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“GOD’S OBJECTIVE TRUTH, AS FAR AS WE KNOW IT”: JOURNALISM IDEOLOGY AT AN EVANGELICAL NEWS MAGAZINE

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For Nora, Harry, and Big Jim Colohan and his absent pennies.

To hell with the begrudgers, Jim.

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Abstract

This study mixes interviews and textual analysis to explore the ideology, motivations, routines, and content at *WORLD*, a major evangelical Christian news magazine whose editor-in-chief, Dr. Marvin Olasky, is a well-known writer and educator. In doing so, the study examines a number of issues, including journalism ideology, the beliefs and motivations of alternative journalists, and the shared beliefs of the "tribe" of American evangelicals. Much of this map of the *WORLD* ideology is defined by seven themes, among them the concept of the "forgotten man" in American thought and journalism and the need to continue to fight the "culture wars" at the center of the conservative/liberal divide in America. The *WORLD* journalists are seen as dedicated, talented and passionate writers and editors who consistently cover topics and use sources that the mainstream American press does not. At the same time, Olasky's concept of "biblical objectivity" as an alternative to mainstream journalism objectivity is found to be imprecise, without a measurable yardstick to how it is implemented. The beliefs of the *WORLD* writers dovetail almost perfectly with those of traditional evangelicals, and as a result *WORLD* emphasizes placing God before man-made institutions; the persecution of Christians by multiple groups, including liberals, Muslims and communists, both at home and across the world; the ongoing humanitarian efforts of Christians; the battle being waged against secular/liberal journalism, academia and society, which they believe is destroying America from the inside; and a focus on fighting gay rights and abortion. This first published study of a major evangelical news organization using interviews and textual analysis suggests a

number of areas for further research, including how to study writers at other religion-based news organizations and the essential differences between *WORLD* and other evangelical news sources, such as the more liberal *Sojourners* magazine. The unique and previously unavailable information in this study is especially relevant at this time in the history of American life and journalism for several reasons, including the ongoing "culture wars" and considerable impact of evangelicals in America, the deepening divide between conservatives and liberals due to beliefs on gay rights and abortion, the declining coverage of religion in the mainstream media, and the influence *WORLD* has on the evangelical Christian community.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Over the past several decades, a considerable amount of research has focused on how journalists understand and perform their work. While journalists cannot be considered an amorphous, one-size-fits-all group, there has been widespread agreement, among such scholars as Pamela J. Shoemaker, Stephen D. Reese, Todd Gitlin and Herbert J. Gans, that the motivations, habits and performances of journalists are strongly shaped by an overarching ideology that informs reporters, editors and managers in making decisions about coverage and content.

Hall (1996) describes ideology as "the mental frameworks – the languages, the concepts, categories, imagery of thought, and the system of representation – which different classes and social groups deploy in order to make sense of, define, figure out, and render intelligible the way society works" (pp. 25-26). In looking for a theory of forces shaping mass media content, Pamela Shoemaker and Stephen Reese (1996) describe a circle with a series of layers including (and listed in order of increasing importance) individual beliefs and experience; media routines; the organization a journalist functions within; extra-media forces such as technology, competitors and market forces; and, on the outside of the circle, ideology. "The ideological level differs from the previous levels in that all the processes taking place at lower levels are considered to be working toward an ideologically related pattern of messages and on behalf of the higher power centers in society" (p.223).

The guiding ideology behind mainstream news producers, they write, is to emphasize American values, which include "the belief in the values of the capitalist

economic system, private ownership, pursuit of profit by self-interested entrepreneurs, and free markets. This system is intertwined with the Protestant ethic and the value of individual achievement" (p. 224). Gitlin and Gans agree with this perspective. Gans (1979) writes that American journalists see themselves as independent and ideology-free but are, in fact, driven by a "paraideology" that puts the profession in service to America as a whole and, in particular, eight "enduring values" that include "ethnocentrism, altruistic democracy, responsible capitalism, small-town pastoralism, individualism, moderatism, social order, and national leadership" (1979, pp. 42, 68). These scholars are arguing, in effect, that American journalism is driven by ideology that is in service to a national ideology that favors American exceptionalism, democracy, capitalism and individual achievement.

Significantly, these values do not include journalists emphasizing the importance of religious freedom or worship in general or any particular religion. Nor do these scholars' works address the ideologies, motivations, and habits of journalists who write for smaller groups while functioning outside the boundaries of mainstream journalism, which can be defined as the newspapers, magazines, television programs, and web sites produced to serve mass audiences that include an array of different ethnic and religious groups.

In the past several decades, evangelical Christians have become more powerful and influential in American political and cultural life. During his campaign for president of the United States in 1976, Jimmy Carter announced that he was a "born-again Christian." This watershed moment helped usher in a new era of importance and visibility for evangelicals. During the 1976 race, a Gallup

poll found that "fully one-third of Americans claimed to be born-again evangelicals. Conservative churches were growing because they offered precisely what their members found lacking in modern society: strong faith, concrete answers to life's challenges, and tight bonds of community" (Fowler, Hertzke, Olson & Den Dulk, 2010, p. 31). Beginning in the 1970s, evangelicals – both religious leaders and followers – made a conscious commitment to become more active in political and cultural affairs, both in the United States and around the world, and there was a decided shift to conservatism and support for the Republican Party, where evangelicals "now constitute a key GOP voting block in both national and local politics. Beneath tremendous diversity in theology and religious practice lies a broad-based consensus in support of conservative politics" (p. 35).

In tandem with this rise in the importance of evangelicals in political and cultural affairs has been the rise in evangelical media, from Christian broadcasting to the number of evangelical publications, including newspapers and magazines. Evangelicals embraced the power of radio in the 1920s, television in the 1950s, and the Internet in the 1990s. There are now evangelical rock groups, web sites and blogs. There are also a large number of evangelical newspapers and magazines, which range from publications from various groups (such as the Salvation Army and Focus on the Family) to denominations in various parts of the country to subjects including education, mission work in other countries, and women's issues.

There are periodicals that range in perspective from staunchly conservative, such as *Christianity Today*, to the more liberal *Sojourners*, which

focuses on social justice issues. There are also news organizations that provide print and online editions that focus on breaking news as well as commentary on news, sports and the arts, such as the *Baptist Press*. It could be argued that the more than 220 evangelical publications cited by the Evangelical Press Association (epassoc.org) represent as wide an array of perspectives and subject matter as any other type of niche publication, if not more.

This study contributes to the understanding of news sociology and modern religious journalism by detailing the motivations, work routines, and content produced by a small group of self-consciously religion-based journalists who seek to balance their professional lives between two competing ideologies that influence journalism performance. In doing so, this study focuses on two basic questions: What does it mean to be an evangelical Christian journalist? What does it mean to balance the ability to execute news reports, features and arts and entertainment commentaries that meet the high standards of quality writing and reporting emphasized in mainstream (or, if one prefers, secular) journalism training with a deeply held belief in the importance of biblical scripture, God as mankind's savior, and the importance of proselytizing for Christianity?

This dissertation seeks to address these questions via an ethnographic case study of one evangelical Christian publication, *WORLD* magazine. Based in Asheville, North Carolina, *WORLD* is a bi-weekly publication that includes news articles, features, and commentary on world events, as well as sports and arts and entertainment news coverage and criticism. With a circulation of 85,000, *WORLD* is the sixth most popular evangelical publication in the United States, according to

Christianity.about.com. *WORLD*'s editor-in-chief is Dr. Marvin Olasky, a prominent figure in evangelical and conservative thought in the United States. Olasky is "widely regarded as the godfather of 'compassionate conservatism.'" This term was widely embraced by Republicans, particularly President George W. Bush, in the late 1990s. At that time, Olasky "emerged as one of the stars in Bush's constellation of policy wonks" (Grann, 1999, ¶ 1,4). He is also a journalism educator, having taught at, among others, both the University of Texas and Patrick Henry College, a Christian university in Purcellville, Virginia, where he is currently both a journalism professor and the Distinguished Chair for Journalism and Public Policy.

In *Telling the Truth: How to Revitalize Christian Journalism*, Olasky offers a new and distinct ideology for evangelical journalists to approach their work and how they see their mission and their relationship with both normative journalism standards and their personal beliefs about God and religion. Olasky calls this approach "biblical objectivity," and describes it as a way for Christian journalists to fight against "secular liberal culture, which is the dominant social, political and philosophical force in America today" (Olasky, 1996, p. 19). Such a God-centered, scripture-based ideology, he writes, is a "commitment to proclaiming God's objective truth as far as we know it" in every type of story, from news reports to features to arts and entertainment reporting and criticism, and its "sole ethic is to reflect biblical positions." Olasky also describes working from an evangelical perspective emphasizing biblical objectivity as the driving ideology behind the magazine itself when, in the mission statement found on the "About Us" page on *WORLD*'s web site, he writes that *WORLD* stands "for factual accuracy and biblical

objectivity, trying to see the world as best we can the way the Bible depicts it. Journalistic humility for us means trying to give God's perspective . . . We believe that our purpose is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever – and forever begins right now" (Olasky, 1996, p. 45).

According to *WORLD*'s online media guide, its readers are "proudly pro-life" and find *WORLD* a "trusted friend" that helps to answer questions of faith and society. A readership survey included in the media guide found that 83 percent considered *WORLD* their first place to go for news and information. Ninety-one percent of readers are Republican, and 17 percent are Presbyterian. Nearly one third (32 percent) are homemakers, and 75 percent donate to missions each month. The average age of readers is 50 and the average annual income is $67,600. Their reading habits include a strong inclination toward Christian reading materials, including Christian fiction (80 percent), theology (86 percent) and Christian living (83 percent). Also, the vast majority (82 percent) have traveled to do mission/ministry work in the last year, and 20 percent have done so at least four times in the past year ("Who's *WORLD*?," 2013). The magazine's main advertisers are Christian businesses and educators, including seminaries, universities, publishing houses, radio networks, and retirement communities, as well as organizations such as the Family Research Council and the Presbyterian Church in America Foundation.

In setting out his case in *Telling* and *WORLD*'s mission statement for biblical objectivity as the correct, and only, path to for Christian journalists to approach their work and the way that these journalists are able to challenge the secular

liberal perspective that he believes is damaging both American journalism and the country as a whole, Olasky clearly sets the magazine and its journalists apart. He describes them as the shining example of a publication that functions both in adherence to the most important concepts and standards of mainstream journalism, and in direct opposition to an ideology that serves, first and foremost, such facets of American culture as capitalism and individualism. In doing so, he suggests a new, and distinct, ideology for how Christian journalists should conceive of and produce their work.

Both immediately after *Telling the Truth* was released in 1996, and in subsequent years, Olasky's biblical objectivity ideology has been controversial in both academic and mainstream journalism circles, and has met with both praise and derision. Important books on religion coverage in American media, such as Stewart M. Hoover's *Religion in the News* and Mark Silk's *Unsecular Media*, note the importance and controversial nature of Olasky's viewpoints. Hoover (1998) describes Olasky as "one of the most vocal critics of journalism's treatment of religion" and his call for "a separate, *religion-centered* coverage" of religion news as "radical" (pp. 62-63, italics in original). Silk (1995) writes that Olasky is "perhaps the most acute evangelical Christian observer of religion and the news media." "For him, the important question has to do not with how the news media deal with religion per se but with what kind of interpretive perspective they bring to the world at large" (pp. 143-144). Schultze (2003) praises the biblical objectivity concept, arguing that it is the exact opposite of, and perhaps an antidote to, the lack of understanding most mainstream news reporters have about religion, and

the way they "favor news that is reported without any accompanying personal or institutional perspective" (pp. 276-277). Four years later, *The New York Review of Magazines* called *WORLD* "the newsweekly of evangelical America . . . for *WORLD* and its readers, God is the ultimate unimpeachable source" (Hendler, 2007, ¶ 1, 14).

Among Olasky's detractors are *Christianity Today* senior writer Tim Stafford and Christian journalism professor and syndicated columnist Terry Mattingly. Mattingly, who has long urged more training for mainstream reporters covering religion, dismisses Olasky as "biased" and *WORLD* as falling short of important standards for fairness while committing journalistic "heresy" (1997, ¶ 1,4). In a *Christianity Today* review of *Telling the Truth*, Stafford compared biblical objectivity to what he said is an old journalism saying: "I already have the story; I just need some quotes." "If you already know what you will write before you begin, you are not really reporting. You are just ornamenting your view with quotation. Olasky seems mainly oblivious to this problem, even though he has critiqued it when the reporter's commitment is pro-abortion." He also describes Olasky's approach as "arrogant," adding that "Arrogance does not produce good journalism, even though it may cheer on our own camp" (Stafford, 1996, ¶ 16, 21).

This dissertation's emphasis will be on how *WORLD* journalists not only describe and perform their work from the perspective of evangelical Christian journalists in general, but also how they produce stories and *WORLD* as a whole within the ideological prism of Olasky's concept of biblical objectivity and emphasizing Christian values and beliefs, and how doing so is in conflict with what

he calls the "secular liberals" who set mainstream journalism norms and practices. For example, in *Telling the Truth* he contrasts what he says is the usual path of secular journalists covering racial issues – and the evangelicals who all too often imitate them – by focusing on liberal leaders or, as he puts it, interviewing the "Jesse Jacksons" who are often assumed to speak for the majority of black Americans. *WORLD*, he writes, took a "more adventurous path" in 1994 by emphasizing the growing numbers and strength of black conservative/evangelical politicians such as Houston politician Beverly Clark, including her view that liberal beliefs had been detrimental to black Americans (Olasky, 1996, pp. 39-40).

Similarly, when examining welfare-reform legislation in 1994 and 1995, *WORLD*'s reporting offered both information about the government's proposals and debates and a "biblical alternative to secular liberal programming," including an evangelical mission in Dallas, Texas, that "emphasizes the Bible and parental involvement" featuring religious instruction and early job training. Subsequent stories in the magazine emphasized the difference between a "culture of irresponsibility" and government handouts found in many black neighborhoods with evangelical Christians trying to offer young black people an "opportunity culture" based on hard work, traditional values and religious education. This Bible-based approach to reporting on important social issues through an evangelical, God-based prism, Olasky writes, "was part of the overall goal of showing, through solidly analytical reporting, the vitality of biblical principles, the usefulness of a biblical worldview, and the emptiness of the current dominant culture, which is secular liberalism" (Olasky, 1996, pp. 43-44). This study's literature review will go

into much greater detail about Olasky's biblical objectivity concept and how he believes evangelical journalists should write and report.

Olasky and a number of *WORLD* editors, senior writers and reporters discussed their work and careers via one-on-one in-person interviews at the *WORLD* office in North Carolina. In addition, these journalists discussed how balancing normative journalism standards and their religious beliefs, as well as the application of biblical objectivity, affected how individual stories and how various issues and topics were selected and approached in the magazine. Olasky is asking *WORLD* journalists to produce news and commentary while adhering to a high application of the qualities that describe excellent mainstream journalism, such as smart, interesting writing, vigorous reporting and, if need be, investigative work, and to challenge mainstream journalism assumptions about objectivity and fairness by doing their work based on an ideology that calls for a new and wholly distinct standard of purpose, excellence, accuracy, and accountability.

Journalism Ideology and Objectivity

This study is based on accepting that the journalists at *WORLD* are a unique social group but also part of the larger population of evangelical Christian Americans, and do their work based on a mental framework that amounts to an ideology balancing ingrained journalism standards and personal religious beliefs in accordance with the teachings of evangelical Christianity, and which emphasizes "biblical objectivity" as an attempt to ascertain what Olasky, as noted earlier, calls "God's perspective" on news events and issues.

Therefore, this study's guiding perspective is that American journalism's ideology is the most important aspect of how its members operate, interact, and ultimately produce content. As noted above, Shoemaker and Reese, Gitlin and Gans are among the many communication scholars that agree with this perspective and have written extensively on newsroom sociology based on the belief that mainstream American journalism ideology is in service to an American culture that emphasizes the importance of democracy, capitalism, and individual achievement, but which does not emphasize the importance of religious freedom and is not in service to any one religious group or set of beliefs.

Gitlin (1980) describes how mainstream newspapers, magazines and television stations promote American values by inclusion and exclusion of different facts and perspectives. The driving force of this work, and of mainstream American journalism in general, is based on a pervasive "hegemonic ideology" (p. 10) that promotes the country's "liberal capitalist society" (p. 11) and elites in business and government, while castigating and disparaging dissenting views, such as members of the New Left who promoted social change and civil rights while condemning the Vietnam War. These values are embedded, he writes, in mainstream journalists' training and daily work routines, including selecting news stories and which members to rely on for information, describing events and issues, and so on.

Journalism, writes Deuze (2005), is built on an "occupational ideology" that hinges on how journalists "give meaning to their newswork" in which journalists all around the world "invoke more or less the same ideal-typical value system

when discussing and reflecting on their work." Deuze identifies five, including "objectivity: journalists are impartial, neutral, objective, fair and (thus) credible" (pp. 444, 446-447). As Durham (1998) writes, "the goal of objectivity has long been valorized in the American journalistic tradition" which has been an "institutionalized hallmark of reportorial excellence" (1998, p. 117). "Objectivity," according to Schudson, (1990) has been recognized as "an ideal counter to reality of reporter's own subjectivity" (p. 268). Objectivity, writes Gans (1979), is how journalists mark themselves out as separate from the rest of the public and seek to gain control over their work. "Journalists justify their right to individual autonomy by the pursuit of objectivity and detachment; in a way, they strike an implied bargain, which allows them autonomy in choosing the news in exchange for leaving out their personal values" (p. 183).

Method

This is a qualitative study based on in-depth interviews and ethnographic content analysis. In this case, the interviews were with journalists at *WORLD* magazine, mainly at the magazine's headquarters in Asheville, North Carolina, and the documents analyzed included stories published at *WORLD*, as well as the magazine's mission statement and style and policy manual. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) write that "qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. They seek answers to how social experience is created and given meaning" (p. 8). In this case, the researcher will

seek to understand and convey how the beliefs that *WORLD* journalists have about how their ideology shapes their work and the magazine as a whole.

To paraphrase Denzin and Lincoln (2000), by doing their work based on these beliefs, they are informing their audience about the social world in a particular way that challenges mainstream American journalism ideology, including the overarching belief in the rightness of a society that stresses, as noted above, capitalism and individual profit and achievement, and emphasizes the rightness of one particular set of religious beliefs (evangelical Christianity and God's ability to heal) and, to use Olasky's terminology, the destructive nature of "secular liberal culture" (Olasky, 1996, p. 45).

Significance

As noted above, this ethnographic case study will provide previously unavailable information about a group of specialized, religion-based journalists' routines and beliefs, and how they apply them to produce an important news magazine. This study is based on the concept, as promoted by Shoemaker and Reese in *Mediating the Message: Theories of Influences on Mass Media Content*, as well as other communications scholars, including Gitlin and Gans, that the ideology of a particular news organization is the most important factor in how its employees understand and perform their work. Moreover, this study is being done at a time when a considerable shift is occurring in how, and by who, news about religion or with a significant religious component is being reported in the United States. These topics will be briefly discussed below.

Newsroom Sociology

The study of newsroom sociology has added significant understanding to how journalists understand and perform their work, its effect on media content, and the effect this content has on audiences. "Media transmission of ideology," write Shoemaker and Reese, "works as it does by drawing on familiar cultural themes that resonate with audiences. These themes, however, are selectively chosen and constructed into a coherent structure" (1996, p. 222). However, as noted above, Shoemaker and Reese's study of media influences, as well as other seminal texts on media sociology and ideology, such as Gitlin's *The Whole World Is Watching,* and Herbert J. Gans's *Deciding What's News: A Study of CBS News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek and Time* only focus on mainstream news organizations, including newspapers, magazines and television stations, to draw their conclusions about the intersection of beliefs, routines, and content.

There have not, to date, been any similar studies on the ideology, routines, and content at religion-based news organizations, much less one that is staffed completely by evangelical Christians. Part of the value of this study, then, is that it compares the assumptions of the confluence of newsroom and national ideology as outlined by Shoemaker and Reese, Gans and Gitlin, with a news organization composed of journalists who are clearly functioning outside of the boundaries of mainstream journalism norms, including the concept of objectivity and keeping one's personal beliefs separate from their work.

Ethnographic Studies

In his seminal work *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Clifford Geertz noted that the purpose of an "ethnographic account" is to "capture primitive facts in faraway places" and "clarify what goes on in such places, to reduce the puzzlement – what manner of men are these? – to which unfamiliar acts emerging out of unknown backgrounds naturally give rise" (p.16). In essence, ethnographic description has three characteristics: "it is interpretive; what it is interpretive of is the flow of social discourse; and the interpreting involves consists in trying to rescue the 'said' of such discourse from it perishing occasions and fix it in perusable terms" (p. 20).

This is exactly what ethnographers studying different news organizations have been doing as a way of understanding the concepts and routines that journalists employ to produce content. This researcher agrees with news ethnographer Chris Paterson who, in noting the increasing number of ethnographic studies of online journalists, writes that "It is our guiding premise that only ethnographic methodologies derived from anthropological and sociological traditions can come close to providing an adequate description of the culture and practice of media production, and the mindset of media producers" (2008, p. 2).

In addition to the increasing number of ethnographies of new/online media news organizations and their employees, there have been a significant number of journalism ethnographies in the past two decades, including analysis of a German television station (Silcock, 2002); a mainstream newspaper led by women (Everbach, 2006); a newspaper going through management transition (Ryfe,

2009); and an alternative newspaper in a large American city (Hindman, 1998). All of these studies, however, examined journalists at mainstream news organizations or, in the case of the Hillman study, a newspaper that was defined by its geographic location, and not the religious beliefs of its employees. In addition, Schmalzbauer's 1999 study of evangelical and Catholic reporters only included interviews with journalists who worked at mainstream newspapers, magazines and television stations and thus had significant constraints on how and in what way they could use their personal beliefs in their work.

To date there have been no studies that focus on the topic proposed in the current study: to use ethnographic research to describe the beliefs, routines and content of a religion-based, evangelical Christian publication whose overriding ideology includes promoting evangelical values and beliefs while explicitly challenging the norms of mainstream news organizations and, according to Olasky, their destructive effect on American society. For reasons that are explained in the Method chapter, the current study does not include substantial observation, unlike most ethnographic studies. Nonetheless, this study does contribute insight about the concepts and routines of the journalists at this evangelical publication.

Time Period

Two factors concerning the current era of American journalism contribute to the value of this study. Taken together, they strongly suggest that more people are relying on niche publications such as *WORLD* for information on hard news both in America and around the world, as well as lifestyle features, sports, arts and entertainment, and commentary and criticism.

The first is that, increasingly, mainstream American journalism is devoting far less energy to writing about religion and topics that are related to religious beliefs at the same time that these factors are becoming increasingly important in politics and social concerns around the world. Shah and Toft (2009) write that "Whether in the form of Islamic radicalism, evangelical Protestants, Hindu nationalism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Buddhist revivalism, or Jewish Zionism, religion is increasingly vibrant, assertive, and politicized the world over"(p. 14). This is certainly true of evangelical Christian Americans who, since the 1990s, "have become the most pro-Republican of all the major religious traditions and are considered the base or core of one of the contemporary party in elections" (Wald & Calhoun-Brown, 2011, p. 222).

As noted by several authors in 2009's *Blind Spot: When Journalists Don't Get Religion*, mainstream journalists have traditionally had a poor understanding of Americans' religious beliefs, and how those beliefs affect important decisions, including how people vote and politicians deal with crisis and set public policy. But in recent years this industry-wide lack of understanding as a reason for poor mainstream journalism religion coverage has been made worse by the financial problems faced by mainstream news organizations. The severe downturns in advertising and readership have led to, at many news organizations, the elimination of the religion beat. Paulson (2009) wrote that "the religion beat is, itself, suffering a serious reversal of fortune," and cited the *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Orlando Sentinel*, *Palm Beach Post*, *Chicago Sun-Times* and *Newsday* as examples of major American newspapers that had eliminated the religion beat (¶ 1,3-4). As a

result, even people who want to read about religion and its influence in anything from their locality to state legislation to national politics to world events are finding it increasingly hard to do so.

The second factor is that there remains in the minds of many Americans a feeling that the ideas raised and problems identified concerning American society via the "culture wars" that began in the 1960s remain extremely important. Mouw and Sobel (2001) describe the culture wars as "conflicts over issues that are rooted in nonnegotiable conceptions of cultural and moral order" that "stem from a breakdown of the old denominational religious loyalties in America, with the traditional denominations splitting along a crosscutting conservative/liberal or orthodox/progressive divide that threatens the normative consensus" (p. 915). The result is extreme polarization of opinion on moral values, politics, and such consistently hot-button topics as homosexuality and abortion. "Instead of a substantial number of moderates who can work toward compromise, the spectrum of opinion is increasingly polarized into irreconcilable viewpoints" (p. 916).

If there is anything that Olasky believes in, it is the culture wars and the destructive influence and power of secular/liberal thought and cultural elites, and *WORLD*'s place in those wars as defenders of morality and preaching the importance of God's word. Christians, he writes in *Telling the Truth*, are now, as they have been in the past, "under attack" by Americans who believe in moral relativism and liberal theology, a situation made worse by what he calls a lack of quality of Christian publications. It's only through by both improving the writing and reporting of Christian journalism, and applying a "Christian worldview" to all

that they do, that the tide can turned. The Christian journalist's first priority, he writes, is "the containment of evil" found in the "aggressiveness" of secular society and journalism (Olasky, 1996, p. 21).

As a result, studying *WORLD* and its journalists at present presents a unique chance to show how evangelical Christians are performing at a time when more and more people are turning away from American mainstream media in a society that remains deeply divided into big-tent groups defined by liberal and conservative viewpoints. This strong moral obligation and sense of urgency mark Olasky's writings on the need for improved Christian journalism, just as many conservative Christian politicians and commentators have rallied to fight what they see as essentially the same society-wide problems engulfing the country. This study, then, can serve as a conduit to helping journalism scholars understand the beliefs and motivations of a small group of journalists who not only wish to spread the word of God via their writing and reporting, but who also, in Olasky's conception of *WORLD*'s mission, have a moral obligation to literally save America from itself – at a time when a large number of increasingly politicized Americans also feel that the country has lost its way.

Conclusion

Journalism sociology and the ideology at work in mainstream news organizations have long been the subjects of communication research. This dissertation will build on this research while adding a new aspect to the existing literature on these subjects by using ethnographic methods to investigate how a group of evangelical journalists at *WORLD* magazine balance normative journalism

standards with their personal religious beliefs, including Olasky's "biblical objectivity" concept. This introduction has included information about Olasky's biblical objectivity concept, mainstream news ideology, and the methods, overriding research topics, and significance of this study. Chapter Two is a literature review that will include information on journalism ideology, the history of evangelical journalism in the United States, and coverage of religion by mainstream news organizations, as well as the research questions this study seeks to answer.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter provides information on a number of topics vital to this dissertation, including the history of American evangelical journalism; mass media ideology and its relationship to mass media journalism practices and objectivity; Marvin Olasky's concept of biblical objectivity as the overarching ideology for evangelical journalism in general and *WORLD* magazine's method of reporting and writing in particular; the often uneasy relationship between mainstream American journalism and religion and religious groups; and a brief overview of books and articles that examine religion and the media, including evangelical media. The chapter concludes with the research questions that will guide this study.

Puritan and Evangelical Journalism in the United States

Olasky situates his argument for biblical objectivity in today's evangelical Christian news journalism as the current manifestation of the history of Christians, journalists and non-journalists alike, challenging powerful officials, from biblical times to the Europe of the 1500s to colonial and modern America. As a result, it is important to situate his arguments about American journalism as part of a historical narrative that focuses much of its attention on development of Puritan/evangelical journalism as a mainstream, and then solidly non-mainstream, force that has, along with evangelicals in general, often challenged mainstream journalism and mainstream American ideology. This has happened at the same time that mainstream journalists have largely failed to understand, and report on, the importance of religion in the lives of Americans and people around the world, including politicians and policy-makers. This section, as a result, will be presented

in large part as a historical narrative in which Olasky's writings about religious journalism and evangelicals are connected to the work of other scholars who have looked at these same topics.

Telling the Truth, Olasky's treatise on how to improve evangelical American journalism, can perhaps be best described as two books in one. Parts of the book are a basic journalism primer that appear to be aimed at fledgling reporters and people with little journalism experience that would like to start an evangelical publication, in that they are concerned with and explain a number of rudimentary aspects of sound writing and reporting. These include assembling articles that are "factually accurate and based on solid research" that have "an emphasis on showing rather than telling." Again and again, Olasky emphasizes finding telling details; writing compelling leads and robust narratives; going out into the field to observe rather than staying at one's office desk; making thorough notes; and planning for an upcoming interview by developing a "particular line of questioning, depending on the intent of the article and should also ask some general questions that allow the interviewee to open up entirely new areas of which you may be unaware" (Olasky, 1996, pp. 32, 73).

All of these suggested methods for performing solid journalism are in service, however, to an evangelical journalism that, while challenging what he regards as the destructive forces of secular liberalism, should embolden evangelical reporters to performing journalism that also goes against the grain of most modern evangelical publications. These publications, in Olasky's opinion, lack detail, are too "lukewarm" or "fluffy," too closely resemble their secular

counterparts, and are unwilling to print news that may cast evangelicals in a less-than-favorable light. Christians "under attack" from those who favor liberal political policies, abortion, homosexuality, and other evils of modern American life have been "put to shame" by the quality of secular niche publications, many of which advance "slimy" morality. As an example, Olasky contrasts the "Bible-believing *Texas Messenger* and the Scripture-spurning *Texas Triangle*, a homosexual monthly." The weakness in design and content of the *Messenger*, as compared to the *Triangle*, is in his opinion proof positive that "in city after city throughout America, publications that exhibit moral depravity often show technical superiority" (Olasky, 1996, pp. xi-xiii).

The larger point that Olasky is making is that weak Christian publications will not effectively help Christian Americans fight against America's continued decline, which will again put Christians and the country as a whole at severe risk. However, the basis of this problem – Christians defending themselves from powerful non-believers, who seek to destroy them and society at large – did not start with lackluster modern Christian publications, or the culture wars of the 1960s and 1970s, or even in America. Here is where the second major theme of *Telling the Truth*, and Olasky's overarching mission to fight against the powers that be in modern American culture, emerges: Olasky spends much of the book (four of its 14 chapters) on the history of Christian journalism and how it differs from American secular journalism. This historic "great cloud of journalistic witnesses," he writes, formed the basis for today's Bible-based journalism, often sacrificing much to do so. In writing about these journalists, Olasky seeks to put the modern

problems and issues facing Christian journalists into historical perspective. As a result, it is important to briefly explore the history of evangelical Christian journalism, its impact on Christian America, the way that the 1925 Scopes trial became the great dividing line between evangelicals and mainstream/secular news organizations, and the rise of modern evangelical Christian media and cultural artifacts (Olasky, 1996, p. 49).

In calling for improved, and aggressive, modern evangelical Christian journalism, Olasky proudly describes himself and his mission as a throwback to everyone from Martin Luther to England's John Foxe to early Christian pamphleteers such as John Stubbes to American Puritan Increase Mather. All of these men, he writes, fought to tell the truth and for Christian beliefs, a battle which, of course, he believes still goes on in American life and culture. But Olasky goes back much further, positing the idea that, in a sense, Jesus Christ was the first evangelical Christian journalist, given that his "emphasis on trusting the Father in heaven contrasted so sharply with Rome's *official story* of governmental power and wisdom." He contrasts the power of the Roman Catholic Church and the rulers of England with those who suffered for non-authorized printing and challenging the status quo, writing that Martin Luther, both in his famous theses and subsequent writings, like other members of the Reformation, "emphasized the importance of Bible-reading; Christians were to find out for themselves what God was saying" and not rely on official word from Rome or the king. Luther emphasized strong reportorial detail, Olasky writes, going to slaughterhouses and

talking to butchers to "describe Old Testament sacrifices" (Olasky, 1996, pp. 49, 51, 53, 56, 103, italics in original).

During the 1500s, Olasky writes, there were printed reports of the executions of such anti-establishment Protestants as John Hooper that "attacked the Queen and praised the heroism of the martyrs." John Foxe's account of Hooper's death, he writes, was an excellent example of strong reporting and accuracy. In the colonial America of the 1600s, in such states as Maryland and Virginia, critics of government policies were also punished; however, some Puritans "did encourage the reporting of bad news that tended to be swept under the rug in most other places . . . Puritan theology not only allowed but emphasized the reporting of bad news, for the coming of well-deserved calamities was a sign that God still reigned." Puritan preacher and journalist Increase Mather, and others, did solid reporting that emphasized God's power over man, and described such events as earthquakes as signs that God was displeased with man's sinfulness. By the mid-1700s, colonial newspapers were largely free of government interference. Samuel Adams, Olasky adds, can also be seen as a precursor to the type of journalism he hopes that modern evangelical Christian journalists can do, in that he did investigative work and challenged government authority while using "Bible-based theories" in his work (Olasky, 1996, pp. 53-54, 103, 117).

Olasky's views on the importance and growth of Puritan journalists in the colonies in the 1600s and 1700s, and their reliance on Bible-based interpretation of issues and events, jibes with several journalism or evangelical Christian historians. Nord (1990) writes that news reporting in early colonial journalism

was "shaped by the belief that everything happened according to God's perfect plan. News was, in a word, teleological. The teleological order was not only divine but also patterned, recurrent, meaningful, and intelligible" (p. 10). Schultze writes that Olasky's viewpoints on the mixture of faith and reporting, as well as his biblical objectivity ideology, harken back to the idea that "news needs an overarching perspective, such as Christianity's worldview." Schultze traces this concept back to St. Augustine's idea that "true knowledge always stems from the fear of God," but also the early days of colonial American journalism (2003, p. 277). "Many seventeenth-century colonial newspapers viewed religion as a vital part of colonial life. These papers framed public life in the most commonly shared language of the time – the language of the Protestant faith. They saw providence as the center from which all events derived their cosmic meaning and historical interpretation" (p. 269). In this era, colonial newspapers were largely based on religious beliefs and produced by religious leaders, men who "interpreted public events within the context of a divine order, the Christian metanarrative, which saw daily events within the larger pattern of God's word in history" (p. 268).

