(UN)HOLY BODIES:
THE RADICAL INTERRUPTION OF C. EVERETT KOOP'S EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANITY IN THE DISCOURSE OF AIDS

A THESIS

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"It is a human trait to want to ascribe meaning to events; we find it hard to tolerate the idea that there is no sense or purpose to what happens in our lives."[1]

AIDS' arrival at the dawn of the 1980s came at a moment in American history that was incredibly susceptible to narrative claims that interpreted the illness as a problem moral pandemic rather than one of public health. At many moments in the course of human history, large-scale outbreaks of disease have been understood to be targeted acts of punishment from a divine source because plagues are explained this way in the Bible.[2] Yet AIDS seems to have been an anomaly in the human experience of plagues: while certain subsets of people have always, due to a variety of factors, been more susceptible to illness, the preliminary presence of AIDS in the gay men's community seemed oddly biblical in its mass and pointed damages in a population that for centuries had been understood to be deviant. AIDS is a unique case study in the relationship between religion and sickness because it was not, like many of the past epidemics, a "democratic plague." As the National Resource Council found in *The Social Impact of AIDS*, the disease from the outset "settled among socially disvalued groups," amongst people with "little economic, political and social power. In this sense, AIDS is an undemocratic affliction."[3]

The moment in which AIDS emerged in the United States is also unique. In the wake of unprecedented social changes that occurred in the 1960s and 1970s, the American body politic in the 1980s seemed to be hoping for some peace and quiet. This desire was embodied by Ronald Reagan, who had no interest in frank discussions of emergent diseases

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[1] Dennis Altman, *AIDS In the Mind of America* (Garden City: Anchor Press, 1986), 192.

[2] Altman, *AIDS in the Mind of America,* 192.

[3] Albert R. Jonsen and Jeff Stryker, editors, *The Social Impact of AIDS in the United States* (Washington: National Academy Press, 1993), 128.

that were rumored to be tied to deviant sexuality. Reagan's refusal to engage contributed to a nearly complete silence, which, paired with the lack of medical knowledge of AIDS, gave the outspoken moral voices of the country an unprecedented opportunity to advance their own narratives on sickness, deviance and retribution. As C. Everett Koop, former Surgeon General of the United States explained, **"**within the politics of AIDS lay one enduring, central conflict: AIDS pitted the politics of the gay revolution of the seventies against the politics of the Reagan revolution of the eighties."[4]

As Australian academic and gay rights activist Dennis Altman wrote in his 1986 book *AIDS in the Mind of America,* the social context made it "very easy to see AIDS as a judgment on sexual promiscuity, on 'fast-lane' life, as some sort of warning about the 'excesses' of modern life."[5] This sentiment was enacted by outspoken religious voices, who deployed rhetorical tactics that had been used to moralize against the sick for centuries.

While it would be incorrect to assume that this very vocal minority was representative of all religious bodies, they were undoubtedly the loudest, most politically connected, and had a new media platform for proselytizing.[6] Because this religious-moral construction took precedence over medical fact or public health, the understanding of AIDS in the United States became weighed down with moral baggage that lasted for nearly a decade. As contemporary scholar of medieval comparative literature Peter Lewis Allen

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[4] C. Everett Koop, M.D., *Koop: The Memories of America's Family Doctor* (New York: Random House, 1991),197.

[5] Altman, *AIDS in the Mind of America,* 192.

[6] "With the Churches remaining largely silent, society can hardly be faulted for assuming that this perspective is representative of the whole Christian community" James, Woodward, editor, *Embracing the Chaos: Theological Responses to AIDS* (London: SPCK, 1990), 1.

explains of the impact on public health, "the disease was new, the response was old, and the consequences were disastrous."[7]

After several years, AIDS was finally addressed by a national leader. Dr. C. Everett Koop harnessed the two affiliations to which he was adamantly faithful—medicine and evangelical Christianity—and became a radical agent of change in the discourse and treatment of AIDS. Koop pushed past the cyclical condemnation of AIDS occurring amongst his religious peers and became driven by moral imperative. Instead of preaching to the masses about moral pollution in the United States, Koop's proselytizing was focused solely on saving as many lives as he could.

Koop spent two years exhaustively researching AIDS, and in 1987 finished a national report that was thorough, honest and called America to task on sexual education. As Koop described of his intention, "as Surgeon General, moved by Christian compassion and the profession of medicine, my course was clear: to do all that I could in this report to halt the spread of AIDS by educating the American people accurately and completely."[8] The content of Koop's report placed him directly at odds with his fundamentalist peers, who claimed he had abandoned his religious affiliations, yet Koop disagreed. As he explained in his autobiography, "my position on AIDS was dictated by scientific integrity and Christian compassion. I felt that my Christian opponents had abandoned not only their old friend, but also their own commitment to integrity and compassion."[9]

I argue that C. Everett Koop's radical faith-based action, from inside a dominant cultural and religious tradition began to re-write the cultural perception of AIDS. In this

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[7] Peter Lewis Allen, *The Wages of Sin* (Chicago :University of Chicago Press, 2000), 152.

[8] Koop, *The Memoirs of America's Family Doctor,* 209.

[9] Koop, *The Memoirs of America's Family Doctor,* 216.

process, Koop stayed true to his two faiths, medicine and evangelical Christianity, and proceeded to discredit centuries of moralizing on illness as divine retribution. His disruption created the necessary foundation for serious action to be taken to resolve the AIDS crisis. In providing factual information about the disease, Koop allowed space for more moderate religious bodies and secular movements, such as ACT UP, to enter the public discourse, humanize the sick, and call America to action on finding a cure for AIDS.

I. Sin Throughout Time

The assumed intersection of illness and morality is neither new nor restricted to the AIDS crisis of the 1980s. For centuries, the claim that individual bad behavior could have collective consequences has been used to justify dogma and provide meaning during widespread, debilitating afflictions. As Altman explains, "there is a powerful tradition of seeing epidemics as the result of social collapse and degeneracy."[10] The drive to explain incomprehensible events has been particularly powerful in contexts where religious narrative histories hold power. This is particularly relevant in Christian and Jewish bodies of faith, which "retain within their traditions memories of epidemic disease. These memories have become powerful images in the religious imagination and have influenced theological interpretations of the way God deals with humanity."[11]

Throughout time, there have always been religious groups who dedicate themselves wholeheartedly to the caring and healing of the ill; however, in the case of threatening medieval epidemics, the act of moralizing "for many, took precedence over the fundamental

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[10] Altman, *AIDS in the Mind of America,* 10.
[11] Jonson and Stryker, editors. *The Social Impact of AIDS in the United States.* 124.

commandments to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and heal the sick."[12] These associations are tethered to the Middle Ages as an era closely associated with overarching moral judgment. Living in a time as defined by death and disease as medieval Europe, it is understandable that the will of God was invoked to create meaning in circumstances that were widespread, inexplicable and traumatic. Allen explains, "the Plague was so devastating and so overwhelming that it could be understood only by ascribing it to divine intent, no matter how mysterious that might be."[13]

As Susan Sontag articulates in her work *AIDS and Its Metaphors,* "diseases, insofar as they acquired meaning, were collective calamities, and judgments on a community. Only injuries and disabilities, not diseases, were thought of as individually merited."[14] The othering that has occurred as a result of these notions were compounded by the belief that "the disease invariably comes from somewhere else."[15] With no medical explanation, the blame often fell on the individual, who was left to reckon with it alone.

