the movement toward responsible living.” This future, “one in which neither global justice nor ecological balance is sacrificed on the altar of greed” would start through a “spirituality of cultural resistance” that would allow people to “create the new future in their households.” “Experiencing the reality of a new future in the household is integral to creating that future in the community and beyond,” he wrote. “Beginning in the household is also an act of integrity.” In Thornberry’s vision for the future of lifestyle religion, once the nuclear family household had been transformed, the movement could more successfully extend into itself society at large through organizing in workplaces, governments, and the marketplace.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Thornberry, “Introduction,” *Alternate Celebrations Catalogue* 14-16.

<sup>9</sup> Thornberry, “A Look to the Future,” *Alternate Celebrations Catalogue*, 186-189.



This kind of nationwide movement, or network, of disparate households building a new future together was enabled by the intimate presence of the catalogue, a physical object whose function as a network forum provided an infrastructure for a textual community to emerge. Writing about liberal Protestant book culture, historian of religion Matthew Hedstrom has observed that “print culture facilitated the emergence of textual community centered on the home.”<sup>10</sup> Like pioneers in a wilderness homestead whose lives of rugged virtue were connected to a networked community through intimate connection to a physical Bible or tract, texts like the Alternatives catalogues helped link simple living families through the connection of their responsible lifestyles, pioneered in households dotted across their nation’s wilderness of meaningless of consumption.<sup>11</sup> “We must be pioneers in finding new ways of living,” wrote Milo and his new wife, Colleen Shannon-Thornberry in an essay on “Hunger and the Lifestyle Connection,” drawing on just this imagery. “That means developing a lifestyle that will be a microcosm of the kind of world order which must come to be.”<sup>12</sup>

Placing the nuclear family household at the center of its movement, Alternatives publications viewed American consumer culture was a direct threat to the nuclear family itself. Later editions of the catalogue reprinted an article from children’s television star Fred Rogers on “How to Make Christmas meaningful for your children,” placed alongside a pull quote from journalist Colman McCarthy suggesting that parents “creatively deprive a child” in order to “keep his sense and mind free of material goods that overwhelm him.”<sup>13</sup> Children were besieged

---

<sup>10</sup> Matthew Hedstrom, *The Rise of Liberal Religion*. 18.

<sup>11</sup> Sonia Hazard, “Evangelical Encounters: The American Tract Society and the Rituals of Print Distribution in Antebellum America,” *The Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 88:1 (2020), 200-234. Modern, *Secularism in Antebellum America*. Gutjahr, *An American Bible*.

<sup>12</sup> Colleen Shannon-Thornberry and Milo Shannon-Thornberry, “Hunger and the Lifestyle Connection,” *The Alternate Celebrations Catalogue*, 83. The pair seem to have met while both serving on the NCC Coordinating Committee for World Hunger, with both changing their last names sometime in mid-1977.

<sup>13</sup> Fred Rogers, “How to make Christmas meaningful for your children,” *Alternate Celebrations Catalogue*, 99-101.

by the overwhelming presence of commodities and needed a kind of deprivation therapy to escape their sway.

An animated film strip, “The Celebration Revolution of Alexander Scrooge,” commissioned by Alternatives and produced by students at Indiana University in 1977, playfully represented this ultimately quite serious sense that family traditions were under siege from the forces behind consumer culture. The film tells the story of Alexander Scrooge, the clean-cut patriarch of a middle-class suburban family who, according to the narrator, “work hard, play hard, go to church, pay their taxes, give to charities.” In an update to *A Christmas Carol*, Scrooge is shown visions by ghosts of celebrations past, present, and yet to come that help him question his family’s lifestyle, which had become “too hurried, too impersonal, too fancy and wasteful.” In the visions provided by the ghost of Celebrations present, Alternatives message that the family was under siege came through vividly. First, Scrooge is shown a street scene with banners proclaiming “sell-ebrate,” before he is given a vision of his kids and their family dog transfixed by the word “BUY” shining brightly on their television screen (fig. 1). Throughout the film, the centrality of family extended beyond the main character’s own household, with the narrator ultimately using it as a metaphor for humanity, mentioning “the whole human family” or “the whole global family” three times in its fifteen-minute runtime, exhorting Scrooge and the audience to become more caring for the human family and “our mother Earth.”<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> Kay Henderson, director. “The Celebration Revolution of Alexander Scrooge,” (Bloomington, IN: Alternatives, Inc., 1977).

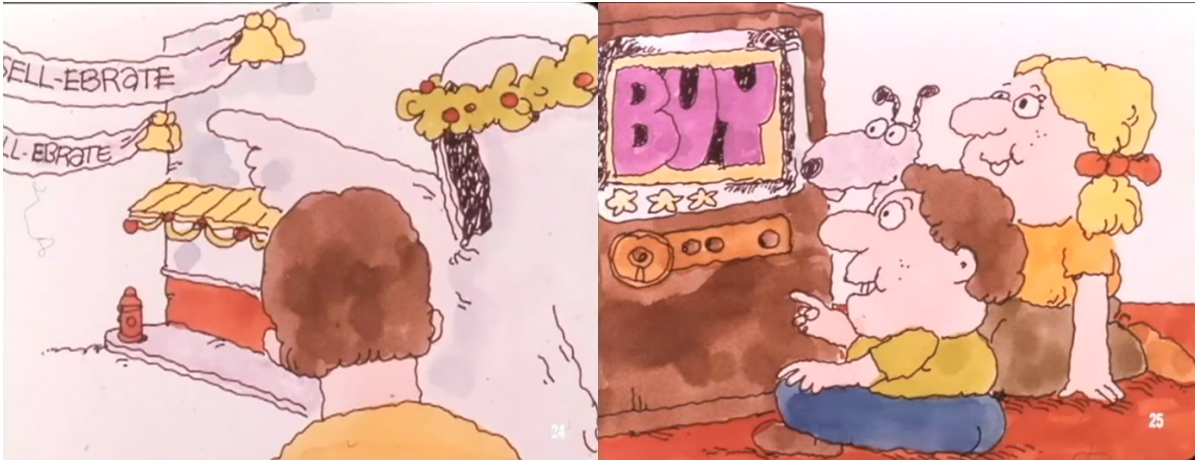


Figure 1 - Still images from "The Celebration Revolution of Alexander Scrooge" (1977)

Metaphors about the nuclear family, traditional sexual norms, and threats to both, extended well beyond the film, revealing a deep alignment in the minds of Kochtitzky, Thornberry, and others between the heteronormative nuclear family and the movement for responsible living. More than one Alternatives writer deployed the metaphor of “prostitution” to describe commercialized holidays, with founder Kochtitzky writing in 1973 that his “antagonism against the *prostitution* of the Holy Season was slow to build, as water takes a while to boil.”<sup>15</sup> Five years later, Eugenia Smith-Durland used the same language in the organization’s 1978 *Voluntary Simplicity Study/Action Guide* to say that “Christmas is a good place to start, because of all our Christian feast it is probably the most badly *prostituted*.”<sup>16</sup> Thornberry reiterated the metaphor in a foreword to the study/action guide’s 1979 second edition, which he also reprinted as an introduction to the fifth edition of the catalogue in 1982. In both texts, Thornberry stated that Alternatives’ movement for lifestyle change was “born of anger that our most sacred celebrations are spiritually bankrupt, their meanings *prostituted* by the notion that the only vehicle for expressing joy, gratitude, love or sorrow is something purchased with money.” On

<sup>15</sup> Kochtitzky, quoted in Thornberry, “Introduction,” *Alternate Christmas Catalogue*, 1973. Emphasis mine.

<sup>16</sup> Eugenia Smith-Durland, *Voluntary Simplicity Study/Action Guide*. Emphasis mine.

the next line, his metaphorical sense that traditional sexual norms and family bonds were transgressed by commercialism continued, “born of a sense of *estrangement* among families, friends and communities because the values of human relationships have been replaced by crass materialism.”<sup>17</sup> One essay printed in the catalogue decried the “annual commercial *orgy*” at Christmastime. And echoing the 1977 film strip’s image of a nuclear family besieged by commercialism, she added, “Our TV sets *seduce* us to buy all sorts of gifts.”<sup>18</sup>

Likening American consumer culture to a threat of sexual upheaval (prostitution, orgy, seduction) that breaks families apart (estrangement, divorce), Alternatives encouraged its network of lifestyle religionists to channel their motivation for global and environmental change into spaces of domesticity.<sup>19</sup> This reflects a decades-long process through which neoliberal economists, business leaders, and their political allies undertook a project of, in historian Bethany Moreton’s words, “confining collective human endeavor to the market, the church, and the family.”<sup>20</sup> In order to gain public buy-in to their agenda of worldwide markets insulated from state regulation, economists like Milton Friedman and business leaders organized themselves through groups like the U.S. Chamber of Commerce to push what Moreton calls a “software of globalization,” deploying the Christian discourse of family values to encourage a reimagining of collective problems as things to be solved at the individual, family, or congregational level.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> Milo Thornberry, “Foreword to the Second Edition,” *Voluntary Simplicity Study/Action Guide*, 2nd ed. (Ellenwood, GA: Alternatives, 1979). Thornberry, “Introduction,” *Alternate Celebrations Catalogue*. Emphasis mine.

<sup>18</sup> M. Deane Walters, “Getting Through the Holidays,” *Alternate Celebrations Catalogue*. 42, 44. Emphasis mine.

<sup>19</sup> “The divorce which modern society has affected between the heads and the hands is, for [Robin Clarke, British member of a simple-living commune], its greatest evil.” Thornberry, “How to Live Better with Less—If you Can Stand the People,” *Alternate Celebrations Catalogue*. 157.

<sup>20</sup> Bethany Moreton, *To Serve God and Wal-Mart: The Making of Christian Free Enterprise* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 269.

<sup>21</sup> Moreton, *To Serve God and Wal-Mart*, 224. The formulation that neoliberalism reimagines collective problems as individual ones with market solutions comes from Brown, “American Nightmare.”

Though the 1970s are rightly called a pivotal decade which witnessed the fracture of collectivities like activist or labor unions that had been able to place checks on the powerful, economists and firms had been laying the groundwork for this retreat from collectivities since World War II.<sup>22</sup>

The postwar consumer economy centered much of its energy on the suburban home. Home ownership emerged as a centerpiece in the aspirations of people struggling with the stresses of war on the battlefield and the home front. “At the center of Americans’ vision of postwar prosperity,” writes historian Lizabeth Cohen, “was the private home, fully equipped with consumer durables.” After the war, the government subsidized this cultural model of family-based economic activity through its support of suburbanization, helping produce spaces for consumption that were private (by emphasizing the single-family home) and segregated (through redlining and other planning and design practices in the construction of subdivisions and shopping malls), helping to reimagine civic engagement as individual and family consumption. These new homes and commercialized public spaces came to structure consumption and its political meanings, creating an emphasis on traditional gender roles and domesticity, which “in feminizing public space...enhanced women’s claim on the suburban landscape while circumscribing the power they wielded there.”<sup>23</sup> Concomitant with the growth of suburbs was the explosion of supermarket chains, which used this rhetoric of “housewives,” to undermine New Deal-era consumer politics, which had embraced the power of collectives to

---

<sup>22</sup> For an influential account of the 1970s as the beginning of an “age of fracture,” see: Daniel T. Rodgers, *Age of Fracture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011). “Pivotal Decade” is Judith Stein’s phrase. Stein, *Pivotal Decade: How the United States Traded Factories for Finance in the Seventies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

<sup>23</sup> Cohen, *Consumers’ Republic*, 72-73, 259.

place checks on big business. Supermarkets used a discourse of respectability to tie aspirations of autonomy and agency to a set of conservative, middle-class notions of femininity.<sup>24</sup>

This elaboration of a suburban infrastructure built out of homes, subdivisions, highways, shopping malls, and supermarkets provided a channel through which to extend neoliberalism's political reason. Individual autonomy in the market was elevated over New Deal and civil-rights-era collectives, themselves recast as antagonistic toward (market) freedom. This message was widespread, directed at the Cold War suburbs by figures like J. Edgar Hoover, long-time antagonist of Black-led social movements and the American Left in general, who joined the chorus of voices offering a public, and clearly racialized, message to “‘homemakers and mothers’ about their unique role in fighting ‘the twin enemies of freedom—crime and communism.’”<sup>25</sup> As Melinda Cooper has shown in *Family Values*, contrary to certain accounts that viewed free market fundamentalists and social conservatives as potential antagonists who only formed an uneasy coalition out of electoral necessity in the emergence of the New Right, social conservatism, with its embrace of the white, suburban heteronormative nuclear family as a reaction against the liberation movements of the 1960s, and neoliberalism, with its plan for capital accumulation through economic liberalization, proceeded in lock step through the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>26</sup> For both groups, “the grand macroeconomic issues of the time, from inflation to budget deficits to ballooning welfare budgets, reflected an ominous shift in the sexual and racial

---

<sup>24</sup> Tracey Deutsch, *Building a Housewife's Paradise: Gender, Politics, and American Grocery Stores in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

<sup>25</sup> Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*. (New York: Basic Books, [1988] 2008), 132. See also: Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015).

<sup>26</sup> The classic statement of the view that the alliance of social conservatives and free market fundamentalists was an uneasy one born out of electoral necessity is: George H. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America since 1945* (New York: Basic Books, 1976).

foundations of the Fordist family.”<sup>27</sup> Neoliberal market fundamentalists known for their emphasis on individual responsibility “end up affirming the necessity of familial obligations when confronted with the social costs of unwaged dependents.” Social conservatives, on the other hand, assume the centrality of the family and imagine it as the basis or starting point of individual liberty. “Both, however, seize upon the necessity of family responsibility as the ideal source of economic security and an effective counterforce to the demoralizing powers of the welfare state.”<sup>28</sup> The heteronormative nuclear family, in other words, becomes a widely useful site for the rationalization of capitalist power, offloading deficit spending and neutralizing collective resistance to the family’s racial, gendered, and sexual logics by channeling all welfare and credit into its confines.

By focusing so centrally on the nuclear family household as the starting point for lifestyle change, and discursively framing affluent consumption as a moral transgression that threatened family bonds, *Alternatives* ensured that the infrastructure produced by its catalogue was aligned with the new discourse of family responsibility, rather than the practices of collective action and social upheaval that had prevailed in the previous decade. At this juncture of individual autonomy and family responsibility, users were invited to imagine themselves as powerful rational actors in the free market, empowered to “use the vote of [their] purchase wisely,” given the guarantee that “our economy assumes that buying reflects taste which reflects rational judgment.”<sup>29</sup> Through a network of nuclear families, intimately linked through the presence of its texts, *Alternatives* envisioned an intentional, powerful transformation of the world through the

---

<sup>27</sup> Melinda Cooper, *Family Values: Between Neoliberalism and the New Social Conservatism* (Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books, 2017), 24.

<sup>28</sup> Cooper, *Family Values*, 72-73.

