

September 10, 2023

Dear APHI Seminar readers,

Thank you for engaging with this piece and offering your feedback. This piece is an article manuscript now (it has gone through two good rounds of R&R with *American Quarterly*, and hopefully it will be accepted at the next AQ editorial board meeting), and it will turn into a chapter in my book manuscript.

I wanted to put this piece in an interdisciplinary journal because I wanted to explore how affect theory could aid my analysis. (As we know, historians sometimes can be a little theory-shy or theory-ambivalent.) I am a historian who is cosplaying as a theory-loving American Studies scholar in this article, and the rounds of revisions have pushed me to do that more. In the second round of R&R, the editorial board asked me to insert affect theory even more in the body of the article, especially the third section on abstinence. I am working on that part of the revisions now, so I would love to hear any suggestions about ways that I can apply more of the affect theory that I introduce about disgust, grief, and compassion.

After this piece gets accepted as an article, I will have the opportunity to expand it as it goes from article to book chapter, and I would love to hear your suggestions about ways that you would like to see the piece expand. Some potential ideas for expansion include: detailing more local resistance to, appropriation of, and collaboration with missionary AIDS programs across the Global South; analyzing the ways that missionaries treated AIDS in the late 1980s as both a health and public relations crisis, after missionaries contracted HIV from untreated blood banks overseas and several mission organizations faced reduced contributions from U.S. donors as a result; and discussing how the development of what I might call paternalist heterosexism shaped U.S. evangelicals' actions toward LGBTQ+ folks in the U.S. in the 2000s and 2010s. Do any of these ideas sound particularly interesting to you? What other expansions might you like to see?

This piece will be the sixth chapter in my book project, *The Missionary Majority: American Evangelicals and Power in a Postcolonial World*, which shows how global missionary work by millions of Americans shaped the conservative resurgence in U.S. society in the mid- and late twentieth century. I demonstrate that in the 1950s-2000s, U.S. evangelicals engaged in global missionary work that taught them distinct ways of thinking and feeling about social hierarchies, with the result that they came to understand certain racial, sexual, and religious hierarchies as expressions of love, and therefore worked to preserve those hierarchies in the U.S. and around the world. Much of the book focuses on how missionary work shaped US evangelicals' perceptions, thoughts, and feelings about race and ethnicity. In three different chapters I trace the development of and concrete expressions of what I call skin-deep antiracism, uncritical multiculturalism, and white-centered multiculturalism on the mission field and then back in the United States. Another chapter takes a detour away from the Global South (the site of most missionary work) and focuses on Russia and Eastern Europe to show the expansion of U.S. evangelicals' thoughts and feelings about Protestant dominionism (via their successful installation of compulsory Bible reading and devotional prayer in post-Soviet public schools).

The final chapter is the one that you are reading about the global AIDS epidemic. While readers of the book will be well equipped with background information about U.S. evangelicals'

changing (and not changing) views on race and ethnicity and about the relationship between missionary work abroad and U.S. evangelicals' attention, devotion, and support at home, before this chapter, readers will have little information about medical mission work, U.S. evangelicals' hostility toward homosexuality, and the global AIDS epidemic. Is the context I provide sufficient for you to understand events unfolding across the Global South and in the U.S., or do you wish that you had more background information? I am also eager to know your thoughts overall. All feedback is appreciated.

Looking forward to our discussion,
Hannah

**Missionary Positions:
How American Evangelicals Learned to Love Global AIDS Work, 1985-2005**

Abstract:

From the mid-1980s to mid-2000s, American missionaries conducted widespread information campaigns across the United States to change U.S. evangelicals' emotions and perceptions of the AIDS epidemic and secure evangelicals' support for global AIDS work. Drawing on longstanding colonial discourses about suffering foreign bodies, missionaries conditioned U.S. evangelicals to shift their feelings about AIDS from disgust to grief, which activated practices of compassion. With evocative stories about their work across the Global South, missionaries taught evangelicals to understand the AIDS epidemic as an opportunity to convert millions of souls, expand control over Black and brown foreign bodies, and strengthen heteropatriarchy around the world. Once U.S. evangelicals learned to love global AIDS work, they funded abstinence-only sex education courses packaged as AIDS prevention programs across the Global South. Missionaries' information campaigns facilitated U.S. evangelicals' dramatic transformation in these decades from the most implacable foes of people with HIV/AIDS domestically to some of the biggest supporters of AIDS work internationally. Assessing U.S. evangelicals' changing attitudes about and involvement with the AIDS epidemic reveals how transnational religious networks linked U.S. conservative political priorities to global health humanitarianism and how religious actors expanded American global power in a postcolonial context.

Late at night in Vitória, Brazil, American missionary Karen Gray would lie awake, racked with grief for the people with AIDS that she was meeting at local hospitals. She and her husband had moved to Brazil in 1981 and witnessed the epidemic's spread over the years throughout the country. When she cried about the suffering that she was seeing, Karen also would weep with remorse for her former contempt for people with HIV/AIDS. "I've asked for forgiveness so many times for my previously held judgmental spirit and condemnation," she later admitted. Karen interpreted that her grief was a divine sign that she should start a hospice for people with AIDS in Vitória. She wanted to fundraise in the United States for the hospice, but she knew that U.S. evangelicals' disdain towards people with HIV/AIDS would be a major obstacle. To combat that disdain, she partnered with other missionaries and the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), the largest evangelical denomination in the United States, to create a curriculum about missionaries' work with people with HIV/AIDS around the world. Thanks to donations from the SBC and churches that used the curriculum, Karen was able to open House of Hope hospice in 1995. Working at the hospice, she often felt a "well of emotion" for the "healing of the soul" that she believed was happening in the local community.¹

Missionaries like Karen conducted widespread information campaigns across the United States from the mid-1980s to mid-2000s to convince American evangelicals that there were people with HIV/AIDS who deserved compassion and there were AIDS programs worthy of funding. Using longstanding colonial ideas and emotions about suffering foreign bodies, missionaries promoted AIDS work to U.S. evangelicals by linking it to evangelicals' desire to save the world. By the late twentieth century, U.S. evangelicals were running some of the world's biggest international NGOs and sending millions of Americans around the world as

¹ Mary Speidel, "Brazilian AIDS Patients Find Jesus' Healing Love," *Baptist Press*, January 9, 1997 and "At Heaven's Door," *The Commission* 66, no. 4 (August 2003), 30.

missionaries each year.² These global religious networks became the pathways for new ways of feeling about AIDS and new ways of imposing heteropatriarchy and white paternalism around the world as “solutions” to AIDS.

The AIDS epidemic has been an “epidemic of signification,” and within the larger contests over the meaning of AIDS, U.S. evangelicals’ shifting interpretations were significant due to their growing domestic political power and vast international influence.³ As Karen’s experience suggests, the core transformation for many evangelicals was an affective shift from disgust to grief that activated a sense of obligation to relieve suffering. Whereas disgust, as Sianne Ngai has detailed, produces exclusion, degradation, and hostility – all major aspects of evangelicals’ responses to the epidemic in the United States – grief dignifies and, as Judith Butler explains, marks “who counts as human” and which “losses we can avow as loss.”⁴ To curb disgust and encourage grief, missionaries had to move U.S. evangelicals from equating HIV/AIDS with sexual immorality to associating HIV/AIDS with Black and brown foreign peoples’ pain. Grief about foreign pain had long triggered evangelicals’ practices of compassion – their methods of assuming the duty to ameliorate distress and determining the solutions for that distress, as Lauren Berlant has described compassionate action – so this grief focused U.S. evangelicals’ attention on bodies and souls for whom evangelicals had long felt responsible.⁵ Thus linking HIV/AIDS to grief for foreign suffering led U.S. evangelicals to support global AIDS work to rescue people that evangelicals felt compelled to save.