This isolation characterized the treatment of lepers in Medieval Europe, where the sick would suffer physical ailments and banishment from common spaces. These imperatives were supported, and arguably legitimized, by the fact that a prescription for communities dealing with leprosy is specifically provided by the biblical book of Leviticus:

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[12] Allen, *The Wages of Sin,* 60.
[13] Allen, *The Wages of Sin,* 75.
[14] Susan Sontag, *AIDS and Its Metaphors* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1988), 45.
[15] Sontag, *AIDS and Its Metaphors,* 47.

"All the days wherein the plague shall be in him he shall be defiled; he is unclean: he shall dwell alone; without the camp shall his habitation be."[16]

The biblical orders were reflected in the medieval laws surrounding leprosy which, according to medical historian Katharine Park,[17] "aimed to set lepers apart as foci of moral and ritual defilement rather than as threats to public health."[18] Neither knowing the source nor the vector for such a profound sickness was likely terrifying for a society that lived in such close quarters, yet as Park demonstrates, concern was often rooted in the contagion of moral blight over physical health.

Consequently, the most direct way to deal with the presence leprosy was to remove the victim from society and sight. This separation sent the message that those with leprosy were morally rather than medically unclean, and with the removal of lepers from common spaces, those who remained were assumed to be morally and medically safe. Yet this separation ignored the underlying medical causes, which were not understood at the time: by failing to see leprosy as an unexplained medical condition, it succeeded the blame onto the afflicted persons' morality.

However, the consequences of disease are, and have always been, a cruel cross to bear alone. John Donne, a sixteenth-century English poet and Anglican cleric, laments this treatment in *Devotions,* for:

> As sickness is the greatest misery, so the greatest misery of sickness is solitude; when the infectiousness of the disease deters them who should assist, from coming;

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[16] This passage is taken from 13 Leviticus: 46 in the King James Bible. I have used this source because this bible is emblematic of the audiences that Koop is trying to reach and outlines a harsher prescription.

[17] Whose work "focuses on the history of science and medicine in medieval and early modern Europe, with special attention to gender, sexuality, and the history of the body." http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~hsdept/bios/park.html

[18] Allen, *The Wages of Sin,* 27.

> even the Phisician [sic] dares scarse [sic] come…. it is an Outlawry, an Excommunication upon the patient.[19]

As a result, "to be a leper was the most loathsome and fearful torment that could be imagined, and to be treated like one the greatest punishment society could inflict."[20]

The effort to remove those who represent illness from a given community has been utilized throughout time because it provides a simple solution for coping with the deep anxiety of death that these epidemics evoke. Indeed, as Allen states "the fear of lepers, and the memories of what they suffered, have haunted the West for centuries, and provided an easy–if unfortunate–model to follow when other diseases came along."[21] This proved to be the case when the next widespread disease hit medieval Europe in the late fifteenth century: syphilis. Though syphilis was not addressed in the Bible, the societal construction and prescription for treatment was little more than an elaboration on leprosy.

Since both were inflictions of mysterious causation that deformed the bodies of the ill, the physicality of both leprosy and syphilis were particularly disturbing for the communities in which the diseases emerged: "underlying some of the moral judgments attached to disease are aesthetic judgments about the beautiful and the ugly, the clean and the unclean, the familiar and the alien or uncanny."[22] According to Sontag's analysis of epidemics, "the most dreaded [diseases] are those that seem like mutations into animality,"[23] for once the stigmatized become less removed from what separates them from animals, the imperative to care for, or even see them, as human beings decreases.

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[19] John Donne, *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions,* cited by Susan Sontag, *AIDS and Its Metaphors,* 35.

[20] Allen, *The Wages of Sin,* 40.

[21] Allen, *The Wages of Sin,* 39.

[22] Sontag, *AIDS and Its Metaphors,* 41.

[23] Sontag, *AIDS and Its Metaphors,* 41.

The Christian imperative to care for the sick may also be reduced when disease is constructed as a worthy punishment. Syphilis was similar to leprosy in the notion that the sick were believed to have "brought their torments upon themselves,[24]" yet it took on a separate dimension of moral transgression because it was tied to sex. As Allen explains, "some pundits, early on, announced that blasphemy was the vice that had called down this new torment from heaven, but most often syphilis was attributed to the sin of lust."[25] Hence, syphilis marked a departure where religious construction of illness became even more tied to individual morality through its link to "dangerous" sexualities.

It is clear that during the course of these illnesses, "the rise of Protestantism [and its suspicion of the body] was a far larger and more influential matter than any bacterium. But a new, virulent, sexually transmitted infection can only have reinforced people's increasing fears and anxieties about sex."[26] Protestantism was especially harsh on the 'sins of the flesh': "lust so afflicted humankind, preached Martin Luther, that God had been obliged to create matrimony as 'a hospital for incurables.'"[27] Though matrimony provided the illusion of a safe haven for containing sexuality, it did not solve the problem of lust.

Anxieties about sexuality were not limited to those outside of heterosexual relationships, but rather anyone afflicted by any sexual urges at all. John Calvin, sixteenth century French theologian, was horrified to hear about young people's exposure to sexual vices: "the young, he preached, were tormented by 'boiling affections,' while fornicators were pigs who soiled the very blood of Christ by mixing it with 'the stinking mire.'"[28]

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[24] Allen, *The Wages of Sin,* 43.
[25] Allen, *The Wages of Sin,* 43.
[26] Allen, *The Wages of Sin,* 47.
[27] Allen, *The Wages of Sin,* 47.
[28] Allen, *The Wages of Sin,* 47.

This religious condemnation of deviant behavior was also enforced politically with the rise of Absolute government, which emerged in the later part of the twelfth century. As historian John Boswell explains, the new political system sought uniformity in both secular and religious realms and "joined Roman civil law with Christian religious principles in an effort to standardize clerical supervision of ethical, moral and legal problems."[29] This pursuit of order, paired with "xenophobia which induced, accompanied and resulted from the crusades,"[30] created a paradigm that was hostile towards identities or actions that deviated from the norm. Though Europe had been accommodating of gay sexuality throughout the early Middle Ages, in the emerging climate that reviled transgressions, "it is scarcely surprising that gay people found themselves the objects of increasing mistrust and hostility on the part of the heterosexual majority."[31]

These medieval anxieties persisted well beyond the European Middle Ages, though the vector to deal with them changed. For Allen, regardless of the fact that "sexual morality in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries became less and less religious and more and more medical…the morality itself was essentially unchanged." Despite the shift towards the medical and scientific "the halo of learning and science that adorned the medical profession reinforced existing structures of social control, and as a result, sexuality continued to be viewed as a dangerous transgression."[32]

Many of these messages were conveyed in the rhetoric of religious leaders, who continued to condemn the sexual urges with consistent reminders of its deviance and roots

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[29] John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 270.

[30] Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality,* 272.

[31] Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality,* 276.

[32] Allen, *The Wages of Sin,* 118.

in sin. Calvin preached warning of an imminent danger that would arrive if people did not tamp down their sexuality and "warned Geneva that the new and strange diseases showed clearly that 'God is more angry than ever' with the sins of humankind."[33] This claim blamed personal desire and pitted it against the health and stability of European society.