Also in the 1700s, Puritanism gave way to evangelicalism, a movement that Noll (2002) describes as part of the growing diversity of religions in America. Evangelicalism "was a movement away from formal, outward, and established religion to personal, inward and heartfelt religion. In the American colonies, the coming of evangelicalism sparked a religious revival" personified by George Whitefield, who preached both in England and America. The "Great Awakening" of evangelism in England and America "marked the passing of Puritanism and the

rise of evangelicalism as the dominant Protestant expression in America. In this new form, loyalty to a particular church was less important than a vibrant religion of the heart" (pp. 51-53).

The early 1800s saw a sharp rise in secular and religious media in the United States, Schultze writes, particularly periodicals, which "provided the means for Christian institutions and movements to combat secular news interpretations by cultivating their own journalistic hermeneutics across geographic space. In fact, religious periodicals represented the first important centrifugal movement of news across the inchoate nation" (2003, p. 271). Much of this rise in religious journalism was in Bible and tract societies, which flourished in the first three decades of the 1800s. By 1820, writes Nord, these societies "would emerge as leaders in both printing technology and the organization of national distribution networks" (2000, pp. 69-70). Men whose religious works spread across the country, such as Elias Boudinot and the Rev. Jedidiah Morse, married a new ability to distribute their works across large distances with traditional values, which produced "what might be called the industrialization of evangelism in America" (p. 71).

By the early 1820s, millions of tracts were distributed nationally each year; the New York-based American Tract Society was an early adopter of "stereotyping," which allowed full plates of type to be used in various places, instead of just one location (Schultze, 2003, p. 75). This and other innovations meant that tracts and Bibles could be quickly and efficiently printed and distributed. These societies combined forces, with the result that millions of tracts,

Bibles and almanacs were printed and distributed annually by the end of the 1820s (p. 81). "By the mid-1830s, the increasingly eclectic world of religious publishing probably represented the major competition with mainstream newspapers as a means for citizens to learn about the affairs of the nation beyond their own towns and cities . . . Religious and religion news competed locally and, increasingly, nationally" (p. 272).

Olasky praises religious journalists of this era, men such as Nathaniel Willis, for using theology and Christian beliefs as the map for examining issues and news events while following what he calls the "ACES of journalism: Accuracy, Clarity, Specificity, and Exposure" (Olasky, 1996). Editors such as George Wisner of the *New York Sun* were "following the Reformed view that the heavens display the glory of God and the streets show the sinfulness of man." But by the 1840s, he writes, more liberal religious leaders "began to proclaim that man was not inherently sinful, and that if mans' environment were changed, man himself could become perfect." A major change in mainstream American journalism occurred, Olasky writes, when "utopian socialist" Albert Brisbane selected Horace Greeley to advance his ideas. This partnership, in Olasky's opinion, led to a major, and destructive, schism that forever divided secular and religious American journalism (Olasky, 1996, pp. 161-164).

Olasky writes that Greeley was a talented (if "looney") journalist, but his destructive ideas about the nature of man, which he espoused in a series of debates with Henry Raymond, led to an eroding of the overriding, religious-based narrative in popular American journalism. Thanks to Greeley's power and

influence, evangelical Christian beliefs and Bible-based reporting would lose most, if not all, of their influence at mainstream American newspapers. "The Bible did not remain dominant in American journalism. Instead of seeing sinful man and a society reflecting that sinfulness, Horace Greeley and his followers believed that man, naturally good, was enslaved by oppressive social systems" (Olasky, 1996, pp. 165-171).

This, in turn, ushered in what Olasky believes is the modern era of American journalism, when secular journalism works hand in glove with secular liberalism, "when leading American journalists forgot what their predecessors had learned about man and God, and began to contend that man could be God." Men such as Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst had the power and influence to advance a "message of hope through science and material progress, evenly distributed by benign government agents." Olasky also criticizes muckrakers Lincoln Steffens and *The Jungle* author Upton Sinclair for embracing socialism and, in the latter's case, "declaring that Jesus had been an anarchist and agitator whose visions of violent upheaval was covered up by church institutions" (Olasky, 1996, pp. 209-221).

If most mainstream American journalists, such as Walter Lippmann, were not Communists, Olasky writes, they were "content to follow Greeley's concept of locating social problems in the environment rather than in humanity itself." As a result of the influence of these journalists, newspapermen of this era simply wrote God's providence and power out of the equation of how to live one's life and why society was suffering various problems, believing, instead, that "individuals were

unimportant; the system was all; progress meant changing the system." From the 1920s on, then, mainstream journalists have advanced the idea that man, not God, is the ultimate authority over what happens both in America and around the world, portraying man "as possessing unlimited potential that a strong and benevolent state could help to liberate, if only journalistic influence were brought to bear on the side of perceived righteousness" (Olasky, 1996, pp. 221, 240).

Schultze, too, sees this era as when the religious press in America became far less powerful. Before then, "the religious press was phenomenally popular and influential in America, acting as a countervailing cultural force to the news media in the inchoate nation; many religious periodicals even viewed themselves as competing new media" (2003, p. 96). By around 1900, and well into the 20th century, Silk writes, religion coverage in mainstream newspapers became a "journalistic commodity like book and car news . . . coverage of religion became increasingly bland and promotional" (1995, p. 25). While Olasky bemoans the declining belief in the importance of God and scripture in mainstream newspapers, authors like Schultze and Silk note that the era also saw the sharp decline of niche religious publications. Mainstream newspapers "became the major means for the average American to orient himself or herself to the growing national culture and to the increasingly heterogeneous local community," (Schultze, 2003, p. 94) and people fled religious publications in droves, so much so that between 1931 and 1961 the number of Protestant journals and magazines in America declined from 542 to 75 (p. 96).

But it was the Scopes trial in the summer of 1925 that, Olasky writes, forever drove a wedge between evangelicals and the mass media as defined by major mainstream, secular, urban American newspapers such as the *New York Times, Chicago Tribune*, and *Los Angeles Times*. Rather than write fairly and accurately about the trial and its underlying issues – creationism versus evolution, or as he puts it, "God's grace or man's evolution" – the mainstream reporting corps couched the trial, and the story, as "pro-evolution intelligence vs. anti-evolution stupidity" (Olasky, 2000, pp. 218-219). Mainstream journalists such as H. L. Mencken, W. O. McGeehan and Bugsy Baer condescendingly described the locals as stupid and ugly, the pro-creation arguments as ridiculous, and the site of the trial, Dayton, Tennessee, as a horrific backwater. Olasky's larger point is that the mainstream reporters arrived in Dayton with their heads filled with "presuppositions" that were anti-rural, anti-religion, and anti-God, and wrote their stories accordingly, no matter what actually occurred during the trial (p. 223). The "infrastructure" of beliefs about the lack of importance of God found at these popular secular news organizations displayed just how anti-religion the mainstream media had become since the late 1800s and early 1900s, and how little respect the media had for conservative Christians who believed in God's grace and power over the affairs of man (p. 228).

Hendershot (2004) writes that the effect of the mainstream media's Scopes trial coverage on American evangelicals was profound in how it changed evangelicals' "engagement with the modern world." The portrayal of "conservative Christians (and Southerners)" as "stupid, irrational, and backward" led

fundamentalists to "withdraw from the wider culture in the 1930s, yet their culture nonetheless continued to thrive." If they were on their own and would never receive respect from the mainstream media, the thinking was, they would simply forge ahead and work harder to build their own cultural and media networks of "Bible schools, radio programs, churches, and publishers" (pp. 25-26). Waters (2001) writes that a loose network of conservative Christian publications "knit together the so-called fundamentalist believers," which became the Evangelical Press Association in 1949, seven years after the establishment of the National Association of Evangelicals. This group "gave a united voice to an informal association of socially and religiously conservative believers" (p. 309).

At the same time, evangelists would, throughout the first several decades of the 20th century, embrace both radio and television as a way to spread their message. "Twentieth century evangelical Protestants were unequivocally the major advocates of religious uses of the mass media, particularly of evangelical efforts to convert the unsaved . . . Evangelicals championed the broadcast media, believing once again that God ordained the new technology for the salvation of the world" (Schultze, 2003, p. 62). This belief, he writes, is part of the "rhetoric of conversion" that lies at the core of evangelical thought: those embracing radio and, later, television, believed new media forms "were a necessary and foreordained part of God's historical plan. Either broadcasting glorified God, which usually meant it proclaimed the Gospel, or it was being used to advance the kingdom of darkness, which typically implied it was promoting cultural worldliness" (p. 63). Evangelical radio accomplished several things: recruitment, battling against an

onslaught of secular media (from films to comic books), and fighting stereotypes about themselves and their beliefs (pp. 143-144). In the 1950s, evangelicals used the burgeoning television market the same way, with a variety of programs and networks that brought the message to American living rooms.

At the same time, Schultze writes, "the most significant religious media in the United States during the twentieth century" were the "monthly or biweekly journals of comment and opinion," publications such as *Christian Century* that have extended ideas about "news in the context of divine providence" that began in American journalism in the 1600s. These journals both "help the tribe recognize what it believes as well as confirm those foundational beliefs in the midst of a wider culture that might dismiss such beliefs or even attack them." In doing so, they "apply their own faith traditions to an ongoing critique of the life of the church and the wider society" by offering "moral discourses, not telegraphic reports" (2003, p. 99). These publications underscore what he describes as the "tribal" aspect of a religious group – a collection of like-minded people who function both inside and solidly outside the wider, secular society, with which they are sometimes, or often, at odds. Because mainstream America – and the mainstream American press – has long shown ignorance of and/or antipathy toward evangelicals and their beliefs, these publications were vital in helping evangelicals discuss and define their place in the larger American culture by showing how the present is informed by both history and the "wisdom of the ages" of Christian belief. These journals served as a "means for a community of faith to locate itself in the wider world as well as within the particular community of faith .

. . In the United States the religious press has been one of the most important vehicles for bringing people of faith into a shared public space to converse about the broader society" (pp. 99-100).

Nowhere has this been more apparent than in the founding of *Christianity Today* by the Rev. Billy Graham in 1956, and the publication's subsequent importance as the leading printed voice in advancing evangelical beliefs. "In a priestly sense the publication hoped to speak for evangelicalism, while in a prophetic sense it sought to evaluate and critique the wider culture and society from a biblical perspective" (Schultze, 2003, p. 125). The magazine's strength was in its ability to "generate serious discussions about the intersection of evangelical Christianity with American culture" (p. 126). The magazine greatly encouraged evangelicals to dive into television broadcasting and to embrace different forms of technology as a way to spread evangelical messages. Many of *Christianity Today*'s articles were devoted to "fairly simple and straightforward theories and techniques for evangelizing the nation . . . the periodical seemed to be enamored with the conversionary rhetoric of the mythos of the electronic church" (p. 128).

To a great extent, according to Alsdurf, the magazine both informed the tribe and popularized evangelical thought in the United States, serving to facilitate a "transformation of a social movement from the oppositional position outside mainstream culture toward a position within it . . . The adaptation of evangelicals to cultural trends show the importance of interpreting evangelicalism as an integral part of the modernization process rather than merely a reaction to it" (2010, p. 23). Graham and other men tied to the magazine provided leadership to

various evangelical media organizations, such as the Evangelical Press Association, while also "leading evangelical colleges and seminaries, various parachurch organizations, and numerous international conferences of evangelism," thereby shaping and defining "the modern evangelical movement during its critical formative years" (p. 24).

That movement, she writes, moved away from reactionary "militant fundamentalism" (p. 27) and toward setting a political and cultural agenda for a more inclusive, friendly and affirming type of evangelism while continuing to fight the influence of liberalism. In the end, the magazine's journalistic and ideological impact was that it has been widely accepted as articulating what it means to be an evangelical American Christian. This was done by, first, giving a sense of the enemies that could unite evangelicals and fundamentalists (p. 39) and, second, creating an "evangelical mindset" by "defining for both evangelicals and the wider culture, the system of ideas about what it meant to be an evangelical; the magazine provided an important forum for evangelical agenda-setters and the large but untapped evangelical audience they represented" and helping Christians "better understand what it meant to be an evangelical and the place of evangelicals n society" (p. 40).

The resurgence of evangelicals in the United States in the 1960s came at the same time that the overall influence of religion in the United States on political and cultural affairs was seen as less than ever before, and declining. The April 8, 1966 *Time* magazine cover headline, "Is God Dead?," was emblematic of an era when "every major religion on every continent seemed to be rapidly losing its influence

on politics, economics and culture . . . Surging forward with seemingly unstoppable historical momentum were instead ideologies and doctrines that sought to replace religion as the source of people's loyalties" (Toft, Philpott & Shah, 2011, p. 1).

Conservative Christians, alarmed by what they saw as less emphasis on religion and traditional values and ideals, as well as America's descent into immorality, pushed back with renewed fervor; this conflict over the direction of America's culture and morals has often been described as the "culture wars," which Fowler, Hertzke, Olson and Den Dulk describe as of the major theories that help describe the overarching picture of the "relationships among religion, politics and culture." The culture wars thesis "asserts that the contours of religion and politics in American today are best understood by recognizing the existence of deep social divisions over values and lifestyles" and divides Americans into two large groups, "conservatives and progressives." The former "adhere to and emphasize traditional values: religion, marriage and family discipline, and opposition to abortion and homosexuality" (2010, p. 319).

This study is not the place for a detailed look at the culture wars, or all the strides that evangelicals made to assert themselves in America's political and cultural marketplace since the 1960s. But suffice to say that evangelicals reasserted themselves in a number of ways to expand their numbers and influence. Graham's rallies during this period led to the growth of missionary work by young evangelicals around the world (Diamond, 1998, p. 60). At the same time, youth ministries such as Campus Crusade for Christ formed and began targeting young Americans. "Young 'Jesus freaks' started a string of coffeehouses and communal

homes" and sponsored multi-day festivals of preaching and music. There was a rise in Christian publishing, and more emphasis on evangelicals entering politics. "After the cultural upheaval of the 1960s, the Vietnam War, and Watergate, millions of Americans were finding inspiration in the certainties of old-time faith," and throughout the 1970s and 1980s, more and more people began to self-identify as evangelicals in national surveys (pp. 62-63).

Evangelical Christians were not, of course, the only people aware of, interested in, or participating in the culture wars and the ongoing national dialogue over America's morals, values, and future, but they, more than any other group, found the subject vitally important and a source of ongoing attention and vigorous effort at the local, state, national and international levels, via everything from local issues to state controversies over textbooks to national elections to international issues, such as persecution and sex trafficking. In doing so, evangelicals "operate with a very strong sense of boundaries that distinguish themselves from non-Christians and from nonevangelical Christians" (Smith, 1998, p. 124). Here, too, we see a historical precedent in Olasky's concept of evangelical Christians as both within, and solidly distinct and separate from, and operating in defiance of, mainstream American culture.

1976, writes Lindsay, was a pivotal year for evangelicals' political and cultural engagement with America, and the election of the born-again Jimmy Carter as president gave evangelicals more presence. Since then, "the legitimacy that has come to the evangelical movement has come through the political, corporate, and cultural leaders who were willing to publicly associate with it"

(Lindsay, 2008, pp. 7, 12). The growing power of evangelicals has included, as noted in this study's introduction, the current enormous influence they have in American politics, but it has also occurred in the media. "Evangelicals have invested tens of millions of dollars in various initiatives aimed at enlivening and expanding their influence in the arts, media, and entertainment worlds," writes Lindsay, who adds that 100 or so new evangelical entertainment-based "programs, organizations, and initiatives that were founded between 1976 and 2006." These include such organizations as the Hollywood-based Act One, which prepares "young people of faith for careers in mainstream film and television" (pp. 142-143).

The resurgence of the influence of evangelicals in American culture has also, Hendershot writes, included an explosion of everything from Christian bookstores to films to music to novels. More and more Christian products are being sold in mainstream retail outlets such as K-Mart. There are Christian graphic novels, superheroes such as Bibleman, sections devoted to Christian non-fiction and fiction at Barnes & Noble, rock bands such as DC Talk, and young people at the local mall wearing tee shirts with legends such as "God's Gym" or "got Jesus?" that play on slogans from popular secular businesses. Millions of people went to see 1999's *The Omega Code* film, and the Left Behind series of apocalyptic novels has been a publishing phenomenon (2004, pp. 3, 6-7, 17, 22, 28, 176-177). The goal of these cultural products is to reach the "mythical average American evangelical" as well as to recruit young people. "To purchase Christian products is to declare one's *respectability* in a country in which people are most often addressed by mass

culture not as citizens but as consumers" in a time when, unlike the past, conservative Christians have been largely ignored by the mainstream media and entertainment industries (p. 30, italics in original).

At the same time, evangelical media outlets have experienced enormous growth in the past several decades. In 2001, there were around 3,000 religious periodicals, including 400 specifically targeting evangelicals, ranging from *Christianity Today* to *Focus on the Family* to *Charisma* to, as noted in this study's introduction, niche publications for smaller groups of people within the evangelical community. As in the past, these publications "inform and edify believers, further denominational and doctrinal adherence, encourage donations to missionary and social service causes, and to debate theological doctrinal issues" (Waters, 2001, pp. 307-308). The vast majority of these publications, according to a 2001 survey of around 400 members of the Evangelical Press Association and the Associated Church Press, have circulations of less than 100,000 (pp. 311-312). "The audiences of religious publications are adults and the majority receive religious publications as a result of denominational affiliation or because they support a specific social or humanitarian cause of a parachurch organization" (p. 317).

Blake (2005) describes the world of evangelical television and radio Christian news coverage as a "vast and growing Christian media universe, which has sprung up largely under the mainstream's radar." The world of Christian news, she writes, includes the Christian Broadcasting Network, as well as six evangelical television networks, more than 1,000 members of the National Religious

Broadcasters, and "more than 2,000 religious radio stations." The number of watchers and listeners is not large as compared to secular radio stations and television programs, but they are growing. "Christian radio's audience, in particular, has climbed 33 percent over the last five years, thanks in large part to the emergence of contemporary Christian music" (Blake, 2005, pp. 32-35).

There are also several dozen local/regional evangelical newspapers based in such cities as San Diego and Dallas that feature both local news and national stories from the Evangelical Press News Service, which sends articles to more than 200 news outlets for a small annual fee. "By mixing local coverage with EPNS file stories, the regional publications function as everyday newspapers for readers seeking an evangelical spin on the news. The regional papers serve to unify and solidify an evangelical worldview" (Diamond, 1998, p. 47). As with many of the evangelical cultural products noted above, the evangelical news media allows believers to be both part of, and separate from, non-evangelicals.

> The sheer volume of Christian media enables evangelicals to live culturally in a parallel universe alongside secular society. Believers may partake of the secular entertainment and news media to their hearts' content. They can talk sports scores and Hollywood gossip with non-Christian coworkers and still rely on a safety net of information and inspiration coming from their own media institutions (p. 48).

In writing about the current state of the evangelical press, and evangelical news media in general, however, Olasky is less concerned with size and impact than quality which, as noted at the start of this chapter, he finds sorely lacking for a

variety of reasons, including a shortage of quality reporting and a willingness to hold evangelicals and evangelical organizations accountable for their mistakes and shortcomings.

These complaints are not unique to Olasky; nor are they new. In the early 1960s, Marty noted that the Protestant press, while growing in popularity, favored soft news and was largely unable, or unwilling, to engage with the larger, "pluralist" world, focusing instead of relatively trivial matters and pseudo controversies within its ranks. "Unable to cope with pluralism and secularity as arenas for witness, taking refuge in the mythology of a past Protestant culture, for the most part it withdraws from the public arena" at the "expense of understanding a revolutionary world and participating in its dynamics in the name of the Lordship of Jesus Christ" (1963, pp. 16, 18-19, 26, 32). Much more recently, Waters writes that evangelical publishers "are aware of their shortcomings and are disheartened, particular when they apply journalistic techniques to their work, and can face severe criticism, and perhaps falling circulation, if they publish articles critical of other evangelicals" (2001, p. 309).

But if evangelical Christian media continues, as Olasky and others have charged, to exhibit severe shortcomings, the mainstream media has also been widely described by journalism professionals and academics alike as tending to have a pronounced inability to adequately cover religious matters, or to understand both the importance of religion to the majority of Americans and the religious dimension of news events in general. Religion reporting on mainstream newspapers has had two major recent growth spurts, in the 1960s and the 1990s;

in both cases, the increase in coverage was due to an understanding in mainstream journalism circles that religion was playing a larger role in the lives of Americans in a variety of contexts. In the 1960s this increased religion coverage was "in response to Vatican II, religious involvement in the civil rights and anti-Vietnam movements, and the interest in alternative forms of spirituality spawned by the counterculture" (Buddenbaum, 1998, p. 5); 30 years later, the rise in coverage was attributed to a widespread recognition that religion was having more of an effect on American culture and national and world politics and that "more and more people are searching for a spiritual element in their lives, whether it's inside a Muslim mosque, Catholic cathedral or through a New Age shaman leading a wilderness vision quest (Shepard, 1995, ¶ 8).

However, media critics charge that even these changes in the mainstream media's religion coverage never went far enough in conveying how important religion is in the lives of most Americans. "On every measure – belief in God, belief in life after death, attendance at religious services, and daily prayer or meditation – the United States consistently ranks higher than most other nations" (Fowler, Hertzke, Olson & den Dulk, 2010, p. 26). The inability of the mainstream media to convey this reality – even in the 1990s, when many newspapers and television stations had religion reporters, and newspapers often had special stand-alone Sunday religion sections – has meant that religious Americans have often not seen themselves and the importance of their faith reflected in the mainstream media that they consume.

"With few exceptions," writes Schultze, "journalists examine religion only as isolated phenomena, not as a significant part of American cultural and social life . . . By dismissing religious epistemologies, journalists eclipse one of the most significant source of discourse about the common good in society" (Schultze, 2003, p. 266). The result is that religious Americans often feel a "disconnect" between their lives and concerns and how society is reported on; the difference between the two is "glaring" in its obviousness, and brings into question the credibility of the press in general, leading to more reliance on religious publications (Silk, 2009, pp. 84-85).

As noted in this study's introduction, however, the gains that were made in at least the sheer volume of religion coverage in mainstream newspapers in the 1990s have, in recent years, been offset, and largely negated, by the financial downturn in the American newspaper industry, which has led to severe budget and staff cutbacks, including even numerous large newspapers doing away with the religion beat. But even before these relatively recent problems, many observers of mainstream American journalism wrote about the industry's distinct lack of understanding the religious dimension of the stories being covered.

Mainstream journalists' lack of understanding a biblical reference in a speech then-Governor George W. Bush made on the 2000 campaign trail was emblematic, Gerson wrote, of the lack of "biblical literacy" among American journalists, which is often accompanied by a general secularism and lack of interest in religious matters "among many journalists and, more broadly, the 'knowledge class.'" (Gerson, 2009, p. xvi). "This kind of secularism can lead to

indifference – and, when religion becomes an unavoidable topic, to suspicion. As a citizen, I believe this makes for bad political philosophy. As a former reporter, I know it makes for bad journalism" (pp. xvi-xvii). This lack of understanding of religion's importance in world affairs, and suspicion of those who are religious, means that mainstream journalists have "missed the greatest stories of our time," including important trends concerning American religious figures on the world stage, such as the enormous inroads evangelical Christians have made around the world (pp. xviii-xix).

This last aspect of secular reporters having a "blind spot" and not "getting" religion is especially important to this study, as media critics have, like Olasky, noted that evangelicals have been treated especially poorly by the mainstream media, which has largely ignored or misrepresented evangelicals and their concerns. While millions of Americans have consistently described themselves as evangelicals and/or born again in poll after poll for several decades, the American press has largely underreported the evangelical perspective, often holding it up for ridicule. For example, Carter's comments on being born again were treated as strange, and perhaps funny, by the press; Schultze (2003) points to a 1996 interview of Carter by Bryant Gumble of the *Today* show that seemed to mock Carter's beliefs and draw a parallel between his reliance on prayer with the general belief that he was "one of the most ineffective Presidents of modern times" (p. 263).

Wills writes that while "the main*stream* of American religion has always been evangelical" and Graham "has been, over the years, the most admired man in

America," the tendency of journalists – reporters and commentators alike – has been to "neglect or dismiss" the tenets of evangelicalism and the American evangelical experience: "revivalism, biblical literalism, millennial hope (for the Second Coming of Christ)" (Wills, 1990, pp. 19-20, italics in original). Wills believes that this strong and underlying tension between evangelicals and the mainstream media is, at least in part, a fallout from the media's marginalization of evangelicals in American life and politics dating back to the Scopes trial (p. 22).

Hendershot (2004) notes that the media has often reduced evangelicals to "caricatures," focusing attention not on their beliefs but using odd, isolated stories, such as, in 1990, the Rev. Jerry Falwell's accusations of homosexuality leveled at children's TV character Tinky-Winky, to cast evangelicals as "out of touch and feckless" while ignoring the importance of their "spiritual, political, or cultural agendas." As a result, when evangelicals are shown to be a powerful voting bloc in national elections, or evangelical leaders demonstrate a strong influence in American cultural and political life, mainstream reporters are caught flat-footed, and have responded with "fear and ridicule" (p. 1).

Understanding this largely negative portrayal of themselves, evangelicals have among major religious groups in America been the most consistent, and strident, critics of the mass media. Schultze uses the "tribe" metaphor to describe the different religious groups in America, and the desire among many of them to remain strong and distinct in their beliefs and organizations in the face of criticism, lack of understanding, and homogenization. Like Olasky, many evangelicals are convinced that their beliefs and understandings of the relationship between man

and God, and God's influence, are at odds with the larger, more liberal, and more fragmented American society, and particularly America's mainstream media. While participating in American society, they still see themselves as "outsiders" – "vulnerable beleaguered, and even exploited," and thus "the most likely to take extraordinary efforts to counter external threats." "Across the spectrum of media in America, Christian tribes have acted like exiles that are deeply concerned with maintaining their own subcultures in the face of large, hostile social forces that threaten to take them completely captive." Their sharp criticisms of the American mainstream media, and desire to assert themselves by strengthening their own media products, including news organizations, then, are part of evangelicals' need to "share their concerns and fears, to discern their captors, and to encourage themselves to reclaim and reassert their tribal culture in the face of perceived threats" (Schultze, 2003, pp. 20, 23, 31-32).

As a result, we can understand Olasky's concerns about the relative weakness of modern American evangelical journalism as not isolated, but, rather, part of an ongoing understanding of evangelicals that their culture and beliefs, while extremely popular and important in the country's culture as a whole, are often seen as unimportant, odd, and negative in the mainstream media. His fight, and his sense of isolation from the larger American cultural landscape and the media that informs it, is part of a wider understanding among evangelicals that they must go their own way and continue to develop and strengthen their own media products as a way of asserting themselves in a national culture that is largely hostile or indifferent to them and their concerns about America's fate.

Normative and Biblical Objectivity

This study's introduction established that there is a widespread belief among communications scholars, including Olasky, that the American mass media functions under an overarching ideology that informs a vast array of decisions about how journalists understand and perform their work. This "paraideology" (Gans, 1979, p. 42) underscores and emphasizes an American ideology based on democracy, capitalism, individuality, and political and cultural elites. According to Shoemaker and Reese (1996), mass media journalism's ideology informs every other aspect its content (p. 223). This section of this study's literature review will discuss the rise in normative objectivity in the American mass media, as well as Olasky's concept of biblical objectivity as a template for how evangelical journalists in general, and *WORLD* journalists in particular, should perform their work, as well as its relationship to the concept of "strong objectivity" as developed by feminist scholars, which also challenges the concept of normative objectivity in both science and journalism.

Central to the idea that the mass media has an ideology that assists America's government, business and elites is the widely accepted belief that the media has a powerful effect in shaping the public's view of reality, and in fact constructs this reality in the way it presents information about a variety of facts, events, and issues. Adoni and Mane (1984) write that "the role of the mass media in the process of the social construction of reality holds a central place in communication research." The media, according to McQuail (1972), play a major role "in shaping the individual and collective consciousness by organizing and

circulating the knowledge which people have of their own everyday life and the more remote contexts of their lives" (p. 13). This belief has been consistent for more than 150 years. Hallin (1985) notes that since at least the 1800s, and continuing to the present, an array of writers and philosophers, from Tocqueville to Habermas to Marx, have discussed the power the media has in the lives of citizens and their understanding of reality, and how this power shape the public's viewpoint into a larger, sustained set of beliefs about a society's culture (pp. 121-122). Marx called the media "the omnipresent open eye of the spirit of the people" and "the mind of the state that can be peddled in every cottage, cheaper than natural gas" (1974, p. 31). Hoggart (1980) described this joining of facts and beliefs the construction of "the cultural air we breathe, the whole ideological atmosphere of our society, which tells us that some things can be said and other had best not be said" (p. X).

The mass media's ability to do this, of course, is built largely on what might be called its "massness," its size, breadth and influence on the American landscape of thought and opinion. Hallin (1985) notes that American newspapers did not become truly mass media until the 1820s and 1830s, when lower prices – the rise of the "penny press" – meant that people other than rich, white elites could afford to buy them, and that newspaper producers no longer had to pander to them to see a profit. Here, and in subsequent decades, the desire to sell to the widest population popular meant that newspapers "had no need of political subsides to stay afloat" (p. 128).

By the 1920s, partisan newspapers in America were largely gone, and mass media journalists were "committed not only to nonpartisanship but to the idea of a professional, 'objective' journalism." Beginning in that decade, "commercial or professional journalism employed standards of truth and of the writer's proper relations to the audience very different from those of the political journalism" (Hallin, 1985, p. 129). These widespread changes in journalism norms "paralleled the rise of science as a cultural paradigm against which all forms of discourse came to be measured" (p. 129). This is essentially the same perspective that Olasky has about the time, and way, in which American mass media changed for what considers the worse, when a belief in the power of God was set aside by journalists and religious publications – as was the case with, as noted above, partisan political publications – lost their huge influence in the American media.

However, where Olasky stresses the importance, and then sad decline, of religious (and, specifically, evangelical) media in importance in public sphere, many journalism scholars, such as Schudson, focus far more attention on the decline of partisan political newspapers from the mid-1800s and into the 1900s when, by the 1920s, non-partisan and independent newspapers – guided by the concept of objectivity – became the norm, and the importance of objectivity was formally valorized as the norm, or at least the ideal, in the mass media.

Reform politics in the forty years between 1880 and 1920 also had a major effect on the professionalism of journalism (Schudson, 2001). There was less emphasis on loyalty to one party, and as a result newspapers "became more willing to take an independent stance. Also, the new voting practices, which included the

establishment of voting booths, meant that voting became "a rational choice," as opposed to simply accepting a party's ballot. As a result, voters actually had a choice in who they voted for, and "politics began to be seen as an administrative science that required experts." Those experts, increasingly, were reporters, who were suddenly "more likely to see themselves as journalists, or as writers, rather than as political hangers-on" (p. 161).

The rise in journalists seeing themselves as independent from partisanship, and using scientific methods in service of mass production, truly flourished in the 1920s. The first code of ethics by the American Society of Newspaper Editors was adopted in the 1920s (p. 162). The code included this sentence: "News reports should be free from opinion or bias of any kind" (Pratte, 1995, p. 206). "Objectivity seemed a natural and progressive ideology for an aspiring occupational group at a moment when science was god, efficiency was cherished, and increasingly prominent elites judged partisanship a vestige of the tribal 19th century." In addition, objectivity was an attempt by journalists to "disaffiliate from the public relations specialists and propagandists who were suddenly all around them" and threatening their "new-found independence" (p. 162).

> Journalists grew self-conscious about the manipulability of information in the propaganda age. They felt a need to close ranks and assert their collective integrity in the face of their close encounter with the publicity agents' unembarrassed effort to use information (or misinformation) to promote special interests (pp. 162-163).

Objectivity, at least in theory, "guides journalists to separate facts from values and to report only the facts . . . According to the objectivity norm, the journalist's job consists of reporting something called 'news' without commenting on it, slanting it, or shaping its formulation in any way" as opposed to partisan journalists, who "do not hesitate to present information fro the perspective of a particular party or faction" (Schudson, 2001, p. 150). Schudson adds that some members of mass media organizations, including foreign correspondents and sports reporters, are not expected to remain objective. "From the perspective of the local news institution, the triumphs and defeats of the local team are examined from a stance that presumes enthusiastic backing of the team" (p. 164). But in general, objectivity is "the chief occupational value of American journalism and the norm that historically and still today distinguishes US journalism from the dominant model of continental European journalism" as well as a "moral code" that guides journalist's thinking and action in meeting difficult daily deadlines (pp. 149, 163).

Several scholars, among them Tuchman (1976), Gans (1979), and Shoemaker and Reese (1996), have written that the objectivity norm is often employed by journalists as a defensive mechanism against criticism. "Attacked for a controversial presentation of 'facts,' newspapermen invoke their objectivity almost the way a Mediterranean peasant might wear a clove of garlic around his neck to ward off evil spirits" (Tuchman, p. 660). Part of this reliance on objectivity is due to the speed at which journalists must perform their work, because "processing news leaves no time for reflexive epistemological examination.

Nonetheless, the newsmen need some working notion of objectivity to minimize the risks imposed by deadlines, libel suits, and superiors' reprimands" (p. 662).

Writing, editing and publishing news reports, then, is a "ritual," a daily and continuous process that relies on technical expertise, habit, and consistency of action. Journalists are "*news assemblers*" who construct reality for public consumption. "The media stand as reporter-reflector-indicators of an objective reality 'out there,' consisting of knowably 'important' events of the world" (Moloch & Lester, 1974, pp. 104-105, italics in original). News is assembled, the authors argue, by the routine process of reporting, writing and editing that favors the "needs of certain social groups and disfavors those of others" (p. 106).

This is where the link between objectivity and members of the mass media privileging those in power (business leaders, government officials, and in general the elites of society) is made and sustained. Moloch and Lester write that the events most often seen as the most important are those that include some members of society being able to gain "habitual access" to reporters, instances when "an individual or group is so situated that their own events needs routinely coincide with the newsmaking activities of media personnel." This sort of routine access to members of the mass media "is generally found among those with extreme wealth or other institutionally-based sources of power. Indeed, this power is both a result of the habitual access and a continuing cause of such access" (p. 107).