<sup>29</sup> Kirk Farnsworth, “The Psychology of Consumption,” *Alternate Celebrations Catalogue*. 47-48.

trustworthy science of supply and demand. One of the longer essays reprinted in *Alternatives Catalogues* described this vision at length:

The advent of a large segment of the population acting fully or partially in accord with [voluntary simplicity, or VS] tenets would have a major impact on business... The person living the simple life tends to prefer products that are functional, healthful, nonpolluting durable, repairable, recyclable or made from renewable raw materials, energy-cheap, authentic, aesthetically pleasing, and made through simple technology. Such criteria will adversely affect many products of conspicuous consumption. On the other hand, the VS lifestyle should create an excellent market for such items as: First class durable products, such as solid wood furniture, high quality music and television systems, top-grade hand tools, geared bicycles. Sturdy cotton and wool clothing deemphasizing fashion, which can be mended, handed down, and worn for years.<sup>30</sup>

The resultant picture is a network of virtuous families with simple, yet aesthetically pleasing tastes.<sup>31</sup> And by buying into this stylish, refined material culture, nuclear families were promised a broad transformation of the political economy thanks to the responsive of markets. We are very far, now, from the optimistic visions of environmental and social action that animated NCC and ESA organizing in the early 1970s, as fair-trade programs and lifestyle catalogues instead envisioned a world of stylish, distinctive lifestyle choices whose virtues reverberate through the global market.

### *More-with-Less*

It might be said that people like Bob Kochtitzky and Milo Thornberry chose to evoke the specter of sexual and marital transgression, and emphasize the centrality of the nuclear family, as a way of mediating an otherwise threatening set of countercultural practices to their less-than-

---

<sup>30</sup> Duane S. Elgin and Arnold Mitchell, "Voluntary Simplicity: lifestyle of the Future?" *Alternate Celebrations Catalogue*. 153-154.

<sup>31</sup> The longstanding alignment between simplicity and refined, "highbrow" tastes in American culture is an important piece of background to much of the material culture of lifestyle religion. Wearing durable wool sweaters that "deemphasize fashion," preferring simple, well-made wooden furniture, eating simple foods with very little added sugar or fat, are all often associated with high-brow cultural status, helping practitioners of lifestyle religion embrace a kind of stylish, refined affluence that signals their commitment to global responsibility in the metropole. See: Russel Lynes, "Highbrow, Lowbrow, Middlebrow," (1949), in *The Wilson Quarterly* 1:1 (1976), 146-158; Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990).



adventurous middle-class Protestant audience. The irony here is that both Kochtitzky and Thornberry had been involved in some seriously risky direct action in the late 1960s, with the former's Mississippi home fire-bombed by the Klan and the latter arrested and expelled from Taiwan for his support of the nationalist movement. In their work at Alternatives in support of lifestyle religion, they turned instead to a more mild, family-friendly vision of religious activity that might secure a sound planetary future through the exercise of purchasing power.

Adapting the more confrontational approaches of the 1960s to a more family-friendly version was certainly at the forefront of Doris Janzen Longacre's mind as she compiled the *More-with-Less* cookbook, arguably the single most significant mediator of Protestant lifestyle religion in the 1970s. Born just before the war, Longacre (1940-1979) grew up during pivotal years for the American Mennonite community (fig. 2). Their tradition of nonconforming pacifism allowed a level of ambivalence about America's role in the world that few others were open to in the years surrounding World War II. Simplicity maintained its importance in Mennonite households like Longacre's long after the economic struggles of the Depression had faded for most white, middle-class families.<sup>32</sup> Years later, Longacre frequently recalled the lessons of frugality and simplicity she had learned from her grandmother and mother as key resources for contemporary responses to planetary crisis.<sup>33</sup> On the evangelical left, simple living advocates like Ronald Sider were more likely to appeal to counterculture ideas from the 1960s; Longacre's appeal to mothers and grandmothers made the message much more accessible to the broad audience of church women she hoped to reach.<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> Doris Janzen Longacre, "Haste, Waste, and the Food Crisis," MCC box 258, folder 156/20.

<sup>33</sup> Longacre, *More-with-Less*, 8–30.

<sup>34</sup> On church women as primary target audience, see Doris Janzen Longacre to Beulah Kauffman, 7/19/74, MCC box 258, folder 156/20.



*Figure 2 - Doris Janzen Longacre*

In many ways, the acculturated Mennonites like Longacre who came of age in the 1950s and 1960s were perfectly positioned to mediate an antiestablishment message of simplicity to moderate, middle-class Protestants. Soon after graduating from university, Longacre and her husband went on two overseas placements through the MCC. Founded in 1920 primarily to provide aid for Mennonites in the Soviet Union, the MCC shifted its focus toward the Third World in the 1950s. Through the formation of the Pax program, the MCC sent thousands of young Mennonites on two- or three-year service placements in Africa, Asia, and Latin America through the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. Thanks to this new type of MCC service placement, Longacre and her husband lived as a young married couple in Vietnam from 1964 to 1967 and

Indonesia in 1971. For Longacre and other young Mennonites, their face-to-face encounters with the Global South, combined with a tradition of nonconformism and pacifism, instilled serious doubts about the American way of life and America's role in the world. As with Edna Ruth Byler's travels to Puerto Rico, Bob Kochtitzky's work coordinating Methodist short-term relief projects through LAOS, and Milo Thornberry's stint as a missionary in Taiwan, Longacre's enthusiasm and successes as a champion of lifestyle religion seemed driven by a desire to recreate her overseas experiences of austerity, authenticity, and purpose in North American domestic spaces.<sup>35</sup> Like her references to lessons learned from mothers and grandmothers, Longacre's ability to appeal to religious tradition and missionary experience made her message more credible to a mainstream audience of moderate churchgoers than the appeals of leaders associated with Evangelicals for Social Action who had developed similar perspectives through their experiences with officially secular, leftist organizations like Students for a Democratic Society.<sup>36</sup>

Back in the United States, following placements in southeast Asia, with her husband Paul serving as assistant executive secretary of the MCC, Longacre found herself surrounded by talk of crisis. "From an almost overnight awareness of diminishing world food reserves," she wrote in *More-with-Less*, "came the 1974 term 'food crisis.'"<sup>37</sup> In late 1973, Paul Longacre drafted a

---

<sup>35</sup> David Hollinger has recently offered a helpful study of the underappreciated influence of missionaries on twentieth-century American society. Hollinger focuses on high-profile figures in the foreign service, universities, and elsewhere, but Longacre and thousands like her who participated in new one- or two-year mission placements affected their home communities in less formal ways. They may have understood themselves as informal agents of globalization, both in their use of globalizing travel and communication technologies and their role in shaping the international gaze of their domestic communities upon return. Hollinger, *Protestants Abroad: How Missionaries Tried to Change the World but Changed America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017).

<sup>36</sup> On the link between figures like Jim Wallis and Students for a Democratic Society, see David R. Swartz, *Moral Minority: The Evangelical Left in an Age of Conservatism*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 47–67.

<sup>37</sup> Longacre, *More-with-Less*, 13.

Resolution on the World Food Crisis; it was officially adopted by the MCC in January of 1974, and quickly became known as the Hillsboro Resolution.<sup>38</sup> In it, the MCC called on each household in its constituency “to examine its lifestyle” to reduce food consumption and expenditures by 10 percent.<sup>39</sup> The resolution also called for educational efforts focusing on “the relationship between overconsumption on the part of North Americans and its effect on needy people in the developing countries.”<sup>40</sup> Trained as a home economist, recently returned from placements in the developing world, and in close company with the drafter of the resolution, Doris Longacre was well positioned to play a key role in those educational efforts. In informal conversations with friends and more formal exchanges with missionary networks, she became aware of widespread demand for a concrete set of practices to respond to the crisis. “‘How shall we change?’,” she wrote, “is a question MCC personnel are hearing in food crisis discussions across the church.”<sup>41</sup>

In the summer of 1974, Longacre proposed a cookbook to the MCC and the Mennonite publishing house Herald Press that would meet the demand she was observing with a practical set of instructions for Christian women across the country to respond to the world food crisis through home cooking, allowing them to “establish a climate of concern and joy” in their homes and “feel a greater sense of purpose and fulfillment as [they gathered] each day at meal time.”<sup>42</sup> With this mission, she signaled an equally intense focus on the nuclear family household as the one reflected in Alternatives catalogues. The project would combine the “traditional assets” of

---

<sup>38</sup> Paul Longacre, “MCC Program to Combat the World Food Crisis” December 5, 1973, Paul Longacre’s papers (author’s personal possession).

<sup>39</sup> Mennonite Central Committee, “Resolution on World Food Crisis,” January 17, 1974, Paul Longacre’s papers (author’s personal possession).

<sup>40</sup> MCC, “Resolution on World Food Crisis.”

<sup>41</sup> Doris Longacre, “Exploratory Outline for Cookbook Proposal”; Doris Longacre to Paul Schrock, September 18, 1974. Herald Press *More-with-Less* editor’s file.

<sup>42</sup> Longacre, *More-with-Less*, back cover copy.

Mennonites like “gardening and food preservation, household thrift, talent for cooking creatively—from scratch and with what we have on hand” with the simple diets of the Third World poor, as encountered firsthand by MCC missionaries on placements throughout Africa, Asia, and Latin America.<sup>43</sup> Longacre issued a call in various Brethren and Mennonite media outlets for tips and recipes from both of these sources, and the cookbook’s contents were deeply shaped by global and traditional Mennonite sensibilities. In its published form, the cookbook brought together joyful images of Third World children; poems, proverbs, and scripture verses about hunger and simplicity; a simple visual motif of measuring spoons meant to evoke “apportioning, conserving” through the commitment and intentionality of the individual user; and a host of globally inspired recipes. In so doing, *More-with-Less* provided a coherent set of ideas and practices seeking to “provide every North American household with a way of responding to the needs of a hungry world.”<sup>44</sup>

By seeking to provide every household with a way of responding, Longacre met demand for individualized religious practice. As scholars have observed, American religion in the second half of the twentieth century was characterized by greater and greater emphasis on personal authenticity and individuation. To use Charles Taylor’s characterization of this “Age of Authenticity,” “the religious life or practice that I become part of must not only be my choice, but it must speak to me, it must make sense in terms of my spiritual development as I understand this.”<sup>45</sup> Although many understand this culture of expressive individualism as the polar opposite of traditional institutional religion, *More-with-Less* reflects a parallel impulse to develop

---

<sup>43</sup> Longacre, “Haste, Waste, and the Food Crisis.”

<sup>44</sup> Ken Hiebert to Paul Schrock, December 23, 1975. Herald Press *More-with-Less* marketing file; Jack C. Scott to CROP offices, Herald Press *More-with-Less* marketing file.

<sup>45</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2007), 486.

individuated and personally authentic religious practice among those who remain affiliated with traditional religious institutions like the mainline Protestant denominations.<sup>46</sup>

In this context, large-scale institutional actions like denominational fundraising or policy advocacy could seem unsatisfactory as responses to the world food crisis. By contrast, *More-with-Less* promised that every household, indeed every person, could make a religious response on an individual basis. It did so by leveraging a sense of worldwide interconnectedness, made newly prominent through the markers of globalization circulating through mass media and by working through the medium of consumer lifestyle to position users as active participants in the networks of global capital, responding with religious intention to their feeling that the world was in crisis. Here, we approach lifestyle religion's infrastructural terminus. If SHC and SERRV had trained people to think within markets, and Alternatives had posited the nuclear family as the starting point of these market choices, Longacre provided a deeply individuated practice of lifestyle religion by helping her readers take objects of global responsibility into their own bodies.

In this ambition to reach every North American household, the production and design of the cookbook was crucial for successfully mediating a fundamentally Mennonite message to a wider Christian audience. The Herald Press encouraged Longacre to "avoid language which would detract from its acceptability on the general market" hoping that "half the sales [would] be from beyond the MCC constituency."<sup>47</sup> For her part, Longacre was also confident of demand beyond the Mennonite church, refraining "from using in-house language" in her manuscript because of her belief that "many non-Mennonite North Americans are eager to be responsible to

---

<sup>46</sup> Robert Wuthnow's categories of "dwelling" and "seeking" is one particularly influential example of this understanding of religious individualism as institutional religion's polar opposite. Wuthnow, *After Heaven: Spirituality in America since the 1950s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 1–18.

<sup>47</sup> Paul Schrock to William T. Snyder, December 4, 1974, Herald Press *More-with-Less* editor's file.

the rest of the world as long as the message comes through as good news, joy.”<sup>48</sup> In early memos circulating between Herald Press, MCC, and Longacre, the stakeholders struggled to create a title and cover design that might draw wider appeal. Early outlines called the cookbook “Simple Food for Plain People” (a reference to the Anabaptist tradition of plain dress).<sup>49</sup> Eventually, Longacre selected “More-with-Less,” hoping to broaden her audience beyond “plain people” by “blend[ing] joy-good news with the concept of caring about what happens to the rest of the world,” and perhaps seeking to avoid the darker tone of environmentalist publications like the *Population Bomb*. Longacre also hoped that “the MCC symbol [could] be woven into cover design to identify the book for Mennonites” without using the name of the organization on the cover at all.<sup>50</sup> With the help of a well-known graphic designer, a front cover was produced that cleverly disguised the MCC logo (a cross transforming into a dove) in a photographic array of non-meat protein sources so that Mennonites would recognize it as a Mennonite publication but others could conceivably miss the reference altogether (fig. 3).<sup>51</sup>

---

<sup>48</sup> Doris Longacre to Herald Press, June 6, 1975, Herald Press *More-with-Less* editor’s file.

<sup>49</sup> “MCC Food Crisis Cookbook Project,” MCC box 258, folder 156/20.

<sup>50</sup> Doris Longacre to Herald Press, June 6, 1975, Herald Press *More-with-Less* editor’s file.

<sup>51</sup> The designer, Kenneth Hiebert, is well known in the graphic design community, holding teaching positions at multiple design schools and authoring two textbooks.



Figure 3 – Doris Janzen Longacre, *More-with-Less* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1976).

In addition to her concern that in-house Anabaptist language might narrow her audience, Longacre was likewise aware that the cookbook's links to ideas from the left-leaning counterculture and environmental movement might too create barriers for her hoped-for constituency of middle-class, church-going mothers. Longacre explicitly modeled *More-with-Less* on Francis Moore Lappé's 1971 *Diet for a Small Planet* and similar environmentalist cookbooks, drawing on their statistical data to explain the world food crisis and America's connection to it. Even so, she reflected that those previous books would have little appeal to a mainstream Protestant audience. As she explained in a her proposal for the book, "Recipes have a strong 'natural foods' bent and call for many ingredients known only to persons who shop at



health food stores.”<sup>52</sup> Her own experiences as a working mother informed her understanding of what would be realistic and practical; she attempted to always “relate food and energy conservation to the busy life-style most mothers experience.”<sup>53</sup> In addition to avoiding the high costs of her source texts’ approach, Longacre carefully translated their countercultural associations. On a cassette tape introducing the philosophy of *More-with-Less*, she walked her audience of middle-class church women through the idea that some of these practices would run counter to mainstream culture, doing so in a gentle, deliberate tone of voice: “We should deal with the fact that if we are really committed to making more with less, we’re doing something that runs counter to the prevailing trend of our society. We’re being different. That will be rather frightening to some people. But we’d better admit it and face it head on. Maybe then we can even be cheerful about it.”<sup>54</sup>

Overall, Longacre’s attempts to mainstream these countercultural dietary practices came primarily through the selection and presentation of recipes. In those recipes, she carefully modeled a reduced-meat diet that would seem accessible to her intended audience of middle-class, Protestant mothers. In Longacre’s mind, Lappé’s use of natural food store cuisine and insistence on total vegetarianism were “unrealistic for our constituency.”<sup>55</sup> Lappé and Longacre both wrote during the moment of the natural foods store’s ascendance, meaning its countercultural associations and high prices were becoming increasingly visible across the country.<sup>56</sup> Whereas Lappé eagerly included products primarily available in natural foods stores

---

<sup>52</sup> “Exploratory Outline for Cookbook Proposal,” July 1974, MCC box 258, folder 156/20.