As time went on, these opinions did change – slightly: "with the advent of the Enlightenment, the balance of power between science and theology shifted, and most people began to take substantially different views of the phenomena of the physical world."[34] Despite these shifts, the legacy of sickness and sin would not be easy to shake. As Allen points out, "a striking feature of the history of medicine, however, was that—especially for diseases linked with sex—many old attitudes about sickness and sin continued to thrive even after this cultural revolution took place,"[35] and made for a dangerously easy pattern for American fundamentalists to revive during the time of AIDS.

II. Foundations of Fundamentalism

Over time, and with the progression of science and modern medicine, it has become more difficult for religious groups to authoritatively claim a link between sickness and sin. However, there are exceptions, for as Sontag explains, "in the twentieth century it has become almost impossible to moralize about epidemics—except those which are transmitted sexually."[36] The advent of AIDS made for an easy return to condemnatory rhetorical devices. Since American fundamentalism grew out of Protestantism and believes strongly in biblical infallibility, it has close ties to the medieval reaction and the sources like

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[33] Allen, *The Wages of Sin,* 48.
[34] Allen, *The Wages of Sin,* 76.
[35] Allen, *The Wages of Sin,* 77.
[36] Sontag, *AIDS and Its Metaphors,* 56.

Leviticus from which it came. Indeed, "those who saw AIDS as God's punishment for homosexuality were the heirs to centuries of preachers, physicians and ordinary people who believed that disease was God's way of responding to human sin, and, in particular, to sins involving sex."[37]

Fundamentalism can be understood, to use religious historian George Marsden's definition, as "a distinct version of evangelical Christianity uniquely shaped by the circumstances of America in the early twentieth century."[38] Foundational to the movement is the belief that "the Bible is the revealed word of God, correct in every detail and complete in its revelation."[39] Fundamentalism is also closely affiliated with premillennialilsm, "the idea that the world would get worse before the Day of Judgment (which was imminent)."[40] This premillennial orientation has sometimes led to a separatist mentality among fundamentalists, for with the impending destruction of humankind, there has been "little point in engaging constructively with the world: better to remain pure and clean by remaining aloof."[41]

These affiliations led to a central tension that exists in the fundamentalist outlook regarding engagement with America. As scholar Martin E. Marty explains:

> The early Protestants came with a sense of "covenant," a claim that God had reached out and, in effect, made an agreement with them. God would favor them if Americans would be faithful. So citizens of the United States started thinking of themselves as "chosen" people with a "mission" and a "destiny."[42]

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[37] Allen, *The Wages of Sin,* 151.

[38] George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 3.

[39] Steve Bruce, *Fundamentalism* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000), 13.

[40] Bruce, *Fundamentalism,* 67.

[41] Bruce, *Fundamentalism,* 71.

[42] Martin E. Marty, editor, *Modern American Protestantism and its World: Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Munich: K.G. Saur, 1993), vii.

This perception of America as both consecrated and fragile demonstrates the contradictory fundamentalist mindset. On one hand, "they view America as a chosen nation, blessed by God, but, like ancient Israel, in constant danger of divine retribution because of immorality within and the forces of the Anti-Christ."[43] Paradoxically, however, to engage with American society was difficult because of a distrust of the emergent dominant culture of technological modernity.

The social context of the early decades of the 1900s set the precedent for a major division between the social progressives and fundamentalists, both in belief and social hierarchy. Scottish sociologist Steve Bruce asserts that in general, the Progressives—those who embraced the new technological opportunities and systems of thought—had an increased sense of agency in their lives and "tended to see life as good and getting better." On the other hand, the fundamentalists, who "were more commonly found in those regions and classes that were benefitting least from American prosperity," tended to stress "the sinful and precarious position of humankind and accused the progressives of usurping God's powers."[44] While tensions between these outlooks had been brewing for quite some time, this opposition became politicized in 1925 through the outcome of the Scopes-Darwin Trial.[45]

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[43] Bill J. Leonard, "Independent Baptists: From Sectarian Minority to "Moral Majority," in *Modern American Protestantism and its World: Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism,* ed. Martin E. Marty (Munich: K.G. Saur, 1993), 222.

[44] Bruce, *Fundamentalism,* 11.

[45]The State of Tennessee vs. John Thomas Scopes, 1925, occurred in Dayton, Tennessee. John Scopes was caught violating the Butler Act, which prohibited the teaching of human evolution in public schools. Scopes, who was defended by Clarence Darrow and prosecuted by William Jennings Bryant, was found guilty, but the case was seminal in the debate of evolution. "Clarence Darrow and the ACLU had succeeded in publicizing scientific evidence for evolution, and the press reported that though Bryan had won the case, he had lost the argument." http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/evolution/library/08/2/l_082_01.html

During the trial, media coverage focused on fundamentalists' lack of culture and education.[46] Hence, as the trial unfolded, Fundamentalists found themselves repeatedly criticized by the secular elite for their beliefs, which started to seem backward and ignorant in contrast to their increasingly progressive counterparts. As R. Laurence Moore interprets in his book *Religious Outsiders and the Making of America*:

> It did not take religious fundamentalists long for to conclude that they were being caught in a trap. They were losing control of their lives, and the lives of their children, to a new class of experts who denied the force of moral authority as a guide to pragmatic social planning but who in fact were engineering a revolution in the moral behavior of the country.[47]

With the social displacement that followed the verdict of this landmark case, fundamentalists in the United States were forced to enter a period of reflection on their position in society, and question how to move forward in a world that was increasingly privileging scientific development over the infallible word of God, particularly in something as foundational as the origins of life.

This loss of prestige was far greater than losing a court case: the dismantling of the supreme authority of God's word by intellectuals and other voices of modernity was deeply disruptive. This helps to explain why "in the period around World War I, theologically conservative Protestants began to step self-consciously into outsider roles."[48]

The reactionary retreat that took place after the Scopes' debacle, created an outsider-identity that came to strengthen the movement in the long run. Despite Moore's

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[46] This coverage is closely associated with H.L. Minken, who was critical of the players in the trial "really believed that there was a small elite of educated and cultivated and intelligent human beings, and then there were the masses who were really ignorant and capable of nothing but being led and bamboozled." http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/monkeytrial/peopleevents/p_mencken.html

[47] R. Laurence Moore, *Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 159.

[48] Moore, *Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans,* 163.

suspicion that "the outsider consciousness that developed among average American Protestants was a defensive reaction to intellectual insecurity,"[49] the fundamentalist retreat was ultimately beneficial to advancing their worldview.

During subsequent years of mid-twentieth-century America, Fundamentalists "maintained their strength in local congregations, in an unaccountable number of independent churches, rapidly expanding Bible institutes, and in the ministries of radio and television preachers."[50] In addition to solidarity, it also provided time for fundamentalists to gain better economic standing. Many fundamentalists in the 1970s had abandoned their ascetic roots and reemerged with considerable financial privilege. Hence, "in pietistic retreat and largely unnoticed by the mainstream, the fundamentalists were able to reproduce themselves, and as, secularization steadily weakened the mainstream denominations, they gradually became an increasingly powerful part of American religious life."[51]

This renewed collective confidence set up an ideal venue for re-engagement with the larger American culture, for as Moore explains, "in the 1970s fundamentalists still formed a world apart and it was a world that was increasingly expansive and self-confident."[52] Though fundamentalists may have carried an outsider perception of themselves, once the self-imposed separation came to an end, the demographics of the group made it relatively easy to slip into a position of power and mobility within the social hierarchy. This, paired with the fact that the members were "mostly white; they were mostly middle class; they were mostly native-born; and they were all, let us not forget,

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[49] Moore, *Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans,* 165.
[50] Moore, *Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans,* 168
[51] Bruce, *Fundamentalism,* 70.
[52] Bruce, *Fundamentalism,* 71.