² See Robert Wuthnow, *Boundless Faith: The Global Outreach of American Churches* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 170 and John Siewert and Dotsey Welliver, eds., *Mission Handbook: US and Canadian Ministries Overseas*, 18th ed. (Wheaton, IL: Evangelism and Missions Information Service, 2001).

³ Paula Treichler, *How to Have Theory in an Epidemic: Cultural Chronicles of AIDS* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 11-41.

⁴ Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 335-40 and Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004), 31, 40.

⁵ Lauren Berlant, “Compassion (and Withholding),” in Lauren Berlant, ed., *Compassion: The Cultural Politics of an Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 1-11.

American missionaries' efforts to change U.S. evangelicals' understanding of AIDS demonstrate how religion and affect forged transnational networks through which millions of Americans merged their religiopolitical priorities with their new concern for the health outcomes of people with HIV/AIDS around the world in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Histories of global health have shown how colonial and neocolonial projects linked foreign endeavors and domestic politics.⁶ Yet much scholarship on the AIDS epidemic focuses on either the United States or other countries and regions.⁷ This essay joins the growing body of scholarship that reveals how changes to global AIDS work and changes in U.S. politics and culture were mutually constitutive.⁸ Scholars have detailed the domestic story of how conservative religious groups denied the importance of the epidemic and vilified people with HIV/AIDS while other religious groups like the Metropolitan Community Church forged supportive communities for people with HIV/AIDS.⁹ Shifting to a transnational frame, this essay

⁶ See for example Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Catherine Choy, *Empire of Care: Nursing and Migration in Filipino American History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); Warwick Anderson, *Colonial Pathologies: American Tropical Medicine, Race, and Hygiene in the Philippines* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006); and John Mckiernan-González, *Fevered Measures: Public Health and Race at the Texas-Mexico Border, 1848-1942* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).

⁷ See for example Stephen Epstein, *Impure Science: AIDS, Activism, and the Politics of Knowledge* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); David Román, *Acts of Intervention: Performance, Gay Culture, and AIDS* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998); Didier Fassin, *When Bodies Remember: Experiences and Politics of AIDS in South Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Matthew Gutmann, *Fixing Men: Sex, Birth Control, and AIDS in Mexico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Deborah Gould, *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP's Fight against AIDS* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Jarrett Zigon, *HIV is God's Blessing: Rehabilitating Morality in Neoliberal Russia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

⁸ See Paul Farmer, *AIDS and Accusation: Haiti and the Geography of Blame* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Cindy Patton, *Globalizing AIDS* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002); Jennifer Brier, *Infectious Ideas: US Political Responses to the AIDS Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Scott Morgensen, "Indigenous Transnationalism and the AIDS Pandemic: Challenging Settler Colonialism and Global Health Governance," in Audra Simpson and Andrea Smith, eds., *Theorizing Native Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 188-206; Melani McAlister, *The Kingdom of God Has No Borders: A Global History of American Evangelicals* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018); Dan Royles, *To Make the Wounded Whole: The African American Struggle against HIV/AIDS* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020); Jih-Fei Cheng, Alexandra Juhasz, and Nishant Shahani, eds., *AIDS and the Distribution of Crises* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020); and Karma Chavez, *The Borders of AIDS: Race, Quarantine, and Resistance* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2021).

⁹ See Melissa Wilcox, *Coming out in Christianity: Religion, Identity, and Community* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003); R. Stephen Warner, *A Church of Our Own: Disestablishment and Diversity in American*

exposes how missionaries taught U.S. evangelicals that they did not have to abandon heteropatriarchy in order to save people with HIV/AIDS, but rather could expand heteropatriarchy through paternalist programs for Black and brown people with HIV/AIDS around the world.

While scholars have highlighted missionaries' longtime roles as agents and sometimes opponents of empire, most scholarship focuses on periods before decolonization.¹⁰ The work of U.S. missionaries during the AIDS epidemic reveals how religious actors expanded American global power in a postcolonial context. U.S. evangelical missionaries often aided U.S. imperialism, for example by inculcating the primacy of the individual and the nuclear family over broader social solidarities, thereby making U.S. neoliberal economic and political domination easier, and missionaries also furthered American cultural hegemony, for example by teaching American songs, histories, literatures, theologies, and practices in classes ostensibly about universal Christian lessons. During the AIDS epidemic, U.S. missionaries extended their influence with foreign governments by obtaining foreign officials' approval of humanitarian and evangelism programs pitched as pandemic relief. After U.S. evangelicals learned to value global AIDS work, their support fueled the expansion of missionaries' abstinence-only sex education programs that imposed conservative white middle-class American conceptions of sexuality, gender, and family structure on communities throughout the Global South. And U.S. evangelicals' fervor for ending the AIDS epidemic according to their priorities led them to

Religion (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005); and Anthony Petro, *After the Wrath of God: AIDS, Sexuality, and American Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

¹⁰ See Emily Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream: American Economic and Cultural Expansion, 1890-1945* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981); Barbara Reeves-Ellington, Kathryn Kish Sklar, and Connie Semo, eds., *Competing Kingdoms: Women, Mission, Nation, and the American Protestant Empire, 1812-1960* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); Derek Chang, *Citizens of a Christian Nation: Evangelical Missions and the Problem of Race in the Nineteenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011); and Emily Conroy-Krutz, *Christian Imperialism: Converting the World in the Early American Republic* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015).

mobilize their political networks to shape the guidelines of the U.S. President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), which influences international organizations’ and foreign states’ AIDS programs to this day.

Missionaries made AIDS work attractive to U.S. evangelicals by teaching them that the epidemic provided an opportunity to convert millions of souls, expand control over Black and brown foreign bodies, and strengthen heteropatriarchy around the world. To trace how missionaries sold new ways of feeling and thinking about AIDS, this article examines missionary newsletters, correspondence, and educational curricula read by millions of evangelicals across the United States from the mid-1980s to mid-2000s. The essay utilizes publications and archival holdings from two prominent U.S. evangelical organizations – the Southern Baptist Convention and Campus Crusade for Christ – because both groups commanded massive transnational networks linking missionaries to U.S. audiences, so the groups’ materials reveal some of the most prevalent messages reaching U.S. evangelicals during these decades. Drawing on affect studies, the article pays attention to the emotions that missionaries’ rhetoric called upon and attempted to call forth in U.S. audiences. And while some studies of U.S. evangelicals’ global activism zoom in on one country to highlight important local distinctions, this essay takes a broader scope to trace the common appeals that missionaries sent from many different countries to U.S. evangelicals. Those commonalities reveal how missionaries flattened heterogeneous contexts and encouraged U.S. evangelicals to understand people across the Global South as largely the same – similarly suffering and similarly deserving of rescue.

The essay first analyzes how evangelicals conflated HIV/AIDS in the U.S. with sexual immorality and generated their feelings of disgust that prevented compassionate action. Next the piece analyzes how missionaries’ accounts of their work in Africa, South America, and

Southeast Asia conditioned U.S. evangelicals to associate AIDS with established evangelical feelings and ideas, especially grief for suffering foreign bodies, suffering families, and lost souls. Then the article explores how missionaries' reports about their AIDS prevention (abstinence education) programs across the Global South encouraged U.S. evangelicals to see AIDS work as a method of bolstering abroad sexual and racial hierarchies that evangelicals wanted to reinforce at home. Offering a ready-made solution to foreign suffering that aligned with evangelical priorities expedited U.S. evangelicals' embrace of global AIDS work as the acceptable way to turn their grief into compassionate action. Together, missionaries' information campaigns facilitated U.S. evangelicals' dramatic transformation from the most implacable foes of people with HIV/AIDS domestically to some of the biggest supporters of AIDS work internationally.