<sup>53</sup> Kalona Mennonite Church Workshop Outline, 3/21/78, MCC box 1, folder 55/04.

<sup>54</sup> Doris Longacre, “How to Conduct a *More-with-Less* Workshop,” 1980 Cassette, MCC.

<sup>55</sup> Longacre, Exploratory Outline for Cookbook Proposal, September 9, 1974, MCC box 258, folder 156/20.

<sup>56</sup> Joshua Clark Davis observes that “these businesses faced an array of criticisms, including charges of cliquish dogmatism [and] excessive prices for questionable products.” Davis, *From Headshops to Whole Foods: The Rise and Fall of Activist Entrepreneurs* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 180. For a broader survey of countercultural food practices, see Warren Belasco, *Appetite for Change: How the Counterculture Took on the Food Industry*, 2nd ed. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, [1989] 2007).

in her recipes, Longacre tried to avoid anything not available at a regular grocery store. In the few cases when she did include unfamiliar ingredients, she carefully introduced them to the reader, hedging against any sense of elitist inaccessibility. With soy products in general, she reminded readers that, although they may seem foreign or unfamiliar, they had a history of use in previous generations. “Older people remember eating soybeans during Depression days,” she recounted. “Several have said to me, ‘You know, we ate soybeans when I was young. We just cooked them up, poured on a little milk or butter, and that’s what we ate.’”<sup>57</sup> In contrast to *Diet for a Small Planet*, Longacre included the beans sparingly, and was careful to recommend only as one option among others for reducing meat consumption. “If such products are not overpriced or over packaged,” she wrote with characteristic gentleness, “give them a try.”<sup>58</sup>

In this way, Longacre’s tone contrasted sharply with Lappé’s, who briefly acknowledged the possible difficulties of changing a household’s eating habits in a concluding paragraph, but otherwise presented her long list of recipes with no commentary or explanation of the many unfamiliar, expensive, hard-to-find ingredients.<sup>59</sup> Longacre, on the other hand, couched the recipes in a pastoral tone, introducing new or unfamiliar items gently and always acknowledging the possible challenges involved. In another passage on soybeans, Longacre framed the challenges of changing diets in terms of her own personal process:

My own experience with soybeans was the same. The first time they simmered all morning on my stove I found their odor a little objectionable. The next few times I did not mind it. Now when I return from outdoors to the kitchen aroma of cooking soybeans, I respond unconsciously with the same good feeling I have for any food smell that signals mealtime. Trying to change too many things at once will only make a household defensive. A slower approach which gives people time to adjust their tastes goes more smoothly.<sup>60</sup>

---

<sup>57</sup> Longacre, *More-with Less*, 97.

<sup>58</sup> Longacre, *More-with-Less*, 98.

<sup>59</sup> Francis Moore Lappé, *Diet for a Small Planet* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1971), 130.

<sup>60</sup> Longacre, *More-with-Less*, 24.

Whereas Lappé's introduction modeled an intellectual shift, suggesting that her audience convert immediately to globally responsible diets based on new understandings gained through her book, Longacre framed the change as a slow, embodied process of growing to love the new foods associated with global responsibility. By generally avoiding ingredients associated with an expensive and unfamiliar subculture, and introducing those she did use in careful, qualified fashion, Longacre developed a different tone that acknowledged the embodied habits of taste, the emotional difficulties of change, and the interpersonal problems of defensiveness and resistance often involved in household eating.

In addition to her careful approach to ingredients associated with natural foods stores, Longacre also presented recipes that could reduce meat consumption without insisting on vegetarianism. This was again a decision about accessibility: "[W]e expect that most people will continue to eat meat . . . but we are calling for lower-meat diets."<sup>61</sup> Of the 250 recipes from categories that typically involve meat, around 140 included it, and 110 were strictly vegetarian. As Longacre noted, even this ratio would be a major change for many families who were accustomed to eating meat daily. Beyond those vegetarian recipes, Longacre's biggest emphasis was on reducing the amount of meat used in meals that did include it. On a sidebar titled "Bean, Soybean, and Lentil Discoveries," for example, she suggested that readers use "soybeans in a chili recipe and reduce ground beef to just enough for flavoring."<sup>62</sup> Many recipes followed this pattern, incorporating the plant-based meat substitutes that were often the main ingredients of *Diet for a Small Planet* recipes into meat-based dishes to reduce the amount of meat consumed. Whereas Lappé included several recipes for rice or other plant-based loaf entrees, Longacre kept

---

<sup>61</sup> Longacre, *More-with-Less*, 29–30.

<sup>62</sup> Longacre, *More-with-Less*, 109.

the meat in meat loaf while reducing the volume, with recipes like “Soy, Cheese, and Meat Loaf.”<sup>63</sup>

Longacre’s careful work of adapting the message of *Diet for a Small Planet* to her middle-class, churchgoing audience recalled Bob Kochtitzky and the Shannon-Thornberrys’ efforts at producing lifestyle catalogues that, while resembling the *Whole Earth Catalog*, avoided its transgressive, countercultural feel. As Colleen Shannon-Thornberry observed in the late 1970s, “lifestyle alteration is threatening to most lay people.”<sup>64</sup> In fact, the *Whole Earth Catalog* was but one (though perhaps most prominent) text in a flourishing cottage industry of countercultural lifestyle publishing. The sociologist Sam Binkley notes that “lifestyle books, lately published on the West Coast, provided a powerful medium for the popularization of a new ethic of the self—a loosening discourse on identity and everyday life.”<sup>65</sup> According to Binkley, this print culture made the “injunction to release oneself into the other in the pursuit of trust. Lifestyle involves learning to let go of egoistic pretense and immersing oneself in spontaneous and unconstrained social communion and group membership.” This kind of self-release wasn’t shy about its sexual valences. Binkley notes that “the explosive sale of sex manuals during the 1970s was a reflection of the wider boom in lifestyle discourse... The consensus throughout this literature was that sexual lifestyles were to become less constrained by restrictions and inhibitions from the older middle classes.”<sup>66</sup>

Ever concerned with the preservation of the nuclear family as the proper site for transformative lifestyle religion, Kochtitzky and the Shannon-Thornberrys worked to adapt the

---

<sup>63</sup> Longacre, *More-with-Less*, 166.

<sup>64</sup> Kochtitzky to Barfoot.

<sup>65</sup> Sam Binkley, *Getting Loose: Lifestyle Consumption in the 1970s* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 6.

<sup>66</sup> Binkley, *Getting Loose*, 172.

*Whole Earth Catalog's* model into something that wouldn't feel threatening to mainline churchgoers. Writing in 1978, Kochtitzky suggested that the Alternatives movement, with its focus on nuclear families and how they celebrate holidays, "'scratches people where they itch' in a relatively non-threatening way at the same time it points to the holistic picture which relates lifestyle to social justice."<sup>67</sup> The Shannon-Thornberrys felt the same way, according to Bob Kochtitsky, who reported, "Colleen agrees that examining celebration patterns can be a non-threatening entry into an eventual examination of the larger patterns and how they relate to domestic and global justice."<sup>68</sup>

Like Longacre in *More-with-Less*, Alternatives' efforts at making lifestyle religion "non-threatening" involved a kind of careful nudging at its audience to change their lifestyles, while affirming the fact that changing the daily practices of a nuclear family household can be tricky. The 1982 catalogue included seven pages of ideas for helping a reader's family make the transition, acknowledging, like Longacre had in her discussion of soybeans, that lifestyle changes can be difficult for some. This departed significantly from *Diet for a Small Planet* and the *Whole Earth Catalog*, both of which took more uncompromising stances that assumed their audiences were ready and willing to make significant changes. By contrast, the Alternatives catalogues recognized an often difficult-to-overcome gap between active readers and their spouses and children. One submission encouraged readers to "make the transition gradually," hoping people wouldn't be pressured by the notion that Christmas must be a perfect day. Instead, the writer admitted, realistically children will be disappointed by a simple-living Christmas for years to come. In the mind of at least one contributor, though, even if "we still don't know how

---

<sup>67</sup> Kochitisky to Barfoot.

<sup>68</sup> Kochtitzky to Barfoot.

our future Christmases will turn out...we'll never go back to our old buying habits to celebrate it."<sup>69</sup>

Just as the Alternatives Catalogue had proven successful in its adaptation of *Whole Earth Catalog* methods for a moderate, suburban audience, *More-with-Less* quickly achieved a much wider readership than any of its collaborators had expected. Even as the publisher, designer, and Longacre worked together to reach a broader audience, their expectations for actual sales were relatively low. For the first printing in the spring of 1976, Herald Press ordered ten thousand copies with the hopes of eventually selling between seventy-five thousand and one hundred thousand.<sup>70</sup> To their surprise, the cookbook was a runaway success and Herald Press struggled to keep up with demand for new printings.<sup>71</sup> The cookbook was quickly reviewed and recommended by the Methodist, Lutheran, and Presbyterian churches, along with various high-profile antihunger organizations like UNICEF, Bread for the World, and CROP Hunger Walk.<sup>72</sup> *More-with-Less* brought lifestyle religion into the daily lives of thousands outside of the Mennonite network Longacre and her publishers initially expected to reach.<sup>73</sup> Soon, it was the subject of requests for radio and television specials, including, despite Paul Longacre's "mixed feelings about legitimizing" the program, a feature on Pat Robertson's fundamentalist television show, the 700 Club.<sup>74</sup> The cookbook was eventually reviewed in the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, *Publisher's Weekly*, the *National Courier*, and a variety of other nonreligious

---

<sup>69</sup> Carolyn C. Shadle, "One Family's Program for Change," *Alternate Celebrations Catalogue*, 52. Carole G. Rogers, "Family Transition: Half the Battle," *Alternate Celebrations Catalogue*, 52.

<sup>70</sup> Paul Schrock to Paul Longacre, 11/17/75, MCC box 258, folder 156/20; Maynard W. Shetler to Reg Toews, 4/13/82, Herald Press *More-with-Less* marketing file.

<sup>71</sup> Paul Schrock to Mary Meyer, January 18, 2000, Herald Press *More-with-Less* 25th anniversary marketing file.

<sup>72</sup> Jack Scott to Bookstore Managers, Herald Press *More-with-Less* marketing file.

<sup>73</sup> Stephen Nolt treats *More-with-Less* as a kind of parochial text with narrow Anabaptist readership. Nolt, "Globalizing a Separate People."

<sup>74</sup> Paul Longacre to Dr. Catherine Mumaw, August 5, 1980, Herald Press *More-with-Less* marketing file.

media outlets.<sup>75</sup> To the amazement of all involved, rapid sales continued and printings surpassed a quarter-million within four years.<sup>76</sup> Although some historians have treated it as a kind of accessory or subsequent addition to Ron Sider's universe of lifestyle organizing, the cookbook, which appeared a year before Sider's *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, bears recognition in its own right as a central, founding text in the rise of lifestyle religion.<sup>77</sup>

Eventually, *More-with-Less* grew into something larger than a cookbook. Longacre called it a philosophy, but it might just as well have been called a brand.<sup>78</sup> The MCC and Herald Press published workshop guides for congregations and retreats, related children's educational materials, cassette tapes featuring Longacre describing the more-with-less philosophy, and instructions for organizing hunger-awareness dinners that took place in churches in a variety of denominations across the country.<sup>79</sup> Within a couple of years, Longacre began work on a sequel focusing on other lifestyle changes beyond food, calling it *Living More with Less*, the book whose five principles for life became a central organizing framework for Alternatives materials in the 1980s and beyond. In the decades that followed, Herald Press and MCC published two more cookbooks "in the more with less tradition."<sup>80</sup> When Herald Press solicited testimonials on the twenty-fifth anniversary of *More-with-Less*, comments flooded in affirming the importance of the cookbook in the spiritual lives of users. One called the book her "cooking Bible" and the majority claimed that it was their most-used cookbook. Some had recently returned from

---

<sup>75</sup> *More-with-Less* reviews file, MCC box 258, folder 156/21.

<sup>76</sup> Herald Press press release, "Sales Pass Quarter Million Mark," 1980, Herald Press *More-with-Less* marketing file.

<sup>77</sup> David Swartz mentions *More-with-Less* within his chapter on Ron Sider, framing it as a kind of extension of Sider's organizing. Swartz, *Moral Minority*, 160-168.

<sup>78</sup> Longacre, "How to Conduct a More-with-Less Workshop," 1980 Cassette. MCC.

<sup>79</sup> Longacre, "How to Conduct"; Aileen Van Beilen, *Hunger Awareness Dinners* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1978); Deloris Hestand, *Living More-with-Less Study Action Guide* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1981)

<sup>80</sup> Doris Janzen Longacre, *Living More with Less* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1980); Joetta Schlabach Handrich, *Extending the Table: A World Community Cookbook* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1991); Mary Beth Lind and Cathleen Hockman-Wert, *Simply in Season* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2005).

overseas placements and were in search of a way “to continue serving in our own community.” *More-with-Less* allowed them to maintain their sense of global interconnectedness within their American homes. Others reflected that *More-with-Less* was their “first encounter with Mennonites” and more than one respondent said they had become Mennonite as a result of the cookbook. Beyond those who actually became Mennonite, Roman Catholics, Disciples of Christ members, Methodists, and others wrote to express thanks.<sup>81</sup>

### The Body

*More-with-Less*’s unexpected success can at least in part be explained by Longacre and her collaborator’s identification of broad demand and their careful choices to avoid in-house Mennonite language or off-putting countercultural overtones. On a deeper level, Longacre’s project provided a needed structure for daily practices of lifestyle religion that could be fully individuated and embodied, while producing a sense of tangible connection between the practitioner and planetary crises. Using a spiritual language of interconnectedness to position food as a mediator between cookbook users, the planet, and the divine, Longacre met this demand while participating in the development of lifestyle religion, which has exerted a lasting influence on North Americans’ conceptions of environmental action.

By focusing on food, Longacre drew on a tradition of American dietary reform movements, appearing perennially as responses to public crises. In the first half of the twentieth century, frugal eating movements repeatedly arose to respond to the crises of the First and

---

<sup>81</sup> More-with-Less 25th anniversary editor’s file. See letters to Herald Press, 2000, in Herald Press *More-with-Less* 25th anniversary editor’s file.



Second World Wars as well as the Great Depression.<sup>82</sup> In each case, communities looked at the world outside, saw it in crisis, and then turned inward to search for some practical response that could align their bodies with the solution. Through the embodied practice of eating, practitioners could experience a concrete, material connection to a translocal cause.

Although *More-with-Less* explicitly drew on memories of frugal diets in the tumultuous war years, it differed from these moments of dietary reform in its emphasis on lifelong change. Longacre's *More-with-Less* produced a permanent system to respond to a newly permanent sense of crisis. Seemingly aware that the harsh asymmetries causing hunger in the decolonizing nations were a chronic feature of the postwar world, Longacre observed that "world food crisis" itself was a misnomer because "[a] crisis comes and goes. The hard facts give us no comfort, however, that this one will go away."<sup>83</sup> Rather than recommending short-term change, the *More-with-Less* lifestyle was meant to respond to a permanent situation. "The world food crisis is not a fad which will disappear in a few years," Longacre predicted in an early outline of the cookbook. "There is a need for people to change their food habits and then stay that way 'from now on.'"<sup>84</sup> In a sense, Longacre's predictions were right. World hunger was viewed as an ongoing crisis, so that on the cookbook's twenty-fifth anniversary, Herald Press commented that "food shortages still plague our world."<sup>85</sup> In a broader sense, beginning in 1970 and continuing through the turn of the century, mass media and globalization combined to create a constant sense of crisis that alternated through fears of war, terror, overpopulation, pollution, famine, and climate change.