Protestant," they had little reason to be identified as American outsiders in the larger realm of American culture.[53]

Despite the fact that the reconciliation with American culture once seemed unlikely, in certain ways, these Fundamentalist groups had never really been apart. Separate from the independent mentality that caused them to split off, the movement was never fully isolated because they continued tracking changes in the public sphere.[54] One focus was the Supreme Court, where cases ranging from *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 and *Roe v. Wade* in 1973 enforced a deepening view that secular beliefs directly contradicted their vision for their country and violated the word of God.[55]

Coinciding with these Supreme Court decisions was the collective emergence of intertwined social movements that were drastically changing "people's concepts of the meaning and place of sex in their lives: the sexual revolution, feminism, and the beginnings of the modern gay and lesbian movement."[56] The American population seemed to be more sexually active than it had been in decades: which was paired with the reality that, both medically and socially, "the accidental consequences of sex—pregnancy and infection—seemed more remote than they had ever been."[57] As the fundamentalists reintegrated into

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[53] Moore, *Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans,* 169

[54]"Fundamentalists *do* relate to the public sphere. They *do* care about political power, economic justice, and social status. But they are above all religiously motivated individuals, drawn together into ideologically structured groups, for the purpose of promoting a vision of divine restoration." Bruce B. Lawrence, *Defenders of God: The Fundamentalist Revolt Against the Modern Age* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989), 1.

[55] "Segregation or Integration, Which?" Sermon by Jerry Falwell, 1958, located at the Jones Memorial Library in Lynchburg, Kentucky.

[56] Allen, *The Wages of Sin,* 120.

[57]These beliefs were also tied to the medical environment, for as Allen explains: "The 1960s and 1970s were the halcyon days of modern medicine…looking at a future in which the only major health problems would be chronic ones like cancer and heart disease, universities began to shut down their departments of infectious disease and tropical

society, they were horrified to find that "sex outside of wedlock was safe; it was readily available; it was viewed as liberating; and—perhaps most important of all, in the consumer culture of the United States—sex was fun."[58]

Because "the family was the bedrock of [fundamentalist] culture,"[59] and given their context in time and place, "sexuality—whether in the form of pre-marital sex, pornography, birth control or same sex relationships—was an abiding concern,"[60] threatening the moral harmony of their safe, suburban spaces. During this moment in the twentieth century, "fundamentalists saw themselves losing control of their churches, their families, their working environments, their schools, their nation."[61] Yet their retreat had created a social and political cohesion that gave them potentially equal political power as their liberal counterparts, which they soon began to exercise.

As Bruce B. Lawrence, professor of Religion at Duke university, argues: "the catalyst for fundamentalist loyalty is hatred of the modernist value agenda."[62]Thus, it is easy to understand why conservative Christian Americans emerging out of the social upheaval of the 1960s had the desire to fight back with their new founded cohesion and resources.

III. Moral Politics & Media

Having observed that ideologies become legitimized through political activity, the fundamentalist concept of high morality moved into politics. Although governmental

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medicine, while some cities withdrew funds from the public clinics they had long provided to control such afflictions as tuberculosis*."*Allen, *The Wages of Sin*, 119-120.

[58] Allen, *The Wages of Sin,* 120.
[59] Bruce, *Fundamentalism,* 68.
[60] Bruce, *Fundamentalism,* 68.
[61] Bruce, *Fundamentalism,* 69.
[62] Lawrence, *Defenders of God,* 6.

initiatives had been experienced by Fundamentalists as a major element in the dismantling of religious authority, some Fundamentalist leaders conceived that they might be used to swing the moral pendulum in their direction. As Bruce explains of this effort, "if America is going to be turned around, the legislative and executive branch of government must be recaptured from the Godless."[63]

The formation of religious and political coalitions such as the Christian Right[64] and later emergences such as the Moral Majority[65] were created to bring Fundamentalist Christian views of the American trajectory to the forefront of mainstream understanding through use of democratic policy.[66] As Bruce explains, "every religious tradition is capable of producing people who put the promotion of religiously inspired goals above their society's norms,"[67] and leaders such as Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson were ideal mobilizers of the cause. These religious leaders, together with others, fought secularism from the moral high ground of the pulpit, used their charisma and sought to recruit from the Fundamentalist base: people who resisted the "modernist vision of a homogenous global community ruled by an enlightened, which is to say secular, elite."[68]

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[63] Bruce, *Fundamentalism,* 78.

[64] Attributed to Richard Viguerie, Paul Weyrich and Howard Phillips, who "believed that, beyond the common stock of the economy and foreign policy, there were many *socio-moral* issues that could serve as the basis of an organized conservative movement," that would be "broader than such previous issues campaigns as the temperance crusades or the anti-Communist League of America" and who targeted "the conservative milieu." Bruce, *Fundamentalism,* 71.

[65] Moral Majority was a faction of the new Religious Right, led by Jerry Falwell of Lynchburg, Virginia. The organization "sensitized conservative Protestants to political issues and to their need to get involved." Moral Majority also encouraged protestant pastors "to preach on the subject from their pulpits and to arrange voter registration drives." It was ultimately disbanded in 1987. Bruce, *Fundamentalism,* 71-72.

[66] Bruce, *Fundamentalism,* 6-7.

[67] Bruce, *Fundamentalism,* 5.

[68] Lawrence, *Defenders of God,* 7.

In the 1970s, Jerry Falwell (1933-2007), American evangelical pastor, host of *Old Time Gospel Hour,* and co-founder of the Moral Majority, was extremely outspoken around issues of sexual liberation, and was unafraid to make unrestricted statements on the topic. While his concerns with sexuality extended to pre-marital sex and promiscuity, he viewed same-sex relationships as a major threat, perhaps because unlike the other "immoral" sexual behavior, he was aware that homosexuality was moving from being seen as a perversion to an acceptable lifestyle. This was occurring largely in urban centers, like New York, Los Angeles and San Francisco, where gay men's culture and sexual expression were increasingly visible to those outside the gay community. The increasing visibility of gay culture in cities dovetailed with existing concerns that "the huddled urban masses" were already seen by traditionalists as "fertile ground where sin festered."[69]

In a book that outlined his plan for the 1980s, Falwell stated with confidence that "the entire homosexual movement is an indictment against America and is contributing to its ultimate downfall."[70] Falwell's concerns around the "homosexual movement" contained larger fears about what would happen if the visibility around these movements extended to young Americans. The effects on the family unit and the country at large could be disastrous. Falwell cautioned, "we must not allow homosexuality to be presented to our nation as an alternative lifestyle. It will not only have a corrupting influence upon our next generation, but will also bring down the wrath of God upon America."[71] Because of their premillennial concerns and perceived danger of the of gay people in American society ,

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[69] Jonson and Stryker, editors. *The Social Impact of AIDS in the United States.* 126.