Which is to say that, since both objectivity and giving significantly more access in the media to those who hold positions of power are part of the standard

working routines of mass media news producers, these two aspects of routine journalism work function together to reinforce society's norms. By using objectivity as the guiding principle to assemble news reports based on "only the facts," free of personal perspective, journalists are, most often, relying on "facts" supplied to them by society's elites, who are promoting the perspectives of the government, big business, other institutions, and elite members of society, as well as the inherent "rightness" of American culture in general. This is the fusion of journalism and society's ideologies.

Bennett (1982) describes this process as newsmakers' ideology being "inherited by reflex from the dominant political culture and embodied in the codes and conventions of the working practices of professional journalists." The result is that "the news – the journalistic form in which the 'facts' are said to be represented free from bias or comment" are given a "distinctive ideological skew" (p. 303). The media's tendency to rely on "social agencies and institutions" for news and perspectives on events leads to the "creation of an 'amplification spiral' whereby the scope and significance of an initial 'problem' – that is, of what is defined as a problem by such agencies – is subject to increased magnification as the reality-defining practices of such agencies reciprocally sustain and compliment each other" (pp. 299-300). In other words, what government officials and society's elites say is important, the media reinforces, and back and forth, endlessly, in a loop that sustains both elite viewpoints and the media's power and visibility.

Gans explicitly fused objectivity and America's enduring social values by writing that those values "are built into importance judgments; as a result they do

not conflict with objectivity – in fact, they make it possible. Being part of news judgment, the enduring values are those of journalism, rather than of journalists; consequently, journalists can feel detached and need not bring in their personal values" (1979, pp. 196-197). This, finally, is the link between the belief systems at the core of both American journalism and the society it reports on:

> In fact, the enduring values coincide almost completely with the major themes of political rhetoric, which is also centered on the nation as a unit, advocates much the same kind of capitalism and democracy, pays allegiance to small-town pastoralism, supports individualism and moderation, and preaches social order. Political rhetoric is not political action, but then news is also a kind of rhetoric; and journalistic assumptions about the need for leadership are often expressed in the speeches politicians make during election campaigns and at ceremonial occasions (p. 206).

A number of studies looking at coverage of a variety of events and subjects in the past several decades indicate that this tendency to favor the perspectives of America's elites, and reinforce American values, is undiminished. Rosas-Moreno, Harp and Bachmann (2013), for example, found that 41 *Time* magazine covers concerning the war in Iraq reaffirmed the importance of white men in determining the country's military policy, linked the war with the country's "sense of national identity and collective memory" concerning international conflicts, and promoted the sense that America was doing the right thing in fighting the war by casting the conflict in terms of "us versus them," by reinforcing "the frame that this was a

(scary) foreign culture, a menacing 'other' that dressed up in skullcaps and hid its face" (pp. 8, 11, 14).

Similarly, several studies found that mainstream reporters covering both local and national elections reinforce the importance of the perspectives of powerful members of society, including political leaders and experts. Peer and Ettema (1998), in looking at mayoral elections in New York, Chicago and Los Angeles, found that "news is ideological in that it positions its viewers, listeners, or readers in relation to privileged interpretations" and that "officials and experts" are consistently the "purveyors of journalistically objective knowledge" in local election reporting (pp. 257, 263).

More recently Entman (2010), in looking at coverage of the 2008 presidential campaign, noted that, to many Americans, the mainstream media is by definition the "liberal media" which has been decried by so many conservatives including, of course, Olasky. At the same time, however, the study found that journalists favor the institution of American democracy by portraying politicians in general as popular and effective, which tends to mean that less "negative" news about them will be printed. "Just about everyone agrees it is better for democracy if a public official is popular rather than reviled, and capable rather than incompetent." Thus, reporters continue to rely on "elite sources" for campaign coverage rather than risking attack from other elites. "Reflecting the elite discourse in this way enables journalists to feel they are fulfilling their watchdog roles while maintaining ideological and partisan neutrality" (pp. 390, 394-395).

These studies clearly indicate that Gans' ideas about the connection of journalistic objectivity and reinforcing American values, such as the appropriateness of conflict with another country and the enduring importance of democracy, as well as how journalists continually favor elites in their reporting, are still relevant to the work being done by American journalists.

However, it is also widely accepted that individuals and groups that are not government/business/celebrity elites, or espouse values or positions that appear contrary to this ideology or set of values, are frequently under-represented, misrepresented, or demonized by the mass media. Because the mass media wants to "honor the political/economic system as a whole," they remain "committed to their own particular economic and political advantage" – and do this partially be de-legitimizing people and viewpoints that deviate from these beliefs (Gitlin, 1980, pp. 258-259). Bennett (1982) writes that, because mass media products are "culturally encoded" and give people a chance to be witnesses to events that consumers "have no first-hand knowledge or experience," those products routinely are able to impose negative "definitions" of groups "whose behavior is viewed as transgressing dominant social norms, be these enshrined in law or in custom and convention" (pp. 295-296).

This is exactly the argument that Olasky and other observers of the interaction of evangelical Christians and the mass media have made. Olasky's core argument for the use of biblical objectivity hinges on the profound inability of the mass media to recognize the importance of God's teachings and guidance in events and issues, relying instead on a worldview that supports a government and a

society that is self-destructing thanks to its secular/liberal viewpoints and governance. Moreover, he (as well as Hendershot, Silk, and Wills, among others, as noted earlier in this chapter) believe that the concerns of conservative, religious Americans are routinely under-reported, misrepresented or, in the case of evangelicals, made sport of by a mass media that neither understands nor respects them.

Just as communication scholars have long discussed the social construction of reality and the mass media's place in it, and noted the inability of reporters and editors to understand or appreciate the power of religion in how societies function, conservative theologians have long been aware of the enormous differences in the core values of American mass society and conservative Christians, and how the media is at the center of this schism. Nelson (1976) wrote about the differences in values between Christians and those that too readily consume American mass media cultural products (such as popular television programs, films, magazines and fiction); the latter are forsaking worshipping God and, instead, partaking in the "worship ceremonies of the American cultural religion." He warned that, taken together, these forms of entertainment have formed a belief system that focuses on the "externality of evil," which can only be battled, and vanquished, by individuals – as opposed to by God. As with news reports, these entertainment products write God out of the picture of sin, redemption and vanquishing evil. The heroes in these mass-produced products' narratives (such as Humphrey Bogart and John Wayne) right wrongs and punish evil-doers and deviants not with God's help, but because of their individual

abilities. As with the American news media, God and his power are nowhere in sight (pp. 17, 22, 24-25).

Writing more than a decade later, Fore (1990) offered a similar critique of how American culture is represented in the media. Unlike Nelson, however, he focuses on news products, including print and television reports. "The media's worldview is quite different from the worldview of Christians, or indeed the worldviews of all truly religious people" (p. 51). Like Gans and Gitlin, he noted that ideas and perspectives that differ from those of America's ruling elites, and the media, are most often squelched in news reports: "Viewpoints and perspectives that are alien to the existing power structure have almost no opportunity to find authoritative expression in the mass media" (p. 53). And like Olasky, he wrote that this worldview and its conflict with the evangelical/religious worldview had deep, and lasting, implications for the future of the country, writing that the resolution of the power of these two belief systems "will determine what kind of world our children's children will live in" (p. 52).

Significantly, Fore's list of the main beliefs of American culture as espoused by the mass media are somewhat similar, if harsher, to those offered by Gans in how they hinge on capitalism and individual achievement. These include the importance of efficiency, technology, and survival of the fittest; unceasing "material acquisition"; and the idea that "*property, wealth, and power and more important than people*"; (pp. 53-55, italics in original); all drive America and what the media focuses on and promotes. The opposite worldview is a Christian value system, and "the place to begin is with the great themes of the Bible," including

"*the creation story, the covenant story, the reign of God*" and "*the servant and the Savior*" (pp. 57-58, italics in original).

These values affirm the importance of following God, as opposed to focusing on material acquisition, as well as the importance of recognizing sin as the source of earthly trouble and conflict, the presence and power of God in all events, and "the value of creating and maintaining a community of faith in which everyone can be a part" (p. 59). Fore summarizes the conflict between the mass media and American mass society's conception of the world and the one espoused by Christians this way:

> In contrast to the media's worldview that we are basically good, that happiness is the chief end of life and that happiness consists of obtaining material goods, the Christian worldview holds that human beings are susceptible to the sin of pride, that the chief end of life is to live in harmony with all creation, and that happiness consists in creating the reign of God within one's self and among one's neighbors – which includes the whole earth (p. 59).

If Olasky is, first and foremost, an inheritor of these and other conservative Christian's beliefs about the destructive nature of the fusion of the mass media and America's mass culture, he is also, in devising, promoting and detailing biblical objectivity, the only theologian/journalist who has offered a framework for how journalists can, on a daily basis, and in all the work they do, fight against these destructive secular/liberal/consumerist forces. Certainly neither Nelson (a theologian) nor, more significantly, Fore (a minister, author and media consultant)

offered advice for how members of the evangelical media could fight these forces in their daily work habits.

As noted in the first chapter and earlier in this chapter, Olasky operationalizes biblical objectivity, first, with an understanding that there are two competing standards of media objectivity, the mass media's and evangelical Christian journalism's, and that the battle for America's soul and future, or what is often referred to as the "culture wars" within American society, are being fought as much in the reporting of news as in the larger landscape of American culture and politics. This war for America's soul, Olasky writes, should be at the forefront of every evangelical Christian journalist's thought and action at all times, as should understanding that there is absolutely no middle ground between the mass media's way and the evangelical Christian's way of reporting the news. "The key for all Christian journalists is to study the Bible and to emphasize its themes of sin and redemption rather than our own feeble attempts to arrive at what is called 'objectivity'" (Olasky, 1999, ¶ 9).

In a series of graphics in *Telling the Truth*, Olasky lays out his conception of the differences between mass media journalists, evangelical Christian journalists using biblical objectivity, and more "liberal" Christian journalists that do not understand, and recognize in their work, that "the Bible is useful not only for salvation but also for application to all aspects of current events as well." Evangelical Christian journalists who are truly following Biblical teachings in their work believe that Christ is both the savior and Lord; are both God centered and conservative; have both concern for other people and readily recognize man's

sinfulness; and recognize the cultural conflict and war between Christian and mass culture. Truly evangelical journalists are both "battling with confidence" against the destructive forces of secular/liberal culture, and are under "no illusions of total victory" (Olasky, 1996, pp. 17, 21).

Olasky emphasizes this sense of battle against liberalism by writing that truly evangelical journalists should also be aware of the differences between their beliefs and those of "liberal evangelicals," although he also notes that alliances with this group can be formed to promote an overall evangelical viewpoint "on issues such as governmental control of welfare, education, and health care" He is asserting that evangelical journalists should fight a "limited war" against secular/liberal culture while trying to find points of agreement and collaboration with more liberal evangelicals, however misguided they may be.

> Your goal should not be the creation of a new Israel or the winning of total victory, for we know that God has placed us in Babylon, and that Christian triumph will come only when Christ returns. Your goal should be faithful perseverance in the containment of evil . . . We cannot destroy sin – Christ will take care of that when He comes again – but through God's grace we can contain it, and regain lost ground when possible (Olasky, 1996, p. 21).

Specifically, Olasky's conception of applying a "God's-eye view" to events and issues is to operationalize journalism work into six "classes" of stories that he compares to the "six classes of rapids" described by white-water rafters. These are the six classes that Olasky urges Christian journalists to use when applying biblical objectivity, as well examples he uses when describing this method:

1. "*Class one: explicit biblical embrace or condemnation*." Giving equal space to the views of homosexuals is "ungodly journalism" because homosexuality is clearly condemned by the Bible (Olasky, 1996, p. 23, italics in original).

2. "*Class two: clearly implicit biblical position*." While the Bible does not specifically address giving children a religious education, it does place "an emphasis on providing a godly education under parental supervision." As a result, "Biblical objectivity means supporting the establishment and improvement of Bible-based education, and criticizing government schools," because allowing those who do not believe in God to educate children is "an abdication of biblical parental responsibility" (Olasky, 1996, p. 23, italics in original).

3. "*Class three: partisans of both sides quote Scripture but careful study allows biblical conclusions*." While people on both sides of the left/right strata of American culture use the Bible to discuss helping the poor, a journalist using biblical objectivity will remember, and will shape his or her reporting, with the understanding that "Biblically, provisions of material help should be coupled with the provision of spiritual lessons; the poor should be given the opportunity to glean but be challenged to work" (Olasky, 1996, p. 23, italics in original).

4. "*Class four: biblical understanding backed by historical experience*." In reporting on the limits and power of government, biblical objectivity will mean remembering that "the historical record over the centuries is clear, and in recent American experience we have particular reason to be suspicious of the person who says, 'I'm from the government and I'm here to help you'" (Olasky, 1996, p. 23, italics in original).

5. "*Class five: biblical sense of human nature*." With these stories, "there is no clear biblical mandate and no clear historical trail, but certain understandings of human nature can be brought to bear." In the case of reporting on issues involving negotiations between countries and the threat of nuclear war, application of biblical objectivity would lead to a viewpoint that "emphasizes discernment rather than credulity: If we do not assume a benign human nature concerning warfare, we need to plan for military preparedness and raise the cost of war to potential aggressors" (Olasky, 1996, pp. 23-24, italics in original).

6. "*Class six: Navigable by experts, who might themselves be overturned*." These stories do not provide either "a clear biblical position," a "historical trail," and "not much else to mark our path." "On an issue of this kind – NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) is a good example – you should balance views and perspectives" (Olasky, 1996, p. 24, italics in original).

> Olasky further discussed the differences between the classes this way:
>
> This six-fold definition suggests a framework for biblical objectivity that will enable you to push hard but avoid twisting Scripture. When you take a very strong biblical stand on a class-one or class-two issue, you will be objective. When you take a more balanced position on a class-five or class-six issue by citing the views and approaches of a variety of informed sources, you are also being biblically objective, because we cannot be sure on an issue when the Bible is not clear. Objectivity is faithful reflection of the biblical view, as best we can discern it through God's Word. When there

is no view that we can discern, then we cast about for wisdom where we can find it (Olasky, 1996, p. 24).

As a result, it is possible to create a template illustrating the six classes to give more precision to their differences as described by Olasky:

Class	**Relationship to the Bible**	**External factors**	**Topic example**
One	Explicit instructions	None/little	Homosexuality
Two	Implicit biblical position	Little/some	Education
Three	Biblical conclusions	"Partisan" views	Fighting poverty
Four	Biblical understanding	History	Government issues
Five	No clear mandate	Human nature	Conflict/war
Six	No biblical "position"	Balancing sources	NAFTA

While these six classes of stories, and how to apply them, obviously hinge to an extent on the writer's interpretation of the story's topic, including who should be interviewed, Olasky also writes that using this method means that evangelical Christian reporters can avoid having to worry about falling "into relativism or situational ethics, however, because its sole ethic is to reflect biblical positions." This is possible, he writes, because unlike normative journalism objectivity (or what he calls "the prevailing liberal theory of objectivity") biblical objectivity assumes that there is, in the end, a singular "true truth" that hinges on God's word and biblical teachings. To use the above example of a class-one story, if the Bible condemns homosexuality, it is not necessary to give credence to (or use quotes by) homosexuals or those that support them. "Biblically, there is no neutrality: We are

either God centered or man centered," and that is where, for him, the truth of every event or issue lies (Olasky, 1996, p. 25).

This definition of objectivity, and how to use it, is obviously completely at odds with normative mass media objectivity. Olasky is implying that the worth of sources, and thus the information that they can provide, hinges only on how much they conform to Scripture, which is what the reporter understands as the only real truth in all matters, and in all situations, as opposed to what information they might have to assist the reporter in giving a variety of perspectives. Where mainstream reporters seek to balance perspectives on topics and controversies in order to, at least in theory, remain objective, Olaksy's idea of objectivity and its use is to promote Christianity by only – or most often – providing readers with sources and perspectives that conform to a conservative, evangelical viewpoint on how closely these sources cleave to what the Bible says about the topic at hand. The clearer the reporter sees the connection between Scripture and the possible sources for a story, the more he or she strives to promote these sources and the information they can provide the reader.

The wider implication of this concept of objectivity and its daily application is that it provides the evangelical journalist a framework for easily, and consistently, simply not using sources and viewpoints that the reporter finds distasteful, misguided and at odds with his or her personal beliefs about what the Bible has to say about a wide variety of issues, from homosexuality to abortion to the government. This is wholly at odds with one of the central tenets of normative objectivity, which is that the reporter should use different sources to provide

different viewpoints, no matter how much the reporter does not agree with a source's perspectives and beliefs.

As noted above, Olasky conceived, has written extensively about, and has promoted biblical objectivity specifically as a rebuttal to mass/liberal/secular journalism norms as part of what he says is the ongoing battle of evangelical Christian beliefs against liberal/secular journalism and American mass culture. In doing so, he has declined to address the ongoing arguments, in both professional journalism and academic circles, about the nature and execution of objectivity in the American media. For Olasky, objectivity is an either/or proposition: There are those in power using normative objectivity to help destroy American culture – and evangelical journalists, fighting the good fight against long odds, using his form of objectivity to challenge the powers that be.

However, Olaksy's biblical objectivity model is not the only recently developed concept of an objectivity that challenges normative objectivity to help those that see themselves as slighted and oppressed by the mass media, and thus cannot readily get their perspectives aired. Durham (1998) uses the phrases "standpoint epistemology" and "strong objectivity" to describe an objective standard rooted in, as was the case with evangelical objectivity, challenging the power relations between the haves and have-nots in American culture, and the way in which the mass media favors those in government, as well as business and other elites. The concept, she notes, is rooted in the work of feminist philosophers, including Nancy Hartsock, Dorothy Smith and Sandra Harding, all of whom have

examined the power relations in general in the creation of knowledge, and not journalism specifically (pp. 126-129).

Harding (1993) wrote that the construction of knowledge in the sciences hinges on the idea that white males have been both able to produce what are often considered "universally valid beliefs – principles of ethics, of human nature, epistemologies, and philosophies" and to assume that these standards "should be found preferable by all rational creatures, past, present, and future" (p. 60). "Standpoint epistemology," however, "sets the relationship between knowledge and politics at the center of its account in the sense that it tries to provide causal accounts – to explain – the effects that different kinds of politics have on the production of knowledge." Using this epistemology means that "knowledge can be *for* marginalized people (and those who would know what the marginalized can know) rather than *for* the use only of dominant groups in their projects of administering and managing the lives of marginalized people"(p. 56, italics in original). The idea, then, is to both understand that much knowledge is produced by, and for, those in power, and to attempt to guide science so that it can benefit people who need it the most.

In using this concept to challenge the notion of mass media objectivity, Durham writes that in recent years concepts of objectivity, while being reshaped in both journalism and academia, "still involve a separation of the reporter's views from the views being represented – a separation that is so rigid that it is the equivalent of erase, the eradication of the reporters' positions from the reporting" (p. 119). The result is that objectivity in mainstream journalism is still "functioning

mainly to preserve the status quo by its stolid refusal to acknowledge or address the ideological bases of various truth-claims presented by supposedly impartial journalists" (p. 126).

Durham's challenge to this type of objectivity is a version of standpoint epistemology which specifically challenges the privileging of elites of American society and news production, many of whom are part of and support what Gans (1979) termed the "white male social order" (p. 61) The first step of challenging these elite/white-male-centered cores of power and knowledge is "beginning all investigations from the perspectives of those outside the privileged community of investigators," and specifically "those who are most marginalized by dominant institutions and practices" (pp. 132). By starting news stories from the perspectives of the "marginalized Others," reporters no longer base their work on a journalistic objectivity that hinges on the belief that they should have no personal belief about the stories they are reporting, and thus can more clearly see and work against "the unconscious ethnocentric, sexist, racist and heterosexist biases that distort news productions as it is governed by the dominant news paradigm" (p. 132). As a result, using standpoint epistemology could be done by all reporters, be they white, black, male, female, heterosexuals, homosexual – and so on.

> Standpoint epistemology offers the practice of journalism a means of becoming meaningfully connected to the politics of everyday life. It also offers some hope for realizing the liberatory goals of journalism by

providing a method of interrogating and challenging a power relations in society via the production of news (p. 134).

Unlike Olasky, Durham does not offer a step-by-step method of deciding where knowledge should come from when reporting a story, or a popular text that provides the foundation of all knowledge and direction. Rather, she urges reporters to start by "thinking past the first, most obvious source – the person nearest the action – to the persons most marginalized in the context of the story" – in part, by writing a "source list of people outside of privileged power groups" in the community or beat being covered. When writing the story, a reporter should pay more attention to "the discourses used by various groups, including the reporters as a member of the press corps, to advance their truth claims." While admitting that examples of this type of story construction are rare, she points to the Women's International Newsgathering Service, which "deliberately begins each story from the point of view of women. Thus, a recent story on the war in Yugoslavia focused on its impact on women as well as the activism of women protesters" (p. 136).

While developed and promoted at around the same time – only two years separate the publication of *Telling the Truth* and Durham's groundbreaking article – these two concepts were apparently conceived completely separately. Olasky never mentions Harding, Durham or strong objectivity in *Truth*, and vice versa. There are, of course, many contradictory points to the two: Olasky believes that the rise in the strength of homosexuals in American culture is far too pervasive and a major part of the country's decline, while Durham writes that they are part of the

group of marginalized and frequently discredited "Others" that are being oppressed. For her part, Durham does not espouse any sort of "true truth" or religious belief system, just that marginalized groups should be heard and represented – and consulted first when a reporter does his or her interviews, before government officials and business elites, and not as an afterthought. Also, neither she nor Harding address the idea that any religious groups could be among the "Others" that do not get their perspectives heard in the mass media. But it is worth noting that both types of recent objectivity favor those who see *themselves* as marginalized in America, and call for reporters (as part of, or at least deeply sympathetic to, marginalized groups), to employ their own perspectives as part of their occupational ideology as a way of troubling the usual power relations between journalism and those who promote, and profit by, the pervasive American ideology.

Secular Values, Religion and Mainstream Journalists

In his books and articles, Olasky discusses his outspoken criticism of mainstream journalists and their secular/liberal outlook in stark us-versus-them terms: his journalists report and write with God and Scripture *always* foremost in their thoughts, routines, and work, and thus attempt to discern the "God's eye view" in everything they cover and how they cover it, while secular journalists *never* let these factors, or any aspect of their religious backgrounds, be part of the work that they do. Olasky sees mainstream American journalism, due mainly to its reliance on objectivity and the relativism and lack of inclusion of personal values

that accompanies it, as hyper-secular, and continuing to suffer from the same malaise and lack of attention to religious beliefs that it has since the 1800s.

As we have seen, Olasky's criticism of American journalism's lack of understanding of the importance of God both in readers' lives and the actions of world leaders, such as conservative politicians like former President George W. Bush, who quoted Scripture and frequently used religious rhetoric in his speeches (Vinson & Guth, 2007, pp. 87-90) is similar to that of many media critics. In fact, entire books have been written about the lack of attention and understanding mainstream journalists have shown to religion.

The issue, the gap between mainstream reporters and religion in American life, is discussed by Ahmanson (2007) as part of a rift that goes more than a century. The difference, essentially, is between people who are well-educated and members of the "knowledge class" – including journalists and members of the academy, the latter being another group that Olasky has serious problems with – and those who are often less educated, and hold less power in American life. The decline, in the 1800s, of the Protestant church as the "de facto state religion" was heightened by the rise of industry, conflict between churches, the lack of acknowledgement by religious leaders regarding advances in science, and a secular public education system. In the late 1800s and into the mid-1900s, the knowledge class (journalists, scientists, educators and others, often educated and living on the East Coast) exploded: all could be seen, broadly, as not relying on God for answers, while extremely religious people, such as evangelicals, who believed that God and Scripture were *the* source of all answers, were confined to the

sidelines of American thought and education. It was the difference between the pluralism of seeking various human perspectives – which is, again, the heart of objectivity – and the absolutism of relying on God to make sense of the world (pp. 164-165).

As part of the knowledge class, reporters have come to see religion as largely a private matter and "not a credible explanation for human behavior. Reporters often look for motives for actions in money, sex, ambition, and power, but not in religion, not in what people believe about God" (pp. 165-166). In other words, secular journalists look for human motivations while, as we will see in the results chapter of this study, Olasky and the *WORLD* staff look for God's hand and mankind's relationship with God as the first, final, and unimpeachable source for discussing and writing about virtually all events and issues.

However, numerous studies indicate that this all-or-nothing/them-versus-us viewpoint lacks nuance and an ability to see that mainstream journalists often do acknowledge both the role of religion in world events and the role that their religious backgrounds have on the work they do – just not in a way that interferes with their professional ideology and reliance on objectivity. Several studies (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1992; Underwood & Stamm, 2001) indicate that many mainstream journalists often attend religious services, have a strong affiliation with religion, and say that religion is meaningful in their lives (p. 772).

The 2001 study, which included responses from 432 American and Canadian mainstream journalists, indicates that the traditional belief about journalists simply not being religious is wildly inaccurate and that the relationship

between journalists' work and their beliefs is more nuanced and complex than Olasky – and, indeed, other critics of journalists' lack of regard for religion – believes. While different types of reporters said religion was more or less important to them, the majority of all reporters said that they do belong to religious groups and that religion and spirituality are a major part of their lives. In addition, the responses indicate that "religious values are intertwined with the progressive impulses that guide journalists in their professional activities." In other words, while journalists are religious in their private lives, they mix these beliefs with journalism standards and a belief in their independence of thought and action, and not a strict fealty to their religious beliefs. They view their independence and journalism training – which, again, emphasizes relativism, different perspectives and objectivity – as being as important as their religious values and beliefs. As a result, they most often "act upon their religious views in ways that do not compromise their professional integrity" (pp. 776-782).

Another study that explores the role of religious beliefs in the work of mainstream newspaper writers also displays a deep connection between different religious backgrounds and how writers "see" the stories that they tell. In interviewing Catholic writers such as E. J. Dionne of the *Washington Post* and evangelical syndicated columnist Cal Thomas (who frequently contributes to *WORLD*), Schmalzbauer (2002) found that the "religious imagination" of the two groups greatly informs the writers' basic approaches and assumptions, and as a result the "recurring patterns" in their work. Thomas, and other evangelicals, relied on the "culture wars" narrative of American life and "emphasized the

boundaries between conservative Christians and secular liberals," while Catholics, being more "culture-affirming," "returned to the themes of community and individualism in story after story." The two basic storylines that emerged were, for the Catholic reporters and columnists, a "communitarianism" and "connectedness" that "reflects Catholicism's focus on family, neighborhood, church, and the mediating institutions of civil society" and, for evangelicals, "the polarized conflict between religious conservatives and secular liberals" that "embodies the dialectical, individualistic, and morality-oriented outlook of the Protestant imagination." And it is the "Catholic sensibility" that is more popular in American journalism, especially at such powerful and influential newspapers such as the *Post* (pp. 28, 30, 44).

In addition, Olasky's dismissal of mainstream reporters does not seem to take into account of the considerable attention paid to religion's importance in mainstream publications. In the 1990s, recognizing the impact of religion on world events and politics, as well as the huge number of Americans that say that religion is a major part of their lives, mainstream newspapers and television stations expanded their coverage of religion by hiring more reporters to cover it; several major newspapers, such as *The Dallas Morning News*, began to publish a weekly religion section (Block, 2000, p. 5).

This expanded coverage "made room for more coverage of non-Christian religions and, indeed, for almost anything connected to people's search for meaning and purpose in their lives" (Buddenbaum, 1998, p. 97). The expanded coverage was only curtailed due to the financial problems faced by the newspaper

industry in the 2000s; weekly religion sections were ended, and at many papers the religion beat, like other formerly high-profile beats, was done away with as staffs were considerably downsized to save money (Ferman, 2011, p. 4). But, again, this expanded coverage was predicated not on absolutism and looking at one source for answers, but, rather, relying on such journalism values as objectivity for direction. In interviews with editors on such prominent publications as the *New York Times* and the *Denver Post*, Ferman found that the importance of continuing to have religion reporters was described in terms of the importance of giving voice to people from different – and sometimes obscure – faith traditions, forging community ties, and helping people to understand the beliefs and motivations of members of religious organizations that they are not part of, as well as objectivity, balance, and presenting various viewpoints (pp. 21-22, 24).

Examining these various studies provides added perspectives on the relationship between religion, the religious beliefs of mainstream journalists, and their work. Suffice to say that there is considerable research to indicate that Olasky's outright dismissal of mainstream reporters as overwhelmingly irreligious, dismissive of religion and more than happy to leave all discussion of religion and its impact out of their writing is deeply flawed and simplistic. While there is a tradition in American life for journalists and other members of the knowledge class to rely less on religion as a source for understanding what people do and why, research also indicates that many American journalists do use their religious beliefs in their work.

These beliefs, however, appear to most often be interwoven with (and often superseded by) the journalists' training and ideology, a major component of which is a belief in the importance of objectivity, which at its essence is a belief not that reporters don't have opinions but, rather, that those opinions should not be the primary, driving force in how they do their work. Olasky believes the exact opposite. As a result, it might be most accurate to say that there is a connection between religion and mainstream journalism ideology – just not a connection that he is comfortable with.

Evangelical Media Studies

This section of this study's literature review will provide a brief overview of the publications that examine evangelical media past and present. This section is necessarily brief because there are relatively few such publications, certainly when compared to the number of publications that examine the American mass media and its ideology.

As noted in the introduction, part of this study's value is that it is both the first ethnographic study of evangelical Christian journalists working for an evangelical news publication, and the first to address how journalists use Olasky's concept of biblical objectivity in their work. Schmalzbauer (1999) wrote the most in-depth ethnographic study of religious journalists but, as noted earlier, this study included interviews with both evangelical and Catholic journalists, all of whom were working for mainstream news publications. There have been other articles featuring interviews with religious journalists (see, for example, Mason, 2008) but,

again, these studies have focused on people with strong religious beliefs and backgrounds at mainstream publications.

Mainstream coverage of religion, however, has been the topic of a number of excellent books, including *Blind Spot* (2009), Mark Silk's *Unsecular Media* (1995), and Stewart M. Hoover's *Religion In the News* (1998). While these books, as well as *Quoting God* (2005) and *Christianity and the Mass Media in America* (2003), address the interplay of religion and the mass media, none focus much, if any, attention on niche religious publications. Similarly, books and articles focusing on newsroom ideology, from Shoemaker and Reese's *Mediating the Message* to Gans' *Deciding What's News* to Gitlin's *The Whole World Is Watching* to the 1980 multi-author collection *The Sociology of Journalism and the Press*, only address the interplay of the mainstream media's ideology and American society.

Writing on evangelical media has largely been confined to sections of historical overviews including, for example, 1963's *The Religious Press in America* or, in the case of Hendershot's *Shaking the World For Jesus*, focusing more on cultural products such as popular television programs and films. *Understanding Evangelical Media* (2008), in tracing the growth of evangelical publishing, Christian music, graphic novels, theater and advertising, as well as evangelical media's expanding presence in foreign countries and cyberspace, hardly touches on evangelical periodicals.

Similarly, studies of specific evangelical news/comment publications are also extremely limited. In addition to the studies by Waters (2001), Blake (2005) and Alsdurf (2010) already noted in this chapter, there have been few studies of

evangelical publications. Waller (2007) studied *Christianity Today*'s history and impact, and interviewed three editors on the then-current staff, but her master's thesis did not address the journalists' working ideology, interview criteria or story construction, focusing instead on the magazine's history, Internet presence, market performance, and finances. At the same time, there have been several books and dissertations (Gasamay, 2008; Swartz, 2008; Heltzer, 2009) looking at the progressive evangelical movement that have noted the influence of *Sojourners* magazine and its editor, Jim Wallis. None of these works have analyzed the magazine in depth, however, and none of them are ethnographic studies.

Research Questions

This study seeks to answer three research questions.

Research Question 1: How do the journalists at *WORLD* magazine fuse normative journalism routines and standards with their religious beliefs as evangelical Christians?

Research Question 2: How do these journalists apply Marvin Olasky's concept of biblical objectivity to their work?

Research Question 3: How is this work part of the larger belief system and culture of evangelical Americans?

This study's introduction, and this literature review, establishes the basis for these research questions and their appropriateness as the basis for this study. This includes providing information on mainstream journalism objectivity and its development; the importance of Olasky's biblical objectivity concept as a unique, important and well-known guideline for how evangelical journalists should

perform their work; and the framework for applying this concept so that it can be used on a daily basis. This material also includes information on the connection between Olasky's views on challenging mainstream journalism's objectivity standards and how these standards support what he sees as a destructive liberal American culture as a whole; the larger gulf between evangelical Americans and their media choices and those of American mainstream media and culture; and the generally poor job mainstream journalism does of covering religion and its importance in national and world events, including evangelicals and their beliefs.

Conclusion

This literature review has included information on the history of Puritan and evangelical journalism in Europe and, to a much larger degree, the United States; the troubled history of religion coverage in the American mass media; the growth of the evangelical media and the popularity of evangelical Christians in general as part of the continuing "culture wars" in America; the growth and importance of objectivity in the ideology of the American mass media; and Olasky's biblical objectivity concept and his guidelines for how evangelical journalists in general and *WORLD* journalists in particular can use this concept in their daily news gathering and writing.

This chapter has also examined the relationship between Olasky's concept of objectivity and strong objectivity as espoused by feminists as a way of countering normative mass media objectivity and its support of an American ideology based on the power of elites and, in particular, white males; as well as a brief overview of publications that examine evangelical journalism. This chapter

concludes with the research questions that will form the basis of the questions that will be asked of the *WORLD* journalists that will form the basis of this study's results and discussion chapters.

This study's next chapter will discuss the fundamental goals of the study, which include discovering and discussing the natural and ongoing realities that the *WORLD* journalists use to conceive of and perform their work. Schutz and Luckmann (1973) write that finding such realities means examining the "stock of knowledge" that a group of people, individually and collectively, "know" to be true, which then provides the basic framework for how they should act on a daily basis (p. 8). In the case of the *WORLD* journalists, a discussion of this knowledge is vitally important to discovering the motivations and routines which inform the journalism that is printed in the magazine.