Medical and Moral Crises

The fight over the meaning and politics of AIDS in the 1980s and 1990s engaged large swaths of U.S. society, including not only religious communities like evangelicals but also members of the medical and scientific community, the LGBTQ+ community, communities of color, activist communities, the federal government, state and local governments, and media outlets. The Centers for Disease Control in 1982 named four already marginalized groups as the official AIDS risk factors – homosexuals, heroin addicts, hemophiliacs, and Haitians. As a result, hostility towards people with HIV/AIDS fomented and was fueled by homophobia, anti-black racism, and xenophobia, and members of the four “at-risk” groups faced increased discrimination and violence. Although most early media reports focused on white gay men, HIV/AIDS also disproportionately impacted poor communities of color, especially African Americans, through

many different transmission contexts, and Black and brown AIDS activists fought to dismantle the economic, social, and political inequities that exacerbated the epidemic in their communities.¹¹ Reflecting the U.S. state’s history of reinforcing social hierarchies via disease policy, the U.S. government responded to the AIDS epidemic with controls, like the Immigration and Naturalization Service’s ban on migrants with HIV, and neglect, such as President Ronald Reagan’s not creating an official Presidential commission on HIV until 1987. Government inaction while tens of thousands of people died spurred widespread activism that demanded provisions and protections for people with HIV/AIDS. One central demand was accelerated production and distribution of medication, and antiretrovirals (ARVs) did become available to wealthy and middle-class people with health insurance in the mid-1990s. The lack of access to ARVs in poor communities of color, however, magnified the obstacles that Black and brown people with HIV/AIDS in the U.S. faced when trying to access care and reduce transmission, and in the following years the burden of the U.S. epidemic shifted heavily to communities of color.¹²

American evangelicals most shaped the discourses and policies of the U.S. epidemic by condemning the disease as a “gay plague” and attacking people with HIV/AIDS as a way to oppose queerness more broadly. Evangelicals constituted a major portion of the growing U.S. Religious Right that exalted the “traditional family” (coded as white, heterosexual, and patriarchal) and vilified feminism, abortion, and homosexuality as “anti-family” forces in U.S. society. For years before the AIDS epidemic emerged, evangelicals had theologically and

¹¹ Michele Tracy Berger, *Workable Sisterhood: The Political Journey of Stigmatized Women with HIV/AIDS* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Alyson O’Daniel, *Holding On: African American Women Surviving AIDS* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016); Darius Bost, *Evidence of Being: The Black Gay Cultural Renaissance and the Politics of Violence* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018); Celeste Watkins-Hayes, *Remaking a Life: How Women Living with HIV/AIDS Confront Inequality* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019); Royles, *To Make the Wounded Whole*; and Chavez, *Borders of AIDS*.

¹² Cheng, Juhasz, and Shahani, *AIDS and the Distribution of Crises*, 3-5; Royles, *To Make the Wounded Whole*; and Chavez, *Borders of AIDS*.

politically opposed queer people by labeling them as pedophiles and existential threats to traditional families and by pairing these harmful ideas with expressions of emotions like disgust. Because of their hostility to queerness, evangelicals equated AIDS with homosexuality when the epidemic began and characterized the disease as “proof” that flouting “divinely ordained” gender and sexual roles would lead to disaster and divine wrath.¹³ This rhetoric, wielded by Religious Right leaders and echoed by clergy and laypeople in pulpits, pews, and prayer groups across the country, performed a binding function by linking feelings of disgust to AIDS and by tying together the evangelical community via shared denunciation of that which was designated as disgusting. Though evangelicals were not the only Americans linking AIDS to queerness and denouncing both, the longstanding dominance of Protestantism in the United States gave evangelicals the power to imbue disgust for people with HIV/AIDS with a special moral authority, thereby dressing up an ugly feeling as an acceptable one.¹⁴

Evangelicals’ perception of AIDS as a primarily queer disease contradicted the realities of the epidemic’s impact in the United States and prevented evangelicals from responding to people with HIV/AIDS with grief and compassionate action. Reading a “scene of distress” and measuring pain and attachment are learned behaviors that create shared practices of compassion in communities and societies, as Berlant has detailed, and evangelicals applied their shared ways of reading and measuring to the AIDS epidemic.¹⁵ Linking HIV/AIDS to queerness and to feelings of disgust about sexual deviance conditioned evangelicals to read the scenes of distress in the U.S. AIDS crisis as unworthy of amelioration, to measure the pain of people with

¹³ See Seth Dowland, *Family Values and the Rise of the Christian Right* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015); Mark Jordan, *Recruiting Young Love: How Christians Talk about Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); Petro, *After the Wrath of God*; and Heather White, *Reforming Sodom: Protestants and the Rise of Gay Rights* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

¹⁴ Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, 335-36 and Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 92-94.

¹⁵ Berlant, “Compassion (and Withholding),” 4-11.

HIV/AIDS in the U.S. as perhaps serious but also deserved, and to measure their attachment to people with HIV/AIDS as weak and unwanted. In these ways, disgust blocked grief and inhibited compassionate responses – evangelicals did not respond to queer people with HIV/AIDS with compassion, and also did not acknowledge or assist the many other communities affected by HIV/AIDS in the United States.

Globally, conversations about AIDS focused on questions of responsibility and access, and the massive resources of American international organizations like missionary groups enabled those non-governmental bodies to shape responses to AIDS around the world. Debates about the epidemic's origins in North America, the Caribbean, or Central Africa recycled long-used racist stereotypes linking blackness to disease and unruly sexual impulses, and the focus on individual behaviors obscured the structural inequalities caused by the Global North that led to infection and disease progression across the Global South.¹⁶ ARVs obtainable for some Americans and Europeans after the mid-1990s were unavailable across the Global South due to cost and drug companies' patents. To address the growing global disparity, intergovernmental and non-profit organizations like UNAIDS and the International AIDS Society coordinated efforts to understand and combat the epidemic and promoted those efforts as global ones. In practice, those efforts were dominated by Global North scientists, governments, and NGOs that reinscribed imperial relations with Global South countries.¹⁷ American international NGOs and foundations had particularly vast assets and established connections across the Global South that they could marshal to address the epidemic. The Ford Foundation, for example, awarded 100 grants, ranging from 20,000 to over 260,000 dollars each, in its first five years of grantmaking

¹⁶ Priscilla Wald, *Contagious: Cultures, Carriers, and the Outbreak Narrative* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008); Richard McKay, *Patient Zero and the Making of the AIDS Epidemic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017); and Cheng, Juhasz, and Shahani, *AIDS and the Distribution of Crises*, 5.

¹⁷ Patton, *Globalizing AIDS*, 27-32

for AIDS programs, and the Rockefeller and MacArthur foundations made similar commitments to AIDS work in the late 1980s and 1990s.¹⁸ American evangelical missionary organizations were poised to respond with similar resources – over 1000 organizations, with outposts in almost every country, a volunteer and paid workforce of millions, and a combined annual budget in 1985 of two billion dollars and by the late 1990s of over eight billion dollars.¹⁹ Missionary organizations had enjoyed decades of overwhelming support from U.S. evangelicals, who cultivated a deep longing and sense of duty to save the world as a part of their regular religious practices. Now, missionaries had to convince evangelicals that saving the world meant saving people with HIV/AIDS, too.