---

<sup>82</sup> Helen Zoe Veit, *Modern Food Moral Food: Self-Control, Science, and the Rise of Modern American Eating in the Early Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2013); Daniel Sack, *Whitebread Protestants: Food and Religion in American Culture* (New York: St. Martin's Press 2000); Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic*, 2004.

<sup>83</sup> Longacre, *More-with-Less*, 13.

<sup>84</sup> Longacre, "Exploratory Outline for Cookbook Proposal."

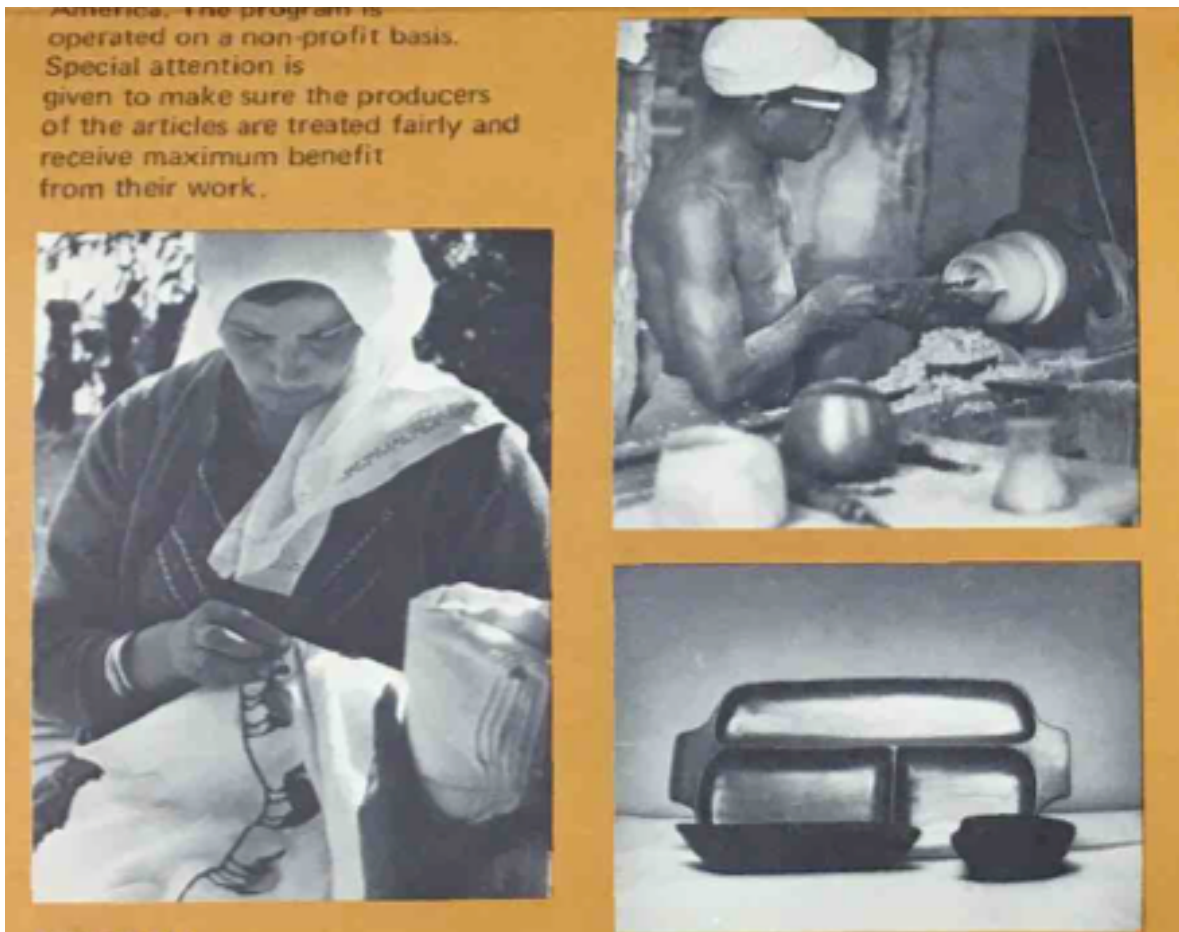
<sup>85</sup> "Foreword to Anniversary Edition," Herald Press *More-with-Less* 25th anniversary edition editors file.

Several decades after its publication, one Herald Press staff member commented that the cookbook's model of lifestyle change was adaptable to any number of global problems.<sup>86</sup> With *More-with-Less*, Longacre espoused a lifestyle religion that met demand for a system of individualized, embodied practices with which to respond to this newly permanent sense of a world in crisis.

In this way, Longacre's cookbook joined the bodily practices facilitated by MCC's related project, Self-Help Crafts (whose brick-and-mortar stores almost always shelve copies of the cookbook), to help produce a market-friendly religious practice that could connect public and private through consumer choice. As Self-Help Crafts expanded—having started as something run out of the trunk of Edna Ruth Byler's car but ending up as an operation with mail-order catalogs and brick-and-mortar stores where consumers could interact with its material culture on demand and up close at a local gift shop—the project began to cultivate its own discourse about the meaning and impact of its products as objects that could transform people's lives on either side of the supply chain. Attending to the way SHC and SERRV provided a concrete, material infrastructure for fair trade shopping and articulated its power as a mediator of lifestyle religion, demonstrates the sensory and embodied qualities of this lived religious experience within a shifting political economy. How did people navigate their ambivalence as white North American mainstream Protestants whose affluence depends on an international political economy causing situations of constant planetary and humanitarian precarity?

---

<sup>86</sup> Paul Schrock to Book Approving Group, May 22, 1990, Herald Press *More-with-Less* 25th anniversary editor's file: "These issues are popular across the country and will likely continue to be in the national consciousness for quite some time."



*Figure 4 - Self-Help Crafts Pamphlet 1972*

SHC and SERRV's published materials consistently affirmed that acts of fair-trade consumption had a measurable, positive effect on sites of production and that the purchased items could serve as sensuous reminders of the good one had done. Catalogues consistently arranged pictures of producers hard at work making the handmade items next to commercial photographs displaying the finished project, inscribing a kind of narrative meaning on the thing itself (fig. 4). Eating a meal set out on a wooden serving tray made in Haiti or warming their body with a blanket woven in Palestine, consumers were promised a sensory, embodied experience of lifestyle choice's power to change things. In catalogues and promotional pieces, they were promised that those acts had a direct impact on producers, imagined as saying, "with

the money I earn I can buy a bit of food for my hungry children.”<sup>87</sup> In this way, the consumer’s religious agency isn’t just said to flow outward toward those global problems affecting sites of production. Rather, it flows in a kind of circuit through the supply chain, creating a sense of deep connection that promises mutual transformation. This twofold movement inward and outward, is conveyed in a single piece of needlework from Israel, about which an SHC staffer noted, “the material appears that it speaks for the appearance of the women, rugged, artistic.”<sup>88</sup> Both ends of the network, producer and consumer, are brought together in the material object itself. By wearing the Israeli garment, the consumer adorns herself with a material that not only helps the producer’s material state, but materially places her artistic and rugged qualities upon the consumer’s own body, a connection understood as not merely symbolic but materially real through the physical networks of exchange through which the object travelled.

Embracing these consumptive practices as a way of embodying religious virtue and navigating morally-suspect aspects of modern life, fair trade shoppers joined a long line of religious women for whom dietary and clothing choices offered an expression of piety in modern secular spaces.<sup>89</sup> In a way that parallels women whose clothing choices expressed purity and piety in modern secular cities like New York and Cairo; or whose dietary restrictions were meant to let them embody restraint, self-control, and virtue among the many vices of modern American life, consumers at SHC and SERRV were likewise worried about the moral compromises of modernity. Here, however, from the perspective of affluent North America, these compromises

---

<sup>87</sup> Glass, “The MCC Needlework Lady,” 1964 (SHP Records, 1962-1972, Box 1, Folder 1/5).

<sup>88</sup> Margaret E. Cressman to Mrs. David Kanagy.

<sup>89</sup> R. Marie Griffith, *Born Again Bodies: Flesh and Spirit in American Christianity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press 2004); Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011); Anthea Butler, *Women in the Church of God in Christ: Making a Sanctified World* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Judith Weisenfeld, *New World A-Coming: Black Religion and Racial Identity during the Great Migration* (New York: New York University Press, 2016).

related to the connection between their affluence and the postwar political economy with its reproduction of global inequality. In all cases, people desired a way of responding that might maintain and even deepen their personal embodiment of religious virtue, which they then could carry with them as they traversed the morally suspect publics.

In the case of fair trade, that public was the expanding free market, meaning that the needlework and the table ware and the decorations and the jewelry being sold in SHC and SERRV's catalogues, stores, and church sales could provide a kind of market discipline at the site of the body. As Saba Mahmood writes of veiling practices in Egypt's mosque movement, "the body was thematized ... as a site of moral training and cultivation."<sup>90</sup> For Mahmood, this suggests that, contra certain accounts of social embodiment and subject formation that emphasize the unconscious incorporation of culture such as Bourdieu's notion of the habitus, in the context of the mosque movement, practices of the body are being intentionally leveraged to cultivate personal virtues in the face of modern secular institutions. This too seems to be the language of SHC and SERRV. By purveying fair trade goods encased in visual and textual reminders of their origin on the other side of the world, SHC and SERRV present consumers with an morally-charged material culture, one that allows them to seek out Christian virtues of self-sacrifice and compassion by spending extra money on handmade goods said to bring change on the other side of the planet, embracing market logics as the proper channel for their religiosity to make waves in the world.

---

<sup>90</sup> Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 139.

A catalog from 1972, for example, prominently displayed a model wearing a sleek, modern black outfit upon which she featured several fair-trade accessories from Haiti: a shopping basket etched with the word “Haiti” as well as a necklace and belt made from beads bearing the somber appellation, “Job’s Tears” (fig. 5). The image follows a description of Haiti two pages earlier, which assures that “the crafts program has aided considerably the economic status of the community. It has given dignity to many who had to ask for charity or simply had not been able to feed their families.”<sup>91</sup> Purchased from this catalogue, inscribed with this story of economic aid and new-found dignity in Haiti, fair trade shoppers can feel the weight of their purposeful purchase on their bodies as they wear a necklace of Job’s Tears or carry groceries in a straw shopping basket marked “Haiti.” Told these economic choices have given dignity as well as needed financial support to someone in Haiti, the consumer is given the opportunity to feel the material weight of their act of goodness through the touch and feel of these Haitian things on their body.



Figure 5 - *Self-Help Catalog 1972*

In the pages of *More-with-Less*, Longacre advocated a similar kind of embodied practice that promised to create a connection between the cookbook user and hungry people on the other side of the planet, transforming body and soul at both ends. Like with *Self-Help Crafts* and

<sup>91</sup> *Self-Help Catalog*, 1972.

SERRV, *More-with-Less* relied on an institutional environment to posit these connections, helping interior states, both bodily and spiritual, to move through publics and seek mutual transformation with other bodies around the world. The ideas and practices reflected in the cookbook cultivated a spiritual connection between self, world, and divine like those observed in other forms of spirituality, doing so in this case through the putatively secular formations of global markets. Seeking viable forms of public religion in this context of incipient neoliberalism, lifestyle religion practitioners leverage their location within networks of exchange to cultivate new channels of spiritual connection. In the case of the Protestant environmental spirituality of *More-with-Less*, what were these new channels through which self, world, and divine could become interconnected?

Longacre's central goal in *More-with-Less* was the transformation of an interconnectedness already in place, brought about by the global circulation of media, commodities, and capital. "Channels to the needy are long and circuitous," wrote Longacre. "The very complexity that frustrates easy answers also means that our decisions in the global family are interrelated."<sup>92</sup> Directed squarely at transforming capitalism's global network of interconnection, the spirituality of *More-with-Less* connected middle-class American practitioners with God, God's people, and God's purposes through those same channels. For Longacre, American consumption in the globalized economy was already affecting the souls of the interconnected masses on both sides of the divide. The task of *More-with-Less* was to leverage that formation toward holy ends. It did so through visual signs of interconnection, an embodied register of transformation, and the sense of individual authenticity produced by the material object of the book itself.

---

<sup>92</sup> Longacre, *More-with-Less*, 22.

As Longacre put it, “If others alone stood to gain from our changes, hopefully the motivation of Christ-inspired sharing would see us through. But we also stand to gain.”<sup>93</sup> She hoped that the possibility of mutual transformation might further motivate her audience. The cookbook’s visual scheme reinforced this message. Longacre and her collaborators were hesitant about using images of people from the Third World. They tried to avoid reproducing stereotypical images of suffering or hungry children increasingly common in the mass media’s presentation of globalization’s ills.<sup>94</sup> Those stereotypical images followed a tradition that David Morgan has dubbed “missive imagery,” which presented scenes and figures from daily indigenous life and the missionary activities that could transform it, in order to shape “the understanding of religious and racial otherness, the international stature of the United States, and the cultural burden of Christianity,” and mobilize support for American missionary endeavors to transform global others.<sup>95</sup> One of the few images Longacre and her graphic designer did include sought to rework the typical message of missive imagery, which portrayed Americans transforming the needy. Instead, the image pointed to the *More-with-Less* message of mutual transformation (fig. 6). In the photograph, an African child gazes at the viewer with a look of pleasure and contentment. Although her rustic straw hat and dress as well as the simple meal set upon a humble wooden table indicate simplicity, there are no signs of despair or lack. Here, simplicity is a virtue, rather than a problem to be solved. The child’s intimate, immediate gaze invites the viewer to embrace rather than evade this virtue. The image is captioned by Proverbs 27:7, “One who is full tramples on virgin honey, but to the man who is hungry, any bitter thing is

---

<sup>93</sup> Longacre, *More-with-Less*, 23.

<sup>94</sup> Paul Schrock, “Doris call to me Nov. 25,” 11/25/1975; Paul Schrock to Kenneth Hiebert and Doris Longacre, 11/22/75, Herald Press *More-with-Less* editor’s file.

<sup>95</sup> David Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 154.



sweet,” suggesting that Americans who always eat their fill are more prone to foolishness and waste, whereas those who live with hunger possess an extra measure of wisdom and contentment.<sup>96</sup> Through this racialized gaze, the text imagines a refined whiteness, freed from the encumbrances of over-civilization through consumption of the foods that made black and brown bodies virtuous in their simplicity.<sup>97</sup> Through the sense of immediacy and emotional connection, such images mobilized a new, mutually transformative relationship between subject and viewer.

For Longacre, the potential for interconnected transformation seemed most tangible and direct in the shape of practitioners’ bodies.