Chapter 3: Mapping the Ideology at *WORLD*

This chapter provides a bridge between the previous chapter, the literature review, and the next chapter, which details this study's methods, by examining the fundamental goal of the study. It does so by, first, looking at the beliefs *WORLD* magazine's editor-in-chief, Dr. Marvin Olasky, has about the fundamental error of the concept of objectivity that is at the core of mainstream journalism, and then examining such concepts as the "life-world," culture and its products, and the "ideal type" as espoused by various sociologists, including Max Weber, as a way of describing the overall goal for this dissertation: to understand what the members of the *WORLD* staff believe about being evangelical Christian journalists – what they take for granted as truths about what they are doing, and its importance, how their work relates to both the Bible and to the world that they see around them, and how these beliefs influence what is found in the magazine.

Alternative Journalism, Olasky and Objectivity

Alternative sources of news do not exist simply to provide news and perspectives that mainstream news organizations do not. Rather, alternative news organizations exist, and often flourish, because they "challenge notions of what journalism is 'supposed' to be" (Hindman, 1998, p. 177). The journalists doing this and providing alternative information are often part of the same, often disenfranchised groups who grow dissatisfied by the perspectives and standards of mainstream journalists, in large part because they do not see themselves and their ethnic/religious/political group represented (or represented enough, or in a way that they feel is accurate and positive) and do not feel that their points of view

are receiving enough attention. At the core of this dissatisfaction is the reality that, traditionally, mainstream "news and its presentation reflect the concerns and views of those with power" (pp. 177-178).

From the *Village Voice* to Irish American, African American, Jewish American, feminist or gay newspapers and magazines, then, a major component of offering an alternative perspective has always been one of frustration, and perhaps anger, toward mainstream news organizations and their perspectives and values. One of the major values of mainstream news organizations, and those that work for them, is objectivity, which Jones (2009) defines as "a genuine effort to be an honest broker when it comes to the news. That means playing it straight without favoring one side when the facts are in dispute, regardless of your own views and preferences." Jones also notes that what he terms "genuine" objectivity is not about journalists trying to pretend that they do not have opinions about subjects that they report on, because they inevitably do. Rather, objectivity is a method of checking those opinions, a "discipline to test the bias against the evidence so as to produce journalism that would be closer to the truth" (p. 94) In this way, Jones writes, the pursuit of real, or genuine, objectivity is as valid and important as it has ever been, even though ideas about objectivity are constantly changing.

As this study's literature review has detailed, Olasky sees the movement to objectivity as the standard for reporting and writing – which began in the late 1800s and had solidified by the second decade of the 20th century – as nothing less than a disaster, because it meant that the role and importance of God was largely removed from the popular press of the day, and has remained absent, or at least

marginalized, ever since. To read virtually anything he has written on journalism, including *Telling the Truth* (1996) and *Prodigal Press* (1988), is to hear the voice of a man who both deeply aggrieved by what he feels is the state of modern mainstream news organizations, and sure of his own feisty alternative: glorifying God and focusing on Scripture in *WORLD*'s news coverage and opinion writing.

In Olasky's world, it is just that simple: In *Telling the Truth*, he commands evangelical journalists to "reject both the theory and the farce" of mainstream/secular ideas about objectivity, and to realize that the "neutrality" on issues suggested by this sort of objectivity is part of the "evil" of modern society that they must fight against. "We are," he writes, "either God centered or man centered": there is God's way, which is the only way of seeing the world and reporting, and there is man's way, which is leading to nothing less than the destruction of American society via promoting gay marriage and rights in general, the continued legality of abortion, declining moral and ethical standards, and conspicuous consumption, as well as support for the current government (Olasky, 1996, pp. 21-25).

This is clearly the "alternative" that Olasky and his staff believe they are offering. In this view, arguably, there is salvation or sin, living in accordance with the Bible or being part of the inevitable decline of society and its moral fabric. And there is no in between.

The "Life-world" at *WORLD*

Even a cursory examination of *WORLD* strongly suggests that the perspectives of its reporters and columnists (who, Olasky included, are often the

same people) are aligned closely with these beliefs. The author will write much more about the way reporting and opinion is examined and analyzed in this study's methods chapter, and the results of that analysis will be part of the study's results and discussion sections. But suffice to say that, in brief, the magazine is clearly of a piece with Olasky's concepts of what constitutes proper journalism, which is to heighten the sense that God is present in every event; that people of God (often ministers and/or those who have been saved from a life largely or completely without faith and trust in God) are the only ones doing the most important and lasting work in government and in helping the poor and the disadvantaged; and that God's followers are constantly fighting a fierce and glorious battle against those indifferent or hostile to them, both at home and abroad.

What this study seeks to understand is twofold: What a news magazine covering events both in America and around the world for the evangelical community looks like when it devotes itself to promoting what it sees as God's word in every event and issue; and how that magazine's reporters and editors understand their work in doing so. Which is to say, what are the meanings and motivations behind what they are doing, and how they are doing it?

Investigating these questions presents an opportunity to describe in detail the "life-world" (in German, *Lebenswelt*) of the people at *WORLD*. Any interpretation of a person's action "must begin with the foundational structures of what is prescientific, the reality which seems self-evident to men remaining within their natural attitude" (Schutz and Luckmann, 1973, p. 3). Just as journalism is a

series of patterned actions based on training, experience and beliefs, the life-world is also a matter of consistency, patterns, and daily behavior: "The world of everyday life is consequently man's fundamental and paramount reality." There are several aspects to a person seeing and understanding his or her life-world, among them the idea that people understand that there exists a "natural world" that includes the "stratified social and cultural world." The totality of that world is "a reality which we modify through our acts and which, on the other hand, modifies our actions. We can say that our natural attitude of daily life is pervasively determined by a *pragmatic motive*" (pp. 3-6, italics in original).

We act on these motives, according to the authors, based on our "stock of knowledge," which acts as the "reference schema for the actual step of my explication of the world." This knowledge base includes both personal experience and, beyond that, "group experience." In other words, it is not only what a person experiences alone, but also as part of larger group of people, that informs how he or she sees reality – what we believe we "know" as certainties, and which are thus taken for granted as the way the world works, and how we are alive in it, and which in turn are constantly determining how we act on a daily basis (Schutz and Luckmann, 1973, p. 8).

In the case of Olasky and the *WORLD* staff, what they "know," in this sense, is retrievable from both interviews with the staff members and a qualitative analysis of one year of news stories and opinion pieces in the magazine. Their stock of knowledge, or what they see as certainties that they take for granted, revolve around both God's presence and direction for both themselves and those

that they report on, particularly those that they write about often and favorably. These are often people who are doing good work as missionaries overseas, or helping the poor and downtrodden in urban communities in America, or politicians using their Christian principles in the halls of Washington, D.C., or fighting against abortion and homosexuality. In all these cases, much of the magazine's efforts are directed toward informing their readers how these God-directed people are facing persecution or indifference from any number of foes, but are pressing on regardless, as they are used by God to fight secular/liberal thought, liberal politicians, Islamic terrorism, and other ills.

Importantly, Schutz and Luckmann and, as we will see, Burns and Wuthnow, all emphasize the taken-for-granted aspect as being of paramount importance in looking at how people see the world through certain parameters and categories, how we map our views that things are one thing but not another, and how beliefs and ideologies are constructed and articulated on a constant basis. Schutz and Luckmann write that the stock of knowledge is "the core of my experience" and that what is taken for granted is "the province of the familiar: it presents solutions to problems of my previous experience. My stock of knowledge consists of such solutions to problems. These become constituted in interpretations of experience (that is to say, explications of the horizon)" (1973, pp. 9-11).

In this case, the stock of knowledge of Olasky and his staff includes the beliefs about the relationships between God, Scripture, journalism and society previously articulated both earlier in this chapter and in this study's introduction

and literature review. This knowledge, in turn, provides to them a constant framework for the "solutions," to use Schutz and Luckmann's term, to how to perform their work. These include who to interview, what topics should be written about often, how their knowledge of the Bible can be used on a daily basis to navigate the six "classes" of stories that Olasky stressed, and how stories should be written.

This Study's Goal

Since these basic, or stock, beliefs, have already been noted, the goal now is to map what Wuthnow (1989) called the "discursive field," or the "symbolic space or structure within the ideology itself" of *WORLD* and its staff. Significantly, Wuthnow discusses the discursive field in light of Martin Luther's teaching. As seen in the literature review, Olasky describes Luther's emphasis on Christians interpreting the word of God, as opposed to having the Roman Catholic Church doing so, as one of several early harbingers for what his journalists – and evangelicals in general – now stress in the sense of being part of a particular cultural group and its conflict with America at large. One can easily align Olasky's description and measure of Luther's importance with Wuthnow's description of his "reforming ideology," which is at once positive (in relying on God) and combative (in opposing the church and, in a larger sense, constrictive authority) relationship with the world that includes "the opposition between the received authority the church on one hand and the authority of the Word of God on the other hand" (p. 13).

Wuthnow describes this as a desire for liberation of thought from the authority of the church, which Luther believed receives and maintains its power as a result of "coercion, of chains and imprisonment." The alternative, a more personal understanding of and relationship with God, offers "freedom, liberty; it was the 'new wine' that worked effectively in the hearts of the believers." In Wuthnow's view, identifying a group's ideology is to "focus on the question of articulation," which is based solely on the "specific social context in which it appears." The discourse, then, "provides the fundamental categories in which thinking can take place" (pp. 13, 16).

Like Wuthnow, Burns (1999) describes these categories as "communities of discourse", which "*are formed, not only around the shared symbols used for communication*, *but around what is taken for granted*." "Members of a given rhetorical community are likely to share a common set of criteria with which to consider that rhetoric, and appeals to members of a given discursive community are likely to be ineffective if not expressed within the symbolic system of that community" (pp. 168-169, italics in original). Setting aside the issue of the effectiveness of the discourse, the analysis of which would suggest a study of *WORLD*'s audience, several aspects of this definition of a community of discourse are especially helpful when discussing the goals of this study.

First is the "common set of criteria" which, we have established, can be considered the ideas Olasky has provided for what constitutes the correct way to write about the world, from the basic premise about the role the magazine should play in the evangelical world and its battle against both mainstream media and the

permissive/liberal culture of the United States, to the more concrete ways that he says his journalists should be doing their jobs.

Second, and closely related, is the reality that a close reading of Olasky – and, as noted earlier in this chapter, the magazine – strongly suggests that what is, to use Burns' term, taken for granted by Olasky and his staff are beliefs in line with much of current evangelical thought about the state of the world, the mission of evangelicals, the oppression of Christians (and particularly those doing missionary work around the world), the general decay of the moral fabric of the country, and related topics. These are, in the terminology of Altheide (1996, pp. 28-29) expressed via a range of frames and themes and an overarching discourse. How to explore these related concepts (frames, themes and discourse), will be discussed in this study's next chapter, and the results of this analysis will form part of both the results and discussion chapters.

An important part of this research, and of the results of this study, is to note the tropes that consistently inform the work the *WORLD* staffers perform, the core ideas and assumptions that they say they know to be true and carry with them, according to their own words, that inform all they do. These tropes, or what Burns calls *"what is taken for granted"* (1999, p. 168, italics in original) can be seen as commonly used guideposts for the beliefs and patterns that guide the writers through their work, and greatly inform the themes and frames that the writers consistently employ.

In conducting the interviews at *WORLD*, the author was able to find much agreement for these tropes among many of the staffers, in terms of both what the

tropes were and their importance. For example, a number of the writers expressed the importance of humility in trying to interpret Scripture as a means of guiding their beliefs about their work, their realization that their understanding of God and Scripture was, at best, incomplete and imperfect. Thus, humility is a trope, an idea that is taken for granted among many members of the staff and informs what they do. These tropes are discussed, at length, in both the results and discussion chapters of this study, and listed in the Appendix.

This study's goal, then, is to attempt to get the *WORLD* staffers to articulate with greater specificity, and, using examples from their own work and work experiences, their beliefs in what it means to be an evangelical journalist devoted to following Olasky's biblical objectivity concept, to fixing God and Scripture as the center of their work, and performing this work in a manner consistent with the six "classes" of stories that he says should always be used to report and write for the magazine. In this way, the author seeks to do exactly what Wuthnow describes: Giving voice to how these people articulate their ideology as evangelical Christian journalists.

In doing so, this study will examine the culture at work at *WORLD*. Doing so, Wuthnow writes, means moving beyond the theoretical and looking at culture "as a form of behavior itself and as the tangible results of that behavior." Culture, then, includes looking at tangible products of how people think, including, among others, "literature, plays, newspapers, philosophical treatises, political tracts, party platforms, and propaganda." Culture is both behavior and the product of that behavior, and can be seen "in the activities and artifacts of its producers"

(Wuthnow, 1989, pp. 15-16). As we will see in the next chapter, the fusing of examining activities and artifacts – what people do, and what are the results of that work – is the essence of qualitative research.

Both in his written work and in conversation, Olasky grounds the beliefs and the resulting journalism at *WORLD* in the work of Christians who, over several centuries, and in a variety of circumstances, opposed what they saw, and currently see, as constrictive power structures. As a result, examining the meaning of what the people at *WORLD* are doing can be based both in history, and in how sociology in general is a matter of looking for the motivations behind people's actions. Weber, in discussing sociology and different groups and their organizing thoughts and motivations, provides a framework for this.

Weber's ideas about understanding the Protestant work ethic, Western capitalism and sociology rest, to a large degree, on "*interpretive understanding*" (in German, *Verstehen*) as the best way to "grasp subjective meaning" of different members of society; this was done to understand the link between social action and social context. This research, in turn, was driven by examining the "ideal types," or "constructed concepts endowed with a degree of consistency seldom found in actual history." In other words, the work of sociology and understanding people and cultures is largely a matter of examining and interpreting how different groups see themselves and their place in the world. He did this through seeking to understand the "frame of mind" of different groups of people in the 1600s, from businessmen to the nobility to various religious groups. Among this last category are Puritans. Puritans, as noted in the literature review, also often fought against

church and state authority, and were the precursors of American evangelicals. Their frame of mind, Weber found, was largely based on the importance of "methodical work," and his work in assessing Puritan thought was the act of "investigating the motivations that underlie the rigorous work patterns of the faithful" (Kalberg, 2009, pp. 36-37, 103, italics in original).

Puritans, Weber wrote, use the "doctrine of predestination" as the "dogmatic framework" for understanding and organizing their lives. They believed that some people will be saved, but that most will not. In a clear foreshadowing of Olasky's beliefs about the inerrancy of God and Scripture, and basing evangelical journalism on both, they believed that God was present in "every single detail of life." Moreover, believers saw themselves as "God's tools" – literally doing His work on earth as the path toward salvation (Weber, 2009, pp. 102-103, 120-121). Again, one can easily draw parallels between these beliefs and Olasky's rationale for the meaning of the work he and the rest of the *WORLD* staff do: God is everywhere, at the forefront of every event, issue and problem that the magazine addresses, and the meaning behind doing excellent journalism is proclaiming this belief.

When Olasky writes about these beliefs, and how evangelical journalists should put them in play in their work, and Weber makes observations about Puritans and their ideas about using their skills to proclaim God's word on earth while proclaiming the perfection and truth of Scripture, they are both discussing consistency, an unchanging set of beliefs and viewpoints. Olasky is particularly adamant about following Scripture – and, within it, the six classes of stories that he says provide a road map for both his own work and that of his staff – in all ways, in

all stories, and at all times. This is the essence of what he describes as giving readers the "God's eye view" of the world around them, in all its majesty and trouble and struggle.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the main goal of this study, which is to map and detail the ideology of the journalists at *WORLD*, including what their beliefs are about the work they are doing and its relationship to both the Bible, glorifying God at all times as they write and report, and fighting what they see as their main foes: the power and prevalence of secular/liberal thought that they believe is ruining America. In doing so, the author hopes to communicate what the staff members see as their "life-world," or the facets of reality that they as a group take for granted, and which inform how and why they do their work.

The author accepts that, to paraphrase Wuthnow, culture is not only what is believed and accepted by members of a group producing cultural artifacts, but those artifacts themselves – in this case, parts of one year's worth of issues of *WORLD*. Part of the results section detailing the findings of the three research questions posed in this study will be detailed as a collection of tropes, or themes, that emerge in both the comments of the *WORLD* staffers and the journalism found in the magazine. The next chapter of this study will detail the methods by which the author will collect and analyze the information that will serve as the basis of both the results and the discussion chapters.

Chapter 4: Methodology

This study takes a qualitative approach to communication research. Carey (1975) describes the purpose of qualitative research this way:

> To seize upon the interpretations people place on existence and to systematize them so they are more readily available to us. This is a process of making large claims from small matters: studying the particular rituals, plays, conversations, songs, dances, theories, and myths and gingerly reaching out to the full relations within a culture or a total way of life (p. 190).

This definition of qualitative research is being applied in this study by seeking to understand how the staff writers and editors at *WORLD* magazine interpret their work as evangelical Christian journalists and apply Marvin Olasky's biblical objectivity standard of reporting and writing, and how this work is part of the larger belief system and culture of evangelical Americans. As noted in this study's literature review, evangelical Christians have long seen themselves as an oppressed minority group functioning to a large extent outside the mainstream of American ideology and mass media, both of which, many evangelicals believe, have long been and remain infected with a destructive liberal/secular belief system. The ritual being studied is how these beliefs, and Olasky's biblical objectivity concept and framework, are applied to the work habits and news production at *WORLD*.

The specific approach taken in this study – interviews and analyzing documents – goes to the core of what qualitative researchers study: *"The performances and practices of human communication"* (Lindlof & Taylor, p. 4, italics

in original) and what they seek to accomplish, which is a "holistic description of cultural membership" (p. 16). In doing so, the author used his understanding of a variety of concepts that have been discussed in this study's literature review, including normative journalism objectivity and ideology and biblical objectivity as defined by Marvin Olasky, as well as interpretation of material obtained through the interviews at *WORLD*, to describe how these journalists see their work and how it relates to the balance between both long-held journalism standards and their Christian beliefs.

Much of the information in this study is gleaned from one-on-one interviews, both in person and on the telephone. Interviews "are particularly well suited to *understanding the social actor's experience, knowledge, and worldviews*" and are divided into three main categories: "stories, accounts, and explanations" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, pp. 173-174, italics in original). Retrieving information from the *WORLD* staff in this way is appropriate for this study because it is based on, as discussed in preceding chapters, their perspectives on the work that they do as evangelical Christian journalists.

Altheide (1996) describes *"ethnographic content analysis"* as "how a researcher interacts with documentary materials so that specific statements can be placed in the proper context for analysis" (p. 2, italics in original). Several authors have noted the importance of a researcher's interpretation of research material as the cornerstone of qualitative research. Lindlof and Taylor (2011) describe this method of inquiry and understanding this way: "Knowledge of social reality emerges from the fundamental interdependence that exists between

researchers and those they study. Researchers do not use methodological instruments. They *are* the instrument" (p. 9, italics in original).

Because of the importance placed on a researcher's personal interpretation of the collected material, it is important to give a few details about the author. I am a veteran journalist who has worked for various Texas newspapers for more than 20 years as a reporter, feature writer, music critic and columnist. I have also worked as a magazine writer and editor. I have never worked, either as a staff member or a freelance writer, for a religious publication. I grew up in a conservative, Roman Catholic home, mainly in the suburbs of Detroit, Michigan and Fort Worth, Texas. Although my approach to this dissertation was, of course, shaped by these influences, I sought to listen carefully and without prejudice to the perspectives of the *WORLD* journalists, and to appreciate the fact that their interpretation of news events and the Bible are not, quite often, the same as mine.

In this study, I collected, organized, categorized and interpreted both the opinions and observations of the *WORLD* staff members and a selection of their work, and how this work describes the events and issues being reported on, to answer the study's three research questions. This research satisfies the definition of a case study supplied by Yin (2009), who wrote that such studies "investigate a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context." Also, Yin writes, case studies rely on triangulating "multiple sources of evidence" and benefit from "the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis" (p. 18).

As noted in this study's introduction, in-person, one-on-one interviews were conducted with members of the *WORLD* staff, both at the *WORLD* headquarters and at several staff members' homes; several other members of the staff were interviewed by telephone. These interviews were used to answer the study's research questions, which examine how the journalists fuse normative journalism standards with their religious beliefs; how they apply Olaksy's concept of biblical objectivity to their work; and how their work is part of the larger belief system and culture of evangelical Americans. Within the broad framework of these research questions, each interviewee was asked to comment on a variety of subtopics to provide a greater understanding of both how the journalists apply Olasky's concept and the ideology of evangelical Christianity, as well as what they see as the function and importance of evangelical Christian journalism in providing information and, to paraphrase Olasky, challenging both the normative journalism standards of objectivity and the dominance of liberal secular thought found at mainstream news organizations. The subtopics that make up the majority of the questions that each journalist was asked are in the Appendix.

At the same time, the previous year of *WORLD* magazine was analyzed by using the method that Altheide (1996) describes as "ethnographic content analysis." As a contrast to quantitative content analysis, ethnographic content analysis hinges on the "reflexive and highly interactive nature of the investigator" in an attempt to study the culture that creates and the meaning behind the text being studied. Altheide writes that "documents are studied to understand culture –

or the process and the array of objects, symbols, and meanings that make up social reality shared by members of a society" (pp. 2, 13, 16).

To do this, Altheide designed a 12-step process that begins with identifying a "specific problem to be investigated," which in this case is pursuing an investigation of the ideology at work at an evangelical Christian news publication. The next steps involve understanding the process and context of the information source and then, via looking at a small number of "relevant documents," selecting a "unit of analysis" to work with. In this case, the unit of analysis was a news story or column in *WORLD*. The process continues with deciding on categories for the data collection and selecting a "protocol" for analyzing them. A protocol is "a way to ask questions of a document; a protocol is a list of questions, items, categories, or variables that guide data collection from documents." The protocols are tested and revised by adding to the number of "cases" that are analyzed. An essential part of this analysis involves finding the themes, frames and discourse of the articles being analyzed (pp. 23-31).

Altheide's method of qualitative analysis continues with deciding on a "sampling rationale and strategy." He recommends "progressive theoretical sampling," which is described as "selection of materials based on emerging understanding of the topic under investigation. The idea is to select materials for conceptual or theoretically relevant reasons." The data is then collected based on "preset codes" and "many descriptive examples." The data analysis is then done, with the researcher writing notes and longer descriptions, or "brief summaries or overviews of data for each category," of what is found. Summaries, combined with

examples of both "typical cases" and "extremes" of the material, are written. A close, and ongoing, reading of the data is necessary. "In general, data analysis consists of extensive reading, sorting, and searching through your materials, comparing within categories, coding, and adding key words and concepts; and then writing mini-summaries of categories." The 12 steps end with writing a draft of the findings gleaned via the previous steps (pp. 32-44).

This process is primarily designed to discover the "meaning and emphasis" of the documents being investigated. This is done by finding the "frame, theme, and discourse" of the documents. Altheide writes that these are "overlapping" concepts dealing with the underlying messages of the text being studied, and that "themes are the recurring typical theses that run through a lot of the reports. Frames are the focus, a parameter or boundary, for discussing a particular event. Frames focus on what will be discussed, how it will be discussed, and above all, how it will not be discussed." The third element of meaning in documents, discourse, "refers to the parameters of relevant meaning that one uses to talk about things . . . We can simply say that discourse and frame work together to suggest a taken-for-granted perspective for how one might approach a problem" (pp. 28, 31).

In this case, discovering the meaning and emphasis of stories in *WORLD* both assisted the researcher in determining the way that the authors and editors approach the stories and topics that are being written about, and provided greater insight for the interviews that followed. Gaining an understanding of what and how the magazine writes about society led the researcher to ask more relevant,

and pointed, questions about the work being done; for example, providing specific examples of how topics and news events were approached.

The data collected through these interviews was analyzed through the grounded theory approach, which Lindlof and Taylor describe as being able to "bring a sense of order to the messy process of qualitative research" (1996, p. 250). Glaser and Strauss (1967) write that this is "*how the discovery of theory from data – systematically obtained and analyzed in social research – can be furthered."* This "discovery of theory from data" is a matter of "providing us with relevant predictions, explanations, interpretations and applications" (p. 1, italics in original). The authors add that "generating theory from data means that most hypotheses and concepts not only come from data, but are systematically worked out in relation to the data during the course of the research. *Generating a theory involves a process of research"* (p. 6, italics in original).

In this context, theories, Lindlof and Taylor (2011) write, are "propositions and concepts" that a researcher can use at the beginning of a given study, but that can also be revamped, or even discarded, during the course of the fieldwork, analysis, and writing. Grounded theory involves a personal interpretation the researcher gives to the perceptions he or she has of the material as it is being collected, organized, and, finally, discussed in the study. "The ideas drawn from theory are useful to the extent that they help you stretch your imagination and create and validate claims" about the material (p. 267).

The researcher followed Lindlof and Taylor's approach to grounded theory and the key features that they draw out. Lindlof and Taylor write that grounded

theory uses categories for analyzing the data that "develop through an ongoing process of comparing units of data with each other (a process known as the *constant-comparative method*)" before the researcher sits down to write, and continue to develop the study's comparison, categorization and theorization during the analysis and writing of the study (pp. 250-251, italics in original). Specifically, the researcher operationalized the collection and organization of the interview material used in this study via Lindlof and Taylor's method in this way:

Olasky gave his written approval for this project, and promised his participation in it, in September 2012. Recruitment of the magazine's writers and editors was done via email and follow up phone calls. Individual interviews were conducted with *WORLD* writers and editors at the magazine's offices, at the journalists' homes, and by telephone. The interviews were recorded both by hand, and via a digital recording device. The interviews were transcribed by the researcher. The length of the interviews varied greatly, between, at minimum, one hour, to several hours. The longest interview, with vice president Warren Cole Smith, lasted more than three hours. The average length of the interviews, then, was about 90 minutes.

Olasky did not, however, allow the researcher to spend very much time observing the *WORLD* staff in its office. The researcher was not, for example, allowed to spend extended periods of time in the office, or to attend the biweekly staff meetings, or sit in on editing sessions. While some observation was done in the course of doing the in-person interviews, of course, observation was not, then, a major part of this study.

The researcher also made notes of the connection between individual stories that the *WORLD* staffers point out as examples of how they do their work by following Olasky's biblical objectivity methodology, as well as its application via his framework of six classes of stories and their consistency with biblical teachings. Lindlof and Taylor (2011) write that making sense of the large amount of data that is the result of the fieldwork in ethnographic studies is largely a matter of answering two overarching questions about the material: "What does it mean?" and "What sense can I make of it?," both of which involve analysis that begins during the data collection in the field and "extends far into the writing that eventually brings a project to its conclusion" (p. 241).

Doing so, they write, means that data must be organized, categorized, and analyzed via a process that includes, first, "*data reduction*," or making value judgments about different parts of the collected material based on "emerging schemes of interpretation." This is done by using "categories and codes that put you in touch with those parts of the material that can be used to construct claims" about it. Data analysis, they write, begins in the field, "informally at the very moment that field notes, interview transcripts, and material culture or document notes are created," as the researcher does the work at hand while "reflecting on these past events and discourses." This examination and categorization of the material's importance is also done later, when the researcher is back in his or her office, and reflecting on parts, or all, of the collected material (pp. 243-244, italics in original). The authors recommend the data's organization be a continuous process accomplished by creating, and then employing, categories and codes.

Categorizing data is organizing it by looking for similarities among "concepts, constructs, themes and other types of 'bins' in which to put items that are similar" (p. 247).

The material will, at the same time, be organized via codes, or the "linkages between data and the categories the researcher creates." While similar in that both serve to aid the researcher in organizing and making sense of the large amount of material that an ethnographic study generates, categories and codes are not the same. The latter exist to "characterize the individual elements constituting a category," as well as to "mark the units of text from fieldnotes, transcripts, documents, and audio-visual material, which permit the researcher to sort, retrieve, link, and display data." The authors further explain the importance and function of codes by describing them as the "islands, archipelagos, and other landmasses of meaningful data from the surrounding sea of raw, uncoded data" (p. 248). Although the material described in Lindlof and Taylor is applicable to analysis of documents, and has similarities to Altheide's method, the latter was used for document analysis because it is specifically tailored to the analysis of media documents, such as the articles in *WORLD*.

Because this study is based partially on the researcher's use and interpretation of the interviews conducted with the magazine's employees, coding the narratives the interviewees offer was especially important as a way of finding "cultural and interpersonal patterns in talk, stories, media content, and other narrative texts" (p. 249). In this case, the researcher found patterns and themes that explained how the interviewees interpret and understand the questions noted

in this study's Appendix, which helped answer the overarching research questions posed in this paper's literature review.

As these journalists were asked to discuss how different topics and news events have been covered based on their Christian beliefs and the overall ideology espoused by Olasky and his emphasis on biblical objectivity, coding the narratives were also be informed by attention to frames. *WORLD* writers and editors were asked to note and discuss specific stories and how exactly they used their beliefs and the concept of biblical objectivity and its application in their reporting, writing, and editing. The researcher considered the frames expressed in these individual interviews to assess the content of the stories that the *WORLD* staffers use as examples of their application of their overall evangelical beliefs and the concept and application of biblical objectivity.

Entman (1993) writes that "to frame is to *select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communication text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation* for the item described" (p. 52, italics in original). By framing news events in a particular way, according to Gamson and Modigliani (1989), news organizations provide "interpretations and meanings for relevant events" and present the news "not as individual items, but as *interpretive packages*" (p. 2, italics in original).

Olasky's biblical objectivity concept adheres closely to these ideas, in that he and his staffers are using their Christian beliefs as the most important aspect of the news that they cover. He is asking that evangelical journalists in general and

WORLD staffers in particular provide a God-centered, Scripture-based, conservative and anti-liberal/secular prism with which to see and report on the world – to, as he wrote, proclaim "God's objective truth as far as we know it." Doing so, Olasky, writes, provides the direction and perspective the writer needs to assemble and write a story while providing readers with a "faithful reflection of the biblical view, as best we can discern it through God's Word" (Olasky, 1996, pp. 24-25). It is hard to imagine a more ready example of the idea of "interpretive packages" that Gamson and Modigliani wrote of as a working definition of journalistic framing than Olasky's biblical objectivity concept and its framework application.

Analysis of the interviews and documents was done in service to applying grounded theory to the material gathered during the fieldwork and the interpretations the researcher makes of it. Lindlof and Taylor (2011) write that grounded theory is especially important to qualitative researchers, first, because "emergent theory is 'grounded in' the relationships between data and the categories into which they are coded," second, because through it "categories develop through an ongoing process of comparing units of data with each other," and, finally, because "codes, categories, and category definitions continue to change dynamically while the researcher is still in the field, with new data altering the scope and terms of the analytic framework." Grounded theory via the constant-comparative method, then, allows researchers to constantly revamp and recode material for greater understanding of how different parts of the material relate to each other, which provides greater clarity and precision for the researcher. "We

begin to see more clearly how the categories are differentiated from each other, how they interrelate, and how full (or empty) of compelling evidence they are" (pp. 250-251).

Lindlof and Taylor (2011) note that another step – interpretation – is necessary in gathering, organizing, and, finally, writing the results in a study. There are several devices for interpreting the material at hand, which, they write, is a matter of using the disparate part of the gathered information to "build a macro structure that interconnects the key parts of the data." In addition, the researcher's interpretation of the collected material was aided and informed by his understanding of how the data is related to several theories that have been discussed in the previous chapter, including journalism ideology and objectivity, as well as how both are used in service to promote and underscore the larger ideology at work in America social life and politics.

The ultimate goal is to find themes in the material – in this case, the interviews with the *WORLD* journalists and the documents, including news stories – that can be understood, and then written, in "particularly arresting or insightful ways." Among the devices the authors list for interpretation are metaphors, ironic expressions, paradigms, and, perhaps most important, exemplars (or, more commonly, examples), the last of which are a "segment of data used to shape and advance an argument" (pp. 266-269).

This means that a single incident, example, or event, or a collection of related incidents, examples, or events, are used to illustrate larger points or concepts. For this study, the researcher used quotes and examples – including the

published stories that the interviewees selected – as examples of how they see and execute their jobs at *WORLD*, and to make larger points about their work as evangelical journalists in general and working under the direction of Olasky and his biblical objectivity concept and the framework of six different classes of stories in particular.

These individual quotes and examples of stories were tied together and organized by the researcher in service of making larger points and observations to help answer this study's research questions and generate a theory, or theories, about the relationships between normative and biblical objectivity, as well as biblical objectivity and its interpretation and application by *WORLD* journalists and how this application informs the magazine's content. Grounded theory is narrower in scope than advancing broad new macro theories. It remains popular in doing qualitative studies in part because of its flexibility, and in part because it uses the methods above, including constant-comparative method, as a way of analyzing the data at hand any number of times. In this way, grounded theory "articulates a compelling 'logic of discovery'" absent in other types of research (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 250).

Conclusion

This chapter has provided a detailed explanation of how the author conducted this study's research, including information about the methods that were used, the nature of document analysis, the process of securing and conducting interviews with the *WORLD* journalists, strategies for organizing and interpreting the material collected in the field, the relationship between the

collected material and grounded theory, and, finally, how the study was written. This study's next chapter will present the results of the research.

Chapter 5: Results

This chapter details the findings of the research via the methods described in Chapter 4. This will be accomplished by, first, providing information on the author's research, including the interviews executed at *WORLD*'s headquarters in Asheville, North Carolina, in Charlotte, North Carolina, and by telephone, and analyzing one year of the printed version of the magazine and its policy/style book. After this, each of the three research questions posed at the end of Chapter 2 will be answered. The answers to each research question will have a separate section within this chapter.

Research

The research used to gather the information to answer this dissertation's three research questions is two-fold. First, the author conducted interviews with 13 members of the *WORLD* staff, both at home/office settings in both Asheville and Charlotte, North Carolina, in April 2013, and during telephone conversations later that month and in May 2013. Second, the author analyzed one year of the print edition of *WORLD* magazine, beginning in July 2012 and ending in June 2013, as well as the magazine's policy book. Written by Dr. Marvin Olasky, the policy book provides the publication's mission statement and discusses such topics as tips for good writing, editorial procedures, ethics, word usage, biblical objectivity, punctuation, and format and design. More detailed information on these research methods is provided in the two sections below.