Salvation and Suffering

To provide medical care and create prevention programs for people with HIV/AIDS, missionaries knew that they would need funding from evangelicals back in the United States, but missionaries also knew about evangelicals' disgust towards people with HIV/AIDS. To change those feelings, missionaries linked stories about the international epidemic to established themes of missionary work that had long provoked strong emotions from U.S. evangelicals – souls that needed salvation (prompting sorrow for lost souls), families that needed help (inspiring grief for broken families), and foreign bodies that needed healing (arousing grief for suffering bodies). A sense of duty to convert the world and a paternalist desire to help and guide those perceived to be helpless had long motivated evangelical support for missionary work. By linking AIDS to stories

¹⁸ Brier, *Infectious Ideas*, 122-55.

¹⁹ Samuel Wilson and John Siewert, eds., *Mission Handbook: North American Protestant Ministries Overseas*, 13th ed. (Monrovia, CA: Missions Advanced Research and Communication Center, 1986) and Siewert and Welliver, *Mission Handbook*.

and emotions that would trigger that sense of responsibility and desire to help, missionaries encouraged U.S. evangelicals to feel grief and then want to take compassionate action towards people with HIV/AIDS around the world.

Missionaries stressed to American evangelicals that the global AIDS epidemic created an opportunity and urgent need to save millions of souls. Enormous numbers of people were near death, missionaries explained, and therefore were more open to salvation. John Gibson, a Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board (FMB) doctor in Thailand, promised U.S. evangelicals that mission work with AIDS patients would yield many conversions because people with HIV/AIDS were looking for assurance of life after death. Gibson predicted that if missionaries evangelized AIDS patients, “we’ll see hundreds and thousands of people turn to the Lord.”²⁰ FMB doctor Larry Pepper similarly told U.S. audiences that missionary nurses, doctors, and chaplains in Uganda were comforting AIDS patients by “dealing with the spiritual aspect” and converting patients through discussions about heaven.²¹ As those U.S. evangelical audiences would have known, missionaries were well positioned to convert AIDS patients because mission organizations owned hospitals around the world. Missionary chaplains at those hospitals noted spiritual events (like prayers or conversions) directly on patients’ charts so that doctors and nurses could evangelize patients. For centuries missionaries had mixed evangelism with healthcare, but even in the postcolonial era the face of international medical aid was often that of a white Western missionary who had the power not only to provide procedures and pills but also to pressure patients to convert.

Missionaries sent U.S. evangelicals glowing reports about new converts but also warned U.S. audiences that time was running out for millions of people with HIV/AIDS who still lacked

²⁰ Martha Skelton, “Touching People Others Won’t,” *The Commission* 58, no. 3 (May/June 1995), 8-9.

²¹ “Prescription: Hope,” *The Commission* 61, no. 5 (May 1998), 34.

salvation. FMB missionaries in Thailand rejoiced that half of all AIDS patients in one hospital had converted to evangelical Christianity, missionaries in Kenya reported that house calls had produced many conversions among AIDS patients in one town, and Karen Gray and her fellow missionaries in Brazil celebrated that each year almost 100 people with AIDS had “accepted Christ” while in hospice care.²² But missionaries like Mike Walker, a FMB doctor in Uganda, alerted U.S. audiences that the spiritual fate of so many people with HIV/AIDS still hung in the balance: “We believe that most of them have not accepted Christ, so when we talk with them many times there is no second chance!”²³ FMB missionaries called people with HIV/AIDS an “unreached people group,” thereby categorizing them with a label that U.S. evangelical audiences would have recognized as a priority designation – these people must be saved. As missionaries explained, these millions of people were dying “without knowledge of Christ” and, therefore, were people “who most urgently need to hear of God’s good news.”²⁴ Language about lost souls had long activated not only evangelicals’ desire to convert but also their fear and sorrow about failing to save souls. U.S. evangelicals cultivated the belief that it was their personal responsibility to save every person from eternal damnation, and coupled with that sense of duty was anxiety and sorrow for souls not saved.²⁵ Emphasizing the urgent need to evangelize

²² Martha Skelton, “The Long Shadow of AIDS,” *The Commission* 58, no. 3 (May/June 1995), 7; “Global Glimpses,” *The Commission* 55, no. 1 (January 1992), 4-5; and Mary Speidel, “A Touch of Heaven,” *The Commission* 59, no. 10 (November 1996), 25.

²³ “Support with Prayer,” *The Commission* 55, no. 9 (December 1992), 77.

²⁴ Sue Sprenkle, “AIDS: No One Mentions the Cause of Death,” *The Commission* 64, no. 6 (July-August 2001), 25. On “unreached people group,” see McAlister, *The Kingdom of God Has No Borders*, 85-102; David Kirkpatrick, *A Gospel for the Poor: Global Social Christianity and the Latin American Left* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), 141-66; and Hannah Waits, “Missionary-Minded: American Evangelicals and Power in a Postcolonial World” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2019), 80-125.

²⁵ See Waits, “Missionary-Minded,” 43-52; Joel Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); and Molly Worthen, *Apostles of Reason: The Crisis of Authority in American Evangelicalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 75-96.

foreign people with HIV/AIDS encouraged evangelicals to feel sorrow for lost souls that would prompt support for missionaries' work to save those souls.

While recasting the AIDS epidemic as an evangelism opportunity, missionaries also stressed that people with HIV/AIDS were suffering and deserved U.S. evangelicals' sympathy. The primary way that missionaries tried to arouse evangelicals' pity was by describing how people with HIV/AIDS were members of hurting families. Rhetoric spotlighting families assuaged evangelicals' homophobia by portraying foreign people with HIV/AIDS as heterosexual, and this rhetoric also associated the epidemic with the chance to redeem families, a cause that would appeal to evangelicals who were fighting for "family values" in the United States. Missionaries for the organization Campus Crusade for Christ explained to U.S. evangelicals that statistics about the global AIDS epidemic were so massive that "it is sometimes difficult to comprehend that every one of those people who are dying has a family. They might be a father. A young mother. A child. Every one of them is in incredible pain."²⁶ John Gibson in Thailand reported that many AIDS victims were "innocent" women and children; while men might sleep with sex workers and acquire AIDS as "a sin-consequence," Gibson explained, "there are wives and children" of those men "who are innocent."²⁷ Some missionaries even placed sex workers within a family framework. Darlene Sorley told U.S. evangelicals that in Kenya she ministered to "those who have supported their families by prostitution" and who contracted AIDS through that work.²⁸

Children whose parents died from AIDS received particular attention from missionaries. U.S. evangelicals heard regularly about these children from missionaries who declared that

²⁶ CrossRoads direct mail letter draft, August 16, 1996, Box 1507, International Ministries Collection, Cru Archives, Cru International Headquarters, Orlando, Florida.

²⁷ Skelton, "Touching People Others Won't," 8.

²⁸ "Global Glimpses," January 1992, 5.