[70] Fallwell, Jerry, *The Fundamentalist Phenomenon: The Resurgence of Conservative Christianity*, 203.

[71] Fallwell, Jerry, *The Fundamentalist Phenomenon: The Resurgence of Conservative Christianity*, 205.

fundamentalists did not shy away from unleashing a wrathful commentary against gay men. Though the anti-gay sentiment was already established in the fundamentalist rhetoric, once AIDS became increasingly visible, the disease presented a perfect vehicle to link fundamentalist fear of the sexual revolution and gay sexuality directly to venereal punishment.[72] As Altman explains, since "the spread of AIDS became linked in the public imagination to the very presence of homosexuals—including lesbians—the gay visibility and affirmation of the past decade allowed for some very nasty scapegoating."[73]

Pat Robertson, Pentecostal minister and failed 1988 presidential candidate,[74] became an important leader in Fundamentalist transition into the political arena. He regularly reminded viewers of his television show *The 700 Club* of the biblical condemnation of gayness as being ''unnatural and against nature." Robertson tied this medieval concern directly to AIDS by explaining that ''people in this country are violating certain moral laws and standards. And as a result, they're getting diseases.''[75] In 1986, Charles Stanley, who was the president of the 14-million-member Southern Baptist Convention, made explicit Robertson's beliefs when he bluntly said ''God has created the AIDS epidemic to indicate his displeasure over America's acceptance of the homosexual lifestyle.''[76] Pat Buchannan, conservative political commentator and later Presidential

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[72]"Under siege from the rapid changes which were turning homosexuality into a 'lifestyle' rather than a 'deviance,' right-wing moralists sought to shore up traditional condemnations of homosexuality; AIDS provided a godsend to them (quite literally, in the eyes of the religious right)." Altman, *AIDS in the Mind of America,* 13.

[73] Altman, *AIDS in the Mind of America,* 13.

[74] Bruce, *Fundamentalism,* 72-73.

[75]David E. Anderson, "Churches Divide on AIDS," *United Press International,* December 8, 1985.

[76]David E. Anderson, "Fear delaying Church's Response to the AIDS crisis," *United Press International,* March 15, 1986.

candidate, claimed that AIDS was "nature's form of retribution" for "the immoral, unnatural, unsanitary, unhealthy and suicidal practice of anal intercourse."[77]

Because of the assumption that to be gay was a choice, it became easy to proclaim that those who were sick with AIDS had brought their fate upon themselves. Further, since Protestant influence on fundamentalist ideology stresses individual choice, AIDS was catalyzed smoothly into a vehicle for blame.[78] Falwell explained, "homosexuals are violating the laws of nature […] God establishes all of nature's laws. When a person ignores those laws there is a price to pay."[79] Falwell further enforced these messages by framing AIDS as explicitly against the moral order, which made the sick even easier to demonize. As he stated: "if the homosexual men who are plagued by AIDS and who are potential high risk victims would stop doing what they're doing, the epidemic would stop."[80] By 1987, the interconnectedness between gay sexuality and AIDS was so strong that 1970s North Carolina Senator and conservative leader "Jesse Helms could reduce the idea to a simple, if inaccurate principle: 'Every AIDS case can be traced back to a homosexual act.'"[81]

Though each religious leader preached from separate pulpits around the country, each of them had relatively unrestrained access to Christian media, which was a critical resource in spreading their message.[82] For the fundamentalists, coverage of AIDS in

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[77] Allen, *The Wages of Sin,* 123.

[78] "They insisted that the conscience and reason of the individual mattered supremely in the plan of God." Martin E. Marty, editor, *Modern American Protestantism and its World: Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Munich: K.G. Saur, 1993), vii.

[79]Fred Bayles, "AIDS: Virus of Fear; Clergy Mixed in Response to AIDS Crisis," *The Associated Press*, September 15, 1985.

[80] David E. Anderson, "Churches Divide on AIDS," December 8, 1985.

[81] Allen, *The Wages of Sin,* 124.

[82] Jeffrey K. Hadden, "Religious Broadcasting and the Mobilization of the New Christian Right," in *Modern American Protestantism and its World: Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism,* ed. Martin E. Marty (Munich: K.G. Saur, 1993), 299.

fundamentalist media provided both a guaranteed audience and the opportunity to legitimize their condemnatory claims. In this context of new media, where evangelical channels could put out self-reinforcing messages and have guaranteed access to religious viewers every day, "a lingering uneasiness about sex and sin made it possible for old ideas to take on form, strength and power."[83]

They also had the New Testament scripture 1 *Romans*: 22-27**,** a cautionary letter from Jesus' apostle Paul, which reads:

> God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the degrading of their bodies among themselves, / because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. / For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, / and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error.[84]

In many cases, this passage provided fundamentalist leaders the biblical "proof" they needed: to be gay was to intentionally disrupt God's intent, and as a result, sickness was both inevitable and deserved.

This passage from *Romans* reinforced the old paradigm of condemnatory prophecy, and just as in medieval times, the concept of moral contamination took hold. As a result, efforts to push gay people out mainstream society grew rampant. William F. Buckley in a 1986 New York Times Op-Ed suggested that "everyone detected with AIDS should be tattooed in the upper forearm, to protect common-needle users, and on the buttocks, to

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[83] Allen, *The Wages of Sin,* 152.

[84] Harold W. Attridge, editor, *The Harper Collins Study Bible.* San Francisco: HarperOne, 2006.

prevent the victimization of other homosexuals."[85] These initiatives were politicized by politicians such as Lyndon LaRouche, whose "Prevent AIDS Now Initiative Committee" (or PANIC) sought to enact ''universal screening and isolating or quarantining all individuals in the active carrier states" through ballot measures across the country.[86] Other forms of public shaming and ostracizing were common across the conservative "solutions" for AIDS.

Though every initiative was not so extreme, for these leaders, no one was safe from the perils caused by the alleged homosexual agenda: "'the *Moral Majority Report* warned that AIDS was turning up in 'exponentially increasing numbers of defenseless heterosexuals' who happened to cross the sinners sinners' path.'"[87] Making gay people the enemy of the health and safety of "ordinary" Americans found ready acceptance given the widespread fundamentalist anxiety surrounding AIDS. This antagonizing played off of more moderate citizens cultural anxieties as well, for as Barry Glassner elaborates in his analysis of American's overblown *Culture of Fear* "the belief in a tangible threat makes it possible to explain and justify one's sense of discomfort."[88]

In the secular media, for many years there was a lack of coverage that prevented attention to the disease and those who suffered from it. This created a strange phenomenon by the fact that "one could have lived in New York, or in most of the United States for that matter, and not even have been aware from the daily newspapers that an

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[85] William F. Buckley, "Crucial Steps in Combating the AIDS Epidemic; Identify All the Carriers," *The New York Times* Op-Ed, March 18, 1986.

[86] David L. Kirp, "LaRouche Turns to AIDS Politics," *The New York Times,* September 11, 1986. Accessed on 4/15/13.

[87] Allen, *The Wages of Sin,* 123.