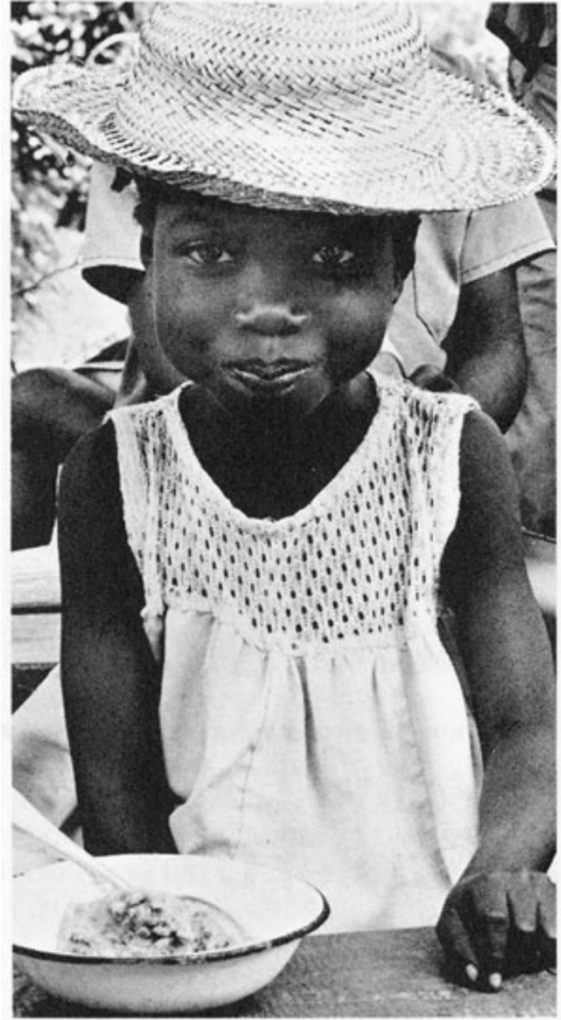


Figure 6 - Longacre, *More-with-Less*.

Through an embodied register, the disparity between American lifestyles and those of the Third World was most clear. After returning from their MCC placement in Vietnam, Longacre and her husband observed, “People here looked cumbersome, ungainly, plodding. We missed the lithe grace of the Asians.”<sup>98</sup> For Longacre, the literal transformation of one’s body was seen as a

<sup>96</sup> Longacre, *More-with-Less*, 25.

<sup>97</sup> This follows what the cultural historian Grace Hale calls “the romance of the outsider,” ascendant over this period as a cultural means for middle-class white American self-fashioning through a fascination with black culture and existence. Hale, *A Nation of Outsiders* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). Scholars of American literature observe similar uses of blackness as a canvas on which white authors produce white identity. See, for example, Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

<sup>98</sup> Longacre, *More-with-Less*, 15.

spiritual act that tangibly connects the self to a religious cause, a cause that seeks to protest American gluttony and indulgence in favor of a spiritual transformation into the firm, fit, or “lithe” virtue imagined through thin bodies.<sup>99</sup> If modernity’s expansive, interconnected networks of trade and communication make crises feel out of reach and insurmountable through ordinary human agency, in *More-with-Less*, bodily transformation helped make the cause of reforming these global networks tangible and clear to practitioners. And unlike the wooden jewelry or knit shawls sold in Self-Help Crafts stores which could only offer a kind of sensory reminder of connection, by simulating the diets of the Third World poor, Longacre hoped her audience might acquire a virtuous thinness so that the very shape of their bodies reflected solidarity with those suffering under postwar planetary crisis.

Finally, we reach the terminus of lifestyle religion’s infrastructure: the bodies of devotees. But, how to think about these African groundnut stews, these soy-meat loaves crafted intentionally in middle-class kitchens, consumed by bodies aware of their connection to the discourse of lifestyle change for the sake of the planet? Writing about religious food preparation in another context, Elizabeth Pérez notes the way “material and discursive acts get under the skin of practitioners, equipping them with the repertoire of skills, dispositions, and habits necessary for religious norms to be internalized, then reproduced.”<sup>100</sup> Subjectivities, socialites, dreams of a world interwoven by markets, and a self whose agency flows outward in predictable fashion are

---

<sup>99</sup> This espousal of the spiritual virtue of thinness or weight loss is not without precedent. See Griffith, *Born Again Bodies*; Lynne Gerber, “Fat Christians and Fit Elites: Negotiating Class and Status in Evangelical Christian Weight-Loss Culture,” *American Quarterly* 64:1 (2012), 61-84. For a deeper genealogy, one might also consider Caroline Walker Bynum’s classic work on late medieval female asceticism, where the saintly practice of “living without eating” became a way of gaining autonomy and spiritual authority even at the expense of one’s body and health. In the world of *More-with-Less*, thinness, lithe grace, and the prospect of subtracting from one’s own flesh through a simulated Third World diet, offers a kind of spiritual or moral autonomy from the corrupting influences of mass consumption. Bynum, *Holy Feast Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

<sup>100</sup> Elizabeth Pérez, *Religion in the Kitchen: Cooking, Talking, and the Making of Black Atlantic Traditions* (New York, NY: NYU Press, 2016), 9.

enacted, embodied, and experienced in these dietary acts. As Latour reminds us, these objects of environmental concern are “simultaneously real, like nature, narrated, like discourse, and collective, like society.”<sup>101</sup>

The challenge, in other words, is to understand how a meal out of *More-with-Less*, perhaps served on a wooden bowl hand-carved in Haiti and bought in a fair-trade store, perhaps cooked on a holiday intentionally celebrated without conventional consumer items, how these objects can be, in literary critic Stacy Alaimo’s words, “simultaneously material and social, sites where institutional and material power swirl together.”<sup>102</sup> According to Jane Bennett, viewing food as an actant in networks with its own kind of nonhuman agency, we might discern “a productive power intrinsic to foodstuff, which enables edible matter to coarsen or refine the imagination or render a disposition more or less liable to resentment, depression, hyperactivity, dull-wittedness, or violence.” Bennett’s texts describe “eating as the formation of assemblage of human and nonhuman elements, all of which bear some agentic capacity. This capacity includes the negative power to resist or obstruct human projects, but it also includes the more active power to affect and create effects.”<sup>103</sup> In the infrastructure of lifestyle religion, food doesn’t just carry meaning, or serve some metaphorical or semiotic purpose. It has its own, at times unpredictable, agency in producing certain affective or embodied states and transformations.

With the dream of shedding my cumbersome and ungainly form and attaining the lithe grace of the Asians, my body is enfolded in a global network where my hopes for the world can flow outward through the workings of the market. As I lose weight, as I adorn my body and my

---

<sup>101</sup> Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 6.

<sup>102</sup> Stacy Alaimo, *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010), 48.

<sup>103</sup> Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 49.

home with handmade goods, as my cookbook acquires the stains and tears that result from its regular use in my kitchen, I withdraw from meaningless consumption while still dreaming of a global market that will let my lifestyle reverberate outwards, changing the lives of others by reducing waste, freeing up resources, and spending money in the right places. My sense of self, my affective experience of the world, and my understanding of relation and value are all shaped by these material acts, helping me conceive of a worldwide free market as real and powerful, changing my body, my affect, my experience, my vision of the world materially, as I imagine parallel changes happening around the world thanks to resources I've freed up, money I've redirected, or consumer demand I've shifted.

Longacre's promise of embodied spiritual transformation notwithstanding, MCC stakeholders were ambivalent about the real-world power of these individual practices on their own. The *More-with-Less* vision of translocal, spiritual communities of embodied transformation raised questions for some collaborators and stakeholders still embedded in more traditional sites of institutional and political intervention. Edgar Stoesz, a director of MCC's food and hunger programs and advisor for *More-with-Less*, confided in a letter to an ecologist who had publicly criticized the cookbook's focus on lifestyles that he did not believe that lifestyle change would end world hunger. He instead hoped to maintain focus on "a broader approach which also includes the all-important public policy issue without which the one less hamburger we might eat does very little for starvation in Bangladesh."<sup>104</sup> Although major powerbrokers in organized Christian responses to hunger like Senator Mark Hatfield and World Vision director Stanley Mooneyham responded positively to the book, they too shied away from the message of

---

<sup>104</sup> Edgar Stoesz to K. B. Hoover, April 25, 1975, MCC box 275, folder 169/69.

spiritual transformation. Instead, their responses focused on the cookbook's consciousness-raising potential.<sup>105</sup>

Anxiety that the message of personal spiritual transformation might distract from concrete political intervention is common among both scholarly and religious observers of the extrainstitutional, individuated religiosity.<sup>106</sup> For Longacre's part, the message was never meant to be merely therapeutic. "When we begin eating less, the job is not finished. It is only beginning," she wrote in the cookbook's front matter. "If we expect North American food conservation to totally solve world hunger, with good reason we sound naive and even paternalistic." Her transformative vision included "food production and distribution programs," and sought to "challenge oppressive government policy."<sup>107</sup> Longacre proved her own personal commitment to these larger-scale interventions when she contacted Herald Press and declined the enormous amount of unanticipated royalties she was owed as author of the runaway success, accepting only \$10,000 as adequate compensation "to cover the year's time [she] gave to the project," and requesting that the rest of the royalties be donated to the global development work of the MCC.<sup>108</sup> In the hands of consumers, however, whether *More-with-Less* served as a first

---

<sup>105</sup> Hatfield called it "a major contribution to the store of knowledge on world hunger and what the individual can do to alleviate it." Mark Hatfield to Doris Longacre, March 4, 1976, Herald Press *More-with-Less* marketing file; Mooneyham noted, "There is nobody in the country doing more to sensitize the conscience of North Americans than the MCC. Your personal significant contribution through the cookbook is just typical of the splendid things the organization is doing." W. Stanley Mooneyham to Doris Longacre, March 22, 1976, Herald Press *More-with-Less* marketing file.

<sup>106</sup> Several books tell a change-over-time story wherein the various forms of American spirituality lose their political edge and become primarily therapeutic, apolitical, and consumerist in the twentieth century: Philip F. Gura, *American Transcendentalism: A History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2008); Beryl Satter, *Each Mind a Kingdom: American Women, Sexual Purity, and the New Thought Movement 1875–1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Jeremy Carrette and Richard King, *Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

<sup>107</sup> Longacre, *More-with-Less*, 23.

<sup>108</sup> Longacre to Paul Schrock, October 24, 1976, Herald Press *More-with-Less* editor's file.

step toward direct political action or whether it more often supported atomized, therapeutic spiritual practice is difficult to assess.

In the years immediately following the cookbook's publication in April 1976, as the philosophy and brand of *More-with-Less* was expanding, Longacre hoped to expand the message to encompass more radical action. Her follow-up to the cookbook, *Living More with Less*, extended the message to all aspects of Christians' lifestyles, looking again to the global poor for more lessons on how to transform the lives of American middle-class churchgoers. When the book was finished and released in 1980, Ron Sider's simple living manifesto, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, had attracted widespread attention, and *Living More with Less* began to merge the *More-with-Less* message with Sider's brand of simple living by citing his book, inviting him to author the introduction, and including many of his tips for creating a simpler lifestyle. *Living More with Less* brought the *More-with-Less* message to deeper conversation with the evangelical left, whose message of simple living had clear parallels with Longacre's but embraced countercultural overtones. The book ultimately included tips for building geodesic domes and using composting toilets, items that had long been associated with the counterculture and celebrated in the pages of the *Whole Earth Catalog*, but that were much less practical or realistic for the busy middle-class mothers Longacre had initially targeted with her cookbook.<sup>109</sup>

Exactly how Doris Longacre would have marketed her lifestyle guide is impossible to know. Long plagued by health issues, Longacre suffered from severe illness while she worked to complete *More-with-Less* and *Living More with Less*. After a three-year struggle with cancer, Longacre died on November 10, 1979, at the age of thirty-nine.<sup>110</sup> *Living More with Less* was

---

<sup>109</sup> Longacre, *Living More with Less*, 129, 137–38.

<sup>110</sup> Herald Press press release, "Sales Pass Quarter Million Mark," 1980, Herald Press *More-with-Less* marketing file.

nearly finished, and her widower Paul Longacre assisted the Herald Press in bringing it to publication. Perhaps because of its more radical, less accessible message and perhaps because of the absence of Longacre's deftness in marketing the message to ordinary churchgoers, it did not sell nearly as well as the *More-with-Less* cookbook.

In the years following her death, the *More-with-Less* audience has diverged in two directions, both groups remaining relatively stable. On the one hand, the middle-class church women she targeted have continued to use the cookbook and a younger generation have now grown up with it as a fixture of their lives. "I grew up with both my parents cooking and baking from this book. When I moved out on my own to go to university, they gave me a copy of the *More-with-Less* cookbook. It taught me how to cook," commented one respondent on its fortieth anniversary. "Lately I've been learning about the idea of this book as a form of theology—a way of living out one's faith in everyday home and family life."<sup>111</sup> On the other hand, *More-with-Less* has in some ways come to be identified with countercultural and progressive Christian communities, from its eventual association with Ron Sider to its significant influence on younger exemplars of progressive evangelicalism like Shane Claiborne, who commented in 2010 that *Living More with Less* "was decades ahead of its time, and is just as relevant today as it was thirty years ago."<sup>112</sup>

Either way, *More-with-Less*'s staying power surely stemmed from its form of lifestyle religion. Many observers note that the world has remained in crisis, whether through famine, overpopulation, poverty, pollution, or climate change. Longacre showed prescience when she

---

<sup>111</sup> *More-with-Less* 40th anniversary testimonials, courtesy of MennoMedia.

<sup>112</sup> *More-with-Less*'s association with the evangelical left is reflected in Swartz's use of the cookbook as a smaller example within Sider's wider story. See Swartz, *Moral Minority*, 153–69. For Shane Claiborne's comments, see *Living More with Less* 30th anniversary testimonials, Herald Press *Living More with Less* 30th anniversary marketing file.

predicted that “world crisis” would not be a fad. The book’s publishers have been able to count on continued interest because that sense of global crisis has persisted into the present. Individual economic choices as a response to global crises, like the changes modeled in lifestyle religion, grow out of a cognitive style that emphasizes causal interconnectedness between middle-class Americans and their global neighbors, forged within globalized, consumer- and media-driven American capitalism.

### Conclusion

As Longacre prepared her follow up to *More-with-Less*, one MCC worker advised her, “If there is one word which should be before you night and day, it is the word HOW. People have been given enough facts and their consciences are troubled enough.”<sup>113</sup> In the twentieth century, people were not always looking for new ideas about humanity, the sacred, or the value of religious institutions. Many Protestant churchgoers felt relatively settled in that regard. Rather, they wanted to know “HOW” to connect with those things in ways that felt authentic and personal. In the preceding half-century, planetary consciousness has loomed large as a means for forging just that type of connection. Unsurprisingly, then, in the context of the postwar political economy, characterized by morally charged lifestyle consumption and globalized circulations of media and capital, lifestyle religion continues to gain currency.

The previous two chapters have toured an infrastructure that was still under construction in the 1970s and 1980s. Fair trade supply chains revealed a training in market logics as consumers were taught to see a seamless link between their economic lifestyle choices and the quality of life at production sites on the other side of the planet. At production sites, racially-coded images of cultural authenticity and romanticized poverty became central discourses about

---

<sup>113</sup> Edgar Stoesz to Doris Longacre, January 27, 1978, MCC box 275, folder 169/69.



what might make trade in this supply chain “fair.” After their purchase in a fair-trade shop, these objects make their way into the suburban households of nuclear families, where a growing print network helped channel environmental consciousness into an intensive focus on the family unit, over against visions of collective action projects that had been dreamt up earlier in the decade. Here, entire families, but especially wives and mothers, were asked to labor against the moral menace of consumer culture, which threatened to undermine traditionally-gendered family relationships. Approaching the infrastructure’s final terminus, the body, fair trade clothing and jewelry, as well as a dietary system for simplified lifestyles promised to transform soul *and* body, guaranteeing virtuous thinness through a simulated diet of Third World poverty, an affective and sensuous practice promising to manifest the free market’s linkage between a lifestyle devotee’s own embodied experiences and crises underway on the other side of the planet. Through the poetics of this infrastructure, lifestyle religion helped channel environmental consciousness away from the potentialities of collective action and into neoliberalism’s world economic imaginary where capitalist power was being reproduced through constructions of racial difference, family value, and individual freedom.