“Africa is becoming a continent of orphans.”²⁹ Characterizing millions of children as orphans obscured the extended kin relationships that provided children with caretakers and reinforced racialized tropes about broken Black families with absent parents.³⁰ These stories about “AIDS orphans” tapped into longstanding U.S. evangelical discourses about foreign orphans and evangelicals’ special calling to save and raise them. Decades of advertising for evangelicals, for example, had trained them to see orphans as their personal concern by offering them the chance to “choose your own orphan” for sponsorship, give money to “keep thousands of war orphans alive and evangelized,” and attend concerts where “orphan choirs” would “sing their thanks” and share their conversion stories.³¹ Global evangelical activism had long focused on converting, adopting (figuratively and sometimes literally), and rearing children in U.S. evangelicals’ image, so linking AIDS to orphans invited evangelicals to connect the epidemic to their established sense of duty and longing to rescue hurting foreign children.³²

Highlighting physical suffering was another way that missionaries tried to provoke grief and compassion from U.S. evangelical audiences. Missionaries had long taught evangelicals that they had a unique responsibility to aid physical suffering because it furthered conversion goals; as one missionary explained, “we must meet people’s physical needs so that we can meet their real (spiritual) needs.”³³ And for years missionaries had elicited shock and grief and then support

²⁹ Sprenkle, “AIDS: No One Mentions the Cause of Death,” 25.

³⁰ See Erica Bornstein, *The Spirit of Development: Protestant NGOs, Morality, and Economics in Zimbabwe* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 67-96; Laura Briggs, *Somebody’s Children: The Politics of Transracial and Transnational Adoption* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012); and Kristen Cheney, *Crying for Our Elders: African Orphanhood in the Age of HIV and AIDS* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

³¹ “Choose Your Own Orphan” Compassion International card set, c. 1966, quoted in Hillary Kaell, *Christian Globalism at Home: Child Sponsorship in the United States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), 136-38; “I Want a Mommy” advertisement, *Christianity Today*, March 4, 1957, 33; and Bob Pierce, *The Korean Orphan Choir: They Sing Their Thanks* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1965).

³² See Kaell, *Christian Globalism at Home* and Helen Kim, *Race for Revival: How Cold War South Korea Shaped the American Evangelical Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022), 75-106.

³³ Lee Grant, “He Only Wants to Save the World,” *Los Angeles Times*, Jan. 22, 1975

from U.S. evangelical audiences by detailing the pain caused by famine, war, or natural disaster, so both the messaging technique and patterns of emotional response felt familiar and acceptable to evangelicals.³⁴ FMB missionaries in 1989 told U.S. evangelicals that soon international news reports would reveal not only shocking images of war and famine but also “the bone-protruding, hollow-eyed victims of the most horrifying plague known to modern man: Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome—AIDS.”³⁵ Missionaries also produced their own evocative images of foreign people with AIDS. Their photographs most often included children, emaciated AIDS patients in healthcare settings, or family members who were grieving sick or lost loved ones. In the most striking images, a child, patient, or family member contorted their face in sorrow or stared directly at the camera (and thus the viewer) from within the scene. These depictions of suffering Black and brown bodies called upon longstanding Western colonial ideas about racialized foreign bodies and conditioned U.S. evangelicals to associate the AIDS epidemic with their enduring feelings of responsibility to aid suffering bodies and souls around the world.³⁶

Missionaries spotlighted this foreign suffering to convince U.S. evangelicals that there was a sharp contrast between the AIDS crisis in the United States and the global AIDS epidemic. While the U.S. AIDS crisis might seem unimportant, missionaries argued, the global AIDS epidemic that broke bodies and hurt families around the world should grieve evangelicals and prompt them to respond with compassion. FMB missionaries told U.S. evangelicals that missionaries’ accounts of the epidemic would provide “a clearer picture of AIDS than you’ve had before” because “AIDS in Africa bears little resemblance to the disease in America. It does

³⁴ See Heather Curtis, *Holy Humanitarians: American Evangelicals and Global Aid* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018) and David King, *God’s Internationalists: World Vision and the Age of Evangelical Humanitarianism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019).

³⁵ “The Other Side of Sorrow,” 10.

³⁶ See Berlant, “Compassion (and Withholding)” and Mary Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

not just affect individuals, but entire societies. Few families remain untouched.”³⁷ Campus Crusade missionaries explained to U.S. readers that AIDS in the United States “seems like more of a political than a health issue right now. Of course, we watch the news and hear about the hospices and the research and the funding problems, but AIDS doesn’t touch many of our individual lives very often.” Then Crusade missionaries invited readers to imagine how they would get involved if the United States were like many foreign countries impacted by the AIDS epidemic: “There are not enough hospitals, let alone hospices, to keep up with the demand of people with HIV. One in every four people has it. Parents, children, and brothers and sisters are watching one another die because of it....[This] is the present in many nations around the world.”³⁸

Directly contrasting the international AIDS epidemic with the U.S. AIDS crisis made clear the differentiation that missionaries’ entire information campaign encouraged. Using stories about foreign suffering bodies and souls to provoke evangelicals’ grief taught evangelicals to read and measure “scenes of distress” related to AIDS around the world very differently than scenes of distress about AIDS in the United States. U.S. evangelicals could measure Black and brown foreign people’s pain as worthy of amelioration and could measure their attachment to those people as strong because of evangelicals’ longstanding paternalist desires to convert and guide people around the world. Why didn’t these messages from missionaries change evangelicals’ feelings about Black and brown people with HIV/AIDS in the United States? Transnational power disparities enabled U.S. evangelicals to enact most of their paternalist desires even when communities across the Global South resisted, whereas in the United States,

³⁷ “A Further Word,” *The Commission* 52, no. 5 (June / July 1989), 6 and Sprenkle, “AIDS: No One Mentions the Cause of Death,” 24.

³⁸ CrossRoads direct mail letter draft, August 16, 1996.

communities of color had achieved greater success in opposing white evangelicals' attempts to bolster racial and class hierarchies. As a result, evangelicals perceived people of color around the world as less threatening, more compliant, and thus more attractive targets of aid campaigns.³⁹ Evangelicals' inaccurate belief that AIDS in the U.S. was a queer disease hindered them from understanding how AIDS impacted U.S. communities of color, but even if evangelicals had seen Black and brown people in the U.S. as experiencing scenes of distress related to AIDS, evangelicals would have measured their attachment to U.S. Black and brown people's pain as weak and not enough to warrant direct involvement.

Not all U.S. Christians who engaged with AIDS in the Global South framed the international epidemic as a foil for the domestic one. African American religious activists through groups like The Balm in Gilead, for example, built transnational solidarities where U.S. evangelicals saw disparities. Drawing on histories of Black internationalism, these activists saw AIDS as a disease affecting both their community and also communities in Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, and Tanzania with which they forged partnerships and shared resources for education and prevention programs.⁴⁰ By contrast, U.S. evangelicals viewed AIDS as a disease of the "other" – the disgusting other in the United States, and the foreign suffering other around the world. Evangelicals maintained a distance from the AIDS epidemic that allowed both their disgust at home and their grief and compassionate action around the world. If the U.S. AIDS crisis did not "touch many of [evangelicals'] individual lives" or seemed like "more of a political issue than a health issue," that was due to U.S. evangelicals' dismissal of people with HIV/AIDS

³⁹ Waits, "Missionary-Minded," 53-125; McAlister, *The Kingdom of God Has No Borders*, 17-52; and Dave Chappell, *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

⁴⁰ Royles, *To Make the Wounded Whole* and Angelique Harris, *AIDS, Sexuality, and the Black Church: Making the Wounded Whole* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010).

and evangelicals' racial and class privilege, not afforded to churches in poor communities of color. So missionaries' campaign to change U.S. evangelicals' feelings and views about the AIDS epidemic did not have to convince evangelicals to value the lives of people with HIV/AIDS in the U.S. to be successful. Rather, missionaries' promotions of global AIDS work invited American evangelicals to shift their focus from the domestic to the international, where, missionaries promised, lives worthy of sympathy and salvation abounded.