[88] Barry Glassner, *Culture of Fear: Why Americans Are Afraid of the Wrong Things* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), xx.

epidemic was happening."[89] As Larry Shilts explains in his fundamental anthology of the American AIDS crisis *And the Band Played On*, "in New York City, where half of the nation's AIDS cases resided, *The New York Times* had written only three stories about the epidemic in 1981 and three more stories in all of 1982. None made the front page."[90]

As Jeffery K. Hadden, an American sociologist interested in the broadcasting methods of the Religious Right, explains that media exposure has the function of "tacitly encouraging people to transform social issues into social problems," for "just beneath the surface of 'objective' reporting, there is the unspoken cry that 'somebody ought to do something about this."[91]AIDS, began to be covered in the mainstream media only when the fear of contracting AIDS was spread to a greater population, which came around the middle of the decade. As Shilts explains, "the epidemic was only news when it was not killing homosexuals. In this sense, AIDS remained a fundamentally gay disease, newsworthy only by virtue of the fact that it sometimes hit people who weren't gay."[92]

Once media coverage began to occur with more frequency, "rumor and hysteria" often took the place of basic information.[93] As Glassner explains of this phenomenon, "journalists, more often than media scholars, identify the judgery that is involved in making small hazards appear huge and huge hazards disappear from sight."[94] In the case of AIDS, media coverage worked to both demonize the sick while simultaneously drawing arguably unnecessary attention to those who were unlikely to get the disease. By pressing the idea

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[89] Shilts, *And the Band Played On,* 191.

[90] Shilts, *And the Band Played On,* 191.

[91]Hadden, Jeffrey K. "Religious Broadcasting and the Mobilization of the New Christian Right," 300.

[92] Shilts, *And the Band Played On,* 213.

[93] Robert Emmet Long, editor, *AIDS:* The Reference Shelf, Vol 59 #3 (New York: The H.W. Wilson Company, 1987), 7.

[94] Glassner, *Culture of Fear: Why Americans Are Afraid of the Wrong Things,* xxiv.

that no one was safe or exempt from the threat of AIDS, the focus was taken off of those were actually infected, which worked to make AIDS into an even more abstract phenomenon.

The early media coverage of AIDS compounded the detrimental effects on both the gay community and people with AIDS. As Glassner observes of large-scale panics, "it is difficult to see how potential victims benefit from the frenzy."[95] Indeed, as Shilts wrote:

> Newspapers and television largely avoided discussion of the disease until the death toll was too high to ignore and the casualties were no longer just the outcasts. Without the media to fulfill its role as public guardian, everyone else was left to deal—and not deal—with AIDS as they saw fit.[96]

The public view of AIDS was also largely influenced by governmental silence that lasted for nearly a decade. The religious resistance to directly helping "sinners" with AIDS, amplified by its political association with the Moral Majority and the new Religious Right, was echoed by leaders in Washington, including the White House. As Allen explains:

> HIV found America a complex and divided nation, particularly in regard to sex. At one extreme was the political and religious right, which publically espoused—and sometimes tried to enforce—old and often highly romanticized patterns of sex and gender behavior: compulsory heterosexuality, virginity until marriage and strict monogamy afterward, and gender roles in which wives were subservient to husbands.[97]

Indeed, the dominant political climate of 1980s America was one that sought "to escape the admittedly unpleasant realities of the present and replace them with a mythical utopia of an America unchallenged in the world and held together by a common set of values at home."[98] This urge to return to the narrative of a better, simpler time in America was

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[95] Glassner, *Culture of Fear: Why Americans Are Afraid of the Wrong Things,* xvi.
[96] Shilts, *And the Band Played On,* xxiii.
[97] Allen, *The Wages of Sin,* 122.
[98] Altman, *AIDS In the Mind of America,* 27.

integral to the resistance to address the disease.[99] These philosophies were embodied by Ronald Reagan, who was encouraged by the Religious Right to spread the idealism of America around the world and simultaneously peddle back into a time dictated by good, Christian sentimentality.[100] As Altman argues of the voters' choice, "it is here that both Reagan's age and career, an object of bemusement for some foreigners, become positive virtues, for who better qualified than an aging B-grade actor to lead the charge back to the 1950s?"[101]

In part, as a result of the political efforts of the Religious Right, the outbreak of AIDS was met by an administration that had little interest in having a frank discussion of a venereal disease whose hosts were largely gay men. Due to the lack of executive acknowledgement paired with "these attitudes in Washington, it was no surprise that effective prevention programs made slow progress around the nation"[102] In the case of AIDS, however, Altman's charge of sentimentality seems too gentle. For Allen, it was closer to complete apathy, for "during the first six years of the AIDS crisis–as 59,572 Americans were diagnosed and 27,909 of them died–President Reagan never once mentioned the disease in public, as if those people, their communities, families and friends did not exist at all."[103] The implications of this silence were vast, for as Allen elaborates:

> The belief that AIDS was a punishment God had visited on a perverse group of sinners not only colored the national discourse and made many of those who were sick or afraid feel even more guilty and anxious than they already were; it also took on legal force and had drastic consequences for the health of the nation.[104]

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[99]And can be summarized well in the 1984 ad campaign "It's Morning Again in America," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EU-IBF8nwSY, accessed on 4/15/14.

[100] Bruce, *Fundamentalism,* 72.

[101] Altman, *AIDS In the Mind of America,* 27.

[102] Allen, *The Wages of Sin,* 124.

[103] Allen, *The Wages of Sin,* 124.

[104] Allen, *The Wages of Sin,* 121.

Ironically, the widespread refusal to address the calamity of AIDS began to be changed by a grandfatherly evangelical Christian who had been presumed by many progressives a backward step for health: C. Everett Koop, a Philadelphia pediatric surgeon who served as Surgeon General from 1982 to 1989.

IV. The Surgeon General

By his own account, Koop was brought into the Reagan Administration as a pawn to represent the conservative mindset the administration was trying to evoke across the nation. He explains, "I naively didn't realize that my nomination was a political issue and that my supporters had little idea of my medical background except for my pro-life position."[105] Koop had been known widely for being an outspoken pro-life advocate, and one that—likely because of his age, religious background and self-presentation—appeared as an obstinate, outdated figure who many worried would turn the country's health policies backward.[106] This is precisely why conservatives advanced Koop for the position, yet what Koop's conservative backers had not really understood was that:

> Even though the Philadelphia surgeon was a serious Christian, his values on other issues did not line up squarely with theirs. Koop's anti-abortion stand grew out of his religious belief that life and health were sacred; these were the same convictions that motivated his medical work.[107]

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[105] Koop, *The Memoirs of America's Family Doctor,* 5.

[106] These concerns went so far as to delay Koop's being sworn in. "In February, 1981, President Reagan appointed Koop as Deputy Assistant Secretary for Health with the promise that he would be nominated as Surgeon General. Opposition to Koop's appointment, especially by those concerned that he would use the position of Surgeon General as a platform for his anti-abortion views, delayed the confirmation process. But he was finally confirmed by the Senate on November 16, 1981 and officially sworn in as Surgeon General on January 21, 1982."
http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/about/previous/biokoop.html

[107] Allen, *The Wages of Sin,* 128.

Indeed, the misinterpretation of Koop's conviction to save *all* lives would ultimately work in ways that directly transformed the administration's approach to AIDS, though no one understood this at the time of his appointment.