## -CONCLUSION-

This dissertation opened with suburban families and it closes with them. In 1974, Ed Huenemann's Presbyterian youth group told him they didn't expect the planet to survive past 2000. "Now when 13 out of 15 suburban kids feel that way," Huenemann wrote, "we're having not just dreams but nightmares."<sup>1</sup> In the second half of the decade, Milo Thornberry, Ron Sider, and others helped develop a lifestyle religion that allowed mainstream Protestants to live out a new dream for the world. "Experiencing the reality of a new future in the household," wrote Thornberry in an *Alternate Celebrations Catalogue* essay, "is integral to creating that future in the community and beyond."<sup>2</sup> With a vision of the planetary web of life woven together not just by ecological relationships but also by the ubiquitous free market, lifestyle religion could transform not only their suburban homes, but their bodies as well, helping them learn to feel at home in neoliberalism.

---

<sup>1</sup> Ed Huenemann, "Theological Perspective on the Hunger Issue." PHS NCC Task Force on World Hunger "WHEAT" Records, box 2, folder "Theological/Ethical Studies," 3.

<sup>2</sup> Thornberry, "A Look to the Future," *Alternate Celebrations Catalogue*, 186-189.

In contemporary debates about the necessity of climate action, lifestyle religion's dream of the world reverberates into the present. In 2019, as part of its series of guides on "living better," the *New York Times* published a stylish set of suggestions for "How to Reduce Your Carbon Footprint." "While real solutions will require action on a global scale," the guide began, "there are choices you can make in your day-to-day life to lessen your personal impact on the environment."<sup>3</sup> An image by illustrator Adam Simpson accompanied each of the guide's sections: "On the Road, in the Sky," "On your Plate," "In Your Home," "What You Buy," and "What You Do." Each image envisions people stepping from one reality into another, with green domestic spaces featured prominently in the new future they could inhabit through lifestyle choice (fig. 1). Like Thornberry writing in 1982, the *Times's* 2018 guide invited its readers to root their dreams of a better future in individual lifestyle choices they could make in the home.



Figure 1 - Adam Simpson, "In Your Home," *New York Times*, 2019.

<sup>3</sup> Livia Albeck-Ripka, "How to Reduce Your Carbon Footprint," *New York Times*, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/guides/year-of-living-better/how-to-reduce-your-carbon-footprint>. See also:

At a Dallas meeting of the United Methodist Church's Hunger Coordinating Committee in 1977, one speaker laid out a "Case for a Simple Life-style" that offered an early look at this logic of carbon footprints. "Now suppose that each of the world's four billion human beings enjoyed the same standard of living as that of your family," he said. "I doubt if anyone thinks such a situation is really possible because the world's fossil fuels would be exhausted long before all those motor vehicles could be built." Instead, a practice of lifestyle religion would be needed to reduce the impact of each affluent American household: "If the affluent individuals of the world (and this includes all middle-income Americans) would live at the level I shall describe, there might be enough food and other essential goods to go around."<sup>4</sup> In 2019, *Newsweek* ran a story on "5 Easy Lifestyle Changes That Could Help Tackle Climate Change," recommending LED lightbulbs, bicycling to work, and eating less meat, while linking readers to the Environmental Protection Agency's tool for calculating your carbon footprint. When the federal EPA offers an easy-to-use tool, encouraging its citizens to calculate the precise impact of the lifestyles on planet Earth, the religion of everyday life that in the late-1970s saw Henry Winter taking a slide rule to the supermarket to measure the exact impact of his groceries, is everywhere helping people feel at home on a planet interwoven by markets.

By pointing out the echoes of lifestyle religion present in today's public conversations about climate action, I do not mean to suggest that mainstream Protestant bureaucrats at places like NCC, ESA, Lausanne, MCC, and Alternatives were solely responsible for the prominence of green consumer choice to deal with climate change. The rise of green lifestyle thinking in general cannot be completely explained by the story of mainstream Protestant environmentalism in the 1970s. Although the Mennonite Central Committee and Church World Service are directly

---

<sup>4</sup> Ray H. Smith, "The Case for a Simpler Life-Style," April 14, 1977. GCAH Hunger Coordinating Committee (Dallas) 1977.

responsible for the now ubiquitous practice of fair trade, many of lifestyle religion's central texts were adaptations of even more widely-read, religiously-unaffiliated books. *More-with-Less* was an adaptation of *Diet for a Small Planet*. The Alternatives catalogues were clearly modeled on *The Whole Earth Catalog*. The overall vision of Christian lifestyle bore a very close resemblance to the 1973 bestseller, *Small is Beautiful*.

The story of mainstream Protestant environmentalism isn't the origin point, or prime mover, in the rise of green consumer choice. But it offers a clear window into lifestyle religion at a precise moment when it was under construction. One thing this story has revealed is that from the start, some practitioners have been ambivalent about the actual power of lifestyle choice to fix the planet when separated from structural changes. The NCC's 1976 world hunger curriculum had insisted that lifestyle be paired with policy advocacy and the *New York Times* 2019 carbon footprint guide began by qualifying that "real solutions" would require changes at the national level. But even in the knowledge that structural changes will be needed, people search out ways to make sense of their personal relationship to the political economy, and lifestyle religion offers them a path forward. Its daily practice promises to transform the devotee's home and even their body, producing a material culture and an affective disposition of pious responsibility for weathering the storms of planetary crisis, while a dream of the invisible hand offers the tantalizing proposition that their piety could have real, measurable power in the world through the trusty laws of supply and demand.

Contemporary observers repeat the refrain that Dieter Hessel and Milo Thornberry offered in 1976, that lifestyle change was just a first step, and that it will hopefully lead to more widespread public buy-in for the structural changes and regulations that will be needed to fight climate change. The authors of "How to Reduce Your Carbon Footprint" and "5 Easy Lifestyle

Changes” both end their guides with a final plea that readers get involved in political action. “In addition to changing your day-to-day habits,” wrote Livia Albeck-Ripka at the *New York Times*, “exercising your rights as a citizen is one of the most significant things you can do to help the planet.”<sup>5</sup>

The story of lifestyle religion challenges the notion that individual consumer choices will be a first step on a pathway to radical political change. Under construction in these mainstream Protestant networks through the 1970s, its potential connection to political action and structural change was contested and ultimately disciplined in subtle and not-so-subtle ways that ultimately helped ensure lifestyle religion would offer a de-politicized, inward facing mode of responding to planetary crisis.

When mainstream Protestant projects drifted toward direct antagonism or action against capital and its political allies, they often faced direct forms of discipline. The corporate money that Rodney Shaw had been able to count on at his D.C.-based Population Center and had assumed would roll into the Ecology Church Action Project never came. Shaw had proven himself naïve on this point, given Kay Shannon’s willingness to take an antagonistic stance against companies like VEPCO. And when Ron Sider’s lifestyle consultations even so much as flirted with criticism of multi-national corporations or the free enterprise system, they were threatened with a complete withdrawal of financial backing from the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, World Vision, and Lausanne itself. Those same evangelical powerbrokers saw to it that the Commitment to Simple Lifestyle produced by Sider’s international consultation in 1980, with its vague, non-committal statement of sympathy toward the NIEO, was heavily edited,

---

<sup>5</sup> Albeck-Ripka, “How to Reduce Your Carbon Footprint.”

redacted, and ultimately buried under a dozen minor Lausanne papers, delayed to such a degree that it had basically no impact on the broader Lausanne network.

These moments of overt discipline dovetailed with more subtle pressures. Crisis-talk, a way of processing the frequent upheavals of neoliberal capitalism, contained a logic of ad hoc, in-the-moment responses, paired with an inward turn as people looked to cultivate crisis-ready dispositions. The rise of lifestyle language in the consumer economy lent these efforts a new moral language for pursuing just these interior dispositions through the intense, daily management of one's own economic choices. The notion of the "market" provided an economic imaginary in which these choices were said to matter, exerting real, direct agency in relation to planetary crises. And within the suburban nuclear family home, practitioners were said to experience "liberation from bondage" through the transformation of both body and soul in the practice of lifestyle religion. As Thornberry found at WHEAT, this experience of personal liberation, this transformation of households leading the way into a new reality, consistently overshadowed his and others' calls for action groups to advocate for new policies and structural change. Lifestyle religion was helping people learn to feel at home in the world of neoliberalism.

The way that these evangelical and mainline mobilization efforts in response to crisis-talk about the planet followed such parallel paths in the 1970s, both producing strikingly similar versions of lifestyle religion, should call religion scholarship's attention to the central importance of their subjects' material positions in a given political economy, thinking critically about the ways religious thought and practice develop in relation to their material conditions. To put it bluntly, class analysis matters. And, looking to the study of religion in the U.S. specifically, as scholars spend more and more time studying the way religion is produced in relationship to state governance and discipline, this kind of attention to quotidian interactions with the political

economy offers a way of investigating the lived religious experience of state power, especially for the middle-class white people whose interactions with the state can be incredibly subtle. In short, this approach can help reveal the way people are channeled into market-friendly forms of religious practice that do not challenge state power.

For example, lifestyle religion, both in the mainstream Protestant networks in this dissertation, and in its more dispersed form in contemporary climate change debates, militates against forms of environmental action that would seek to challenge or place checks on capital and its political allies. Instead, it produces an ultimately apolitical form of daily practice for people to focus their efforts on, allowing the biggest contributors to climate change to continue their profit-seeking unchallenged. Take Shell Oil for example. According to a 2017 study, the fossil fuel giant was the ninth biggest greenhouse gas emitter between 1988 and 2015.<sup>6</sup> In 2020, the company's official social media account posted a poll that read, "What are you willing to change to help reduce emissions?" The poll's four choices each focused on individual lifestyle changes: "offset emissions," "stop flying," "buy electric vehicle," and "renewable electricity."<sup>7</sup> An apolitical vision of individual lifestyle change has become a talking point for the fossil fuel industry in its efforts to insulate itself from democratic pressures.<sup>8</sup>

\* \* \*

---

<sup>6</sup> Paul Griffin, "Carbon Majors Report," (London: CDP Worldwide, 2017), 8.

<sup>7</sup> In a response to Shell's social media poll, congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez responded by pointing out "the audacity of Shell asking YOU what YOU'RE willing to do to reduce emissions. They're showing you RIGHT HERE how the suggestion that individual choices—not systems—are a main driver of climate change is a fossil fuel talking point." Sophie Hirsh, "Twitter Roasts Shell for 'Gaslighting' Consumers with Emissions Poll," Green Matters, 11/2/2020 < <https://www.greenmatters.com/p/shell-twitter-poll>>.

<sup>8</sup> In a 2021 article, Geoffrey Supran and Naomi Oreskes point out that the very language of "carbon footprints" was first popularized by BP between 2004 and 2006. Supran and Oreskes, "Rhetoric and Frame Analysis of ExxonMobil's Climate Change Communications," *One Earth* 4:5 (May 21, 2021), 712.





*Figure 2 - Kay Vickers Shannon at Resurrection City, 1968*

Mainstream Protestant environmentalism wasn't always so apolitical. When she moved to New York in 1970 to lead the Ecology Church Action Project, Kay Vickers Shannon had just spent several years involved in direct action for racial justice in D.C. After joining the D.C. staff of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, she spent the spring and summer of 1968 supporting the Poor People's Campaign's six-week occupation of the Washington Mall known as Resurrection City. That June, Shannon was photographed being carried away by police as they

forcibly broke up the encampment (fig. 2).<sup>9</sup> “I think that Resurrection City was a success,” she noted later, because even though it had been forcibly torn down by policy after six weeks, that act of collective, direct action had “radicalized an awful lot of people.”<sup>10</sup>

Shannon brought this familiarity with direct action and commitment to racial justice to her environmental work in the NCC offices on Riverside Drive. She insisted that the denominational leaders on ECAP’s executive committee pay more attention to the links between racism and environmental issues and she didn’t shy away from putting direct pressure on the industries causing the most damage. Fired after nine months, her brief stint at the helm of a major mainline environmental project was a moment of real possibility as she challenged churchgoers to undertake collective actions that would confront corporations and states alike. After Shannon’s departure, Milo Thornberry, Ronald Sider, and other evangelicals and mainliners began circulating lifestyle religion as an apolitical replacement for Shannon’s vision of a more politically-engaged environmental religion.

In 1978, just as Thornberry relocated to the Atlanta suburbs to help spread the gospel of lifestyle through Alternatives, Inc. catalogues and Christmas campaigns, a powerful religious alternative to lifestyle religion was forming elsewhere in the South. 500 miles away in Warren County, North Carolina, a coalition led by Black United Church of Christ ministers were beginning to make plans for political mobilization and disruptive collective action in order to challenge plans to dump toxic waste in their area. A local civil rights activist, Dollie Burwell, used her connections to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the United Church of Christ Commission on Racial Justice to help build a coalition who, gathering in the county’s

---

<sup>9</sup> AP Wirephoto, “Forcibly Evicted,” *Lexington Leader*, June 25, 1968.

<sup>10</sup> Katherine Shannon, interview by Claudio Rawles, August 12, 1968, Washington, D.C., 20. Ralph J. Bunche Oral Histories Collection.

churches, prepared to draw on the civil rights movement's nonviolent direct action techniques to resist plans to offload environmental hazards on the area's predominantly Black community.<sup>11</sup>

According to Eileen McGurty, at a public hearing in early 1979, Warren County residents informed the EPA, "that a direct action against the site was a real possibility."<sup>12</sup> By 1982, their public pressure had failed and plans to dump truckloads of toxic waste in their community began moving forward. In response, a coalition of protestors led by UCC ministers Leon White and Benjamin Chavis, as well as Reverend Luther Brown, the pastor of a nearby Black Baptist church, executed a plan of disruptive direct action. On the morning of September 15th, as the first caravan of trucks filled with toxic waste began rolling toward the Warren County landfill, over two hundred people marched from the local Baptist church to the landfill's entrance, where they used their bodies to block the trucks. Around a hundred Highway Patrol officers and National Guard battalion descended on the protestors, arresting 67 protestors. For two months, protestors continued to regularly block the landfill's entrance, resulting in over 500 arrests. Although the protestors failed to stop the trucks (all told, over 7,000 truckloads of waste were dumped), photos of activists lying in the road to block the trucks' entry are remembered as iconic images of the birth of the environmental justice movement (fig. 3).<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> Willis Jenkins, *The Future of Ethics: Sustainability, Social Justice, and Religious Creativity* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2013), 200.

<sup>12</sup> Eileen McGurty, *Transforming Environmentalism: Warren County, PCBs, and the Origins of Environmental Justice* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 93.

<sup>13</sup> These details come from McGurty, *Transforming Environmentalism*, 81.



*Figure 3 - Protestors blocking trucks in Warren County, North Carolina, 1982.*

Five years later, Benjamin Chavis produced a UCC-commissioned research study, *Toxic Waste and Race in the United States of America*, that further popularized environmental justice, especially in response to environmental racism, which the report had shown beyond doubt was taking place not just in Warren County, but nationwide.<sup>14</sup> By embracing the collective forms of direct action that had proven so successful in the civil rights movement, Burwell, Chavis, and the other Warren County activists pioneered a vital religious alternative to the apolitical environmentalism offered by lifestyle religion.