Interviews and Observation

Interview requests were sent electronically to 16 members of the *WORLD* staff. Of these, 13 consented to in-person or telephone interviews. These were:

1. Editor-in-chief Dr. Marvin Olasky.

2. Founder Joel Belz.

3. Vice president Warren Cole Smith.

4. Chief executive officer Kevin Martin.

5. Managing editor Tim Lamer.

6. Editor Mindy Belz.

7. News editor Jamie Dean.

8. Senior writer Susan Olasky.

9. Senior writer Lynn Vincent.

10. Reporter Emily Belz.

11. Correspondent Sophia Lee.

12. Correspondent Angela Lu.

13. Correspondent Tiffany Owens.

Marvin and Susan Olasky, Joel and Mindy Belz, Smith, Martin, Dean and Owens were all interviewed in person in Asheville or Charlotte, North Carolina. Lamer, Vincent, Emily Belz, Lee and Lu were interviewed by telephone. The interviews focused on the questions which can be found in Appendix A of this study.

The *WORLD* staff works out of a stand-alone building in the Biltmore Village Historic District, a small, quaint collection of retail shops, restaurants and art

galleries set on tree-lined streets and brick sidewalks south of downtown Asheville. The village is near the entrance to the Biltmore Estate, George Washington Vanderbilt's tourist-friendly mansion and grounds, and was originally constructed in the late 1800s to house workers at the estate. The journalists are on the second floor of the building. The second floor is quiet, with none of the hubbub and confusion of a newspaper newsroom, and the offices of individuals, such as the Olaskys, are small. Smith's house is large and comfortable, with two stories and a deck, and is at the end of a quiet, leafy cul-de-sac in the Charlotte suburbs. He does his work out of an office in the basement.

It should be noted that the titles of several *WORLD* staff members do not indicate how much writing each person does for the magazine. Mindy Belz, for example, writes at least one column and one news story in each issue of the magazine; while she does write about domestic topics, much of her focus is on Christian missionary efforts in Africa and the Middle East and the challenges faced by indigenous Christians in those areas, which often includes writing feature stories about the persecution of Christians by Muslims. Her husband, Joel Belz, writes one column per issue. Smith and Dean also contribute a significant amount of reporting to each issue. Dean is the magazine's most prolific news/feature reporter, frequently writing on such topics as community recovery in New York and New Jersey from Hurricane Sandy, the school shootings in Sandy Hook, Connecticut, and the Boston Marathon bombings.

Marvin Olasky writes a column in each issue, and frequently contributes news and opinion stories; he also writes the Q&A story in each issue, which is an

in-person interview that he conducts with a variety of people in academia, politics, government and entertainment. These interviews are conducted before a student audience at Patrick Henry College; in a few cases, the interviews are spread across two consecutive issues of *WORLD*.

WORLD and Policy Book Analysis

The author analyzed 24 issues of *WORLD*'s print edition, which is published twice per month. The period of analysis was one year. Because this dissertation's goal is, in part, to discuss how the magazine writes about a wide range of both foreign and domestic topics and significant news events, as opposed to only opinion pieces or news coverage, seven different parts of each issue of *WORLD* were selected for analysis. These include:

1. Joel Belz's column. This column is placed at the front of each issue of the magazine.

2. Mindy Belz's column.

3. Marvin Olasky's column. This column is placed at the end of each issue.

4. Olasky's Q&A interview.

5. Each issue's cover story. Invariably the longest and most in-depth story of a given issue, the cover story highlights the ongoing concerns and most important news events and trends that the magazine is covering. These stories are often written by Dean or Mindy Belz. Topics for cover stories have included the conflict in Syria, the controversy over the Boys Scouts of America admitting gay members, assistance by various churches to Boston after the bombings, upcoming Supreme Court decisions involving gay marriage, the 2012 presidential election,

immigration, assistance for the urban poor in various American cities, persecution of Christians, the aftermath of the Sandy Hook shootings, and the stand various Christian business owners are taking against the Affordable Care Act, which is nicknamed Obamacare.

6. The Dispatches item. This is a news story that is found in each issue after Joel Belz's column and before Olasky's Q&A interview. Dispatches news stories are relatively brief, staff-generated, and provide information about news events such as progress in the trial of abortion doctor Dr. Kermit Gosnell, attacks by Muslims on Christians, the election of Pope Francis, and Obama's second inaugural speech. Again, Dean writes many of these stories, as does Mindy Belz.

7. The main News story. These stories are, typically, longer and more in-depth than the Dispatches items, but briefer than the cover story. The news story runs after the cover story but before Marvin Olasky's column. Topics covered in the News section include the testimony concerning the September 2012 attack on the United States embassy in Benghazi, Libya, recovery in New York and New Jersey after Hurricane Sandy, the annual International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church, and a profile of a retiree who brings together soldiers who served in the Vietnam War.

WORLD's policy book is not published or made available to the public for viewing or download at the magazine's web site, although the "About Us" mission statement at the web site is found, in slightly altered form, in the book. At the author's request, the 2012 edition of the policy book was provided to the author by Olasky via an email attachment in the spring of 2013.

The policy book is included for analysis in this study because it explains how work at *WORLD* should be performed, both in practical terms (such as how to conduct interviews and write stories) and how the magazine's staff members should view their work in the context of their relationship with mainstream news organizations, their faith, their ethics, and biblical objectivity. As such, the policy book codifies a number of the main concepts and ideas that greatly inform how the staff understands its work and its importance.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1: How do the journalists at *WORLD* magazine fuse normative journalism routines and standards with their religious beliefs as evangelical Christians?

It should first be noted that the *WORLD* journalists interviewed for this study are all polite, well-spoken and thoughtful people who appear to be deeply committed to both their faith and their profession, and often seemed grateful that their opinions and perspectives were being sought by the author. They took the interviews and the individual questions seriously, and were fully engaged in the interview process; there were, in other words, very few answers that could be described as flippant.

Moreover, even though the interviewees never asked how other staff members had answered the questions posed to them, their answers were often remarkably similar, reflecting, perhaps, a true, if informal, consensus of attitude and perspective on their work and how it is intertwined with their faith. Similarly,

the analysis of *WORLD* revealed that the issues, perspectives, and interview subjects remained consistent from issue to issue and story to story.

As a result, it is possible to organize the answer to Research Question 1 around a series of themes, or tropes, that emerge from the interviews, and to display how these categories of answers are reflected in the magazine and policy book analysis. These are listed and detailed below.

Journalism as a holy calling and a uniquely Christian profession

WORLD staffers do not see the differences between their work and that of secular journalists as one of professional standards regarding quality of reporting or writing, or the need to provide information on events that have recently occurred or major topics and trends that affect society. They believe that these time-honored goals are often met by secular publications, that those publications often contain excellent writing and reporting, that secular journalists are to be admired and emulated for their individual talents, and that training at major secular publications can prove invaluable for those seeking a career in the field of Christian journalism.

For example, over lunch at an Asheville café, Marvin Olasky praised a young former *WORLD* intern for securing a summer internship at the *Chicago Sun-Times*, and said that he hoped that other young Christian journalists would hone their skills at established secular publications. "If she wants to do that, I am glad she can see both sides," he said (personal communication, April 4, 2013).

Similarly, the magazine's policy book contains numerous examples of praise for the work of secular journalists as a way of showing *WORLD* writers how to

better perform their work. Newspaper and magazine reporters including Gay Talese, Susan Orlean, Richard Ben Cramer, Michael Lewis and Lawrence Wright are all quoted, often extensively, in addressing such topics as the writing process, how to conduct interviews, and finding the determination to revise their work to make it better.

In fact, the policy book quotes journalists who work or have worked for secular publications almost exclusively, adding to the sense that Olasky and his staff find much to be admired in the news and feature stories published by a wide variety of secular publications. Even Vincent, perhaps the interviewee who was the most stridently opposed to the secular perspective of most mainstream news publications, effusively praised established newspapers such as the *San Francisco Chronicle* and the *Wall Street Journal* – and secular newspapers and weekly news magazines in general – for their tradition of reporting "with substance," which she believes is being eroded in the current "blabocracy," which she describes as "virtual shouting matches and passing off invective as news. I wish we'd get back to reporting and not sermonizing – sermons don't only come from evangelicals" (personal communication, April 30, 2013).

As a result, it is an overall perspective, rather than bedrock journalism standards, that the staffers see as the divide between secular and evangelical Christian journalists. *WORLD*'s journalism is greatly informed by a sense of mission, a belief that the work they are doing is a calling, a singularly Christian vocation that is similar in several respects to the Bible in both presentation and

what several biblical figures were commanded by God to do: write the truth, warn the faithful, and guard against sin.

This theme, comparing biblical figures and events to the journalists' mission at *WORLD,* begins in the policy book. The Bible, Olasky writes, is a book of stories, of "news and features," as compared to the Quran, which is "almost all editorial, telling rather than showing. The Bible tells stories, the Quran gives orders." As a result, Christian journalists continue the work of the Bible by "emphasizing story-telling." Olasky frames modern Christian journalists not as simply reporters attempting to do good, honest reporting and writing, but as having a higher purpose and working toward higher goals and ideals, as the modern inheritors of the work done by biblical figures such as the watchman found in the book of Ezekiel, who was sent by God to Israel. In this discourse, Olasky writes that, like the watchman, Christian journalists should see themselves as protagonists against the enemy "bringing a sword to the land, or a metaphorical enemy: sin. The watchman's goal is to warn the people when a threat appears" (Olasky, 2012, p. 21). To Olasky and many of his co-workers, the modern enemies that threaten them and other Christians, as well as the well-being of America in general, include the mainstream media, the current administration of President Barack Obama, the popularity of secular/liberal thought, and the rising force of Muslims, both in this country and abroad.

Several of the staffers, including Joel Belz, Smith and Vincent, underscored this idea when discussing what they see as the uniquely Christian aspect of journalism, what Smith calls the "Christian stewardship" sense of the importance

of their work (personal communication, April 16, 2013). In doing so, *WORLD* writers refer to passages in the Bible to convey the connection between what they are doing and what God commanded biblical figures such as Adam and John the Baptist to do. Like them, Smith says, he is giving his "testimony" and "bearing witness" for God to what he sees around him, and the stories that he is covering. "Journalism is a Christian vocation," said Smith. "The Bible is a book of journalism more than a book of history. In Revelation Jesus comes to John and says, 'Write down what you see.' That's what journalism does."

Similarly, Susan Olasky said that the beginning of the Gospel of Luke greatly informs her sense of self as a Christian journalist. The gospel is addressed to Theophilus and tells the story of the life of Jesus, and in the opening verses, Luke writes about the importance of "eyewitnesses," and setting down an accurate record of what happened, so that Theophilus "mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed" (Luke 1:4, King James Version).

"I keep going back to this idea," said Olaksy (personal communication, April 4, 2013). "Luke wrote down what he found so Theophilus could know the exact truth. I'm going to carefully investigate and write out what I find. I'm not reporting sound bites and talking points."

This sense of story-telling as a particularly Christian vocation was also noted by Joel Belz, who compared their work to Jesus Christ's ministry: "It's not a coincidence that Jesus was a consummate storyteller. He said, 'A man had two sons' and he tells the story of the two sons. Most effective persuasion about culture comes from effective storytelling" (personal communication, April 5, 2013).

WORLD is neither conservative nor liberal

This sense of reporting from a Christian perspective and working in the tradition of biblical figures is underscored by the widely held belief among *WORLD* staffers that they are viewing the world from a position that de-emphasizes the American political system – which, they say, hinges on the beliefs of and contrasts between liberals and conservatives, Republicans and Democrats. As Christians first and foremost, they see themselves as having the freedom to report from a position not weighed down or beholden to either/or positions at the heart of the current American political landscape. In a sense, they say, they are holding themselves above the fray because they are not guided by such shifting ideas; they are, above all else, Christians trying to work in accordance with more eternal standards.

Tim Lamer says that while the "conservative movement is closer to our point of view than the liberals would be," following biblical teachings is more important than either perspective (personal communication, May 6, 2013).

> I've voted Republican in the last several elections, but we're not conservative. We're perfectly willing to criticize conservatives if they're not in line with biblical views. Someone who follows Ayn Rand and believes poor people don't matter, that's not in line with biblical teachings on helping the poor. We don't fall into the conservative camp.

Marvin Olasky's example of how the *WORLD* perspective is not in accordance with either the conservative or liberal schools of thought is immigration, and what he sees as the tendency of conservatives to say that liberals "just want to open the gates" and the liberal tendency to describe conservatives

who oppose immigration as "racist or just generally nasty." Rather, he says, *WORLD* approaches the subject from the perspective of first being "compassionate toward sojourners in our midst." While noting, as Lamer does, that the *WORLD* position – and the politics of individual staff members – is often closer to the general conservative viewpoint than the liberal viewpoint, "we're different from both. We start with reading the Bible."

This, says Susan Olasky, is because "both secular liberal and conservatives' understanding of people are in materialistic terms. We see that people are created in the image of God. We remind people that this matters."

Olasky, too, says that this belief in the primacy of God and biblical teachings over current liberal and conservative perspectives means that the first responsibility as a reporter is to look at the disadvantaged – which, she notes, can mean the unborn that are caught in the middle of the conservative/liberal debate on abortion. Going back to more basic, eternal truths, such as the soul being present in all people, means, she says, approaching stories from a perspective that leads to emphasizing different aspects of the abortion debate.

> If you see the *New York Times* articles about abortion, they have a certain stance, that it's freedom for the woman. From my perspective, the fact that God makes human beings raises different questions. If God makes us, as a woman I know I was created and when I'm pregnant something in my body is created to live. If you believe humans are made in the image of God and have souls that cannot die, there's a one-flesh aspect to that. That's how the world is. And that leads to interesting stories. I start thinking about a story

that way – what questions am I thinking about? If a million women have abortions in this country a year, it changes them and it changes the culture.

Through the comments of these *WORLD* staff members, and the instructions in the magazine's policy book, it is evident that the difference between evangelical Christian and secular journalists is seen as not ability or daily routines or quality of work, but rather of purpose. The comments here suggest that *WORLD* reporters and editors view what they are doing as outside the norms of mainstream journalism in the sense of historical antecedents and meaning. They see themselves as carrying on the traditions of Jesus and a variety of biblical figures who discussed culture through stories, not providing a set of orders; informed the faithful about threats from outside the "walls" of Christian belief and the protection of a like-minded community of believers; and told the truth about the world around them through thorough investigation and description. In doing this, they believe, they are adding their voices and their observations to an ancient, God-directed tradition designed to help those who believe as they do and wish to make sense of the world.

The meta-narrative: creation, fall and redemption

At the heart of the viewpoint of *WORLD* staffers about the mission of Christian journalists and their relationship to secular journalists is the biblical narrative of mankind's creation, fall and, it is hoped, eventual redemption and salvation by God. This narrative of mankind's past, present and future, beginning with Adam and Eve's original sin and being cast out of the Garden of Eden, is an essential aspect of Christian belief. References to the fall as described in the Book

of Genesis, and the sinful nature of mankind, are found throughout the Bible, including Romans: "As is it written, There is none righteous, no, not one" and "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:10, 3:23, King James Version). The importance of looking at the world through the lens of the meta-narrative was noted by virtually every staff member interviewed for this study, from the oldest, founder Joel Belz, to the youngest, correspondent Tiffany Owens.

This theme informs the work done at *WORLD* in several ways, most notably the sense that if the Bible is the starting point for understanding what is happening in the world today, it follows that God – and not people as individuals or as groups, such as governments – is directing everything that happens, and that people do things that they should not do because they are, first and foremost, fallen – sinners who naturally commit crimes and act inappropriately, and are not doing such things primarily as a result of the influence of other people or society as a whole.

At the same time, the other side of the meta-narrative theme is that it is also assumes that when people do good works – such as, as frequently seen in stories in the magazine, spreading Christianity, fighting abortion, or trying to help the poor and downtrodden members of society – they are described as doing so not for individual reward, but as a sign that God is working in their lives, that they are being directed by God to do (as will be explored later in this chapter) what people who do not believe in God are unwilling to do, and that in the end there will be salvation and eternal reward.

"It all comes from the hand of God," said Joel Belz. "We messed it up and He's redeeming and restoring what we messed up. The story of the Bible is the story of creation, fall and redemption. We always look for that theme in our reporting."

This is done, according to Owens, who has worked for *WORLD* for two years, by often reminding herself that "God is in control" and about "God's grace" when looking at the "craziness" and lack of morality in the modern, secular world (personal communication, April 10, 2013), including her contemporaries in their 20s. As God will someday renew the world for all eternity, she says, so too is He working through Christians to renew the world in the here and now, even though their efforts will be imperfect. This, she says, is the "counter-narrative" to the prevailing narrative offered by both secular media and secular society, which she describes as being concerned with fleeting, consumer-driven goals.

Those narratives, she says, are "very loud" in American culture, and especially among teens and young adults, and include the "YOLO narrative" so popular among young people. YOLO is the acronym for "you only live once" and, as popularized by several rappers, stands for the belief that people should live for today and not worry about tomorrow (Martin, 2012, ¶ 2). This is, Owens says, a hedonistic stance that ignores the consequences of one's actions and promotes the pursuit of temporary pleasures, such as sex before marriage and conspicuous consumption while forgetting the importance of the meta-narrative of God's return and the promise of eternal salvation, and living one's life accordingly.

I'm inspired when I'm reminded daily that it's all part of a larger story. Christians need to be reminded of that – it's all part of a larger story. Our job is to join Him in the renewal, and He has a role for us. Things happen because of sin. The biblical meta-narrative lets you process stories, that bad things happen but eventually there will be redemption and everything will be renewed. We emphasize telling stories of the world in the context of God's sovereignty and His grace.

Smith, too, discussed the meta-narrative and the fallen nature of mankind as essential for understanding the difference between secular and evangelical Christian reporting. Secular reporters who do not see the meta-narrative, mankind's original sin, and the connectedness of all events that are being covered, believe in individual, episodic stories and that people are both basically good and in control of what they do. Asked to give an example, he brought up homosexuality.

When a gay man tells his story, his narrative doesn't connect to the meta-narrative. He doesn't connect to the notion of original sin – he's corrupt. We're all corrupt. Christianity says we are born in corruption – Jesus brings the happy ending. So our narratives relate to the meta-narrative. Our narratives are like an impressionist painting. There's a drib here and a drab there, but when you step back, you can see the entire painting. What the secular media is doing is putting black dots on a page, and eventually it will just become all back.

The connection between current events and the meta-narrative of God's eventual return is seen in a variety of the stories printed in *WORLD*. Ready

examples are the cover stories for the November 3 and December 29, 2012, and January 12, 2013, issues, as well as numerous columns.

In the November 3 story, "Decision time," Marvin Olasky frames the upcoming elections not as the "crapshoot" that "materialist" observers see them, but as a chance to pray and "trust in God's providential guidance in all that happens." His theme in looking at the possible outcomes of the contest is that, no matter what, God is in control, and that no matter how badly Obama winning a second term in the White House would be, in the end, God will rectify all things. His discourse in writing about this hinges on the wide gulf between our imperfection and God's perfection: while we can hope to make the right decisions about who to vote for we should always remember that our ability to do so is limited because "all elections depend on fallen and sinful individuals, with all the quirky reasoning at our commend, marking ballots." If this, and possible election outcomes that we do not want, sound scary, we should always remember to trust God and remember that Jesus Christ's crucifixion and eventual return will ultimately save us from our "arrogance and folly and evil inclinations. Faith in democracy, the Founders, and even America itself is insufficient. We need faith in God" (Olasky, 2012, p. 44).

In the December 29 issue, Olasky extends this theme by making the connection between Adam's fall from grace in the Garden of Eden to numerous events that occurred in 2012, including drought, war in Syria, and Hurricane Sandy. All of these modern events, he writes, are not individual incidents controlled by people, but rather the fault of mankind in general, or what he calls the "repercussions of mankind's fall." He concludes the story with the suggestion

that "We can end 2012 with the words that end the Bible: 'Come, Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.'" In doing so via this discourse, Olasky frames both mankind's failings and natural disasters as proof of man's inadequacy and God's providence over all events, and suggests that help for mankind's troubles will only come with God's salvation, which we should all anticipate and ask for (Olasky, 2012, p. 29).

Similarly, Emily Belz's January 12 cover story about the shootings in Sandy Hook, Connecticut, "A town clothed in misery," extensively quoted two local pastors, Mike Mancini and Parker Reardon, who were trying to comfort the community, about the connection between the shootings and the failure of mankind as the result of the fall. The theme of their remarks – and, thus, the story itself – adheres to the theme of the metal-narrative: the inherently sinful nature of man is the cause for the shootings, rather than the mental illness or evil of the shooter, and hoping for God's eventual return and renewal is the best way to help people get through the horrific days and weeks after the massacre.

Quotes emphasizing the importance of the meta-narrative theme appear at several points in the story, and a quote from Mancini, of Walnut Hill Community Church, about God's hand in all things and eventual return – "He's coming back to make all things whole. So there's hope. That's it" – ends the story. Belz's discourse is not on recovery efforts as a whole, but rather on the spiritual aspect of how the town is, through the work of conservative Christians, dealing with an unimaginable tragedy, and how those pastors are framing their messages as the need for the Sandy Hook community to understand the shootings not as the individual failing of

Adam Lanza, but, rather, as proof of mankind's sinfulness in a "broken" world (Belz, 2013, p. 37).

Numerous columnists also use the meta-narrative theme as the best way to understand events and trends. In her December 29, 2012, column "A grain of wheat," Mindy Belz wrote about the death of American Jeremiah Small in Iraq, and the aid group, Vision2020, his family began to help people in the part of the country where Small was killed. Small's death and his family's reaction, she wrote, was a chance to "glimpse eternity" in all events and to remember that there is always a connection between what God is doing now and His eventual return. Her theme is that everything, no matter how sad or disheartening, is connected to God's plan for us which, in the end, includes eternal salvation (Belz, 2012, p. 88).

Three months earlier, in the September 22, 2012 issue, a more lighthearted column by Joel Belz discussed the two types of tasks that people perform: "positive assignments," such as "composing music," and those who are "working to undo or counter the effects of the Fall" and heal a broken world full of sinners by doing things "focused primarily on reclamation, repair, and redemption." In either case, the goal of all Christians, he writes, should be to strengthen the connection between our fallen world and eternity as a way of preparing for the latter, when the world will be renewed. His point is that Christians should always remember that everything we do now can be a reflection of God's grace working in our lives to prepare for the world to come (Belz, 2012, p. 8).

These quotes, and stories, are, as noted above, examples of the importance of the meta-narrative that informs both how the *WORLD* journalists approach their

work, how they "see" what they are doing and why they are doing it in the larger sense, as opposed to work on individual stories and addressing individual topics, and the actual writing in the magazine. The fundamental belief is that they are inhabiting, and reporting on, a fallen world in which original sin, and the sinful nature of all people, is the driving force behind what people do.

Christians, by recognizing the sinful nature of humanity and the broken nature of the world, are, they believe, better equipped to understand the true nature of events and the motivations of those who are doing both bad and good, from engaging in gay sex to killing schoolchildren to working to improving the lives of others. The focus on the inherent imperfection of human beings is also a major factor in how the *WORLD* staff members discussed the next major theme detailed in this chapter: humility.

Humility

If all people are imperfect and sinful, and unable to act in perfect accordance with how God would like us to live our lives, it only follows, *WORLD* staffers say, that their understanding of how to do their jobs – including writing stories in accordance with biblical objectivity – will always be flawed. As a result, the magazine's writers and editors frequently noted that they approach their ability to understand and interpret the Bible and its direction for how they should do their work with a profound sense of humility. They know, they say, that their judgments are being made by people who are as much sinners, and fallen, as those that they report on, and their work will never be in full alignment with God's word.

In the *WORLD* policy book, Olasky writes that "Christ's sacrifice bridges the gap" between God's holiness and man's fallen nature and sinfulness. Trying to see the "God's eye view" of what is going on in the world, and thus reporting on it, is impossible, but "by following the Bible's teachings we try to come as close as we can" (Olasky, 2012, p. 4).

In conversation, Olasky said that he "hopes to go back to the Bible" for understanding how to do his work because it is the "key explainer of why things happen. We don't just go by our own experience or our own moods or sense of things because those can fluctuate wildly. My own mood at the time – I'm not going to let that run me." This, he notes, is the essential difference between the general position of "Protestant Christianity" and ideas of man's independence of thought and reason found in Enlightenment position, which puts "reason on top."

Many *WORLD* staffers underscored this idea, noting that they realize that their overarching goal – using the Bible as the final authority for how to interpret the world and report on it – would never truly succeed. The hope, they say, is that they can come as close as possible, and not let their human nature get in the way any more than is necessary. In discussing this, several *WORLD* staffers described the relationship between the perfection of God's word and their imperfection in interpreting it as a struggle, a problem and an issue that they are constantly aware of.

Sophia Lee said that all writers hoping to use biblical objectivity as the standard of reporting and writing are, necessarily, hampered by where they are in their development as a Christian.

"I struggle with worldly conflicts, and the way I approach my journalism is the same – I can only go as far as my relationship with God," she says. "I still struggle to understand who God is and what He's doing in the world. My insight can only go as deep as that" (personal communication, May 28, 2013).

This struggle, and this sense of not perfectly understanding God's word, was seen by several of the *WORLD* journalists as an aspect of their work that people who don't believe in biblical objectivity do not understand. Far from being sure of their interpretations of the Bible and that their fusing of faith and journalism standards are signs that their work is free of error, they say that the opposite is true: their sense is that they are always, as fallen people, somewhat frustrated with their ability to discern what to do. Even when they are absolutely sure of God's *view* of certain issues – such as, most prominently, abortion and homosexuality – they know that the *execution* of their work will never fully, and perfectly, reflect God's word.

"I don't want to give the idea that we are moralists," says Mindy Belz. "We're not. The story of Christ is that we can never follow the law perfectly. It's not a certain knowledge of the Bible. It's hard."

Owens heightened this sense of struggling to interpret God's word in her work by saying that, without it, she would be "lost . . . I would have no help" when contrasting her work with that of secular journalists who do not use the Bible as the starting point for interpreting the world around them and how to best write about it. This sense of fear, of being lost without the Bible, was echoed by Mindy

Belz, who said that without acknowledging and using the Bible as the "standard" of how to do her job, she would be "wasted and discouraged."

The Bible and its teachings as the key component in deciding how to write and report was also described by some staffers as offering a profound sense of relief and solace. In observing and writing about a fallen, confusing and constantly changing world, there is always a reference point they could return to, one that grounds and steadies them by offering eternal truths that do not shift or change in the face of evolving (and, they believe, declining) standards of conduct and morals.

Susan Olasky says that while most people – including the secular media and members of more "liberal" churches – let political correctness and current ideas about morality guide them, relying on the Bible means that she is always "tethered" to a set of truths and teachings that do not change as society erodes and Christianity becomes, more and more, a "salad bar" where "you take whatever you want."

"God's word does not fail," she says. "It is a rock and a measuring stick that does not fail. It should be the standard because the Bible says that God's word is an anvil that has worn away many hammers."

Steadfastness

In much the same way that a sense of humility drives the staff members in interpreting God's word for their own work, a common theme found in the reporting at *WORLD* is the steadfastness of the Christians that they write about. Stories on a wide variety of people and subjects all emphasize the idea that Christians are continuing their work in the face of overwhelming odds and

difficulties, including, in many cases, the fear of death. This is true whether the *WORLD* writers are focusing on American politics or Christian aid workers in urban areas or helping people in the aftermath of such disasters as Hurricane Sandy.

The theme of the vast majority of the stories published in *WORLD* that reported on Christians in foreign countries – and, indeed, foreign news in general – is that there are considerable dangers faced by Christian missionaries trying to bring the word of God to Middle East or Africa. Mindy Belz's "Surviving by serving," which was printed in the September 8, 2012 issue, provides an example.

In detailing the conflict in Syria, Belz focused on the city of Aleppo and small number of Christians there. After providing an overview of the conflict in the country and the hardships being endured by Aleppo residents – including severe food and gas shortages – Belz devoted much of the story to the aid work being done by Christians even as they are persecuted, including having their churches looted or destroyed. Belz frames the plight of these Christians as a selfless, harassed minority working tirelessly and without thanks for the good of the many who are, like them, caught in the middle of a violent conflict they have no control over: while living in fear, the Christians of Aleppo are continuing to distribute food and help the refugees pouring into the city. The story ends with a quote from Chaldean Bishop Antoine Audo, who says that Christians in Aleppo are "doing our duty as witnesses, praying, attending to the Eucharist, showing the presence of the Lord, and serving Him with joy" (Belz, 2012, p. 40).

To read the story is to understand that, in a violent world where, increasingly, a civil war rages and the government cannot or will not help average citizens with even basic necessities, it is Christians alone who, in remaining steadfast to their beliefs in the face of overwhelming opposition and danger, are aiding the less fortunate, even as they are being persecuted, threatened with violence and, in some cases, killed for their beliefs.

Many of the stories with the theme of the steadfastness of Christians described their work not as physically dangerous but, rather, as an antidote to the indifference of authorities at various levels of the government in the United States, including officials in large cities such as Detroit who have forgotten about the poor in their communities.

Susan Olasky's "Brightmoor fighters," the cover story of the March 9, 2013 issue, provides an excellent example of the many stories in *WORLD* with the theme of how anonymous Christians are working to help the less fortunate in urban America. The story looks at the renewal of a small, crime- and neglect-plagued area of northwest Detroit, a neighborhood without basic services such as garbage pickup and working street lights that a city report deemed "too far gone to save." Led by two Christians, Riet and Mark Schumack, Brightmoor is saving itself via community involvement, including planting gardens, raising animals, composting, providing places for children to play, holding events, and in general "keeping blight at bay" (Olasky, 2013, pp. 50-55).

The story's frame of the stark, dramatic contrast between what the city is willing to do for the community and what the community, led by several

Christians, is quietly doing for itself, runs through the story and heightens the successes of the Schumacks and their neighbors. The sense is that Brightmoor would have descended into complete malaise and violent chaos had not the Schumacks, and Christians like them, made an investment of time and effort as a way to show their faith in God through good works for the disadvantaged.

Still other stories that hinge on the theme of steadfastness emphasize that Christians in business and politics are guided by their Christian principles while those around them (including, in many stories that focus on political battles in Washington, D.C., conservative politicians) focus on adhering to the ideas and standards espoused by the Republican and Democratic political parties. Rather than align themselves with these platforms or standards, these subjects of *WORLD* stories are framed as remaining true what they see as the higher standard of interpreting God's word as their guidepost in how to address issues and problems, including their response to Obamacare.

Printed exactly one month apart, Jamie Dean's "Here they stand" (February 9, 2013) and Edward Lee Pitts's "Twelve worried men"(March 9, 2013) provide examples of the numerous *WORLD* stories that have running through them a discourse that frequently praises business owners and politicians who are remaining true to their Christian values in the face of laws and party platforms. The Dean story features interviews with numerous evangelical and Catholic business owners in the Midwest who are fighting against Obamacare's mandate that some business owners provide contraception as part of their health care packages, or face hefty fines.

This conflict is framed by Dean as whether or not Christians who oppose abortion in general – and birth control and "emergency contraception" pills in particular – will have the "basic freedom to maintain Christian principles in the workplace." Dean quotes one of the businessmen, St. Louis' Paul Griesdieck, as saying that, for him, there is no separation between worshipping God on Sunday and staying true to his Christian beliefs as a professional: "You have to practice what you preach. And you have to live your belief seven days a week." The Christian business owners who are fighting against what they see is an anti-Christian law and an anti-Christian government, are, then, framed as far less concerned with the enormous fines they might face than being able to maintain their Christian beliefs as part of their working lives (Dean, 2013, pp. 34-41).

Edward Lee Pitts's March 9 story, "Twelve worried men," looked at a dozen Republicans who were going against party politics because, as Pitts writes, their "religious beliefs gave them the courage to stand by their convictions and step away from party discipline." The primary example of this is not supporting John Boehner's second term as House speaker. The frame is clear: even conservative lawmakers battling the ultra-liberal Obama administration and dwindling support for the Republican platform will not support their own party if they believe that its standards are not in line with their Christian beliefs on such issues as the nation's debt. One of them, Georgia Baptist Paul Broun, drives home this discourse by saying that "there's no rule that says I have to check my faith when I go through the doors of the house chamber" (Pitts, 2013, pp. 38-42).

Stories on these three subcategories detailing Christian steadfastness could be found in each issue of the magazine. Numerous issues would contain more than one such story. Among these were, as shown above, the March 9 issue, which contained both the Olasky and Pitts stories. But in all cases, these stories emphasize the theme that it is conservative Christians, and conservative Christians only, who are helping the less fortunate, or governing in accordance with biblical principles and thus remaining truly Christian, or both. The cavalry, these stories say, is not coming – *we* are the cavalry and, guided by God, we are the only ones who can be trusted to help.

The forgotten man

In their interviews, numerous *WORLD* staffers, including those who provide a considerable amount of the magazine's news coverage, discussed the forgotten man as a recurring theme in their work. The forgotten man, they say, is the person whom both the government and, moreover, the mainstream media, regularly ignore. There is, then, a close correlation between this theme and the theme of steadfastness, which highlights Christians doing good works in the face of the threat of violence by Muslim extremists, government inaction, or the actions of people who do not place their belief in God at the forefront of their lives.

But if steadfastness can be seen as highlighting positive action by evangelical Christians in a world of violence and indifference, the forgotten man trope can be seen as more of a reaction *against* the mainstream media and its coverage, because it usually includes individuals or groups of people whose viewpoints are not sought out by the mainstream media because, in the opinion of

the *WORLD* writers, the forgotten man's situations or focus on spirituality and the effect of God on people's lives do not fit the narratives that the non-evangelical-Christian media provide their readers.

These narratives include basic ideas about stories and issues that *WORLD* consistently covers, including Obamacare, gay rights, and abortion. To *WORLD* staffers, the forgotten man is the person or group that goes against the mainstream media's basic assumptions and narratives about these topics, which can be generalized as: Obamacare is doing a great deal of good for the poor and uninsured; there is growing sentiment in American society that there should be equal rights for gay people, including marriage; abortion is mainly about a woman's right to choose what to do with her body, and not the fate of the baby being aborted; and so on.