Abstinence and AIDS

As they coached U.S. evangelicals to feel grief and want to relieve the suffering of foreign people with HIV/AIDS, missionaries also sold to evangelicals a solution for that suffering – abstinence-only sex education. This solution, missionaries promised, would heal souls and bodies through conversion and instruction in “divinely ordained” sexual and gender norms that would protect people from HIV/AIDS. U.S. evangelicals, as members of the Religious Right, were fighting for heteropatriarchal policies in the United States, and international abstinence programs offered evangelicals the chance to spread those same conservative views of sexuality and gender around the world. Presenting U.S. evangelicals with a response to foreign suffering that incorporated their contemporary domestic political priorities encouraged them to see missionaries' global AIDS work as an appealing form of compassionate action towards people with HIV/AIDS around the world.

Missionaries drew inspiration from U.S. evangelicals' domestic activism by exporting materials from the U.S. purity movement, evangelicals' national promotion of sexual abstinence before monogamous heterosexual marriage. Launched in the early 1990s by evangelicals who

disapproved of the sexual revolution, the purity movement stressed that sexual abstinence was a brave choice that protected young people from disease, guaranteed them happy future marriages, and created a better future U.S. society of virtuous heterosexual families. These purity movement messages were gender differentiated and strengthened heteropatriarchal norms by regulating girls and women more than boys and men. For example, modesty lessons cast young women as responsible for both their own sexual purity and the purity of boys and men, and purity ceremonies included father-daughter covenant rituals with no father-son or mother-son equivalents.⁴¹ The movement was best known for its flashy merchandise, slogans, and events; for example, rock-music-filled youth rallies urged young people to sign cards or don rings to promise sexual abstinence before marriage. One of the biggest purity organizations, True Love Waits, reached national prominence in 1994 through its Washington, D.C. rally where teenagers staked 212,000 purity cards onto the National Mall and lobbied President Bill Clinton for federal funding for abstinence education.⁴² Through the purity movement, evangelicals promoted and tried to entrench the conservative sexual and gender norms that they believed individuals and whole societies should follow.

Missionaries fashioned their AIDS prevention programs around the world by combining U.S. purity movement resources with new abstinence education materials created on the mission field. FMB missionaries in Africa and Latin America developed their AIDS programs by integrating pamphlets written by medical missionaries with curriculum from True Love Waits. The first programs began in Uganda, where medical missionary Rick Goodgame partnered with

⁴¹ See Heather Hendershot, *Shaking the World for Jesus: Media and Conservative Evangelical Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Sara Moslener, *Virgin Nation: Sexual Purity and American Adolescence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); and Amy DeRogatis, *Saving Sex: Sexuality and Salvation in American Evangelicalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

⁴² See Esme Infante, “Teens: Sex Can Wait for Wedding Bells,” *USA Today*, July 29, 1994 and Laurie Goodstein, “Saying No to Teen Sex in No Uncertain Terms,” *Washington Post*, July 30, 1994.

Uganda’s national government to distribute 350,000 copies of his booklet “Medical Science and God’s Word Answer Questions Related to AIDS” along with 120,000 bibles in 1988.⁴³ Then in 1994 FMB missionaries Sharon and Larry Pumpelly began presenting the True Love Waits program at youth rallies across Uganda, including the national Christian Youth Conference sponsored by Uganda’s first lady.⁴⁴ In succeeding years, FMB missionaries launched True Love Waits campaigns in Kenya, Brazil, and South Africa, where missionaries called their program “Operation HIV: He Is Victorious.”⁴⁵ Missionaries asked U.S. evangelicals to pray that young people at abstinence rallies in those countries would “commit themselves to God’s plan for their sex lives.”⁴⁶

Campus Crusade missionaries also blended materials produced on the mission field with U.S. purity curriculum to create their global AIDS prevention program. During the mid-1990s in Malawi, Crusade missionary Dick Day, who had co-authored the prominent U.S. abstinence book *Why Wait?*, partnered with Malawi’s Ministry of Education to adapt his book into curriculum for primary and secondary schools. Day explained to U.S. evangelicals that these lessons gave Malawian students “training in character and moral development, with emphasis on Jesus Christ as their model. Building on this, teachers will then present an abstinence-based, sex-education curriculum.”⁴⁷ For example, primary school students learned a song that matched the tune of the U.S. gospel song “This Little Light of Mine” with the lyrics “this little life of mine, I’m gonna let it grow...I’ll abstain, I’ll abstain from sex.”⁴⁸ Crusade missionaries in other

⁴³ “1988 Annual Report,” *The Commission* 52, no. 4 (May 1989), 42.

⁴⁴ “Baptists on Mission,” *The Commission* 61, no. 6 (June 1998), 15.

⁴⁵ “Call to Prayer,” *The Commission* 64, no. 4 (May 2001), 52; Betty Poor and Mary Speidel, “Daring to Be Different,” *The Commission* 59, no. 10 (November 1996), 30-33; and Sprenkle, “AIDS: No One Mentions the Cause of Death,” 25.

⁴⁶ “Call to Prayer,” 52.

⁴⁷ Diane McDougall, “Sounds of Silence,” *Worldwide Challenge* 22, no.6 (November/December 1995), 14-15, 18.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

countries quickly adopted the curriculum project, called CrossRoads, and by the early 2000s the program had spread to almost sixty countries across Africa, Latin America, and South and East Asia.⁴⁹ Incorporating purity movement materials respected by U.S. evangelicals, as those from *Why Wait?* and *True Love Waits* were, signaled to U.S. evangelical audiences that these international AIDS programs were familiar and trustworthy and thus deserving of evangelicals' support.

Missionaries promised U.S. evangelicals that global AIDS prevention programs would save souls by evangelizing and teaching young people that only God could give them the strength to abstain from sex. FMB missionaries in Uganda boasted to U.S. evangelicals about the “hundreds of professions of faith” at abstinence rallies, thereby underscoring that conversions, not just abstinence pledges, were desired outcomes.⁵⁰ Missionaries also used AIDS prevention programs to evangelize in countries closed to traditional missionary work. These tales of “undercover” access thrilled U.S. evangelical audiences who for decades during the Cold War had developed an obsession with thwarting foreign states' opposition to proselytizing.⁵¹ Crusade missionaries rejoiced to U.S. audiences when they established a CrossRoads program in a country with a predominantly Muslim population: “While traditional evangelism is limited, CrossRoads reaches a previously unreachable Muslim audience with the Gospel of Jesus Christ!”⁵² As they explained to U.S. evangelicals, Crusade missionaries accessed countries closed to missionizing by marketing the CrossRoads program, along with its free materials,

⁴⁹ “CrossRoads Annual Report 2006,” Box 1507, International Ministries Collection and “Where is CrossRoads,” CrossRoads, accessed May 20, 2020, <http://www.crossroadslink.org/about/where-is-crossroads/>.

⁵⁰ “Outside the Shadows, Beyond the Spotlights,” *The Commission* 52, no. 5 (June / July 1989), 36.

⁵¹ McAlister, *The Kingdom of God Has No Borders*, 105-116 and Lauren Turek, *To Bring the Good News to All Nations: Evangelical Influence on Human Rights and US Foreign Relations* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2020), 44-71.

⁵² Sample direct mail letter, June 1997, Box 1507, International Ministries Collection.

technology, and personnel, as the solution to foreign governments' public health problems.⁵³ By trumpeting their ability to capitalize on disasters like epidemics to circumvent foreign governments' restrictions, missionaries assured U.S. evangelicals that international AIDS work gave them opportunities to bypass restraints on their global power and thereby save even more souls around the world.