Despite the fact that the Surgeon General had not been a position of much prestige in the past, Koop's occupation of the title was characterized by energy, activity and conviction. As he wrote, "I saw it as a position of medical leadership, especially in the education of the public about the promotion of health and prevention of disease."[108] Part of this decision was apparent in Koop's choice to wear the Surgeon General's uniform, which he hoped "would give a greater aura of authority to the health messages I wanted the American public to receive."[109]

As time passed, it became clear to Koop that his role in the administration carried certain assumptions he had not predicted. As Koop understood it, "the Surgeon General is mandated by Congress to inform the American people about the prevention of disease and the promotion of health,"[110] yet when it came to AIDS, he was pressured to do the opposite. Initially, this was not a major concern, for though he did not address the disease until Reagan's second term, "I never considered myself muzzled about AIDS. I really believed initially that my exclusion was simply the result of a division of labor – a very naive belief, I now realize."[111]

As time went on and AIDS grew worse, Koop's concern increased. Nevertheless the Reagan administration kept him on a tight leash. Koop—representing the administration

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[108] Koop, *The Memoirs of America's Family Doctor,* 6.
[109] Koop, *The Memoirs of America's Family Doctor,* 150.
[110] Koop, *The Memoirs of America's Family Doctor,* 195.
[111] Koop, *The Memoirs of America's Family Doctor,* 196.

and the Department of Health and Human Services—had already given a remarkable total of 202 formal public addresses before he was allowed to speak on what he described as "the most mysterious and vexing health issue of the century."[112] While he desired to speak earlier, the political climate in the White House worked against his intentions. The administration wanted to continue to cultivate support from the Religious Right, a key element of the "Reagan coalition," which created a perceived political advantage to perpetuate outdated religious notions of the connection between health and morality.

As a result of these allegiances, Koop was in a bind: "the conservative politics of the middle and late years of the Reagan administration attempted to thwart my attempts to educate the public about AIDS and tried to stir up hostility toward its victims."[113] Yet Koop was adamant. Finally, he was asked to write a report, and for the next two years, Koop writes: "AIDS took over my life."[114]

The report was released on October 22, 1986. Despite Koop's evangelical background and old age, it was clinical, accurate and "remarkably frank. It endorsed abstinence, but was not shy about explaining that AIDS could be transmitted by anal, oral, or vaginal sex–and that transmission could be prevented by the proper use of condoms."[115] Koop's report provided the most thorough information on AIDS that had been written, since from his perspective, "the only weapon we had against AIDS was education, education and more education."[116]

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[112] Koop, *The Memoirs of America's Family Doctor,* 202.
[113] Koop, *The Memoirs of America's Family Doctor,* 198.
[114] Koop, *The Memoirs of America's Family Doctor,* 203.
[115] Allen, *The Wages of Sin,* 130.
[116] Koop, *The Memoirs of America's Family Doctor,* 203.

Despite his scrupulous adherence to medical fact, Koop was not protected from public attack by his co-religionists and other conservatives. As he explained: "I knew that telling the truth about AIDS, the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth would not be well received in some places. One of those places would be the White House, at least in those offices where ideology would be the main concern."[117] Koop elaborated, "it did not take long for me to discover how difficult it could be to get the word out, because no matter what the issue, there were always forces trying to keep me from communicating health messages to the American people. I had to wage a series of political battles before I could even do my job."[118]

Despite the attempts of those higher up in the chain of command, Koop found a way to prevent censorship of his report. As he explained, "I figured that if the Domestic Policy Council were handed a pamphlet shrieking expensive paper and printing, they might be disinclined to make changes because of the reprinting. I think it worked."[119] Koop made it a point to make his findings accessible, and as a result, "the report was sent to anyone who requested it."[120]

Koop's report was the largest public health mailing ever done.[121] Though as he predicted, once the report was distributed, people were shocked at Koop's call to action and demand for sexual education—of all varieties. Perceptions of him shifted: he was now

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[117] "… A large portion of the president's constituency was anti-homosexual, anti-drug abuse, anti-promiscuity, and anti-sex education; these people would not respond well to some of the things that would have to be said on a health report on AIDS." Koop, *The Memoirs of America's Family Doctor,* 204.

[118] Koop, *The Memoirs of America's Family Doctor,* 196.

[119] Koop, *The Memoirs of America's Family Doctor,* 212.

[120] Koop, *The Memoirs of America's Family Doctor,* 215.

[121] Sent to107 million households in the United States in 1988 http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/about/previous/biokoop.html

praised by many of his early critics and experienced backlash from many of his conservative peers. The whirlwind of public opinion was vexing for Koop. He had been brought in and presumed to be too conservative, and was now being condemned by his electors for encouraging sexual education. Yet Koop was adamant about his intentions and his actions, and defended what he had written:

> I said then—and I repeated frequently—that the Surgeon General was the Surgeon General of homosexuals as well as of heterosexuals and of the promiscuous as well as of the moral. I am not sure anyone listened. If they had, they would not have been so surprised that my AIDS report was a health report, not the exercise in more censure they had wanted.[122]

A factor that kept Koop going in the tumultuous Capitol Hill climate was his faith. As he explained:

> On several occasions, if it had not been for my conviction that the Lord had put me in Washington for some specific reason, I would have succumbed to the temptation to say, "I don't need this kind of life, this kind of treatment, this kind of tension, and there must be something else to do." It also helped when Betty would remind me that I was otherwise unemployed.[123]

Koop found validation in his relationship with God, for despite the turbulence in his life, "I realized that God was still sovereign, that I was performing a necessary role, that even though I was unable to control the forces around me, I was confident I was right."[124]

Koop's convictions distinguished him from many of his religious peers during this time, for while they were aligned in belief and political affiliation, Koop chose to employ his faith in a manner of pastoral care that was vehement about preserving life of all peoples. Instead using his powerful position to promote the narratives of condemnation, Koop used

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[122] Koop, *The Memoirs of America's Family Doctor,* 204.
[123] Koop, *The Memoirs of America's Family Doctor,* 138.
[124] Koop, *The Memoirs of America's Family Doctor,* 223.

it to effectively tear down the dominant discourse around AIDS. As a result, he brought about a sea change in the treatment of people with AIDS.

This departure from the original intention of his appointment demonstrates that Koop's dedication to his twin commitments, Christ's teaching of compassion for those who suffer and the medical imperative to improve public health, manifested in a way was commendably rogue. When it came to health care, Koop embodied a radically different Christianity than his evangelical counterparts. He ignored an alluring biblical narrative of meaning about the virus and instead saw it for what it was, a terrible medical problem. Once this had become clear, the imperative of Koop's faith simply demanded that he act.

V. Embodied Protest

Though Koop's contributions to the discourse around AIDS were remarkable, it would be an oversimplification to understand him as the sole agent who transformed acceptance and treatment of the sick. While Koop advocated for the treatment of the sick and for frank education on a larger spectrum of sexual expression, Koop's understanding of gay sexuality was not particularly nuanced. As he states of the movement: "in what was known at this time as the 'gay revolution,' homosexual and bisexual men were 'coming out of the closet' and asserting their civil rights. Unfortunately, most gay activists combined the otherwise separate issues of homosexual health and politics."[125] This reveals the desire that Koop–along many others during this time–held regarding the treatment of gay people. The urge to remove sexuality from the picture denied those who were sick with AIDS a visibility that accounted for their full, lived experience. Sexual identity in the AIDS crisis

[125] Koop, *The Memoirs of America's Family Doctor,* 197-198.

was not something that "became needlessly mired in the sexual politics of the early eighties" as Koop claims, but instead was important for the American people to grapple with people who had AIDS as fellow, vulnerable humans.