The forgotten man, then, is, according to these staffers (including Smith, Dean and Emily Belz) both a main component and focus of the stories that they tell, and a major example of how their work is constantly at odds with and fighting against the secular media on topics of vital importance to both conservative Christians and America as a whole. In his interview, Smith gave a sense of how wide-ranging the forgotten man theme is in *WORLD*, and how pervasive the importance of writing about these people and their perspectives is.

> We talk about this in staff meetings – we often ask who this is. In the case of abortion, it's the baby. With Obamacare, it's the taxpayer paying for the expansion of the federal government. It's easy to talk about who is helped by Obamacare but the mainstream media doesn't have any interest in

showing who is hurt. The mainstream media find it easy to find an uninsured child or mother – they're not forgotten. It's easy to write that, and write it over and over again. There are poor children and mothers who *do* need help, but at what cost? We are looking at people who are victimized in unintended ways. It could be the taxpayers or a person on food stamps – where is the father? How are we perpetuating a cycle of dependency?

There are numerous examples of how the forgotten man theme is highlighted in *WORLD*, and why the authors of these stories choose to focus on what they see as a forgotten group. Two of the best are the pair of stories about gay marriage that ran on April 20, 2013. Written by Emily Belz and Pitts, the stories ("Gettin' on board the gay marriage train" and "Countercultural warriors") frame conservative Christians opposing changes to California's Proposition 8 and the national Defense of Marriage Act as either forgotten about or abused by the mainstream media, but struggling on anyway.

The Belz story starts with a stark contrast: a lesbian plaintiff in the DOMA case being argued before the Supreme Court is embraced as a "rock star" by both gay marriage proponents and the media, while Paul Clement, who is arguing for DOMA, leaves the Supreme Court building unnoticed by the public and reporters. Clement, and those like him who are defending traditional marriage, are framed by Belz as battling a "runaway public campaign aimed at media, politics, and other public officials to force acceptability of same-sex marriage." Clearly, the article's discourse is that these viewpoints are now and will continue to be largely ignored

because they are in direct opposition to both the media's framing of the cases and prevailing cultural beliefs (Belz, 2013, pp. 35-39).

The first quote in the accompanying Pitts article sets the tone for what follows: a discourse centered on young conservatives and their fight against the growing sentiment (both in general and among their generation) for gay marriage rights. Speaking at a pro-traditional-marriage rally, Liberty University graduate Alicia Howard says that "the media will tell you that I don't exist. Well, I'll be the unicorn. I do exist, and I believe in the marriage between a man and a woman." Howard and the other young people Pitts talks to are "willing to face scorn by taking very public stands against the redefinition of society's most basic institution." While acknowledging that their stance on gay marriage is in contrast to that of many young people – who increasingly do support gay marriage – the young activists in the article say that they are pressing on, guided by their belief in God and the basic sanctity of traditional marriage. They may hold the minority opinion, one that is increasingly dismissed and/or ignored, but they will not be silenced – even if the media tries to do so or, in the case of conservative activist Eric Teetsel's appearance on *Piers Morgan Live*, one of them is derided for having viewpoints that were described by secular guests on the program as "bizarre, odd, offensive and uneducated" (Pitts, 2013, pp. 40-43).

This section of the story, about an encounter between a conservative Christian and secular/liberal members of both society and the media, is telling, because the theme of the forgotten man is not that conservatives are always *completely* forgotten but, rather, that their perspectives – especially on important

topics such as gay marriage and abortion – are often derided and insulted when the mainstream media does, on occasion, pay attention to them. These perspectives may be covered infrequently, but when they are they are portrayed as stodgy, dumb, outmoded, and simply invalid.

At the same time, *WORLD* writers say, writing about the forgotten man can mean writing about Christians or a segment of society that are under-reported on at a particular time. The December 2012 Newtown shootings and their aftermath display this in the Jamie Dean cover story of the February 23, 2013 issue. The story, "Loaded questions," focuses on the thousands of urban shootings that are largely forgotten by the media in the debates over gun control that resume whenever there is a mass shooting story.

Dean traveled to urban communities in Atlanta, New Orleans and Chicago to show the ongoing cost of communities trapped in cycles of poverty, gangs, and violence, as well as the community members and pastors who are trying to turn these problems around by addressing what Dean calls the "root of the problem": steadfastness in "forging relationships rooted in Christ and staying committed to an often discouraging process that could last a lifetime" or, as one Chicago pastor puts it, emphasizing relationships based on "demonstrating the gospel." These Christians, then, are framed as forgotten by mainstream America in two ways: by a media and public that only looks at handgun violence when there is a massacre, and by addressing the gun violence problem as a debate over new laws and regulations, instead of focusing on the spiritual hole at the center of many violent urban communities (Dean, 2013, pp. 38-44).

This frame – that the forgotten men in American society are often those providing spiritual help, rather than the sort of monetary help that governments can provide – was at the center of Emily Belz's January 12 Newtown story. The forgotten men, in this story, are the pastors who are trying to help a community deal with a horrific event, and the people at the local Christian churches who are coming together to use their faith to get through a time of grief. As a Christian reporter, Belz says, her primary job in Newtown was to look at the spiritual aspect of Christians coming to terms with the shootings, rather than reporting on the perspectives of government officials and all community leaders, Christian and non-Christian.

> The Bible teaches us that everybody is made in God's image and that shapes how you do a story. The idea is that there are no unimportant people. I went there with different goals – to see what the church was going to do. So the night of he shooting I went to a church having a prayer meeting and everyone there had a really interesting story. Sometimes looking at different sections of the community and how religious beliefs are changing what is going on is something different for me as a Christian reporter. I was the only reporter at that church, which is pretty surprising considering that thousands of people were descending on the town. The next night I went to a different church and they told me I was the only reporter who had been there, too.

Belz is not framing the mainstream media covering Newtown as *maliciously* ignoring the perspectives of Christians and, as she highlighted in the story, the

pastors who were helping the community deal with its grief. But in interviewing her it was clear that she was, from the outset of her reporting, aware of the lack of attention being paid by most members of the media to the pastors and their faith communities. Knowing this, and that the mainstream media would instead be basing numerous stories on survivors of various faiths and information from government officials, she veered away from the usual sources and narratives, and instead focused her discourse on both the spiritual aspect of dealing with the tragedy and groups of people in the Newtown community that were being largely ignored. This willingness to focus on the perspectives of Christians and, moreover, to build in-depth features mainly or completely on those perspectives, is at the heart of the forgotten man theme at work in so many *WORLD* stories. In this case, the neglect by the mainstream media appeared to be benign, but it was, Belz said, neglect all the same.

Persecution and resistance

This study's literature review includes quotes by Marvin Olasky in *Telling the Truth* about the fight evangelical Christian journalists are waging against "secular liberal culture, which is the dominant social, political, and philosophical force in America today." Olasky compares the situation of today's conservative Christians in modern to the ancient Jews' persecution as they were placed in captivity in Babylon. But if "Christian victory will come only when Christ returns," Olasky writes, in the meantime, Christians can fight a "limited war" against secular liberalism. While there are many things Christians in general can do in this struggle, Olasky writes that Christian journalists can accomplish this goal by doing

the sort of work that – led by biblical objectivity – is accomplished at *WORLD* (Olasky, 1996, pp. 21-22).

There is a definite us-versus-them tone to these remarks, and to other sections of *Telling the Truth*. These remarks, and others in the book, hinge on the theme that evangelical Christians in modern America are the underdogs, the oppressed, and fighting the good fight against stronger, numerically superior forces that are led by a government bent on destroying them or, at the very least, keeping them in bondage, as well as a moral climate largely dictated by secular/liberal members of society.

Speaking to *WORLD* staffers, it becomes abundantly clear that this sense of being persecuted, of constantly fighting back with their work against a destructive and ungodly culture, is at the core of their beliefs about why they do what they do. Biblical objectivity, as we have seen, is described as a way of not only focusing one's efforts in terms of daily journalism tasks, but also as a way of continuing to focus on God's teachings in facing a secular/liberal American society, and an often oppressively anti-Christian world. It is this sense of fighting a battle, of constant confrontation against a culture that largely opposes them, that is at the heart of the persecution and resistance theme.

Obviously, this means that *WORLD* is not only providing an alternative to the mainstream media, but is also actively and self-consciously opposing both the media and the culture that they believe it is part of and representative of. As a result, it could be argued that this sense – that they are actively resisting the daily

oppression, morals and destructive power of an un-Christian American culture – drives the work the *WORLD* staff does.

This belief has been addressed earlier in this chapter with information provided about, for example, about how *WORLD* staffers approach their work with the understanding that they are living in a "fallen" world, and the concepts of steadfastness and the forgotten man, both of which place Christians within the framework of working within hostile environments in both foreign countries and America. Also, it is worth noting here that much of what the staffers have to say about the stark differences between their beliefs in God and values and the values and morals of America in general dovetails with overarching evangelical Christian beliefs about America's present and possible future. As we will see, these beliefs are at the core of answering Research Question 3, which addresses how *WORLD* staffers see their work in relationship to the larger belief system and culture of evangelical Americans.

For now, it is sufficient to, first, note that virtually every *WORLD* staff member interviewed for this study was well aware of the concept of "culture wars" within America and responded in the affirmative when asked if he or she felt that their work at *WORLD* was part of these wars currently being fought in American society. Emblematic of this belief were comments by Mindy Belz, who said that her Christian faith and her experiences as a reporter led her to an understanding of the relationship between Christians such as herself and the rest of American society:

> Having done this for a long time, I can see that society is changing and what we were doing 20 or 25 years ago was new to a lot of Christians and now I

think there's a growing hostility to Christians in America. In a lot of places in the world and the U.S. there is a growing hostility to Christians and it has changed how we approach stories.

But beyond detailing the hostility and/or indifference to Christian beliefs shown above, the theme of persecution and resistance also becomes evident in news stories or profiles, as well as columns, especially by Marvin Olasky and Joel Belz, that focus on the destructive power of intellectual movers and shakers in American society.

Broadly speaking, these groups include the mainstream secular media as well as several groups that have not been examined above, namely, the people that *WORLD* members sometimes describe as "elites" and "educrats," those who both hold power and shape intellectual thought in the country, often from the bully pulpit of the college campus. Moreover, the theme of persecution and resistance, when applied more to the intellectual life of the country and those that oppose what the *WORLD* authors see as the correct and God-inspired path that Americans should follow, often contains a sense that their battle, first, is against almost everyone else, and, second, is being lost. As they see it, those who want to drag America down and separate the country from God are winning – but those who stand with God must both understand the urgency of the conflict and continue the fight regardless.

This theme of Christians fighting the good fight for the good of the country in the face of overwhelming odds and anti-Christian intellectual forces is seen, for example, in "Soldiering On," an Edward Lee Pitts profile of retired Army Lt. General

William Boykin that ran in the February 9, 2013 edition. The story's discourse centers on Boykin's military career and his current fight in the culture wars as executive director of the Family Research Council.

Pitts frames Boykin as a committed Christian beset on all fronts by the ungodly: the Muslim extremists who still want to kill him, yes, but, moreover, a liberal media that ridiculed his beliefs that the true enemy in the war on terror is Satan, and the brickbats hurled against him for his beliefs by liberal politicians such as then-Sen, John Kerry. Boykin, then, is described as fighting the good fight while in the military, only to find that he is still fighting an intellectual war against the media and liberal members of the government that see his views on the spiritual aspects of the conflict against terrorists as outmoded and dishonest. The war against these powerful liberal viewpoints, Pitts writes, is suffering because "the stream of media ridicule often faced by outspoken social conservatives" is intimidating many who feel the same way Boykin does into silence. Boykin, however, is not giving up: his beliefs, and the lessons he learned in the military, are giving him the strength and the know-how to continue the fight against the "evil" that has replaced God in American society (Pitts, 2013, pp. 44-46).

In addition, Marvin Olasky's Q&A feature frequently serves as a forum for conservatives who advance similar ideas and examples of the culture wars and the battle conservative Christians are waging against stronger secular/liberal intellectual forces. There are numerous examples of this, including an interview with Charles Murray, an author and member of the American Enterprise Institute, which ran in the November 3, 2012 issue. Murray's discourse includes quotes that

America's moral decline is due to a "separate culture" of Americans who have been "socialized" at "elite colleges" and whose tendency to be self-centered (and thus not help the less fortunate, as Christians often do) has led to America's "growing social disorganization." America, Murray said, is now "living off the interest" of the country's traditional Christian moral and social grounding that was largely upended by the country's shift to self-centered liberalism led by college professors and students beginning in the 1960s (Olasky, 2012, pp. 35-36).

Similarly, journalist Tucker Carlson's discourse on both the secular media and academia in the April 20, 2013 issue, emphasizes that both are useless and anti-Christian: the former has basic narratives (big business, private enterprise and white people are all bad) that he and his Internet news source, The Daily Caller, are actively opposing. Liberal journalists on major mainstream news organizations, Carlson said, are drawn mainly from liberal East Coast elite universities such as Princeton and, as a result, are "all secular. They never owned a gun. They never go to church." The Daily Caller's job is to fight against their assumptions and their influence on a gullible American public; he does this by staffing his organization with young, hard-working, intellectually curious journalists that, he says, he often hires precisely because they did not go to college (Olasky, 2013, pp. 28-29).

In the March 23, 2013 issue, Christian author Rosaria Butterfield recounted her journey from a liberal lesbian academic at Syracuse University to a heterosexual Christian. Butterfield frames the pro-gay, anti-Christian liberal climate at Syracuse as keeping her a "heathen," ignorant of God and the

conservative Christian message until, befriended by a kindly pastor and his wife, she renounced her old ways and began working for God (Olasky, 2013, pp. 33-35).

Donna Rice, interviewed for the February 9, 2013 edition, said that her journey away from God began in college, when she was date-raped by "one of those non-Christian guys" and included being tempted by a host of secular/liberal organizations, including *Playboy* magazine and mainstream television networks, before returning to God and working against pornography, which she said leads to everything from Viagra use by young men to marital problems (Olasky, 2013, pp. 28-29). In each of the above interviews, the subjects of Olasky's columns provide a discourse on both the destructive power of secular liberals in the media, academia or America's decline moral culture in general in their lives, and how their Christian beliefs lead them to fight on against these destructive forces.

As noted above, columns by Olasky and Joel and Mindy Belz frequently espouse the same theme: we must continue to fight the culture wars, even if we are losing them. Joel Belz's September 22 column, as previously noted in this chapter, calls for Christians to attempt to "claim the culture for Christ" no matter how difficult the battle, and no matter what their profession or status in American society (Belz, 2012, p. 8). He addresses the urgency of this calling, and the sense that this is a battle is waged against superior forces, in several other columns, including those printed in the February 23 and April 20, 2013, editions.

In both cases, his theme is that America, in abandoning "biblical morality," is slipping into a morass of immorality and deceit. In the February 23 column, he starts with what he considers to be an obvious lie – the White House's comments

that Obama frequently enjoys skeet shooting at Camp David – to position his argument that the country is growing comfortable with deceitful leaders and what he considers to be more far-reaching lies based on secular/liberal positions, including the widespread acceptance of homosexuality. It is this sense that America has already lost its way due to abandoning biblical teachings that permeates both columns, and he frequently calls for Christians to continue to do all they can to counteract this decay (Belz, 2013, p. 4).

Similarly, Mindy Belz attacks what she sees as secular/liberal institutions or ideas in several columns. Her September 8, 2012 column begins with describing feminist author and longtime *Cosmopolitan* magazine editor Helen Gurley Brown (who had recently died) as a woman who had helped usher in a sexually liberated era whose hallmarks are the "selfishness and self-destruction" of generations of young women at the altar of "choice." Belz's discourse through the column is built on the idea that secular feminism in general and popular feminist ideas – it's okay to have abortions and/or children out of wedlock – have helped coarsen both American culture in general and women's relationships with men and their own bodies in particular. She calls on both older and younger women to fight against these liberal/feminist assumptions and remember the essential, biblically directed joys of marriage, commitment, and motherhood, even as the assumptions that, she says, Brown helped popularize remain strong in a morally destructive national culture (Belz, 2012, p. 32).

In a second column, published on November 17, 2012, Belz notes the hard work, and worry, that high-school students, and their parents, experience as

seniors apply to colleges. The added problem facing Christian students and parents, she writes, is that "college campuses are becoming by the day a toxic environment for Christian families. Enter with your eyes open and at your own risk." Her single example of this unfriendliness toward Christians is a case at Tufts University in Massachusetts, where a Christian organization was "de-recognized" by the school for being accused of using "hate speech" because of the organization's comments on homosexuality. What exactly the group said, and comments by those criticizing the comments, are not included. Rather, Belz frames this single incident as evidence that secular educators around the country wish to "silence Christian voice and witness," and that the situation will only get worse (Belz, 2012, p. 34). Belz is clearly frames the situation at Tufts not as an isolated incident, but rather as proof that secular colleges in general now attack Christians for their views – including, but not exclusively, dislike of homosexuality – and are creating a worsening sense of oppression and censorship for all Christian students who wish to get an education at these institutions.

Perhaps not surprisingly, it is Olasky – a veteran academic who has taught at several universities – who is the most strident in his columns in advancing the persecution/resistance theme as regards academia. In one column, published August 25, 2012, he recounts the inability of University of Texas sociology professor Dr. Bob Woodberry to receive tenure as a result of his research on Protestant evangelicals and how they have had a positive influence on the places and people that, over the centuries, they have encountered.

Olasky's discourse in much of the column as an imaginary dialogue between a member of Woodberry's tenure committee and the sociology dean; the tenure committee member continues to note that Woodberry's research is solid, even excellent, but has to backtrack in his positive estimation of the work because he knows that such an opinion will find disfavor among his academic colleagues. In the end, Olasky notes, not only did Woodberry not receive tenure at UT – he also could not find a tenure-track job at 108 other American universities, and had to take a job at a university in Singapore. Olasky frames Woodberry's troubles not as those of an individual academic, but as proof that American academia as a whole simply will not accept pro-evangelical/pro-Christian research and professors, and that those doing such research will not receive proper recognition of their work or the sort of highly valued tenured positions that will allow them to continue the research throughout a long career (Olasky, 2012, p. 76).

A second column, published on September 8, 2012, starts by recounting the story of Octavious Bishop, who grew up poor, played for the National Football League, and is currently working on his dissertation in neuroscience. Bishop's attempts to balance his Christian beliefs and his current academic research are made difficult because the field (and the study of depression and the human mind in general) has been taken over by secular academics who have taken God out of the equation.

The current study of neuroscience, Olasky writes, is framed as the essence of anti-Christian "materialism" in modern academia. The idea that man can fix whatever is wrong with man, essentially, is the idea that the human mind is not

influenced by God but, rather, is simply "a piece of machinery, and neurosensory experts have the reset button." It is this abandonment of God in academia, Olasky writes, that is so troubling, and those that wish to remain steadfast Christians at American universities are, as a result, having a difficult time reconciling their faith with their education. As a result, he writes at the column's conclusion, Christians should "pray for graduate students at secular universities" (Olasky, 2012, p. 76). Both of these columns, then, frame American academia as a place that is clearly anti-God and anti-Christian, and unfriendly – or at least indifferent – to the idea that God is the ultimate authority and guide. The discourse in these columns center on Christians having a tough time trying to find a home at such secular institutions, and the prediction that this satiation will continue to in the foreseeable future – and that conservative Christian academics may, as in the case of Woodberry, be actively disparaged and persecuted for their beliefs.

Interestingly, the only staff members that said that they didn't usually think about the culture wars aspect of the work they do were the two youngest people interviewed, Tiffany Owens and Emily Belz, although, as we have seen with their comments and examples of stories that they have written, their work is greatly informed by the idea of biblical objectivity and the themes of working in a fallen world and giving a great amount of attention to the plight of the fallen man.

Summary

Research Question 1: How do the journalists at *WORLD* magazine fuse normative journalism routines and standards with their religious beliefs as evangelical Christians?

In answering this question, the author analyzed both material from the interviews he conducted with 13 *WORLD* staff members and news stories and columns printed during a one-year period, from July 2012 to June 2013. This material was organized into seven overarching themes that emerged from the analysis. These are:

1. Journalism is a holy calling and a uniquely Christian profession.

2. *WORLD* staff members are neither conservative nor liberal in their perspectives or approach to reporting and writing.

3. *WORLD* staff members believe strongly in the meta-narrative that encapsulates so much of Christian belief: man is fallen and naturally sinful, but God's eventual return will liberate man from his sinfulness and restore God's dominion over Earth.

4. In trying to understand biblical teachings and how they relate to the journalism that they do, they must be humble and constantly aware that, as fallen and sinful people, they can never perfectly understand these teachings and integrate them into their work.

5. They must remain steadfast to their beliefs, and must often write about those Christians who are likewise remaining steadfast to their beliefs in the face of difficulties, persecution, and sometimes death.

6. A great deal of attention should be paid to the forgotten man – the person or groups whose values and beliefs are largely ignored or ridiculed by mainstream American society, and frequently the mainstream media.

7. As conservative Christians, they are often persecuted for their beliefs, which run counter to an American culture dominated by secular/liberal beliefs and morals. Even though the battle against these superior forces is difficult, they must continue to fight the culture wars that have existed in American society for decades.

As noted above, these beliefs often closely resemble the themes Olasky promoted in several books about Christians in American journalism, as well as the standards for good writing and reporting advanced in the magazine's policy book. The answer to Research Question 1, then, strongly suggests that the *WORLD* journalists do not see their work as different from secular journalists in terms of basic skills, such as thorough reporting and strong, evocative and entertaining writing. Rather, they believe that the major difference between themselves and secular journalists (even the many whose skills they greatly admire) is one of perspective and intent.

Their belief is that they live in a fallen world and an anti-Christian culture that has largely abandoned biblical teachings and morality, and that much of their job is to find a way to bring biblical truths and a sense of Christian stewardship to their work, in no small part by concentrating much of their efforts on showing the good works that Christians are doing in the face of anti-Christian violence in other countries and, in America, an immoral culture that often ignores the poor and disadvantaged.

Because America, they believe, has largely abandoned its Christian traditions, their work is best understood not as simply writing and reporting well,

and accurately, but as a battle, a constant struggle against immoral forces that are quickly ruining what has historically been a country based on Christian teachings and principles. As Christian journalists, they believe that the correct way to do their work is to remember, and constantly put into action, their Christian beliefs, and to understand their work as a calling from God for the good of both society and the place of Christianity within that society.

Research Question 2

Research Question 2: How do these journalists apply Marvin Olasky's concept of biblical objectivity to their work?

As with Research Question 1, it is important to note that the answers that the *WORLD* journalists gave in relation to this question were remarkably similar. Again, this consistency of answers to the questions that dealt with their ability to work within the framework of Olasky's biblical objectivity concept strongly suggest a marked, if informal, consensus of opinion.

This extends to most of the themes that are part of the general answer to the question. As with the themes that were used to organize the answers to Research Question 1, these themes are used to answer Research Question 2. They are listed and detailed below.

Stories about homosexuality and abortion are always Class one or Class two

While the answers to the questions that help answer Research Question 2 were, as noted above, extremely similar from interviewee to interviewee, there were differences in how some aspects of how the *WORLD* staff members see and

apply Olasky's six different classes of stories in their writing and reporting. These will be discussed later in this chapter. However, there was complete agreement that any story involving homosexuality and abortion is always classified as Class one or Class two, which Olasky, in *Telling the Truth*, describes as, for Class one, "*explicit biblical embrace or condemnation*" and for Class two, "*clearly implicit biblical position*" (Olasky, 1996, p. 23, italics in original). Every interviewee noted that stories on these topics – no matter what the nuances and differences between them might be in terms of specific issues and incidents, amount of space and time they had to write an individual story, or other factors – were always going to fit into one of these two classes. In all cases, they said, the biblical position was that abortion and homosexuality are always wrong, because they are both explicitly condemned in the Bible.

Vincent said that this determination on such topics can be made easily by anyone who believes that the Bible should be the starting point for Christian journalists. Such journalists, she says, do not have to worry about trying to decide how to approach such stories because the determinations of the inappropriateness of any abortions and any homosexual acts are out of their hands.

> I believe biblical objectivity holds that there is a higher authority that's already decided a large number of issues. On many issues, you don't say, "We report – you decide." Because on many issues it's already been decided, and not by us. That's an important distinction. Not by us.

The result, says Smith, is that normative journalistic ideas about balancing viewpoints can be done away with entirely. "When covering abortion," he says, "we

don't find it necessary to balance the voices that say abortion is wrong by quoting people that say it's good. Some issues are so clearly wrong."

Abortion and homosexuality (including rights for homosexuals, such as marriage) are seen as so indefensibly wrong, so outside what is biblically directed and correct, that those practicing them are compared to, variously, murderers and kidnappers by some members of the *WORLD* staff. Mindy Belz compared those in favor of abortion or homosexuality to both.

> The best example is the idea of murder. We don't wonder about murder – it's wrong. And God said the same thing about other things – that they're sinful or an abomination . . . I don't need a kidnapper's perspective to know it's wrong. That's helpful in looking at controversial issues – we're not going to talk as much about the kidnappers.

Clearly, then, these beliefs about how to report and write about these topics are closely related to ideas of biblical versus conventional journalistic objectivity as far as the approach to a story with these elements, including who should and should not be interviewed to provide perspectives on the particular situation or issue at hand.

News stories published in *WORLD* on these topics closely adhere to this belief, and clearly show that, in terms of interviewees and general tone and approach, the magazine's writers consistently follow the above perspectives. The discourse of Jamie Dean's previously noted "Here they stand" (February 9, 2013), for example, relies on quotes from a variety of Christian businessmen and attorneys representing them in their attempts to not have to offer health plans to

their employees that violate their beliefs by including birth control pills and what Dean describes as possible "abortifacients." This discourse is not interrupted by any quotes offering the perspectives of government officials, health care experts or Christian business owners that have embraced the new plans and that could argue for them – such as, perhaps, discussing how they might benefit employees in offering low-cost insurance, or to contradict or challenge the idea that the plans mandate that the companies provide "abortifacients," or what those drugs are, or how they work. Based solely on the beliefs and perspectives of the quoted business owners and their attorneys, the story frames these sources and their beliefs as correct, that the Obama administration's health plan is anti-Christian and forces these employers, and many more, to provide abortion drugs to their employees, thus impinging on their religious beliefs and causing more abortions. Dean relies on the steadfastness theme, casting these men as holding fast to their conservative Christian values and beliefs in the face of overwhelming government pushback and the threat of financial ruin. She frames the Christian-led companies as people and organizations that are being victimized and destroyed, "crushed" under the "looming threat" and "burden" of fines of, possibly, more than $1 million per day for not following the federal guidelines: the Christian business owners, in her discourse, are the oppressed, the federal government the anti-Christian oppressor (Dean, 2013, pp. 34-36).

Similarly, the discourse in Smith's May 18, 2013 cover story about the controversy over the proposal to allow openly gay boys and men in the Boy Scouts of America, "Boy Scout dilemma," relies almost completely on quotes by those who

do not want changes to the Scouts' policies banning openly gay members and leaders. In addition to quotes by conservative Scout leader John Stemberger and Steve Onxley, a North Carolina troop leader and church elder, these include several members of top conservative political and religious organizations, including Andrew Walker of the Heritage Foundation, Frank Page of the Southern Baptist Convention and Tony Perkins of the Family Research Council.

All are quoted extensively, and a Page quote about the need for Scouts to "defend biblical morality for both men and boys" brings the story to a close. These quotes, and others, reinforce the main frame of the story – that, as Smith writes, the Scouts "did not choose to be on the front lines of this culture war, but atheist and homosexual groups brought the battle to it" (Smith, 2013, pp. 35, 40). While there is background material by a variety of both pro- and anti-policy change groups, including GLAAD (formerly the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation), virtually all of Smith's new and original reporting – which is to say, the sources that he employs to carry the narrative forward and provide the reader with new information about the issue – are by the anti-gay sources noted above. The most extensively quoted sources are Walker, Perkins and Page, who represent well-known conservative organizations that *WORLD* readers are most likely to be familiar with, and agree with.

The only exception to quoting only anti-gay Scout leaders and conservatives are two brief quotes by Alvin Townley, who has written about the Scouts' history and is an organization spokesman affiliated with the United Methodist Church. Smith quotes Townley on two subjects: the Scouts' historic importance and, in a

paraphrase, his approval of the new pro-gay proposal because it is part of the organization's history of bringing together people of disparate backgrounds.

Smith begins the next paragraph by writing that "He's right about the history" and then goes on to give a brief summation of that history, from the Scouts' founding in 1910 to the present day. By noting that Townley is "right" about the Scouts' history, Smith is clearly, and strongly, suggesting that Townley's opinion on the rightness of admitting gay boys and men is wrong – while not saying so in so many words. He is, then, disparaging the one new and original interviewee in the story that believes the Scouts should admit gay people (Smith, 2013, p. 39).

Smith's theme, as indicated above, is that the Scouts, an organization that serves as a haven for fellowship and moral behavior – and which, he notes, often includes sponsorship by local churches – has been thrust into a battle by outside secular/liberal/gay groups with, as he writes, a "gay agenda" that will separate the organization from its religious/biblical focus, as indicated at various points in the story and, finally, Page's closing quote. The story, then, is an excellent example of both the sense of persecution and resistance discussed in the themes that *WORLD* writers employ to mark their work as different from secular/mainstream journalists, and the way that the writers use Olasky's Class one classification to approach stories dealing with homosexuality (Smith, 2013, p. 39).

Olasky and the *WORLD* staffers are, as we have seen, extremely concerned about the inroads that people supporting gay rights and abortion have made into society, and how destructive these viewpoints are. This, as noted above, is a major

aspect of how they see their mission, and their fight in the culture wars that they believe still rage in the largely secularized American society.

It is not surprising, then, that several staff members noted that occasionally stories which can often seem to have a variety of aspects and nuances are actually much simpler, and can be boiled down, essentially, to stories about abortion and homosexuality, and can thus be reported on and written that way, by talking mainly (or exclusively) to people who are against gay and abortion rights, and by writing the story in such a way as to support these viewpoints.

Smith's Boy Scouts cover story is, he says, a prime example. On one level, the story is about money – the financial pressure being put on the Scouts by corporate donors to enact a policy that would admit out gay boys and men. As topics such as finance are often, Smith says, Class three or four, the story could be seen as falling into one of those categories. But during the reporting, he realized that, at its core, a Class one, because, he says, "the Bible is explicit about homosexuality."

> For the Scouts – in my view they're facing a Class one question. They didn't get here in a vacuum – they got here via pressure from atheists and gays via corporate groups and people who want them to bow to homosexual pressure. So it becomes a Class one.

The overwhelming antipathy toward people who support gay and abortion rights is, as noted above, supported without reservation by everyone on the *WORLD* staff. The only voice of even slight dissent is Lee, who expressed concern

about how pregnant women in certain situations might view what she sees as the "combative and hard-hitting" *WORLD* stance on abortion and gay rights.

> I think *WORLD* does a good job but we could also bring other points of view into it. Sometimes I wonder what if I was pregnant and not married and stuck in a bad relationship and had no way to support myself – if I read an article on abortion from *WORLD,* what would I feel? Would I feel compassion from an article or feel condemned or guilty? Sometimes I struggle with what a person who is struggling would see with *WORLD*'s rhetoric.

The "organic" nature of applying biblical objectivity

and the six classes of stories

Reading *Telling the Truth* leads to the question of how, exactly, the *WORLD* staffers practice biblical objectivity through the application of the six classes that Olasky describes. After all, *WORLD* writers often produce fairly long, detailed, multi-source feature stories as well as, in several cases, regular columns. Some writers, such as Mindy Belz and Jamie Dean, frequently travel to do on-site reporting, and write several pieces for a given issue, and then repeat this process for the next issue two weeks later, and the next.

It would follow that the writers might require, or at least want, a particular, time-tested method of fusing biblical objectivity, the six classes, and their day-to-day reporting and writing, if only to have a reliable set of guidelines that can work even in the busiest, and most stressful, times – such as being faced with a very tight deadline in reporting and writing, say, an extensive cover story.

Such is not the case. The process of applying what they are taught in the Bible and their own education and development as Christians to their work, they say, does not follow a set, established, testable path. Nor is any quantifiable competency test given, before or during a journalists' tenure at the magazine, to measure exactly how much knowledge of the Bible and its teachings a given reporter has. Nor is there a hard and fast, verifiable pathway recommended to the staff writers to show how, and when, they should fuse biblical teachings and the six classes of stories with their work.

There is not, in other words, a checklist, yardstick or test for how well, and how extensively, the writers have considered and applied their knowledge as Christians and Olasky's six classes of stories to the reporting process and the finished work . The exception, as we have seen, is the common understanding by everyone at *WORLD* that *any* story dealing with abortion or homosexuality is a Class one or Class two; even stories involving the violent oppression of Christians in foreign countries are not afforded this sweeping generality. As a result, in virtually all cases only anti-homosexuality and anti-abortion sources are quoted extensively, and stories deal with these topics are framed in a way that emphasizes the appropriateness of the anti-gay or anti-abortion perspectives.

Rather, the staffers say, it is assumed that they have a basic grounding in the Bible as well as the concepts of biblical objectivity and the six classes of stories. Their knowledge of these topics, they agree, is greatly informed by their own individual development as Christians. This includes the education they have received, their family background, the church they attend, the books they read, the

people they talk to, how often and in what way they study the Bible on their own time, and other personal traits and experiences.

Different *WORLD* staff members describe the individual freedom that each writer has in interpreting Scripture and Olasky's classes of stories in different ways. Dean says that, for her, applying the different classes is an "organic" ability that stems from her firm convictions as a Christian, as well as from "reading the Bible every year for 20 years and sitting in a church that preaches the Bible for 20 years and reading about the Bible – all of that contributes to a biblical world view."

That term, "organic," was used by several other *WORLD* staffers to describe the highly individual, ingrained sense of how to perform their work, as opposed to any sort of testable yardstick of how well they are combining their journalism training, their knowledge of the Bible, and their knowledge of the different classes to report and write stories that adhere to the standards of biblical objectivity and fall neatly into the different classes.

Mindy Belz, for example, said that when she is working with another reporter on a story, or editing another reporter's work, the key in applying biblical objectivity and the six classes of stories is to be able to recall some of the Bible's basic tenets, as opposed to being able to quote various Bible passages to justify how a story was reported and written.