Missionaries' AIDS prevention programs linked conversion to sexual purity by telling young people across the Global South that salvation would provide the morals and power to abstain from sex. The FMB's AIDS education pamphlets in Uganda addressed the question "how can I control my sexual behavior" by insisting that "doing what is right is only possible through the Holy Spirit."⁵⁴ Crusade missionaries predicted that enough lives changed by the Holy Spirit would protect the world from the AIDS epidemic: "If the people of the world had their hearts changed and were willing to live according to His laws, [God] could keep the globe safe from the catastrophic effects of HIV."⁵⁵ The idea that blame for the AIDS epidemic lay with those who made "disobedient" choices was central to evangelicals' vilification of people with HIV/AIDS in the United States, and the concept became a key part of missionaries' AIDS programs through promises about guaranteed safety via salvation and obedience. Although U.S. evangelicals faced organized resistance to their systematic condemnation of "disobedient" behavior in the United States, the power disparities involved in global AIDS work allowed them to export those views about obedience and disobedience with greater impunity around the world.⁵⁶ Missionaries told U.S. evangelicals that these abstinence programs would increase obedience through conversion

⁵³ "Choosing the Right Road Makes All the Difference," promotional brochure, n.d., ca. 1998, Box 1507, International Ministries Collection.

⁵⁴ Pamphlet quoted in "Saying Goodbye to Uganda," *The Commission* 52, no. 5 (June / July 1989), 21.

⁵⁵ CrossRoads direct mail letter draft, August 16, 1996.

⁵⁶ Petro, *After the Wrath of God*, 137-85.

and through the accompanying divine sanctification that would enable people to make the “right” sexual choices.

To bolster that divine sanctification, missionaries’ AIDS prevention programs made plain what obedience to “divinely ordained” sexual and gender norms included. These guidelines, missionaries promised U.S. evangelicals, would save not only souls but also bodies by stopping the spread of HIV. To encourage bodies to be abstinent, missionaries’ AIDS programs denigrated safe sex practices as unsafe and promoted abstinence as the only ethical choice and only effective protection against HIV/AIDS. The CrossRoads curriculum described condoms as dangerous in both class readings and group activities such as the “Choose Your Own Adventure” game in which participants chose to travel down “Unprotected Avenue,” “Condom Street,” or “Abstinence Boulevard,” and only Abstinence Boulevard led to a “rewarding future” and a “strong healthy family.”⁵⁷ Crusade missionaries explained to U.S. evangelicals that international abstinence programs taught young people that safe sex practices were a gamble, that “the costs are too great” for such a risk, and that therefore “the only responsible sexual choice for teens is to abstain.”⁵⁸ With lessons like these, missionaries offered only one option to combat the AIDS epidemic and instructed young people across the Global South to reject safe sex practices, thereby endangering those young people by increasing the likelihood that they would contract HIV if they had sex. Discouraging condom use also limited young people’s knowledge about birth control options. But by promoting conservative views of sexuality, missionaries’ abstinence-only sex education made global AIDS work attractive to U.S. evangelicals by making it a way to spread “family values” as a solution to the epidemic.

⁵⁷ E. Bailey Marks, Jr., ed., *Life at the Crossroads: An Educational Curriculum from Youth at the Crossroads* (Orlando, FL: New Life World Aid, Inc., 1995), n.p.

⁵⁸ Marcia Ball and Jennie Cerullo, “Life at the CrossRoads: Conference Training Manual,” 1998, Box 700, CrossRoads Collection, Cru Archives, Cru International Headquarters, Orlando, Florida.

When teaching young people to choose abstinence in the face of “pressures” to have sex, missionaries’ AIDS programs gave gender differentiated messages that depicted boys and men as those who act and girls and women as those who are acted upon and are responsible for restraining boys’ and men’s sexual impulses. CrossRoads lessons on peer pressure utilized stories in which young men could not control their sex drive and young women had to intervene to maintain both parties’ sexual purity, but there were no examples of young men controlling themselves or resisting another’s advances. Similarly, role playing exercises listed statements that “he says” to pressure a partner into sex and responses “she says” to rebuff those overtures and remain chaste.⁵⁹ Presenting gendered dichotomies of actor-object and aggressor-resister and suggesting that women are to blame for men’s sexual actions imparted heteropatriarchal norms that aligned with U.S. evangelicals’ views of gender and sexuality.

Missionaries’ AIDS programs focused on not only gendered peer pressure but also cultural pressure from societies that, missionaries argued, condoned sexual promiscuity. Young people in abstinence programs frequently brainstormed which local media messages advanced an “everyone’s doing it” claim, and missionaries taught that in such an environment abstinence was a bold countercultural choice that improved one’s whole society.⁶⁰ Missionaries also told U.S. evangelicals that abstinence programs saved bodies and souls from the corrupting influence of sexually permissive societies. FMB missionary Tom Hearon reported to U.S. evangelicals that his work with True Love Waits in Brazil addressed the country’s “extremely sensual culture” filled with “sexual propaganda,” and argued that without True Love Waits, Brazilian young people would have no way to know that “they have the option of waiting until marriage to have

⁵⁹ Marks, Jr., *Life at the Crossroads*, n.p.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

sex.”⁶¹ FMB missionary Lyndee Joe similarly conveyed to U.S. audiences that her work in South Africa was a battle against a culture of promiscuity: “There’s so much sexual immorality that happens here that these kids are affected at an early age. I’m trying to get them to a better quality of life and not have to deal with the epidemic that has stricken this area.”⁶² Labeling foreign countries as “promiscuous” or “sensual” encouraged U.S. evangelicals to hypersexualize Black and brown bodies and believe that white American missionization’s discipline would save those out-of-control foreign bodies from themselves.

Missionaries’ AIDS prevention programs also indirectly increased the risk of harm or neglect for some foreign bodies and souls. Abstinence teachings provided indirect support for later explicit organizing by U.S. evangelical and other conservative Christian groups to promote laws against homosexuality, especially throughout sub-Saharan Africa and most notably in Uganda.⁶³ Missionaries’ abstinence lessons that characterized an entire society as “sexually perverse” invited questions about who is responsible for that perversion and what would rid a society of perversion, and declarations that sexual abstinence before monogamous heterosexual marriage is the only way to “have character” and “be honorable” suggested that all other ways of being and living are dishonorable and immoral. While many U.S. evangelicals spoke out against legislation assigning the death penalty to homosexuality and asserted that those laws had no ties to missionaries’ global AIDS work, disavowing direct influence did not erase the resonant effects of promoting conservative sexual and gender norms.⁶⁴ In addition to impacting queer people across the Global South, missionaries’ AIDS programs also obscured the disproportionate needs

⁶¹ Betty Poor and Mary Speidel, “Daring to Be Different,” 30.

⁶² Heidi Steinrock, “Decide to Decide Right: Work in HIV Prevention,” *The Commission* 70, no. 3 (Fall 2007), 10.

⁶³ See Kapya Kaoma, *Colonizing African Values: How the U.S. Christian Right is Transforming Sexual Politics in Africa* (Somerville, MA: Political Research Associates, 2012); Robert Thornton, *Unimagined Community: Sex, Networks, and AIDS in Uganda and South Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); and Jeff Sharlet, *The Family: The Secret Fundamentalism at the Heart of American Power* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008).

⁶⁴ Kaoma, *Colonizing African Values*, vi-1.

of sex workers and intravenous drug users. But the goal of missionaries' campaign to convince U.S. evangelicals to support global AIDS work was not to spotlight and assist every group affected by HIV/AIDS; rather, the aim was to tap into existing evangelical feelings and priorities and link those to AIDS. Thus missionaries framed the epidemic as a disease hurting families and undifferentiated foreign bodies that U.S. evangelicals could save and help through conversion and instruction in sexual abstinence. Missionaries' global AIDS programs appealed to U.S. evangelicals as a way to discharge their grief for foreign suffering and take compassionate action by giving foreign souls and bodies what, missionaries claimed and evangelicals agreed, they most needed.