\* \* \*

---

<sup>14</sup> United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice, "Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States: A National Report on the Racial and Socioeconomic Characteristics of Communities with Hazardous Waste Sites," (New York, 1987).

On September 20, 2019, a few hundred members of the University of Virginia community gathered on campus to march in solidarity with the youth-led climate strike actions taking place that day. The teenagers behind the climate strike called on communities around the world to join in walkouts and marches to demand that the heads of state gathered at that month's United Nations Climate Summit take decisive action on climate change. In the U.S., the Future Coalition organized many of the marches around a set of five demands, including environmental justice and support for a Green New Deal, calling on the federal government to undertake a massive economic transformation to ensure 100% renewable energy by the end of the next decade.

Embracing the message and methods of the environmental justice movement, the teenagers behind the Climate Strike envision a planetary future won through collective action and direct opposition to the people in power who, despite warnings from climate scientists, have continued to insulate the fossil fuel industry from democratic pressure. As I gathered with other students, faculty, and staff to support the Climate Strike that day, the ongoing tension between environmental justice and environmental lifestyle was evident. Before we marched the two miles to downtown Charlottesville in a show of solidarity with the local high schoolers gathering in front of City Hall, a coalition of UVA students put together a brief slate of speakers on the university's rotunda steps. One speaker, a permaculture farmer a decade or two older than most of the undergraduates in the crowd, wearing a long beard reminiscent of the counterculture, encouraged those in attendance to turn inward and ask themselves a question: "How do I arrange my lifestyle to fit within a renewable energy system?" Boos of disagreement rang out from a many of the young people in the crowd. "Guilt is not productive," declared one student a few speeches later in what felt like a direct response, "this isn't about your emissions!"





*Figure 4 - Climate strikers carry an effigy of BP's CEO (2019)*

This same theme came up in speech after speech that day. Rejecting lifestyle religion, now a favored talking point of Shell and other fossil fuel companies, the young people behind the Climate Strike embraced environmental justice. Handmade protest signs called for “system change, not climate change;” “100% renewables by 2030;” and “people over profit.” Endorsing structural change and calling out the inaction of the powerful, their signs showed a willingness to challenge the fossil fuel industry and their political allies directly, something lifestyle religion teaches people to shy away from. “The wrong Amazon is burning,” read one sign, directing ire at the prominent multi-national corporation. Signs reading “don’t be a fossil fool” showed up at a number of protests. In San Francisco, marchers carried an effigy of BP’s CEO. “Bob Dudley, Greedy Goblin,” read the sign on his chest (fig. 4).

If lifestyle religion reverberates into the present through the fossil fuel industry talking-point of “carbon footprints,” the environmental justice approach pioneered by Black Baptist and

UCC ministers in Warren County echoes forth not only in today's Climate Strikes, but also in the small groups around the country organizing to block the construction of oil pipelines and other pieces of fossil fuel infrastructure. As an alternative to lifestyle religion's tendency to turn away from questions of power and collective struggle, the religious environmentalism developed in part by a coalition of activists gathering in a Black Baptist Church in Warren County faces them head on.

Lifestyle religion has taught many of us to feel at home in a dream of the planet seamlessly interconnected by free markets. But as Karl Marx reminds in *Capital* volume 3, this vision is an illusion. "Capital's purpose is not the satisfaction of needs but the production of profit," wrote Marx.<sup>15</sup> Production outpaces consumption as the credit system props up capital's extraction of surplus value, regardless of demand for its products. Whether or not consumers choose it, capital often breaks the laws of supply and demand.

On a piece of cardboard at one of the Climate Strike marches, a student painted an image of planet Earth on fire, surrounded by a ringing alarm clock. If lifestyle religion offers a dream in which people can place their trust in the laws of supply and demand, young people are sounding the alarm. No amount of purchasing power can overcome capital's voracious profit-seeking. If the fossil fuel industry is going to be curbed, it will require the kinds of collective struggle and direct action championed by the early environmental justice movement instead.

---

<sup>15</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital Volume Three*. (New York: Penguin Books, [1981] 1991), 365.

# BIBLIOGRAPHY

## *Primary Sources*

### *Archival Collections*

Administrative Records of the Division of General Welfare of the General Board of Church and Society. United Methodist General Commission on Archives and History. Drew University. Madison, NJ

Administrative Records of the Division of Human Relations and Economic Affairs of the General Board of Church and Society. United Methodist General Commission on Archives and History. Drew University. Madison, NJ.

Herald Press Editors' Files. MennoMedia Offices. Harrisonburg, PA.

Herald Press Marketing Files. MennoMedia Offices. Harrisonburg, PA.

National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America (NCC) Division of Christian Life and Mission Records. Presbyterian Historical Society. Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia, PA.

NCC Office of Administration Records, 1938-1973. Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia, PA.

NCC Office of Communications Records. Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia, PA.

NCC Task Force on World Hunger Records. Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia, PA.

Needlework and Crafts Project Records. Mennonite Central Committee Archives. Akron, PA.

Papers of John R.W. Stott. Billy Graham Center Archives. Wheaton College.



Records of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association – Montreat Office. Billy Graham Center Archives. Wheaton College.

Records of *Christianity Today*. Billy Graham Center Archives. Wheaton College.

Records of Evangelicals for Social Action. Billy Graham Center Archives. Wheaton College.

Records of the Lausanne Movement, Billy Graham Center Archives. Wheaton College.

Self-Help Program Records. Mennonite Central Committee Archives. Akron, PA.

### *Periodicals*

*The Christian Century*

*Christianity and Crisis*

*Christianity Today*

*Church and Society*

*Journal of Marketing*

*Journal for Preachers*

*The Reformed Journal*

*Together*

### *Databases*

Atla Religion Database

Mississippi Digital Library

ProQuest Newspaper Archive

Ralph J. Bunche Oral Histories Collection

Vanderbilt Television News Archive

*Published*

Adler, Alfred, and W. Béran Wolfe, translator. *Understanding Human Nature*. New York:

Greenberg, 1930.

Amran, Robert, and Rolf Forsberg, directors. *The Late Great Planet Earth*. Amran and RCR,

1978.

Arendt, Hannah. "The Crisis in Education." *Between Past and Future* (New York: Viking Press,

1961): 173-196.

Barth, Karl, and Edwyn Clement, translator. *The Epistle to the Romans*. London, Oxford

University Press, 1933.

*The Book of Common Prayer*. New York: Church Publishing Incorporated, 2007.

Carson, Rachel. *Silent Spring*. New York: Fawcett World Library, 1962, 1969.

Committee on Agriculture, *Malthus and America: A Report About Food and People*.

Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1974.

Ehrlich, Paul. *The Population Bomb*. New York: Ballantine, 1968.

Emerson, Ralph Waldo. "Address on the Anniversary of Emancipation in the British West

Indies." David Robinson, editor. *The Political Emerson: Essential Writings on Politics*

*and Social Reform*. Boston: Beacon, 2004, 91-119.

Fuller, R. Buckminster. *Operating Manual for Spaceship Earth*. New York: Dutton, 1963.

Gibson, William H. "The Lifestyle of Christian Faithfulness." Michael Schut, editor. *Simpler*

*Living, Compassionate Life: A Christian Perspective*. Denver, CO: Living the Good

News, 1999. 134-135.

- Greyser, Stephen A., editor. *Toward Scientific Marketing: Proceedings of the Winter Conference of the American Marketing Association (December 27-28, 1963, Boston)*. Chicago, IL: American Marketing Association, 1964.
- Handrich, Joetta Schlabach. *Extending the Table: A World Community Cookbook*. Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1991.
- Hessel, Dieter, editor. *Beyond Survival: Bread and Justice in Christian Perspective*. New York: Friendship Press, 1977.
- Henderson, Kay, director. "The Celebration Revolution of Alexander Scrooge." Bloomington, IN: Alternatives, Inc., 1977.
- Histand, Deloris. *Living More-with-Less Study Action Guide*. Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1981.
- Kochtitzky, Bob. "Historical Note." Simple Living Works, 1993.
- <https://simpleliving.startlogic.com/indexoth.php?place=what.php>.
- Lappé, Francis Moore. *Diet for a Small Planet*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1971.
- Lind, Mary Beth, and Cathleen Hockman-Wert. *Simply in Season*. Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2005.
- Lindsey, Hal. *The Late Great Planet Earth*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1970.
- Lynes, Russel. "Highbrow, Lowbrow, Middlebrow," *The Wilson Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (1976): 146-158.
- Longacre, Doris Janzen. *Living More with Less*. Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1980.
- Longacre, Doris Janzen. *More-with-Less Cookbook*. Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1976.
- Muir, John. *The Yosemite*. New York: The Century Company, 1912.
- Nichols, Alan. *LOP 20: An Evangelical Commitment to Simple Life-style*. Wheaton, IL: Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, 1980.

- Pogue, Carolyn, editor. *Treasury of Celebrations*. British Columbia: Wood Lake Publishing, 1996.
- Rauschenbusch, Walter. *Christianity and the Social Crisis*. New York: Macmillan Company, 1907.
- Rose, Stephen C. *Study Action Guide: Justice on the Spaceship Earth*. New York: Council Press, 1968.
- Sider, Ronald J., editor. *Lifestyle in the Eighties: An Evangelical Commitment to Simple Lifestyle*. Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1982.
- Sider, Ronald J. *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger: A Biblical Study*. New York: Paulist Press, 1977.
- Sissel, H.B. *Help for the Smaller City: A Study/Action Guide*. New York: Division of Christian Life and Mission, National Council of Churches, 1968.
- Smith-Durland, Eugenia. *Voluntary Simplicity Study/Action Guide*. Bloomington, IN: Alternatives, 1978.
- Stott, John R.W. *The Lausanne Covenant: An Exposition and Commentary*. Wheaton, IL: Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, 1975.
- Stott, John R.W. *The Lausanne Covenant: Complete Text with Study Guide*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2012.
- Thornberry, Milo, editor. *The Alternative Celebrations Catalogue*. New York: Pilgrim Press, 1982.
- Thornberry, Milo L. *Fireproof Moth: A Missionary in Taiwan's White Terror*. Boiling Springs, PA: Sunberry Press, 2011.

Thornberry, Milo. "Why Celebrations?" Simple Living Works, 2002.

<https://simpleliving.startlogic.com/indexoth.php?place=what.php>.

United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice, "Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States: A National Report on the Racial and Socioeconomic Characteristics of Communities with Hazardous Waste Sites." New York, 1987.

Van Beilen, Aileen. *Hunger Awareness Dinners*. Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1978.

Wells, William D., editor. *Life Style and Psychographics*. Chicago, IL: American Marketing Association, 1974.

White Jr., Lynn. "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis." *Science* 155, no. 3767 (1967): 1203-1207.

## *Secondary Sources*

Alaimo, Stacy. *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010.

Albanese, Catherine L. *Nature Religion in America: From the Algonkian Indians to the New Age*. Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press, 1990.

Asad, Talal. *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, and Modernity*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003.

Asad, Talal. *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993.

Azaransky, Sarah. *This Worldwide Struggle: Religion and the International Roots of the Civil Rights Movement*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017.

- Baugh, Amanda J. *God and the Green Divide: Religious Environmentalism in Black and White*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2017.
- Belasco, Warren. *Appetite for Change: How the Counterculture Took on the Food Industry*, 2nd edition. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989, 2007.
- Bell, David, and Joanne Hollows, editors. *Historicizing Lifestyle: Mediating Taste, Consumption, and Identity from the 1900s to the 1970s*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate 2006.
- Bender, Courtney. *The New Metaphysicals: Spirituality and the American Religious Imagination*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010.
- Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010.
- Berry, Evan. *Devoted to Nature: The Religious Roots of American Environmentalism*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2015.
- Binkley, Sam. *Getting Loose: Lifestyle Consumption in the 1970s*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007.
- Blundell, Sally. *No Nonsense Guide to Fair Trade*. Oxford: New Internationalist, 2013.
- Brown, Candy Gunther. *The Word in the World: Evangelical Writing, Publishing, and Reading in America, 1789-1880*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004.
- Brown, Wendy. "American Nightmare: Neoliberalism, Neoconservatism, and De-democratization," *Political Theory* 34, no. 6 (December 2006): 690-714.
- Brown, Wendy. *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution*. New York: Zone Books, 2015.
- Butler, Anthea. *Women in the Church of God in Christ: Making a Sanctified World*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2011.

- Bynum, Caroline Walker. *Holy Feast Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987.
- Carpenter, Joel A. *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Carrette, Jeremy, and Richard King. *Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion*. New York: Routledge, 2005.
- Casanova, José. *Public Religions in the Modern World*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.
- Clover, Joshua. "Crisis." Jeff Diamanti, Andrew Pendakis, and Imre Szeman, editors. *The Bloomsbury Companion to Marx*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019. 289-296.
- Coffman, Elisha J. *The Christian Century and the Rise of the Protestant Mainline*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Cohen, Elizabeth. *Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*. New York: Vintage Books, 2003.
- Cohen, Elizabeth. *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- Cooper, Melinda. *Family Values; Between Neoliberalism and the New Social Conservatism*. Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books, 2017.
- Cowie, Jefferson. *Capital Moves: RCA's 70 Year Quest for Cheap Labor*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999.
- Cowie, Jefferson. *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class*. New York: The New Press, 2010.

- Cremer, Douglas J. Protestant Theology in Early Weimar Germany: Barth, Tillich, and Bultmann." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 56, no. 2 (1995): 289-307.
- Curtis, Finbarr. *The Production of American Religious Freedom*. New York: NYU Press, 2016.
- Davis, Joshua Clark. *From Headships to Whole Foods: The Rise and Fall of Activist Entrepreneurs*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2017.
- DeCaroli, Steven. "Arendt's *Krisis*." *Ethics and Education* 15, no. 2 (2020): 173-185.
- Deutsch, Tracey. *Building a Housewife's Paradise: Gender, Politics, and American Grocery Stores in the Twentieth Century*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2010.
- Dochuk, Darren. *Anointed with Oil: How Christianity and Crude Made Modern America*. New York: Basic Books, 2019.
- Dochuk, Darren. *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain Folk Religion, Grassroots, Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Religion*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2011.
- Ellis, Isaiah. "Infrastructure between Anthropology, Geography, and Religious Studies." Katie Day and Elise M. Edwards, editors. *The Routledge Handbook of Religion and Cities*. New York: Routledge, 2021. 94-104.
- Engelke, Matthew. *God's Agents: Biblical Publicity in Contemporary England*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2013.
- Fassin, Didier. *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011.
- Faulkner, Carol. "The Root of the Evil: Free Produce and Radical Antislavery, 1820-1860." *Journal of the Early Republic* 27, no. 3 (Fall 2007): 377-405.



- Fessenden, Tracy. *Culture and Redemption: Religion, the Secular, and American Literature*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007.
- Fields, Barbara. "Slavery, Race, and Ideology in the United States of America." *New Left Review* 1, no. 1871 (1990): 95-118.
- Fowler, Robert Booth. *The Greening of Protestant Thought*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995.
- Gasaway, Brantley. *Progressive Evangelicals and the Pursuit of Social Justice*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014.
- Gatta, John. *Making Nature Sacred: Literature, Religion, and the Environment in America from the Puritans to the Present*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Gerber, Lynne. "Fat Christians and Fit Elites: Negotiating Class and Status in Evangelical Christian Weight-Loss Culture." *American Quarterly* 64, no. 1 (2012): 61-84.
- Getachew, Adom. *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019.
- Gill, Jill K. *Embattled Ecumenism: The National Council of Churches, the Vietnam War, and the Trials of the Protestant Left*. DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2011.
- Glickman, Lawrence B. *Buying Power: A History of Consumer Activism in America*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2009.
- Gloege, Timothy E.W. *Guaranteed Pure: The Moody Bible Institute, Business, and the Making of Modern Evangelicalism*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015.
- Grainger, Brett. *Church in the Wild: Evangelicals in Antebellum America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019.