> It happens organically. We'll use phrases we all know out of Scripture – benchmarks like "Love your neighbor." I would not ask a reporter for a theological justification of a story – we're not theologians and we don't have

the time. We apply what we know about Scripture to do the work that's put in front of us. That's our task.

In the same way, Joel Belz said that, when he is writing, he does not pick up a Bible and look for specific chapters and verses to guide him through the column at hand. Rather, he says, as a long-time Christian who reads the Bible, talks about it with his wife, Susan, and regularly attends church, his understanding is "instinctive" – and he hopes other Christian journalists have the same basic, individualistic understanding.

"What I really want," he says, "is for people who are already familiar with God's truth to come in with the right instincts."

What's important, the *WORLD* staffers say, is this basic knowledge of the Bible and its most important tenets. They do not, they say, start to work on a story and look through a Bible for individual verses for guidance and justification during the reporting and writing process. This, coupled with the assumptions that they share about the importance of their work, its mission within the culture wars, the importance of the forgotten man, the sense of persecution and resistance in a fallen and largely secularized world, and other themes described and emphasized in the answer to Research Question 1, are the signposts that guide them. They trust that when they live and report with these beliefs and assumptions in mind, the path to proper application of biblical objectivity and the six classes will reveal itself as needed.

"If you read Scripture," says Tiffany Owens, "you will have stories from Scripture pop into your head at an important moment."

Emily Belz describes the process and the result in a similar way, as having access to knowledge that, over time and one's development and education as a Christian, simply becomes embedded in a person's psyche.

"It's in your DNA, hopefully," she says. "It's something that just exhales in your work."

Nor does the *WORLD* team usually discuss different classes of stories, and their relationship to the Bible, or individual parts of Scripture, when they come together, either in staff meetings or one-on-one editing sessions. Vincent said that such discussions in staff meetings were infrequent during her 11 years on the magazine. What was discussed, she said, were general ideas about how to handle a story, how to report it and write it; quoting passages from Scripture to illustrate a point, as well as debates and discussions over the actual class of a story – say, a three as opposed to a five – were very few and far between.

At the same time, the *WORLD* staffers agreed that, because they realize that as fallen people their knowledge of the Bible can never be perfect, they are constantly reading Scripture and discussing it with other Christians, from their wives and husbands to their pastors to their friends and colleagues. This process of continuous, day-to-day education was described by Olasky this way:

> It starts out with trying to see things through a biblical perspective – every day my wife and I start out at breakfast, reading, listening to the Bible on our computers and so over the course of a year we will have been immersed in it. Starting out in the morning but then all through the day we're trying to look at issues with a biblical perspective. We have Bibles readily available,

we have Bibles on our computer. So we can look things up and try to think in those terms. I think that's the starting point – to immerse yourself in Scripture so you think in those ways.

This description echoes, and amplifies, much of what the *WORLD* staff says about how they sort through the classes and Scripture to get to the truths and justifications for how they do their work. A few mention reading certain books to assist in their knowledge of Scripture that they put in play when doing their work. Angela Lu, for example, notes that she has been influenced by Christian author and blogger Tim Challies, who has written extensively about faith in the modern, technology-driven world. But Lu also said that, really, her understanding of how to use biblical objectivity and the classes was the result of how "I'm growing my faith and following Christ, and a lot of times it's helpful to have a conversation with Susan and Marvin if I'm questioning or unsure. It's not like with every story I'm asking, 'What does God say about this?' I don't always go back to the rapids."

The lack of agreement on what stories can be assigned to which class

The above two sections of the answer to Research Question 2 have established that *WORLD* staffers agree that, first, all stories involving issues of abortion and homosexuality are Class one or Class two, and that, as a result, only people that are against abortion and homosexuality should be quoted extensively. Second, there is widespread agreement that a strong faith as a Christian and an understanding of the Bible are far more important to writing and reporting within the biblical objectivity and class standards than worrying about individual classes of stories.

It follows, then, that the interviewees did not, very often, worry about which class other subject matter that they were reporting on fell into. If the standard is that all stories about homosexuality and abortion be Class one or Class two, it is apparent that other stories and how to report them are less a matter of what the individual situation or story may be than what *type* of story, in general, is being covered, as determined by the basic subject matter and issue, and not the individual situation or possible interview subjects.

For example, several staffers, including Lamer and Smith, said that stories about financial issues are Class three or Class four. In *Telling the Truth*, Olasky defines Class three stories as those in which *"partisans of both sides quote Scripture but careful study allows biblical conclusions"* and Class four stories as having *"biblical understanding backed by historical experience"* (Olasky, 1996, p. 23, italics in original). Lamer, who noted that he is "not looking up Scripture" when he reports and writes, said that he used to think gambling stories were a Class one, but, after examining his understanding of biblical principles, he decided that such stories are Class three because they focus more on "the principles of how we should treat others. The Bible says we should consider our neighbor's interests as our own and we should do something valuable to get money. But if I gamble, only one of us wins. It's a zero-sum game."

Smith said much the same, noting that stories about the economy are often Class three or Class four, including stories on America's national debt.

> Look at Jesus' parable of the tablets. He advocated debt. So how can you say debt is wrong? That's a Class three or Class four. You can't make the

argument that universal debt is bad. I can make the argument that my debt for this home – what I borrowed to buy this home was twice my annual income – it was prudent for me to do that for this asset. The Bible speaks against usury but not against debt. The government lowers interest rates – is that good or bad?

The cover story that Smith wrote for the March 23, 2013 issue, detailing the career and legacy of Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke, seems to adhere to this idea of the sort of greater balance Olasky has said should be in Class three or Class four stories – but only to a point. In "The house that Ben built," Smith offers an overview of Bernanke's life and career, but most of the story features quotes from a variety of financial experts, including several journalists and economists, who give conflicting opinions on whether or not his tenure was a success or a failure.

These men have wildly conflicting opinions, and there is no overt religious element to the story; Bernanke's Jewish background is only mentioned at the very beginning, as is his parents' worries that he would lose his "Jewish roots" when he left North Carolina to attend Harvard, and there is no mention of the religious affiliation of any of those quoted. However, even here, in a story with no religious component, Smith's only includes quotes people from one notably conservative mainstream publication, the *Wall Street Journal*, and several men he identifies as "conservative economists" (Smith, 2013, pp. 41-42).

While he gives the sources plenty of room to discuss why they believe Bernanke's policies have helped America or contributed to the country's current

economic woes, he does not include anyone identified as a "liberal economist," or from a more liberal publication than the *Journal*, or from a liberal think tank. The result is that, where there is a variety of opinions in the story, there are none from those who are not, at minimum, even slightly liberal, or mainstream.

At the same time, some reporters say that the basic element or theme of a story can be a Class one, but that other aspects of it may not be, which can lead them to change how they report the story. In covering the marathon bombing in Boston in April 2013, Dean said, it was obvious that the basic idea behind her reporting is that the bombing and its aftermath is Class one story, based on the Sixth Commandment: Thou shall not kill.

"We're looking at a terrorist act, compassion, and initial response," she said. "That didn't require a lot of parsing through. Also, it's Class one to say that people have a right to keep and bear arms. But the Bible doesn't talk about background checks and how many rounds of ammo there should be in a magazine clip."

As a result, she said, stories about American gun laws would be, in her view, a Class three or Class four, because there is no clear connection between the current debates over gun control and biblical teachings. Unfortunately, Dean's May 4 cover story on the bombings did not discuss such gun control issues, and she did no stories on this subject during the one-year period that the author analyzed for this study.

However, another story that she wrote illustrates the idea that stories that initially seem to be Class one or Class two can actually be more nuanced, and require the more varied reporting and variety of sources with differing opinions

that are found in Class three or Class four stories. Published in the May 4, 2013 issue, "Schools of thought" explores two controversies involving the Romeike family, German evangelicals who sought asylum in the United States so they could home school their children.

The first controversy is the right of German evangelicals to home school their children to keep them away from a German public school curriculum that, Dean writes, promotes homosexuality, among other subjects. The second is the right of the family to stay in the United States, which, Dean writes, the Obama administration has opposed. The story's discourse focuses on the family's legal limbo, happily living in a conservative community in Tennessee but facing possible deportation back to Germany, which suffers from what one evangelical there says is a "secular mindset" that includes persecuting evangelicals and forcing them to send their children to secular state-run schools (Dean, 2013, pp. 44-49).

Dean said that the story could be seen as a Class one, because "Scripture is clear that parents have a responsibility before the Lord for raising their children." However, because Scripture "doesn't talk about home schooling, we'd want to be careful we're not advocating home school or what decision Christian parents should make. And should the U.S. grant asylum? The whole thrust of the story isn't our sympathy."

Perhaps not, but a reading of the story makes it clear that, whatever class that Dean and her editor, Mindy Belz, believed "Schools of thought" fit into, the family's plight is framed in a way that closely adheres with Olasky's concept of a Class one, in that the vast majority of those quoted in the story are either the

family, German evangelicals who believe as they do, or those supporting home schooling on religious grounds in general or the Romeike family in particular. The idea that the family's battle against home schooling is based on opposing secular ideas about homosexuality and similar topics is mentioned several times, and the Obama administration's stance against their asylum in America is described by Dean (and not, it should be noted, by any of the sources she quotes) as denying the family "a fundamental human right" (Dean, 2013, pp. 44-49).

No Obama administration officials are interviewed as to why the Romeike family was singled out, or why they should be deported, or any other aspect of the case. As a result, the story's frame is that the family is right – they are fighting against both an anti-Christian Obama administration and German school officials who want to impose secular beliefs on their children.

In effect, rather than giving a wide variety of opinions on home schooling and the family's plight, and thus appearing to fall into any class other than the first two, the story continuously reinforces the family's position (and the positions of other evangelicals) while decrying their persecution by secular/liberal institutions in both Germany and America. In doing so, the story adheres closely to several of the themes found in the answer to Research Question 2, including the forgotten man and persecution by Christians against stronger secular/liberal forces, and their resistance to these forces. Reinforcing the theme of steadfastness that runs throughout the story, Dean closes with Hannelore Romeike, the family's mother, saying that the family will put their trust in God to lead them through this time of

trial and persecution. “God has stayed with us until now,” she says, “and He will do the same in the future” (Dean, 2013, p. 49).

Summary

Research Question 2: How do these journalists apply Marvin Olasky’s concept of biblical objectivity to their work?

The importance of analyzing these last two stories to illustrate the lack of agreement about what stories fall into what classes is two-fold. First, the stories make it clear that approaching different stories, and different subject matter in general – from gambling to America’s economy to questions over evangelicals being able to home school their children – is, for the *WORLD* writers, a matter of their individual perspectives. The writers are, in essence, left to their own devices as to how to do stories and who to talk to, unless, of course, the stories deal with abortion or homosexuality. This is the person-by-person, untested and untestable essence of the idea that working with the classes is, for everyone at *WORLD*, an “organic” process that relies on each writer’s religious background, life experiences, understanding of the Bible and the six classes, and so on.

Second, the stories – and all of the comments about the different classes of stories noted in this section of the answer to Research Question 2 – clearly illustrate that adhering to the different classes is far less important to the *WORLD* writers as they approach, report, and write their stories than their reliance on the themes and ideas found in the answer to Research Question 1. Virtually every column, Olasky question and answer session, and news/feature story in the magazine contains at least one, if not several, of the elements of these themes.

Moreover, virtually all of these articles draw exclusively from sources that support these themes and underscore the fundamental rightness of the conservative/evangelical Christian perspective on the world. The nuances may be extensive, as we have seen from the Bernanke and home schooling stories, but the bottom line is that almost all of the sources almost always reinforce such themes as steadfastness, the forgotten man, and persecution and resistance by evangelicals in a world that is ruled by secular/liberal institutions and thought.

The adherence to and/or reliance on different classes of stories to guide the writers' work is simply not there because the only classes that the *WORLD* reporters must always be aware of and adhere to are the first two. Lynn Vincent illustrated this point when she noted that the different classes, and how individual stories fall into them, was not discussed in the decade-plus she was at *WORLD*. "The taxonomy or classification wasn't there," Vincent said. "It's looser than that."

In fact, the researcher could only find one story printed in *WORLD* that did not contain elements of the themes noted in Research Question 1, and an overall evangelical Christian perspective – or, in the case of Smith's Bernanke cover story, at least a complete reliance on conservative sources. That story, "Broken brains," by Edward Lee Pitts, ran in the January 12, 2013 issue and addressed the huge number of military veterans coming home from Iraq and Afghanistan with Traumatic Brain Injury, or TBI, which affects them in a variety of ways, including severe memory loss and problems with balance.

Pitts interviewed three veterans recovering from TBI, as well as three doctors treating TBI patients. The story's discourse includes excellent description

of the individual soldiers' injuries and recovery, including therapy sessions, as well as an explanation of why TBI is more prevalent now than in previous wars. What it does not include is any reference to the patients' religious affiliations, religious beliefs and/or reliance on God to see them through their current ordeals, or interviews with their pastors or any other religious figures. As such, "Broken brains" stands out as a complete, and notable, anomaly to the dozens of stories printed in *WORLD* that, no matter the subject matter, trend, or people chosen for interviews, continuously advance at least one – if not several – of the themes found in the answer for Research Question 1.

Research Question 3

Research Question 3: How is this work part of the larger belief system and culture of evangelical Americans?

This study's literature review (e.g., Alsdurf, 2010; Hendershot, 2004; Schultze, 2003; Smith, 1998; Diamond, 1998) has established several aspects of American evangelicals' belief system and culture. To briefly summarize: many evangelicals believe that their culture is both part of, and separate from, America's overall culture, which is generally seen as hostile, or at best indifferent, to their beliefs about America's future, the importance of God and religion in public and government affairs, and the country's declining morals. American evangelicals believe that they are, to a large extent, part of an oppressed, or forgotten, minority, and that they live and worship outside of the power structures of the country's elites, which include liberal East Coast intellectuals and academics, the mainstream/secular media, liberal politicians, and the like.

Many evangelicals believe, quite strongly, that these elites are ruining the country with their focus on the importance of material acquisition and liberal political policies, the lack of importance placed on religion and morality, and an unwillingness to understand the inherent sinfulness of man. As a result, there is an ongoing belief in the importance of the "culture wars" and an us-versus-them viewpoint that is part of the widening gap in perspectives between liberals and conservatives, highlighted by two important issues: abortion and gay rights.

It would be fair to say that these two issues, as well as the importance of Scripture in guiding one's life and actions, the growing threat of Muslims, seeing religion as more important than secular organizations such as political parties, and mankind's inherent sinfulness because of original sin, are where many evangelicals see the most profound differences in perspective between their beliefs and those of the power elites and liberals that they believe are ruining the country. This perspective has deepened in recent years by their considerable dislike, to put it mildly, of the policies of the current administration controlling the federal government, as led by President Barack Obama, which they believe are both causing and hastening America's decline.

When focusing, specifically, on their representation in the mainstream media, evangelicals believe that they have been treated especially poorly since at least the Scopes trial of 1925, where, according to Olasky (2000) and Hendershot (2004), the mainstream/East Coast/secular media portrayed their beliefs on the national stage as backward and ignorant. In the years since, this dislike and mistrust of the mainstream media – and the media's inability or unwillingness to

adequately cover both their viewpoints and the importance of religion in American social and cultural life in general – has been a major topic of discussion, and an important reason why evangelicals have worked so hard, for so long, to establish their own media products, including newspapers, magazines, online news services, radio and television stations, and more. Many evangelicals believe the mainstream media simply doesn't "get" the importance of religion in American life, and has treated them with a unique, and ongoing, contempt.

As evidenced by a number of the answers found in this chapter covering the answers to this study's first two research questions, the *WORLD* staff adheres extremely closely to the above perspectives, and take them for granted, just like many other American evangelicals. There were no answers given by anyone to any of the questions posed in the interviews that indicated any significant departure from these viewpoints; in fact, virtually all of the staffers not only professed to have these viewpoints, but also stressed their importance in what they choose to cover and how they write about it. As evidenced by many articles published in the magazine, and the answers the staffers gave to most of the questions posed to them in their interviews, the people at *WORLD* believe that they are fighting the good fight against the corrosive power of liberalism, secular society, and a hostile and/or indifferent government, as well as the spread of Muslim extremists both at home and abroad.

They define their work as part of the ongoing culture wars in American life for the soul of the country, as a forum for and extension of evangelical Christian thought, and as a counterbalance and reply to liberal/secular media and academia.

As noted earlier, several of the themes that help define the *WORLD* magazine perspective on how they should report and write – including the meta-narrative of mankind's fall and hope for eternal salvation, the forgotten man and persecution and resistance – are drawn directly from these beliefs.

The primary job of the American evangelical is, according to *WORLD* founder Joel Belz, to "claim the culture for Christ" (2012, p. 8) and the magazine's staffers believe they are doing this by emphasizing a perspective that is self-consciously at odds with the liberal stance that they see in the mainstream media. As discussed earlier, this perspective is highlighted by placing a great deal of emphasis on combating the mainstream viewpoint – in society and the media – on a variety of topics while doing their work based on biblical objectivity, which claims that, through a familiarity with Scripture and careful, humble reflection, journalists can, to a limited extent, provide a "God's eye view" on the world around them.

Having established the above from this study's literature review and the answers to the first two research questions, it is possible to answer this research question in more detail. As was the case with answering Research Question 2, these will be organized by two themes. These are listed and detailed below.

The preacher/congregation relationship

An important thread running through the comments of the *WORLD* staffers regarding their place in the world of American evangelicals is that they see themselves not as simply part of this culture, but as at the forefront of it. They see themselves as leaders, an important unified voice that speaks not only to

evangelical concerns, but also for evangelicals as a whole. Many *WORLD* staffers advanced this perspective in their interviews, emphasizing the magazine's place at the forefront of evangelical thought and the battles evangelicals are currently fighting on the American cultural/political battlefield.

Joel Belz, for example, compared the work that *WORLD* is doing to shepherds looking over, and taking care of, a flock of animals. In looking for worthy replacements for a staffer who, more than a decade ago, was leaving the magazine, Belz said it was particularly important that he find someone with the "shepherd's art," someone who could draw readers in and shape their perspectives on news, art, and culture, who could "pull people in" and tell them why subjects that they might not be otherwise interested in – from R-rated movies to conflicts in Europe – were important and relevant to what evangelicals in America were doing.

"That's distinctly Christian because that's a Christian's responsibility – to ask what is really going on in Washington or in my family," said Belz. "That's the duty of every Christian. *WORLD i*s more significant in looking at culture, telling stories about people and their interaction with culture."

Numerous other staffers, including Smith and Marvin Olasky, expressed similar opinions on the role the magazine plays in American evangelical culture. Smith, in noting that he often meets with small groups of *WORLD* subscribers at informal lunches when he travels to different cities for work, highlighted the sense that *WORLD* readers are seen as, or at least similar to, a group of worshippers at a church, or what he calls a "congregation in diaspora."

This idea, he said, guides his thinking with regards to his mission and the magazine's importance. Again using a parallel between biblical and modern times, Smith compared the knowledge of the sons of Issachar as described in the Bible (1 Chronicles 12:32, King James Version) to the work he and his fellow staffers were performing.

"The sons of Issachar were described as being men who understood their times and knew what Israel should do," Smith said. "That's what we have an opportunity to do, to help Christians understand the times and knowing how they should act. We don't just cover the Christian ghetto. Like Adam, we look out into the world and decide what we see."

This comment, like Belz's, illustrates the idea that *WORLD* staffers see themselves as bridging the gap between the concerns of evangelicals and the larger world where secular thought and politics are in power, and helping those that think like them engage in that larger world. Marvin Olasky spoke at length about joy he feels knowing that *WORLD* is telling evangelicals about the work that other evangelicals are "quietly" doing, whether it's helping abused women or parentless children, just as much as he wants both evangelicals and non-evangelicals to see the magazine "blowing the whistle" on evangelicals who are acting inappropriately "so that at least the outside world can see that this is not something that the church wants to put up with."

In doing so, he, too, compared the relationship between *WORLD* and its readers as the same as a pastor and his congregation while again emphasizing that

one of the magazine's primary functions is the counteract the narratives that the secular media tells about Christians.

"What is the function that a pastor serves in his sermons and his teaching?" he asked. "Pastors do much more in comforting people in times of great sorrow, but basically they are preaching and teaching. And we basically are trying to do that sort of thing as well, so we are in some ways serving our congregation and in some ways showing the world that Christians are not as sometimes depicted on the secular media."

This sense of comforting fellow evangelicals, and bearing witness to their trials and successes, can also be found in comments made about covering such tragedies as the Newtown shootings. Olasky, and others, quoted the biblical passage "rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep" (Romans 12:15, King James Version). The emphasis on showing their readers instances of evangelical Christians working tirelessly both for the sake of their fellow man and for the glory of God is described by various staffers as, as indicated by the Olasky quote above, providing a counter-weight to the difficulties that Christians must deal with in facing a liberal American culture and government, as well as the growing power of Muslims.

Owens put it succinctly: "I want to show Christians doing cool things, not just hopeful stories about tragic things. Christians should be fully aware of all the craziness going on and God's grace and that's the balance."

At the same time, Olasky says that the leadership role *WORLD* takes in the evangelical community includes holding its leaders accountable when they

transgress in various ways, either morally or legally. These stories do not appear in the magazine with any regularity, but they do appear. During the year's worth of issues that the author analyzed, the only significant stories that criticized evangelical leaders were written by Olasky and appeared in the July 14, 2012 and August 11, 2012 issues. Both stories focused on the National Association of Evangelicals and the $1 million grant it received from the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy which, he writes, "is devoted to practicing contraceptive use by the unmarried" (Olasky, 2012, p. 9). His column in the same issue makes it clear that in his opinion the NAE's partnership with the "anti-biblical" National Campaign is a clear sign that the former organization is letting its mission and standards be compromised by a secular group, and thus failing to emphasize the need to stay away from pre-marital sex and appreciate the importance of marriage. In doing so, he writes, the NAE is sending an anti-biblical message to young evangelicals, even though many of them "understand that contraceptive use by unmarried individuals enables sinful behavior," including pre-marital sex and an increased risk of seeking an abortion due to an unplanned pregnancy (Olasky, 2012, p. 88).

Olasky says that *WORLD* does suffer subscription cancellations when such stories taking evangelical leaders and organizations to task are printed, as well as letters criticizing the magazine for making such evangelicals, and evangelicals in general, look bad. However, he notes, he receives far more positive letters about such stories. Both pointing out the frequent good and the occasional bad that

evangelicals are doing are, he says, the main aspects of how *WORLD* serves "our congregation."

Bearing witness to America's troubled future

As previously discussed, a central theme running through the belief systems of both evangelicals and the *WORLD* staff is that, because of the fall of mankind and the inherent sinfulness of man, all the problems of the world will be remedied when God returns. Therefore, the importance of how Christians live their lives in preparation for this moment – by living according to biblical teachings first, and worrying about man-made constructs such as the conservative/liberal Republican/Democrat divides at the heart of American politics a distant second – is often written about in *WORLD*. This includes, for example, profiles of Christians such as retired Army Lt. General William Boykin and the business owners who are opposing Obamacare, people who are portrayed as far more concerned with their faith than cleaving to party platforms and worrying about political divisions.

The belief that God will eventually return to renew the world, that Christians must remain steadfast in their beliefs in the face of overwhelming opposition in a country with declining morals, and that their faith is more important than the man-made divisions in American political and civic life, are, as we have seen, central to evangelical culture. All of them find their way into how *WORLD* staffers discuss America's future and their place in it. They are, they believe, bearing witness to a country in moral crisis, pointing out its faults and shortcomings to a committed audience in the face of indifference and hostility, and

doing the best they can while realizing that, in the end, God will decide America's future.

These beliefs in the importance of their work, and of being part of a small band of dissenters in the wilderness, harken back to the idea of the duality of the American evangelical being both part of and yet outside American society, of the "tribe" mentality of different religious groups noted by Schultze (2003) and of Olasky's comparison of modern evangelicals having a similar plight as the Jews placed in bondage in Babylon during biblical times. All three are discussed at length in this study's literature review. As noted in that chapter, Olasky's suggestion is that evangelical Christian journalists both fight a "limited war" (1996, p. 21) against the coming darkness, and eagerly and confidently await God's return.

It is this perspective that informs the passion so many *WORLD* staffers have for their work, and their sense of its importance in modern evangelical America: they are bearing witness to what may be America's last days, and certainly to its moral free fall from a Godly country to one in which mankind's inherent sinfulness is combining with liberalism and secularism to destroy what once was a far better place.

Angela Lu discussed this theme and the inside/outside duality of how *WORLD* staffers look at evangelicals' place in American culture when she talked about her and her co-workers' relationship with America.

> We care about what happens and we love this country, but it's not the most important thing or the ultimate good. Our ultimate hope is in Christ, not a

country or a nation. America is not the ultimate thing. We believe people are sinful and things will happen but we can be hopeful that God will come again and redeem us.

The work of bearing witness to evangelicals' place in America's decline was often mentioned by *WORLD* staffers, whose comments ranged from extremely pessimistic about America's future to being both pessimistic and hopeful. In other words, while all sounded dire warnings about America's future, there were those that spoke as though the country's eventual fall as nearly inevitable due to lack of morality, while at the same time, there were also several staffers who believed that there was as much cause for hope as for worry.

Lee's comments place her in the first category.

I'm not a cynic but the future of America is getting darker and darker. Gay marriage is going to be legalized and Roe versus Wade won't ever be overturned. The Bible has said that the world is only going to get darker and darker and the time of Jesus coming back is not far. I don't have too much hope that America can recover its Christian focus. The voice of people spreading God's truth is continuously being drowned out with the world's corrupt views and darkness.

Susan Olasky, too, sounded scared when speaking about America's future and its moral decline due to "drifting away from biblically-based social mores" and the "bill that is coming due" as a result.

You have to ask yourself how good is measured and if you read any news site and you read about America, ask your grandmother if she ever thought

she'd see something like that reported in her country, she'd say no. America is founded on great principles – as a nation we have strayed from these principles and to the extent we have the nation will continue to decline. We're a baby of a nation – we're not even 300 years old. But nations gobble each other up – we think we can't be gobbled up.

Marvin Olasky, on the other hand, was one of several staffers to sound a more hopeful tone, noting, first, that while there are indications that America is losing its way morally, it's also true that "in many ways the evangelical church has grown stronger over the past 50 years." He then described looking at the country's possible fate as a "roller coaster in some ways – sometimes it's going up and sometimes it's going down" before saying that, in the end, "it's in God's hands. We shall see. Christians say that God is not pleased with the 50 million abortions in America and I am sure that's true but what that means to our future I don't know."

But while the future of America hangs in precarious balance, and while there are indications of very dark days ahead, the task at hand now, they agree, is the work: reminding the *WORLD* faithful of the good Christians are doing; seeing the world through, to the extent that they can, God's eyes, and crafting their journalism accordingly; and reporting on the destructive power of liberalism in political and academic American life, gay rights, abortion, the growing threat of Muslim extremists both in the Middle East and in their midst, and other topics. Sitting in his suburban Charlotte house on a quiet weekday, Smith grew passionate when talking about his desire to work for God in what could be America's last days and the legacy he was leaving to his children and to history.

When I'm being melodramatic I'll say to myself, "I don't want to be on my death bed and when my children ask, 'What did you do about it?' I don't want to say that I did nothing. As a Christian I'm a person of hope – I refuse to believe all is lost because I know the end of the story. The ultimate end of the universe is a new heaven and earth so I tend to be hopeful. But at any given moment things look dark and as humans we don't know where we are in the arc of history. T. S. Eliot says we fight for the truth not to win but to keep the truth alive. That's a strong motivation for me personally. Our duty is to understand the times and know what America should do – I'm not responsible for the shape America is in right now, but I am responsible for how I behave and where God has placed me. As a Christian journalist my role is to understand and to do it – whether we win or lose is up to God.

Summary

Research Question 3: How is this work part of the larger belief system and culture of evangelical Americans?

Like many fellow evangelicals, *WORLD* staffers' core beliefs focus on the importance of the meta-narrative of mankind's fall and original sin; the importance of the culture wars in American life; the destructive power of secular/liberal thought and influence as evidenced by the enormous importance placed on abortion and homosexuality; the country's declining morality; and the hostility mainstream America (as evidenced by the mainstream media) has for evangelicals. Information on these topics has been noted in both the literature review and the answers to Research Question 1 and Research Question 2 in this chapter.

However, because they are journalists who are reporting and writing about a wide range of subjects, the members of *WORLD* have a different perspective on their place in evangelical culture and the belief that it is functioning both inside and outside of American mainstream culture. Because they have a forum to bring news and opinion to their audience, which is largely like-minded evangelicals, they believe that they have responsibilities that other evangelicals do not have. Based on the answers the *WORLD* journalists gave in their interviews, it is possible to organize how they see these responsibilities into two main themes.

1. The preacher/congregation relationship. Numerous members of *WORLD* said that they see themselves their roles as shepherds of a flock, leaders of a congregation who, with their special skill and training as journalists, can interpret and make sense of events both inside and outside of evangelical culture for an audience of people who think and worship as they do. Their belief is that they, through using biblical objectivity and their limited ability to provide a "God's eye view" of the world, are providing their readers with important information and interpretation, and how evangelicals are interacting with the larger, liberal, and often hostile world around them.

2. Bearing witness to America's troubled future. The vast majority of the *WORLD* staff, like many evangelicals, believes that the sinfulness of man and the growing influence of secular/liberal power are combining to hasten America's decline, and perhaps usher in its destruction. *WORLD* staffers believe that a major part of the work they do is to show their readers how the destructive power of these liberal influences – in academia, in politics, in the media, and in civil society

in general – are usurping the power of God and religion, and leading, perhaps, to the collapse of America as we know it. While there is no agreement by members of the staff as to when the country might finally self-destruct, or whether or not there is reason to believe this downward progression can be slowed or even stopped, there is widespread agreement that it is vitally important that they bear witness to America's moral decline.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided the results to the three research questions posed in this study. In doing so, the author has provided information about the research's time frame, the names and positions of the *WORLD* staff interviewed and the printed material in *WORLD* and its policy book used for analysis, and the answers to the research questions. In doing so, the author has provided information on three main subjects:

1. The seven themes that guide the *WORLD* staffers in their work, and examples of how these themes influence the news articles and opinion pieces that they write.

2. The three themes that detail how the *WORLD* staff uses Marvin Olasky's biblical objectivity method of writing and reporting in an attempt to provide readers with a limited "God's eye view" of the world around them.

3. The two themes that display how the *WORLD* staffers see their place within the larger scope of American evangelical culture and belief.

This study's next, and final, chapter will provide discussion about the findings detailed in this chapter.

Chapter 6: Discussion

This final chapter of this study provides discussion about the results of the three research questions found in Chapter 5. In doing so, this chapter fuses the results with a number of the most important ideas about the role of evangelical Christian journalists in modern American society, the importance of ideology in shaping news coverage, and the life-world of people that belong to a social group, all of which have been discussed in Chapter 1, Chapter 2, and Chapter 3. This chapter also discusses the significance of this study within current journalism research, the limitations of the study, and possibilities for future research.

Findings

The interviews with the 13 members of the *WORLD* staff, as well as the textual analysis of one year's worth of issues of the magazine and its style book, reveal a number of important aspects of how the journalists view their world, and how these views translate into the stories and columns that are printed in the magazine.

The *WORLD* staff members are, as previously noted, extremely similar in their views about the role evangelical journalists have in relation to secular journalists, secular society, and other American evangelicals. They see themselves as providing an alternative to the viewpoints of both secular journalists and most of America, which they believe is crumbling due to declining moral and ethical standards. Their belief is that they are fighting a battle for biblical truth and transcendent morals against a wide array of opponents, among them liberal

journalists, politicians, and academics, as well as Muslim extremists, and that their work is part of the culture wars in American life.

The results of Research Question 1 detail the themes that assist in defining the ideology of the *WORLD* journalists. Theirs is, they believe, a uniquely Christian calling, one that takes its cues from the Bible, and particularly the story of mankind's fall into sin. As a result of their sinfulness, they believe that their work is a humble, imperfect attempt to see the world through a "God's eye view" that emphasizes writing about the selfless work of Christians who are also working for the good of the less fortunate and the oppressed both in America and abroad, particularly those who put God first and foremost in their motivations and actions. These, they believe, are the "forgotten man" of American society, the people who stand steadfast against a world gone mad and who, like themselves, have been persecuted for their beliefs.

The sense that emerges from examining the stories in *WORLD* is that they serve to constantly remind readers of the fundamental rightness of commonly-held evangelical positions on such issues as the growing power of Muslims; the persecution of Christians around the world; serving God before country and political parties; the culture wars and chasm between religious and secular thought and action in American life; and the array of Christians working, often quietly and behind the scenes, to improve the lives of others, no matter how beset by stronger, opposing forces. Using Altheide's 12-step method of ethnographic content analysis provided the researcher with a window through which to find

these themes, as well as how individual stories framed the information that they brought to *WORLD* readers, and the discourse used to discuss these topics.

The magazine staff's guidepost for how to perform this work and attempting to see the "God's eye view" in all they write about is using what Marvin Olasky calls "biblical objectivity," a series of "classes" that assist writers in deciding how to report and write. The results of Research Question 2 detail how the *WORLD* staff works with the classes. The one constant of this work is that stories about homosexuality (including gay rights) and abortion are always considered to be Class 1 or Class 2, and it is agreed that they are to be reported and written in a way that completely excludes any viewpoints other than the perspective that is commonly held among American evangelicals: that abortion and rights for homosexuals are always wrong. Those who believe differently are usually completely excluded from the stories written on these subjects.

Other stories – and possible interviewees for these stories – can, in theory, fall into other categories, and various *WORLD* writers discuss stories with different topics (such as business and finance) as at times belonging to different classes. In reality, though, these stories are also written in a way that heavily (and usually exclusively) relies on interviewees that agree with the beliefs of the writers and the general evangelical position. This is true whether the stories address the work evangelicals are doing to help the poor in urban America, politicians that are acting in accordance with their religious beliefs and not party platforms, conflicts between Christians and the federal government, or other topics.