Despite being one of the most targeted social groups during the crisis, people with AIDS had been largely absent from the public discourse surrounding the disease. As Susan Leigh Foster argues, because of this absence, the "state and local governments, churches, drug companies, and health organizations all responded to the AIDS crisis with homophobic suspicion," which made AIDS "the inevitable product of obscene sexual practices."[126] As a result the disease was wholly abstracted from those who were actually sick.

In response, the work of the AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power, ACT UP, was to bring the discussion back to the embodied experience of those with AIDS. In doing so, ACT UP re-wrote the narrative of both illness and homosexuality and became a visible fixture in the media. As Kevin Michael DeLuca explains, ACT UP "challenged the world not through good reasons, but through vulnerable bodies, not through rational arguments, but through bodies at risk."[127]

By bringing their bodies to the forefront of their argument, ACT UP's methods covered an important area that Koop did, and could, not. This addition was important, for "the presence of gay bodies, sick, emaciated, and healthy, constitute an eloquent and courageous response to discrimination and hate." It represented "a refusal to be

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[126] Susan Leigh Foster. "Choreographies of Protest." *Theatre Journal* 55, no. 3 (2003): 403.

[127] Kevin Michael Deluca, "Unruly Arguments: The Body Rhetoric of Earth First!, ACT UP, and Queer Nation," *Argumentation and Advocacy,* 36 (1999): 11.

quarantined, isolated, marginalized, silenced. In making their bodies visible, present, exposed, the ACT UP activists call on society to care."[128]

In addition to calling upon people to acknowledge those who were sick, ACT UP also inverted the shame that for years had been placed upon gay people and those with AIDS . By "asserting that the (in)actions of the government and other institutions responsible for the AIDS crisis were shameful,"[129] it challenged—for the first time in such a public and ruthless way—the blatant apathy and discrimination in America's leadership and defined it as more despicable and shameful than homosexual behavior.

ACT UP's work was incredibly important to the secular, social stage of AIDS and brought home the demand that lives needed to be saved. While it would be incorrect to connect Koop and ACT UP as a direct alliance, their collective work of generating compassion and demanding action, covered most areas of discourse in the United States. Koop and ACT UP made treating AIDS a moral imperative, and a place where this reparative work took place was moderate religious bodies.

While smaller religious groups were some of the first to respond to the AIDS crisis in care, they had largely shied away from public statement during the years of the fundamentalist discourse. As a result, the religious reconstruction of AIDS and gayness that was happening in America and Europe sought tactful maneuvering in how to move forward as religious bodies in the wake of AIDS.

As James Woodward explains of the religious rhetorical legacy, "fears about sexuality and morality have been revealed, and further the basic problems of homophobia,

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[128]DeLuca,"Unruly Arguments: The Body Rhetoric of Earth First!, ACT UP, and Queer Nation," 17.

[129] Deborah B. Gould. "Life During Wartime: Emotions and the Development of ACT UP." *Mobilization: An International Journal* (2):177-200. 14.

racism and sexism emerge to expose prejudice and foster isolation. These are our starting points as we attempt to set the agenda for pastoral care."[130] Woodward's new agenda, and others like it, were reflective, and found nuanced ways to examine the relationship between religion and illness. These reconstructions came at a unique time of possibility, for as Woodward elaborates, "the Church has an opportunity to recover the theological basis of its pastoral response to AIDS in a way that can extend compassion, promote justice, and offer support, nurture and hope."[131] The initiatives set forth by these religious bodies were an important element in healing the damages that had been caused to religious groups by fundamentalist rhetoric, and were added an important dimension in the responses that came after Koop's report.

V. Conclusions

C. Everett Koop's re-writing of AIDS was an indisputable disruption of the moral trajectory that had turned it into a crusade of good and evil and removed it from a medical issue that was about life and death. This is remarkable given the fact that the AIDS was "an old nemesis in new guise," due to the fact that "religious tradition and teaching have had, from time immemorial, a place for pestilential disease."[132] Fundamentalists provided an explanation for AIDS in a time when all other authorities were mute. Pairing their longstanding warnings about the conditions of the imminent last days, and a biblical model to follow, they offered a compelling conceptual framework. Making the issue into a series of dichotomies—black and white, us vs. them, good vs. evil—made their position very difficult

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[130] "Woodward, James, editor, *Embracing the Chaos: Theological Responses to AIDS. (*London: SPCK, 1990), 5.

[131] Woodward, *Embracing the Chaos,* 3.

[132] Jonson and Stryker, editors. *The Social Impact of AIDS in the United States.* 128.

to challenge. But in reframing AIDS as a medical infliction rather than a merited social punishment, Koop broke the pattern and legitimacy of biblical condemnation in one fell swoop. By refusing to be silenced by his superiors, the distribution of his report cleared latent stigmas and made way for discourses and movements on AIDS.

Because Koop's actions took place from within a tradition that up until that point had been little more than spiteful and condemning towards the sick, his discrediting of condemnatory claims was even more significant in derailing the power of the religious rhetoric surrounding AIDS. While there are those who continue to moralize in outspoken ways on sexuality, illness and the country's demise, in the case of AIDS, popular negative discourse after 1987 has been difficult to come by.

Though facts about AIDS would have inevitably been uncovered and reported on, Koop's call to task was an outstanding element of his work. As he stated in the forward of his report, "we are fighting a disease, not people. Those who are already afflicted are sick people and need our care as do all sick patients. The country must face this epidemic as a unified society. We must prevent the spread of AIDS while at the same time preserving our humanity and intimacy."[133] This humanistic reading was in stark opposition to other fundamentalist leaders and demonstrated his individuality in the context of the larger tradition. This occurred on a personal level, for Koop was willing to break faith with those closest to him in order to protect as many lives as he could, which raised the moral bar and created a new imperative for the nation to care.

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[133] United States. Public Health Service. Office of the Surgeon General. *"Surgeon General's Report on Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome."* United States. Public Health Service. Office of the Surgeon General, [October 1986] 6. http://profiles.nlm.nih.gov/ps/access/QQBDRM.pdf

While Koop should not be cast as the sole hero of AIDS, it would be an oversight to deny his exceptional advances in the caring and construction of human life. The legacy of his action allowed significant strides to be made in regard to care for the sick, treatment of the disease and models of human rights activism.

Despite the work of Koop, ACT UP and many others that have been foundational to the significant reduction and stigma of AIDS in the United States, AIDS, in this country and around the world, is still here and will be for a very long time. While the metaphors may not be as salient, the desire to remove AIDS from sight remains. As the NRC report predicted, "HIV/AIDS will 'disappear,' not because, like smallpox it has been eliminated, but because those who continue to be affected by it are socially invisible, beyond the sight and attention of the majority population."[134]

While the urge to ignore what is distant, both in time and location, may be a necessary strategy for moving forward from traumatic eras of illness, the history of religion and AIDS in this country should make us cautious to not "other "or ascribe metaphor to those things which feel threatening and far away. Just as the compassion and radical action that Koop evoked must be remembered, the history of AIDS in this country must not be pushed out of sight, for to do so ignores a powerful teaching, and erases a legacy of pointed action that worked to undo an powerful religious legacy of bigotry and hate.

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[134] Jonson and Stryker, editors. *The Social Impact of AIDS in the United States.* 9.

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