Graziano, Michael. *Errand into the Wilderness of Mirrors: Religion and the History of the CIA*.

Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021.

Grem, Darren E. *The Blessings of Business: How Corporations Shaped Conservative*

*Christianity*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016.

Griffin, Paul. *Carbon Majors Report*. London: CDP Worldwide, 2017.

Griffith, R. Marie. *Born Again Bodies: Flesh and Spirit in American Christianity*. Berkeley, CA:

University of California Press, 2004.

Griffith, R. Marie. *God's Daughters: Evangelical Women and the Power of Submission*.

Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997.

Gutjahr, Paul. *An American Bible: A History of the Good Book in the United States, 1777-1880*.

Stanford University Press, 1999.

Gura, Philip. *American Transcendentalism: A History*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2008.

Hale, Grace Elizabeth. *A Nation of Outsiders: How the White Middle Class Fell in Love with*

*Rebellion in Postwar America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Hall, David D., editor. *Lived Religion: Toward a History of Practice*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton

University Press, 1997.

Hall, Jacqueline Dowd. "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past."

*The Journal of American History* 91, no. 4 (March 2005): 1233-1263.

Hall, Stuart. *Cultural Studies 1983: A Theoretical History*. Edited by Lawrence Grossberg and

Jennifer Daryl Slack. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016.

Hall, Stuart. "Notes on Deconstructing the Popular." In Raphael Samuel, editor. *People's History*

*and Socialist Theory*. New York: Routledge, 1981. 227-241.

Harvey, David. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

- Harvey, David. *The New Imperialism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Haskell, Thomas L. "Capitalism and the Origins of the Humanitarian Sensibility, Part 1." *The American Historical Review* 90, no. 2 (April 1985): 339-361.
- Haskell, Thomas L. "Capitalism and the Origins of the Humanitarian Sensibility, Part 2." *The American Historical Review* 90, no. 3 (June 1985): 547-566.
- Hazard, Sonia. "Evangelical Encounters: The American Tract Society and the Rituals of Print Distribution in Antebellum America," *The Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 88, no. 1 (2020): 200-234.
- Hazard, Sonia. "Thing." *Early American Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 16, no. 4 (2018): 792-800.
- Hedstrom, Matthew S. *The Rise of Liberal Religion: Book Culture and American Spirituality in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Hoganson, Kristin. *Consumers' Imperium: The Global Production of American Domesticity, 1865-1920*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007.
- Hollinger, David A. *After Cloven Tongues of Fire: Protestant Liberalism in Modern American History*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013.
- Hollinger, David A. *Protestants Abroad: How Missionaries Tried to Change the World but Changed America*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017.
- Hulsether, Mark. *Building a Protestant Left: Christianity and Crisis Magazine, 1941-1933*. Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1999.
- Hutchinson, William R. *Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1987.

Jacobs, Margaret D. "Maternal Colonialism: White Women and Indigenous Child Removal In the American West and Australia, 1880-1940." *Western Historical Quarterly* 36, no. 4 (Dec 2005): 453-476.

Jacobs, Meg. *Pocketbook Politics: Economic Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America*. Princeton, NJ: University Press, 2004.

Jenkins, Willis J. *The Future of Ethics: Sustainability, Social Justice, and Religious Creativity*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2013.

Johnson, Paul E. *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837* (New York: Hill and Wang; 1978, 2004.

Johnson, Sylvester A., and Steven Weitzman, editors. *The FBI and Religion: Faith and National Security before and after 9/11*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2017.

Johnson, Walter. *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999.

Kaell, Hillary. *Christian Globalism at Home: Child Sponsorship in the United States*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020.

Kirkpatrick, David. *A Gospel for the Poor: Global Social Christianity and the Latin American Evangelical Left*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019.

Klassen, Pamela, and Kathryn Lofton. "Material Witnesses." Mia Lövheim, editor. *Media, Religion and Gender: Key Issues and New Challenges*. New York: Routledge, 2013. 114-140.

Klein, Naomi. *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*. New York, Metropolitan Books, 2007.

- Korsch, Dietrich. "Theology as Language of Crisis: Karl Barth's Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans." Lars K. Bruun, Karl Christian Lammers, and Gert Sørensen, editors. *European Self-Reflection between Politics and Religion: The Crisis of Europe in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013. 95-111.
- Koselleck, Reinhart. *Critique and Crisis: Enlightenment and the Pathogenesis of Modern Society*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1959, 1988.
- Kruse, Kevin M. *One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America*. New York: Basic Books, 2015.
- Larkin, Brian. "The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 42 (October 2013): 327-343.
- Larson, David Kenneth. "God's Gardeners: American Protestant Evangelicals Confront Environmentalism, 1967-2000." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 2001.
- Latour, Bruno. *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Latour, Bruno. *We Have Never Been Modern*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993.
- Latour, Bruno. "Where are the missing masses? The sociology of a few mundane artifacts." W.E. Bijker and J. Law, editors. *Shaping Technology/Building Society: Studies in Sociotechnical Change*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992. 225-258.
- Lears, T.J. Jackson. *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America*. New York: Basic Books 1994.
- Lears, T.J. Jackson. *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture*. Chicago: University Press, 1981.

- LeMeneger, Stephanie. *Living Oil: Petroleum Culture in the American Century*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Lempke, Mark A. *My Brother's Keeper: George McGovern and Progressive Christianity*. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2017.
- LeVasseur, Todd, and Anna Peterson, editors. *Religion and Ecological Crisis: The Lynn White Thesis at Fifty*. New York: Routledge, 2017.
- Levine, Lawrence W. *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990.
- Levy, Jonathan. *Freaks of Fortune: The Emerging World of Capitalism and Risk in America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012.
- Lipsitz, George. *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics*. 25th Anniversary Edition. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992, 2018.
- Lofton, Kathryn. *Consuming Religion*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2017.
- Lofton, Kathryn. *Oprah: The Gospel of an Icon*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011.
- Lofton, Kathryn. "Why Religion Is Hard For Historians (and How It Can Be Easier)." *Modern American History* 3 (2020): 69-86.
- Longacre, Doris Janzen. *More-with-Less*. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1976.
- Mahmood, Saba. *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011.
- Mahmood, Saba. *Religious Difference in a Secular Age: A Minority Report*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015.

Malloy, Sean L. *Out of Oakland: Black Panther Party Internationalism during the Cold War*.

Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2017.

Marsden, George M. *Fundamentalism and American Culture*. New York: Oxford University

Press, 1980 2006.

Martin, Lerone. *The Gospel of J. Edgar Hoover: The FBI and the Making of White*

*Evangelicalism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, forthcoming.

Marx, Karl. *Capital Volume One*. New York: Penguin Books, 1976, 1991.

Marx, Karl. *Capital Volume Three*. New York: Penguin Books, 1981, 1991.

Masuzawa, Tomoko. *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism Was*

*Preserved in the Language of Pluralism*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005.

May, Elaine Tyler. *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*. New York:

Basic Books, 1988, 2008.

McAllister, Melani. *The Kingdom of God Has No Borders: A Global History of American*

*Evangelicals*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018.

McCrary, Charles, and Jeffrey Wheatley, "The Protestant Secular in the Study of American

Religion: Reappraisal and Suggestions," *Religion* 47, no. 2 (2017): 256-276.

McCrary, Charles. *Sincerely Held: American Secularism and Its Believers*. Chicago: University

of Chicago Press, 2022.

McGirr, Lisa. *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right*. Princeton, NJ:

Princeton University Press, 2015.

McGurty, Eileen. *Transforming Environmentalism: Warren County, PCBs, and the Origins of*

*Environmental Justice*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007.

- Miller, Karl Hagstrom. *Segregating Sound: Inventing Folk and Pop Music in the Age of Jim Crow*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010.
- Mills, Kay. *This Little Light of Mine: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer*. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky.
- Mitchell, Kerry. *Spirituality and the State: Managing Nature and Experience in America's National Parks*. New York: New York University Press, 2016.
- Modern, John Lardas. *Secularism in Antebellum America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011.
- Moreton, Bethany. "The Soul of Neoliberalism." *Social Text* 25, no. 3 (92) (2007): 103-123.
- Moreton, Bethany. *To Serve God and Wal-Mart: The Making of Christian Free Enterprise*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010.
- Morgan, David. "The Ecology of Images: Seeing and the Study of Religion." *Religion and Society* 5 (2014): 813-105.
- Morgan, David. *The Forge of Vision: A Visual History of Modern Christianity*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2015.
- Morgan, David. *Protestants and Pictures: Religion, Visual Culture, and the Age of American Mass Production*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Morgan, David. *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005.
- Morrison, Toni. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992.
- Muhammad, Khalil Gibran. *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010.



- Murphy, Michelle. *The Economization of Life*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017.
- Nash, George H. *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America since 1945*. New York: Basic Books, 1976.
- Nitzke, Solvejg, and Nicolas Pethes, editors. *Imagining Earth: Concepts of Wholeness in Cultural Constructions of Our Home Planet*. New York: Columbia Univeristy Press, 2018.
- Noll, Mark A. *America's God: Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Nolt, Steven M. "Globalizing a Separate People: World Christianity and North American Mennonites, 1940-1990. *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 84 (October 2010): 487-506.
- Orsi, Robert A. *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950*, 3rd edition. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985, 2010.
- Painter, Nell Irvin. *The History of White People*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2010.
- Patterson, James T. *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945-1974*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Peréz, Elizabeth. *Religion in the Kitchen: Cooking, Talking, and the Making of Black Atlantic Traditions*. New York, NY: NYU Press, 2016.
- Petro, Anthony. *After the Wrath of God: AIDS, Sexuality, and American Religion*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Phillips, Sarah T. "Environmental History." Eric Foner and Lisa McGirr, editors. *American History Now* Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2011. 285-313.
- Poole, Robert. *Earthrise: How We First Saw Ourselves* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010.

- Rehmann, Jan. "Religion." Jeff Diamanti, Andrew Pendakis, and Imre Szeman, editors. *The Bloomsbury Companion to Marx*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019. 387-394.
- Robertson, Thomas. *The Malthusian Moment: Global Population Growth and the Birth of American Environmentalism*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2012.
- Rodgers, Daniel T. *Age of Fracture*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011.
- Roitman, Janet. *Anti-Crisis*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014.
- Rome, Adam. *The Bulldozer in the Countryside: Suburban Sprawl and the Rise of American Environmentalism*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Rossinow, Doug. *The Politics of Authenticity: Liberalism, Christianity, and the New Left in America*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998.
- Rothermund, Dietmar. *An Economic History of India: From Pre-Colonial Times to 1991*. New York: Routledge, 1991.
- Rothman, Hal K. *The Greening of a Nation? Environmentalism in the U.S. since 1945*. Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace, 1998.
- Ryan, Maureen E. *Lifestyle Media in American Culture: Gender, Class, and the Politics of Ordinarity*. New York: Routledge, 2018.
- Sack, Daniel. *Whitebread Protestants: Food and Religion in American Culture*. New York: Palgrave, 2000.
- Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage, 1979.
- Satter, Beryl. *Each Mind a Kingdom: American Women, Sexual Purity, and the New Thought Movement 1875-1920*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999.
- Schmidt, Leigh Eric. *Consumer Rites: The Buying and Selling of American Holidays*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997.

- Sellers, Charles. *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.
- Sideris, Lisa H. *Consecrating Science: Wonder, Knowledge, and the Natural World*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2017.
- Slobodian, Quinn. *Globalists: The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018.
- Stein, Judith. *Pivotal Decade: How the United States Traded Factories for Finance in the Seventies*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011.
- Stoll, Mark R. *Inherit the Holy Mountain: Religion and the Rise of American Environmentalism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Stoll, Mark R. *Protestantism, Capitalism, and Nature in America*. Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1997.
- Supran, Geoffrey, and Naomi Oreskes. "Rhetoric and Frame Analysis of ExxonMobil's Climate Change Communications." *One Earth* 4, no. 5, (May 2021), 696-719.
- Sugrue, Thomas. *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996.
- Sullivan, Robert, editor. *100 Photographs that Changed the World*. New York: Life Books, 2003.
- Sullivan, Winnifred Fallers. *The Impossibility of Religious Freedom*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005.
- Sutton, Matthew Avery. *American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2014.

- Sutton, Matthew Avery. *Double Cross: The Missionaries Who Spied for the United States during the Second World War*. New York: Basic Books, 2019.
- Swartz, David R. *Moral Minority: The Evangelical Left in an Age of Conservatism*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012.
- Taylor, Bron. *Dark Green Religion: Nature Spirituality and the Planetary Future*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2010.
- Taylor, Charles. *A Secular Age*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007.
- Thompson, Michael G. *For God and Globe: Christian Internationalism in the United States between the Great War and the Cold War*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015.
- Turner, Fred. *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2006.
- Vaca, Daniel. *Evangelicals Incorporated: Books and the Business of Religion*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019.
- Veit, Helen Zoe. *Modern Food Moral Food: Self-Control, Science, and the Rise of Modern American Eating in the Early Twentieth Century*. Chapel hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2013.
- Veldman, Robin Globus, Andrew Szasz, and Randolph Haluza-DeLay, "Introduction: Climate Change and Religion—A Review of Existing Research." *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* 6, no. 3 (2012): 255-275.
- Viola, Antonella. "Alternative Trading Associations." Frederick F. Wherry and Juliet B. Schor, editors. *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Economics and Society*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2015. 98-100.

Walker, David. *Railroading Religion: Mormons, Tourists, and the Corporate Spirit of the West*.

Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2019.

Warren, Heather A. *Theologians of a New World Order: Reinhold Niebuhr and the Christian*

*Realists, 1920-1948*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Weisenfeld, Judith. *New World A-Coming: Black Religion and Racial Identity during the Great*

*Migration*. New York: NYU Press, 2016.

Wenger, Tisa. *We Have a Religion: The 1920s Pueblo Indian Dance Controversy and American*

*Religious Freedom*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009.

Williams, Daniel K. *God's Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right*. New York: Oxford

University Press, 2010.

Witt, Joseph D. *Religion and Resistance in Appalachia: Faith and the Fight Against*

*Mountaintop Removal Coal Mining*. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2016.

Wolfer, Terry A., and Katrina del Pilar. "Ten Thousand Villages: Partnering with Artisans to

Overcome Poverty." *Social Work and Christianity* 35, no. 4 (2008): 449-472.

Wood, Linda Beecher. *A More Perfect Union: Holistic Worldviews and the Transformation of*

*American Culture after World War II*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Worthen, Molly. *Apostles of Reason: The Crisis of Authority in American Evangelicalism*. New

York: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Wuthnow, Robert. *After Heaven: Spirituality in America since the 1950s*. Berkeley, CA:

University of California Press, 1998.

Yaple, Charles H. "The Christian Church and Environmental Education: A Study of Involvement

in the United States." Ph.D. Dissertation, College of Environmental Science and Forestry,

State University of New York, Syracuse, 1982.