Research Question 3 looks at how the *WORLD* staffers see their relationship with evangelical America. Believing that they are beset on all sides by immorality and a society that is either indifferent or actively hostile to their beliefs and those of evangelicals in general, they also believe that they are fulfilling the role commonly held by preachers. They see themselves doing this in that they are guiding their readers to a better understanding of the world around them while detailing and bearing witness to what may be America's final days.

Significance

This study provides unique and previously unavailable information on a number of topics within the study of journalism, newsroom ideology, and evangelical Christian Americans. It represents the first ethnographic study of a major evangelical Christian news organization, as well as the first study of evangelical Christian journalists that combines interviews with textual analysis to provide a look at the ideology that shapes their perspectives, motivations and routines, and the content that the journalists produce.

Moreover, because of the popularity of Marvin Olasky and *WORLD* in general, this study provides valuable insight into the information that the evangelical Christian community receives. This study also provides information on how exactly *WORLD* journalists use Olasky's six classes of biblical objectivity, which he has often claimed provides a handy guide for evangelical journalists to perform their work and how it relates to the Bible, and to oppose traditional mainstream journalism objectivity.

As noted in this study's literature review (e.g., Gans, 1979; Harding, 1993; Durham, 1998), alternative journalists are, broadly speaking, those that actively oppose the power structures inherent in the connection between mainstream journalists and the powers that be in American life. How alternative journalists see their role, and how they oppose mainstream journalists and their connection with those in power in America, has been written about extensively. However, this study is the first to detail how a group of self-consciously alternative journalists that use the Bible, and their interpretation of it as well as their individual understandings of God and religion, as the basis of their ideology, work routines, and content.

In doing so, the *WORLD* staff provides a unique and religion-based example of what Durham (1998) calls "standpoint epistemology," or taking the idea of objectivity away from the "intellectual property of dominant groups" of elite social actors that work with journalists to reinforce the powerful structures of American society. Durham and other feminist scholars, such as Nancy Hartsock, have advanced standpoint epistemology as a way of confronting the connection between American elites and mainstream journalists. Those elites, in their eyes, are predominantly white men, who continuously work with reporters, editors and media companies to construct "privileged discourses in the construction of knowledge via journalism" (p. 129).

To the *WORLD* staff, the privileged are not defined by race or sex. Rather, in addition to reporters, they include secular liberals, feminists, professors working within and the institution of American academia, Democrats, and even

conservatives who – while having much in common with evangelicals as far as general voting tendencies and opposing liberals – base their actions not on biblical teachings, but rather on earthly standards such as one's political party. In challenging these discourses between the mainstream media and the privileged, the *WORLD* staff has created, in effect, a standpoint epistemology that challenges even some of the ideas – such as feminism and white privilege – that the concept grew out of in the 1990s. To them, white men are not the problem; liberals and people who do not believe in the inerrancy of the Bible are. The concept of the "forgotten man" that is so important to the way those at *WORLD* report and write, for example, clearly shows that the magazine often defines itself as a direct challenge to the relationship between American elites and the media that negates and/or ignores the perspectives of those will not conform to its liberal/secular/relativistic standards.

As a result, this study adds to the understanding of the role of alternative journalists who are united by their belief in the vast importance of a document, a widely-available printed text, as the basis for their work, as opposed to other types of alternative journalists, who base their sense of mission and opposition to America's elite on such characteristics as ethnic background, sex, sexual orientation, or geographic location. This, too, is a unique aspect of this study, because while there are other alternative journalists who report from a religion-based perspective, none of them have a code such as Olasky's six classes to use as, theoretically, the defining standard for how to fuse their work with a religious text.

Shoemaker and Reese (1996) have advanced the theory that, first, ideology within a news organization is the most important factor when looking at content, and, second, that "media transmission of ideology works as it does by drawing on familiar cultural themes that resonate with audiences. These themes, however, are selectively chosen and constructed into a coherent structure" (1996, p. 222). These ideas about the importance of ideology and themes, however, are only discussed by the authors in terms of mainstream journalism.

This study strongly suggests that the same holds true for evangelical Christian journalists or, at the very least, the journalists at *WORLD*. These journalists are not attempting to provide an alternative to mainstream American journalism in terms of basic journalism skills or style of writing; in terms of reporting and the way stories are written, the *WORLD* journalists seek to emulate their secular counterparts and, in fact, find much to admire in the quality of their reporting and writing, as evidenced by the many positive comments about well-known secular journalists found in the magazine's policy book.

Rather, they are self-consciously providing a different overall perspective on the world and news events that they want to both challenge mainstream journalism ideology and advance a number of cultural themes, to use Shoemaker and Reese's terminology, that show up constantly in the magazine. These themes have been previously noted and discussed, but it is important to note that, according to information in this study's literature review, they are almost perfectly aligned, and as a result resonate, with the perspectives of the majority of evangelical Christians. As noted by Schultze (2003), evangelicals are one group of

Americans who see themselves as functioning as a "tribe" that is both inside and solidly outside of mainstream culture, and thus "vulnerable, beleaguered, and even exploited." As a result of this belief, he wrote, it is these groups that are "the most likely to take extraordinary efforts to counter external threats" (pp. 31-32).

At *WORLD*, these efforts are the news stories and features, and Olasky's question-and-answer sessions, that consistently feature the perspectives of people – almost all of whom are Christians – that emphasize the themes, sometimes with an us-against-them tone. Believing that they are "vulnerable, beleaguered, and even exploited" by everyone from liberal politicians to Muslim extremists, the *WORLD* journalists see themselves as fighting a lonely battle that emphasizes telling the stories of fellow Christians who are also ignored and/or attacked, both intellectually, as in the halls of academia and Washington, D.C., and physically, as in the many Christians who are suffering at the hands of Muslim extremists in, particularly, Africa and the Middle East.

The same is true of the recurring columns by magazine founder Joel Belz, his wife Mindy, and Olasky, all of whom explore the same topics, but with individual differences. Joel Belz focuses more on general ideas about the work evangelicals can and should do to stem America's apparently inevitable moral decline, while Mindy Belz, who is the magazine's most well-traveled and reporter, critiques several secular/liberal institutions, such as feminism, but, more often, details the growing power and violence of Muslim extremists, as well as the possibility that these Muslims might find a foothold in America. Olasky, meanwhile, looks more at the media and American education, including what he sees as an

entrenched secular/anti-religion stance and how this stance hurts Christian academics who will not adhere to it.

In effect, *WORLD* is providing its readers with a publication that somewhat resembles several predecessors, including *Christianity Today* which, as Schultze writes, "sought to evaluate and critique the wider culture and society from a biblical perspective" (2003, p. 128). This is the essence of Olasky's concept of biblical objectivity, of using a personal interpretation of the Bible to decide which stories to cover, which members of the public to interview, and how to write stories. The biblical perspective is one that relies on both passages from the Bible and one's own development as a Christian which, according to the interviewees, is used to bridge the interaction between evangelical thought and the stories of individuals.

By promoting this method, Olasky is also seeking to provide a publication that returns American journalism – or, at least, his corner of it – to the standards found in what he sees as its golden age: the long period in the 1700s and 1800s when major publications were guided by the Bible and a belief in mankind's inherent sinfulness. It was an era when the religiously driven press's power in America peaked, before the shift to placing man and science center stage. It is clear from the comments of the interviewees that they believe that modern journalism and modern society are walking in lock step down a destructive path that places its emphasis on individuality, temporary pleasures, science, liberal academia, and adherence to earthly standards such as the stances and platforms of political parties.

The *WORLD* staff, then, could be said to agree with media critic Michael J. Gerson when he wrote that secular journalists simply don't "get" religion and its importance in American life, and thus, through their ignorance, fail to report "the greatest stories of our time" (Gerson, 2009, xviii). To *WORLD*, these "greatest stories" focus on hard work and sacrifice by Christians; resistance to the standards of secular-dominated media, politics and thought; and those who are placing Christian ideals and teachings before everything else, whether they are reporting on gay rights battles in Washington, D.C. or beleaguered Christians helping refugees in the Syrian city of Aleppo or Christian businessmen in the American heartland who refuse to agree to the mandates of Obamacare, even as they know that doing so could mean they could be assessed fines that might bankrupt them.

WORLD contributes significantly to the landscape of American journalism in a variety of ways. First, it can be said to provide a more news-based alternative to *Christianity Today*. Both magazines have large evangelical Christian audiences, and both include both news and commentary, as well as reviews, but while *Christianity Today* is more commentary-based, *WORLD* provides readers with more news stories focusing on events from around America and the world, often on topics that American audiences in general are interested in. *WORLD* is more concerned with timely coverage and reporting, while *Christianity Today* focuses more on columns, reflections, and personal essays, as well as more news items about what is going on within evangelical America, and its churches and pastors. *WORLD* covers a wider range of topics, often with more in-depth, rigorously reported feature stories that resemble the sort of big-picture, multi-source articles that can be

found in, say, *Newsweek*. In this way, *WORLD* can be said to complement *Christianity Today*, and vice versa.

Also, by placing religious beliefs and how those beliefs are acted on by many people at the forefront of explaining why people do what they do, *WORLD* reflects the reality that, as previously noted in this study, America is a far more religious country than many others (Fowler, Hertzke, Olson & den Dulk, 2010, p. 26). Simply put, many Americans decide who to vote for, who to marry, which causes to support, which cultural products (such as films, movies and books) to consume, and where to send their children to school, among other crucial life decisions, based first and foremost on their religious beliefs, and it is this standard that is reflected in the pages of *WORLD*. This is in direct contrast to the tendency among mainstream journalists to "examine religion only as isolated phenomena, not a significant pat of American cultural and social life" (Schultze, 2003, p. 266).

In addition, in focusing on the beliefs and activities of evangelicals, *WORLD* gives voice to and documents the actions of a religious group that has considerable influence in American life and politics. As noted in this study's introduction, beginning in the 1970s, at least one-third of Americans self-identified as evangelicals, and became extremely involved in mainstream American politics, to the point where they now "constitute a key GOP voting block in both national and local politics" (Fowler, Hertzke, Olson & den Dulk, 2010, p. 35). This broad and ongoing influence, and how it shapes American politics, is a constant feature of the articles in *WORLD*, in sharp contrast to political coverage in virtually any mainstream news publication. The same is true of the widespread belief in the

importance of the "culture wars" in American life, including the sharp divide among Americans about a small number of hot-button topics, such as homosexuality and gay rights. The importance of portraying this divide, and focusing on these topics, means that the journalism at *WORLD*, again, reflects much of the American social landscape (Mouw and Sobel, 2001, p. 916).

Also, *WORLD* provides readers with information about a vast array of Americans living their lives as committed, church-going people. Virtually every issue of the magazine contains quotes from people at various levels of popularity and influence, from politicians to public figures to educators to evangelicals in foreign countries to those working quietly for the good of others in isolated pockets of America. *WORLD* sources are movers and shakers in the halls of Washington, D.C., college students, business owners, ministers in violence-scarred urban areas, retirees, authors, small-town families, and so on. In giving these people a voice, and in showing the array of evangelicals in all areas of public life, the *WORLD* journalists provide the alternative to the mainstream media's tendency to reduce evangelicals to easily dismissible "caricatures" that portray them as "out of touch and feckless" and, quite often, the subject of ridicule (Hendershot, 2004, p. 1).

In all of these ways, the journalism published in *WORLD* can be seen as, perhaps, a corrective to the portrayal of the political and social world – of evangelicals but, moreover, American religious life in general – that has long been regarded as one of the major failings of the American mainstream media, and which means that there is often a pronounced "disconnect" (Silk, 2009, p. 84)

between the world that many Americans see around them, and the world that they read about in much of America's popular media. In doing so, *WORLD* deserves a considerable amount of praise.

At the same time, the *WORLD* writers also often appear to be falling into the trap described in the literature review by Christian journalism professor and columnist Terry Mattingly, who writes that Olasky "seems mainly oblivious" to the shortcomings of journalism that decides on a stance and a perspective before actually reporting and writing a story. *WORLD* reporters, writes Mattingly, do this constantly, the result being that they are consistently "biased" in their work (1997, ¶ 1, 16).

This tendency was seen in story after story throughout the year of issues of the magazine that the author examined. Essentially, *WORLD* writers, when covering any story and any subject, interview only people who agree with the anti-gay/anti-abortion/anti-government/anti-Muslim/anti-liberal sentiments shown in so many of the interviews with them, as well as Christians who are working hard to help the poor and disadvantaged, whether they were in a blighted corner of Detroit or Aleppo. This is not simply a matter of choosing to do stories on hard-working or oppressed Christians, either: while it might not be realistic to think that Mindy Belz could find and interview the Muslims that, say, burned down a Baptist church in rural Africa, it is, if one is following basic mainstream journalism standards about fairness and presenting different sides of a story and/or an issue, completely realistic to believe that she, and all *WORLD* reporters, would speak to

people who do not agree with the ideas and perspectives of the people that the *WORLD* reporters build their stories around.

Time and time again, though, this simply was not done. If, for example, a mainstream reporter did a story about the Christian businessmen who strongly oppose Obamacare mandates, the reporter would be expected to interview a government spokesperson to answer the charges posed by the businessmen. When *WORLD* reporter Jamie Dean did this story (which was published in the February 9, 2013 issue) she did not. Similarly, if a mainstream reporter did a story about Christians rescuing a small community in poverty-wracked Detroit, it would be expected that the reporter would speak to city officials as to exactly why they had decided to abandon that community. When Susan Olasky did the story (which was published in the March 9, 2013 issue), she did not. Finally, if a mainstream reporter did a story on a German evangelical family who had resettled in America and claimed to be facing deportation by the Obama administration, it would be expected that the reporter would get quotes from an administration spokesperson as to why this family, in particular, was being targeted, if in fact it was. When Dean did the story (which was published in the May 4, 2013 issue), she did not.

The same is true of the columns that reflect on events as a way of getting to discussions of larger issues. Both Marvin Olasky and Mindy Belz, in writing about incidents of Christians being mistreated by liberals in academia – in the former case, a University of Texas professor who did not receive tenure, and in the latter, a Christian organization that was banned at Tufts University in Massachusetts – did not provide quotes and/or context from school officials as to why these actions

were taken, even to argue against such reasoning. In both cases, and there are others, the viewpoints of those who do not agree with Olasky and Belz (and the UT professor, and the Christian organization at Tufts) are not only wrong, they are not even worth mentioning. Based on the author's considerable experience as a columnist for a large Texas daily newspaper, it would be fair to say that neither of these columns would have seen print without such basic information being included.

While there are, in some *WORLD* stories, quotes from people that oppose the viewpoint of the *WORLD* writers and the people that they interview, almost invariably those quotes are from background material, and much less prevalent than the quotes and perspectives of those who agree with the *WORLD* reporters on the subject at hand. In virtually all cases, the discourse of these stories is built on the perspectives of Christians who are working to help people because of neglect of the powerful, putting their Christian beliefs first as the basis for their actions, standing firm in the face of opposition from non-Christian forces, or toiling in obscurity as the "forgotten man" because they are being ignored or castigated by the liberal media.

Moreover, as seen with the Christians/Obamacare story by Dean and the story over the controversy about admitting gay people into the Boy Scouts by Warren Cole Smith, *WORLD* writers often add their own editorial comments that further frame the subjects of their stories as having the correct perspective on the issue at hand, and those opposing them as being not only misguided, but simply wrong. The vast majority of the stories in *WORLD*, then, appear to exist to advance

the perspectives on the world that were detailed in the interviews with the *WORLD* staff and which, as noted earlier, dovetail with the perspectives of many evangelical Christian Americans.

In effect, then, the news stories and columns in *WORLD* create an "echo chamber" of perspectives between writers, interview subjects and story narratives, and the evangelical Christian audience the stories are written for. Putnam and Campbell (2010) describe echo chambers as "social interaction among like-minded co-religionists" that "reinforces and even hardens one's beliefs, even if the process is subtle." The authors were writing about the connection between religion and political salience by various American religious groups, but their point about agreement and reinforcement of opinion on various issues (including, and most frequently, hot-button issues such as abortion) being "embedded within a social network where common opinions are shared" (p. 439) is perfectly illustrated by the three-way connection between journalist, subject and audience found in the work that *WORLD* does.

The ideas about why *WORLD* journalists do what they do – as seen, for example, in the seven themes that answer Research Question 1 – are agreed on by all members of the staff, as is the tendency to write most often about a small number of topics, and in reporting and writing about those topics to quote only those that agree with the writers. These stories, passed on to *WORLD* readers, reinforce the perspectives on a variety of issues that are common to many evangelical Christian Americans. These core beliefs echo, and echo again,

throughout the chamber defined by the three groups, creating, in effect, a constant feedback loop of thought and opinion.

This is done, in fact, by design: as seen with the answers to Research Question 3, the *WORLD* writers believe that they are shepherding, to paraphrase Joel Belz, their readers to a better understanding of what is going on in the world, self-consciously offering a way to "see" what they believe is the correct, Bible-directed perspective. In doing so, they reinforce several basic ideas that are often taken for granted in the evangelical community, among them the destructive power of liberalism, the need for recognition of mankind's fall and original sin as the basis for violence and misdeeds, the oppression of evangelical Christians around the world, and the need for vigorously fighting back against that oppression and raging against the darkness that they see creeping, inexorably, across the land. There are their perspectives, and there are the perspectives of people who are at once wrong, destructive, anti-God, anti-Christian, and evil.

This is exactly the sort of uncompromising viewpoint and unwillingness to see different perspectives that Mouw and Sobel (2001) describe when they write that the culture wars in American life continue to be "rooted in nonnegotiable conceptions of cultural and moral order" (p. 915). It is this unwillingness to find any sort of common ground – by both staunch conservatives and staunch liberals – that leads to the sense that there remains, in much of the country's political and intellectual life, two Americas: theirs and ours. They will never meet, because the gulf between the core beliefs of each group and those they oppose are too far apart, too much at odds with each other.

This gulf, it appears, has widened in recent years, especially where the issue of gay rights is concerned and, considering the wide readership *WORLD* enjoys and Olasky's high profile as both a journalist and a conservative spokesperson/thinker, the argument could be made that the magazine is a leading force in this battle for American hearts and minds.

In looking at an individual's "life-world," Schutz and Luckman (1973) note the importance of looking at the "reality which seems self-evident to men remaining within their natural attitude," the individual and "group" experience which is based on their "stock of knowledge" upon which they base their actions (pp. 4-6, 8). In other words, what people, individually and as a group, take for granted as "true." This dissertation maps and makes more readily available these fundamental beliefs in the fundamental realities of the world that the *WORLD* staff sees as natural, self-evident, ongoing and, most important, "true," as well as how these beliefs affect the magazine that they produce.

It is important to note, again, that in the conversations the author had with the *WORLD* staff, there was little, if any, deviation on the main points or themes that define their beliefs about why they are doing their work, why it is important to cover what they cover, the sense of valiantly opposing more powerful forces in American life, the importance of the meta-narrative in explaining so much about why people do what they do, the need to nurture and guide the "flock" that is their readership, the paramount importance of their journalism serving as a way to fight against gay rights, abortion, extremist Muslims, and liberalism in general; the paramount importance of being directed in their work by their understanding of

the Bible, and journalism as an inherently Christian, biblically-directed occupation. The passion with which they often argued for these points, and the lack of deviation from them from one interviewee to another, strongly suggest that these ideas form the "stock of knowledge" that defines what they see as self-evident and unshakably true.

However, while they agree so much on what is "true" in the world, the *WORLD* journalists vary greatly in their application of Olasky's biblical objectivity method. They are, essentially, left to their own devices when deciding how to use the six different classes of the method: there are no rules, no reliable yardstick, no test that assures that there is any constant connection between story type, content, Scripture, and application of the classes. *WORLD* staffers are, in other words, given a very free hand when applying this method to their work. They acknowledge that the way they use the Bible and its teachings in deciding how to report and write is "organic" and largely a matter of their individual experiences and religious training, as well as ideas about the fusion of journalism and the Bible that they glean from friends, family, co-workers, and fellow worshippers and religious leaders at whatever church they attend.

There is simply no hard and fast standard for how Olasky's classes are applied, including which stories fall into which class, and no system of checks and balances to maintain any sort of standard for how well the reporters are, or are not, adhering to the biblical objectivity concept. The staffers are, in effect, often not differentiating much between the classes while relying far more on their individual knowledge and interpretation, basic Christian beliefs such as "thou shalt not kill,"

and whatever religious training they may have had, in making these crucial decisions.

This is not a criticism: it is simply the best way to accurately reflect the looseness with which this most fundamental concept relating to Olasky's vision of what *WORLD* should do, and how it should be done, emerged from the interviews. In other words, the six classes of the Olasky biblical objectivity method are far less important than the general ideas and, to the staffers, self-evident truths about their work and how it is done in defining the ideology and routines with which they perform their tasks.

The fact that mainstream objectivity and biblical objectivity are so far apart in conception and execution bothers the *WORLD* staffers not a bit – on the contrary, this is, they believe, exactly why the latter is so worthy and important a method to base their work on. By using it they are creating a parallel to what they are fighting against: the way that journalism, like so much of America, is based on man-made structures and standards, and has essentially, in their opinion, left God out of the picture. The nuances of the biblical objectivity method matter far less to the *WORLD* staffers than the fact that they know they can rely at all times, and however they see fit, on the Bible as the defining benchmark of how to report and write.

The results of this study were, at times, surprising to the researcher. While I assumed that there would be significant agreement among members of the *WORLD* staff on many of the topics presented in the interviews, I did not anticipate that there would be almost no difference of opinion. I also understood, from reading

the magazine before doing the bulk of my analysis, that the *WORLD* journalists consistently favored the perspectives of those who, like them, were committed conservative Christians. However, I did not anticipate the almost total lack of inclusion of quotes from people who opposed their beliefs that I found when doing more in-depth research.

But perhaps the most significant departure from what I anticipated that I would find was the lack of importance the *WORLD* staff placed on close adherence to the six classes of stories described in detail in *Telling the Truth*. I anticipated that this system would be used consistently, and precisely, in guiding the *WORLD* journalists through their daily reporting and writing, when in fact, as indicated in the answers to Research Question 2, its importance at the magazine appears to be far less than an individual or, as several staffers put it, "organic" understanding of the Bible and its major tenets.

In other ways, though, this encounter with the people at *WORLD* and the content that they produce was consistent with what I anticipated that I would find. The magazine is produced by a small number of deeply committed, passionate and driven journalists who believe that they are making a significant contribution to the lives of evangelical Americans, and care deeply about the fate of America and its possible destruction. Their journalism, from the magazine's look to the feature articles, news stories and columns that make up the majority of its content, is often excellent, provides a different look at significant events in a way that mainstream/secular journalists simply do not, and covers a number of topics that are important to many Americans but that major mainstream publications often

simply ignore. In this way, there is much to admire about the work the *WORLD* journalists do, and their commitment to their craft and the perspectives that they offer to their readers.

Limitations

This study has several limitations, the most significant being, as previously noted, the lack of observation of the *WORLD* staff while at work in their headquarters in Asheville, North Carolina. While the author asked on several occasions to be able to observe the *WORLD* staff working in their normal environment, Marvin Olasky opted to only give the author limited access; the author was not, for example, allowed to sit in on editorial meetings or individual editing sessions that included one writer and one editor.

At the same time, it is important to note that many members of the magazine, including such significant contributors as Jamie Dean and Warren Cole Smith, do not live in or near Asheville, and work out of home offices. This tendency of writers to work from their homes, often hundreds of miles from a central office, is common in the modern world of magazine journalism; the same is true at any number of national magazines. Magazines, in general, do not resemble newspapers in the number or percentage of writers and editors who work out of a central office.

The second significant limitation of the study is the interviews themselves. They usually lasted less than two hours, although the amount of time an individual was willing to speak to the author varied greatly, from an hour in several cases to more than three hours in the case of Warren Cole Smith. The interview subjects

were all very forthcoming about their beliefs and how they affect their routines and the journalism that they produce, but given the limited amount of time they had – due, mainly, to the *WORLD* production schedule and the small number of staff members, many of whom both write and edit – it would have been preferable to have more time. The people that declined to give interviews for this study, such as Edward Lee Pitts, whose writing focuses on Washington, D.C. and government/policy topics, did so because, they said, they simply did not have the time, due to the constant demands of writing for a magazine that publishes twice a month.

Future Research

The results of this study suggest a number of avenues for future research on journalism ideology, evangelical journalists, and the culture wars in American life.

Perhaps the most obvious is looking at other major evangelical publications and how reporters and editors there describe and perform their work without Olasky's biblical objectivity method. Olasky is a well-known member of the American evangelical Christian community in general and its journalism community in particular, but this does not mean that his method has been widely adopted by the majority of similar publications. As a result, a study of journalists who have the same general ideas about fusing their evangelical beliefs and basic journalism standards, but do not use this method, could yield significant insights into how exactly they perform their work and the standards with which they assess what needs to be covered, who to interview, and how to write their stories.

The same could be said for non-evangelical, religion-based reporters, such as those at Catholic or Jewish publications. All, one would think, are aware of and to a degree follow the basic standards of mainstream journalism, but also have the freedom to report and write in a way that focuses attention on stories, individuals and issues relevant to audiences made up mainly, if not completely, of people who belong to the same faith traditions. While there have certainly been studies examining alternative news organizations that are based on religion – as opposed to sexual orientation or geography – there has not been a study that examines exactly how such journalists perform their tasks, and their standards for judging their work and how closely it adheres to the principles and tenets of their religion. In doing so, a researcher could describe and detail the various themes that help define the ideology of the journalists at these publications and the work that that ideology produces.

There is also an important study to be done of what one could call "liberal" evangelical publications that focus their attention on different subjects than *WORLD*. Perhaps the most widely known of these is *Sojourners*, a 40-year-old publication founded and led by theologian/author/educator Jim Wallis. Wallis and the magazine have been heavily criticized for being too liberal or progressive by everyone from *Christianity Today* to Glenn Beck to Olasky himself, and their stance on social issues and acceptance of gay people is clearly at odds with the perspectives of *WORLD* and many members of the evangelical Christianity community.

How, then, do the journalists at this publication – also well known, and also influential – conceive of their work? What are the basic themes that guide *Sojourners* reporters and editors, and how do these ideas about what they know to be "true" mean to the content that they produce? A study such as this one, which fuses interviews with textual analysis, could lead to information as to what "liberal" evangelicals think about their work, and the content that is the result of those beliefs. Part of this research could be a discourse analysis of how the two publications cover a particular event or issue over an extended period of time, including who the writers at both publications choose to interview, how they frame the issue, and what, if any, comments the writers themselves make in the course of writing the stories.

A study of the journalists and content at *Sojourners* would be especially valuable at this point in the history of American evangelicals because many young Christians are abandoning traditional evangelical churches and ideas about hot-button topics in favor of more liberal viewpoints and places to worship. This is generational shift is a problem for many in the evangelical community, and so prevalent that Pitts built an entire story around it ("Countercultural warriors," published in the April 20, 2013 issue), complete with statistics about how young people, even those who profess to be conservative Christians, are agreeing more and more with liberal ideas about gay marriage and abortion. *Sojourners*, then, is an increasingly important voice and source of news for those who feel disenfranchised from traditional, hard-line evangelical beliefs.

Another possible study would examine differences in coverage between *WORLD* and *Christianity Today*. Because of the differences in formats, the two publications approach coverage of national and world events differently. At the same time, the two publications are very similar in outlook and in their general agreement with evangelical/conservative viewpoints on a number of issues, including homosexuality. As a result, a study comparing the two publications and how they examine issues and events that are important to both could find interesting contrasts and connections in how they engage their audiences on these topics, and what aspects of these issues and events that they choose to emphasize or downplay.

Future research that would examine *WORLD* on its own could also include interviews with advertisers or subscribers, an advertising content analysis, or a longitudinal analysis to examine the long-term influence and impact of their ideology. There are, for example, a number of topics and events that were covered by the magazine beginning before, and continuing after, the one-year period of content analysis included in this study, including the trial and sentencing of Philadelphia abortionist Dr. Kermit Gosnell, Obamacare, and the continuing debates concerning gay Boy Scouts. Longer, multi-year studies of these issues, and others, could give further insight into how the magazine developed and extended its coverage of these topics, including sourcing, emphasis in coverage, and the connection between opinion pieces and news stories.

Conclusion

This dissertation has explored the ideology that informs the evangelical journalists who write for *WORLD* magazine, an influential and at times controversial Christian news publication. The author has fused textual analysis of a year of issues with interviews with more than a dozen members of the *WORLD* staff to examine the core beliefs, themes, and assumptions that the magazine's writers and editors use to conceive and perform their work while providing information to a largely evangelical Christian audience on a variety of topics and trends both in America and around the world.

In doing so, the author has provided answers to three research questions and interpretation of those answers. If providing an ethnographic account of a group of people is, as Geertz wrote, designed to discover "what manner of men are these?" (1973, p. 16), it can be summarized that this study has found that the members of *WORLD* are, for the most part, talented, intelligent, dedicated and well-trained journalists who see their work, like their place and the place of American evangelicals in general, both part of and solidly, and permanently, outside of the American mainstream: in their work, they take what they believe is useful from mainstream journalism standards and use these standards as the foundation of how to do their work, but without, as mainstream journalists do, a fealty to the concept of objectivity and its goal of giving voice to people with differing opinions, including some, if not many, that a given reporter might not agree with.

Rather, they fuse these mainstream standards with their religious beliefs and training and experience as evangelical Christians as a way of shaping their

content to reflect not only their beliefs, but the traditional beliefs of the so-called "tribe" of evangelical America about the importance of certain topics, a mistrust of secular institutions and other religions (particularly Islam), and a fear of the ongoing damage liberal thought and governmental policies are doing to the country. Their goal is to, in their daily professional lives, to fight a daily "limited war," as Olasky describes it, against the ungodly forces pressing in from all sides.

The validity of fusing these standards as an alternative way of seeing the "truths" that exist in the world, and how this way of seeing impacts the content that they produce, has been criticized by some journalism professionals and commentators, including fellow evangelical Terry Mattingly, just as it has also been widely accepted by the *WORLD* audience. As with the us-versus-them core beliefs at the heart of *WORLD* and its employees and content, you either believe in the way *WORLD* writers perform their work, or you don't. If the author learned anything from his research, it is this: *WORLD* deals in a world of absolutes and unshakable tenets when looking at how the world operates, why people do what they do, who is right and who is wrong, and what the final outcome of mankind may be. As with the culture wars that continue to inform American life, there is no middle ground.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

This study's literature review provides the three research questions that were used to execute this study. Answering these questions was done by conducting interviews with staff writers and editors at *WORLD* magazine. Each interviewee was asked a number of questions that seek more in-depth, individual opinions and examples of how they conceive of the fusion of normative journalism routines and standards with their religious beliefs as evangelical Christians and, in particular, how they apply Dr. Marvin Olasky's concept of biblical objectivity to their work. The researcher will used the interviewee's answers to these sub-topics that relate to the general questions. These subtopics include:

* What does it mean to be an evangelical Christian journalist, as opposed to being a professional, veteran journalist in general?

* Can you describe the day-to-day realities of doing your work as an evangelical Christian journalist who is trying to do both excellent journalism general and journalism based in evangelical beliefs in particular?

* What does *WORLD* magazine contribute to American journalism, and to its audience's understanding of the events and issues *WORLD* journalists cover?

* Why is it important to have *WORLD* magazine, and other evangelical Christian news organizations, as well as mainstream news organizations?

* *WORLD*'s editor-in-chief, Dr. Marvin Olasky, has written extensively about *WORLD*'s importance in the "culture wars" in American life, and how the publication challenges the "secular liberal" perspective that he believes dominates

both American journalism and American culture. How do you, in the course of your work, feel that you do this?

* Can you give particular examples and discuss them?

* Dr. Olasky has also conceived of and promoted the concept of "biblical objectivity" as the standard with which evangelical journalists should do their work, and in particular the standard for reporting and writing at *WORLD*. What does this concept mean to you and your work?

* What does reporting from the standpoint of biblical objectivity, and as an evangelical Christian journalist, tell you about American's present and future?

* Can you give specific examples of how and when this concept was use to shape and define your work in a way that it would not have been without it?

* Dr. Olasky's concept of biblical objectivity includes reporters using six "classes" of stories to help determine how closely each story is related to Biblical teachings. Can you describe how you use this system of classifying stories in your work with a few examples?

* Why should biblical objectivity be the standard by which evangelical journalists do their reporting, writing, and editing?

* What does this concept of journalism ideology help Christian journalists accomplish that they could not without its application?

These questions will be asked of each interview, including Olaksy and a variety of senior staff writers and editors. Of course, some of the interviewee's answers will result in the researcher asking follow up questions that cannot be anticipated here.

Appendix B: Themes

This study's third chapter provides information on mapping the ideology of the members of the *WORLD* staff. As noted, the "stock of knowledge" of people, as individuals and as part of a like-minded group, form what they know to be "true," assumptions and beliefs that, when taken for granted, form the basis for their actions, their "life-world" (Schutz and Luckmann, 1973, p. 8).

The interviews done with 13 members of the *WORLD* staff yielded seven themes, or tropes, that form the basis of these taken-for-granted beliefs about their work and how it relates to their relationship with the Bible, secular journalism and America, and their audience. These seven themes are listed here.

1. Journalism is a holy calling and a uniquely Christian profession.

2. *WORLD* staff members are neither conservative nor liberal in their perspectives or approach to reporting and writing.

3. *WORLD* staff members believe strongly in the meta-narrative that encapsulates so much of Christian belief; man is fallen and naturally sinful, but God's eventual return liberate man from his sinfulness and restore God's dominion over Earth.

4. In trying to understand biblical teachings and how they relate to the journalism that they do, they must be humble and constantly aware that, as fallen and sinful people, they can never perfectly understand these teachings and integrate them into their work.

5. They must remain steadfast to their beliefs, and must often write about those Christian who are likewise remaining steadfast to their beliefs in the face of difficulties, persecution, and sometimes death.

6. A great deal of attention should be paid to the forgotten man – the person or groups whose values and beliefs are largely ignored or ridiculed by mainstream American society, and frequently the mainstream media.

7. As conservative Christians, they are often persecuted for their beliefs, which run counter to an American culture dominated by secular/liberal beliefs and morals. Even though the battle against these superior forces is difficult, they must continue to fight the culture wars that have existed in American society for decades.