Conclusion

In the first years of the 2000s, U.S. evangelicals' support for global AIDS work accelerated as missionaries' longtime information campaign was joined by a new chorus of evangelical celebrities, politicians, and megachurch pastors. While missionaries sought to change evangelicals' feelings about AIDS to fundraise for missionary work, and had received increased donations with letters that thanked missionaries for "opening up a very sensitive area for understanding and ministry," the new cohort of celebrities and pastors urged evangelicals both to finance missionaries' AIDS work and to push for global AIDS funding from the U.S. government.⁶⁵ Billy Graham's son Franklin Graham spoke with the weight of his Religious Right credentials and family name when he lobbied politicians and organized a Washington, D.C. conference on global AIDS where he urged evangelicals to champion global AIDS relief because

⁶⁵ Mary Speidel, "A Boost from, for Baptists," *The Commission* 59, no. 10 (November 1996), 28.

Jesus would have.⁶⁶ Bono enlisted evangelical musicians' help as he appealed to megachurch attendees and evangelical college students during his global AIDS advocacy tours in 2002 and 2003. During both tours, evangelicals signed thousands of cards – not to pledge abstinence but to demand robust global AIDS funding – and mailed them to Congress and the White House.⁶⁷

There were many activist groups and religious bodies that pushed for what became the 2003 President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), which provided billions of dollars for international AIDS work, especially in Africa, but it was evangelicals' support (and the threat of its withdrawal) that led conservative legislators to mold PEPFAR in line with evangelicals' "family values."⁶⁸ Consequently, PEPFAR obligated prevention programs to use the ABC approach, which prioritized A (Abstinence) and B (Being faithful) over C (using Condoms), and required that one-third of AIDS prevention funding go towards abstinence education. The George W. Bush administration established PEPFAR amid the launch of the Iraq War, and the aid program served in some ways as a counterweight to militarism, as a form of soft power that served national security while also providing moral authority to the U.S. "new imperialism."⁶⁹ As had been the case in previous iterations of U.S. imperialism, evangelical Protestant missionaries provided part of that moral authority. The evangelical-friendly Bush administration with its penchant for directing funds to faith-based organizations ensured that PEPFAR was a windfall for many missionary groups that used federal dollars for evangelism and abstinence education. For example, World Relief, the international aid arm of the National Association of Evangelicals, earned the largest first-round USAID grant of 9.7 million dollars to expand its

⁶⁶ Franklin Graham, "AIDS Victims Need Churches' Help," *USA Today*, February 26, 2002.

⁶⁷ Cathleen Falsani, "Bono's American Prayer," *Christianity Today*, March 1, 2003.

⁶⁸ Emily Bass, *To End a Plague: America's Fight to Defeat AIDS in Africa* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2021), 112-135 and Royles, *To Make the Wounded Whole*, 165-94.

⁶⁹ Bass, *To End a Plague*, 108-11.

Mobilizing for Life program, which taught young people in Rwanda, Kenya, Mozambique, and Haiti to “choose abstinence as the best means of HIV prevention.”⁷⁰ U.S. evangelicals supplemented federal support for these AIDS programs with their own dollars too, as by the mid-2000s, one out of every seven evangelicals expressed an eagerness to support global AIDS work.⁷¹

Today, U.S. evangelicals are still eagerly supporting global AIDS work and still fueling their missionary organizations with private and public funding for AIDS programs of evangelism and abstinence education. Evangelical musicians and influencers encourage their followers to “see the need for help in the eyes of beautiful passionate kids” across the globe and donate to international evangelical NGOs to help children impacted by HIV/AIDS.⁷² While many religious groups focus on communities in the United States affected by the epidemic, especially poor communities of color, evangelicals still portray AIDS as a mostly foreign problem. For example, the National Association of Evangelicals asks evangelicals to call their representatives in support of funding for the Global Fund but does not issue pleas to support domestic AIDS funding, and the nation’s top evangelical megachurches describe people with HIV/AIDS as those to whom evangelicals can minister on international mission trips.⁷³ Evangelicals take those trips regularly and also give generously to missionaries’ global AIDS programs. The CrossRoads and True

⁷⁰ United States Agency for International Development, “USAID Announces First Round of Grants for President Bush's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief,” news release, April 13, 2004, accessed July 20, 2018, <https://reliefweb.int/report/botswana/usaid-announces-first-round-grants-president-bushs-emergency-plan-aids-relief>.

⁷¹ David King, *God's Internationalists*, 237-38 and Nina Shapiro, “The AIDS Evangelists,” *Seattle Weekly*, February 12, 2007.

⁷² See “Sadie Robertson Huff,” World Vision, accessed July 10, 2023, <https://www.worldvision.org/lp/sadie-robertson-huff> and Anne Wilson, “Join Anne Wilson in Giving Hope,” World Vision, July 11, 2022, YouTube video, 0:53, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=phETbdV1fRE>.

⁷³ “Support Global Funding for AIDS Relief,” National Association of Evangelicals, March 7, 2023, accessed June 8, 2023, <https://www.nae.org/support-global-funding-aids-relief/>; “The Air is Thinner Here,” Christ’s Church of the Valley, January 24, 2017, accessed July 10, 2023, <https://ccv.church/ministries/missions/story?Item=2585>; and “Nairobi Trip Detail,” Newspring Church, accessed July 10, 2023, <https://newspring.cc/nations/2199990>.

Love Waits programs, both reliant on private donations, are currently widespread; CrossRoads programs run in forty-five countries, and True Love Waits programs reach communities in sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia.⁷⁴ And public funding from PEPFAR continues to finance missionaries' AIDS programs of evangelism and abstinence education. Over the past few years, evangelical groups like Focus on the Family, Samaritan's Purse, World Vision, and Children's AIDS Fund have received millions in PEPFAR funding for their HIV prevention programs.⁷⁵

U.S. evangelicals' continued emotional, financial, and political investment in helping people with HIV/AIDS across the world more than those across town points to the importance of tracing how communities learn and reinforce ways of seeing and feeling about distress and relief. Though the percentage of evangelicals in U.S. society is declining, their domestic and international power remains robust, so it is crucial to understand how these millions of Americans perceive and enact what they believe to be compassionate action. And we should also ask larger questions about practices of compassion and the ways that communities and societies teach members to value some bodies and souls over others. Analyzing the ways that different spectators learn to notice suffering, deem it worthy, determine a solution, and enact it offers opportunities for challenging existing systems and practices of aid and imagining anew.

⁷⁴ "Where is CrossRoads" and Jane Rodgers, "Texas Churches Build a Wall in Ecuador to Break Down Barriers," International Mission Board, January 26, 2018, accessed July 10, 2023, <https://www.imb.org/2018/01/26/texas-wall-in-ecuador/>.

⁷⁵ See for example "Project Grant SSF75017GR0046 Focus on the Family," USA Spending, accessed July 10, 2023, https://www.usaspending.gov/award/ASST_NON_SSF75017GR0046_1900; "Project Grant 72067421FA00005 World Vision," USA Spending, accessed July 10, 2023, https://www.usaspending.gov/award/ASST_NON_72067421FA00005_7200; "Cooperative Agreement U2GGH000624 Children's AIDS Fund," USA Spending, accessed July 10, 2023, https://www.usaspending.gov/award/ASST_NON_U2GGH000624_7523.