

## The Soul of Neoliberalism

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Bethany E. Moreton

In 1992, the champion economics student in Arkansas bore the demographically unlikely surname of Díaz. Competing in his second language, this Nicaraguan citizen placed first in a statewide contest for collegians and even went on to a fourth-place showing at the national finals. His accomplishment made a nationally syndicated column by Christian radio personality Paul Harvey. Noting that the young man's education at a small evangelical college in the Ozarks had been funded by the Wal-Mart family's philanthropic foundation, Harvey proclaimed him a "Sam Walton success."<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the Christian campus was only a short drive from Wal-Mart's low-key headquarters in Bentonville, Arkansas.

The scholarship program that took Mr. Díaz from Nicaragua to Northwest Arkansas was born in the Reagan era as a private-sector effort to fight communism in the region that Jeane Kirkpatrick proclaimed "the most important place on earth." For its Central American participants who had come of age in the 1980s, the intervention could encompass multiple historical ironies. Mr. Díaz himself had passed his teenaged years in the leftist Sandinista army, fighting the U.S.-backed *contras* and translating CNN broadcasts for the Sandinista intelligence service. A nominal Catholic by raising, he was born again during his military service, when his relationship to Christ was forced into high relief by the constant threat of violent death. But he attributes his real spiritual growth to his experiences in Arkansas, where his professors nurtured the small student body personally and placed their studies in the context of their Christian purpose. "Praying at the beginning of every class," he recalls, was "unforgettable."<sup>2</sup>

The scholarship program explicitly respected students' freedom of conscience, but the example of their evangelical hosts spoke to them powerfully. "I met Sam Walton twice in person and quickly came to learn that financial success and Christianity were perfectly compatible: being successful and humble, being loving and demanding, being competitive and caring for others--all these were compatible." Upon graduation in 1992 Mr. Díaz was offered a job in the Nicaraguan Ministry of Economics in the new U.S.-

backed Chamorro government, and he stills dreams of a public career. For the moment, though, he works as a marketing manager for an American oil company in Guatemala.

Mr. Díaz's Christian testimony--his inspirational biography of salvation, success, and humility--is also one of the quiet back-stories of free trade in the Americas. The official narrative focuses on the hemisphere's neoliberal "Washington Consensus," the term applied by a corporate think-tank in 1989 to a suite of economic reforms intended to spur growth in Latin America. Backed by the lending muscle of the World Bank, these recommendations included privatizing state enterprises, flattening tax rates, liberalizing trade, and relaxing government regulation. The Washington Consensus, in other words, functioned as the hardware of neoliberal perestroika in the Western hemisphere.

But the software could be found in the webs of personal relationships that shadowed the Washington Consensus. Among these was a private-sector "Bentonville Consensus" that grew out of the particular ecology of the Sunbelt service sector in an era of Christian revival. Its popular orthodoxy of servant leadership circulated between the overlapping spheres of white-collar vocational training and evangelical theology. Both increasingly found audiences in the formerly agricultural peripheries of the U.S. South as well as the global South. Servant leadership, as produced in the halls of post-Fordist industry and post-modern Christianity, offered a distinct cosmology for the service economy. And for the people caught up in these transformations, it has also provided what one avatar famously calls a "purpose-driven life."<sup>3</sup>

It has done so through a remarkably successful movement of grassroots globalization: Christian revival linking discrete points in the U.S. Sunbelt to people and institutions in the "Two-Thirds World," as it is known among many North American evangelicals.<sup>4</sup> Explicitly transnational evangelism dwarfs other organized popular globalisms, from Teamsters to turtles. The multitude may be enjoying a discursive renaissance on the academic left, but for Bible-readers it never lost currency in the first place. Perhaps the real counterpoint to the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre is not so much the World Economic Forum in Davos, the gathering of a self-conscious power elite, but rather the Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus, where 500,000 Brazilians offer a different salvific plan for the multitude every week.

Over the last century, Christianity's center of gravity has shifted radically.<sup>5</sup> Today the most successful forms of Christianity traveling the globe respond directly to the crisis of faith's old foe, rational scientific modernity.<sup>6</sup> In the mass disillusionment with humanistic progress, these self-consciously post-modern varieties of religious experience see an opportunity for the world to reconnect with the signs and wonders of the Biblical past. Spokesmen decry the radical loneliness and insecurity of life under neoliberalism with the same fervor as secular critics, but they also see in it a truer reflection of the human condition, of fallenness and dependence on God alone, than could ever arise from optimistic Western developmentalism. In seminaries as on college campuses generally, the universal claims of the Enlightenment today often meet with skepticism, and the project of provincializing Europe flourishes.

Some of the fastest-growing sectors of Christianity--Pentecostalism, Mormonism, the "abundant life" movement—responded directly to the collapse of the Bretton Woods order in the early seventies. Various understood in secular circles as globalization, flexible production, neoliberalism, post-Fordism, or the flat earth, the free-market war of all against all has made intimate competitors out of faceless billions, generated financial flows that magically appear and disappear, multiplied debt at every level, destabilized companionate marriage, and stimulated global consumer desire while decreasing economic security. Thus a thirteen-week evangelical video program on living debt-free is offered by U.S. churches, corporations, and military bases, and Joel Osteen fills Houston stadium with his message that gratitude to God can "save a marriage, save your job, [and] get you a promotion" while his wife affirms that "Our Daddy God is the strongest!" African branches of the Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus decorate altars with ads for luxury cars and lotteries. In Seoul, at the world's largest Pentecostal church, congregants gather for the "Threefold Blessing of Salvation": spiritual, material, and physical abundance. At the computerized World Prayer Center in Colorado Springs, appeals for supernatural medical care scroll over giant screens: "Pray a healing MIRACLE for me for kidney problems (disease? failure?)," pleads Lauralee from Vermont. "I'm so alone; no insurance!"<sup>7</sup>

But while secular and religious observers alike comment on the congruence between the cold new world and the "health-and-wealth" gospel that comforts its most obvious victims, Pentecostal services in

the United States draw “medical secretaries, computer programmers, insurance salesmen, graduate students in microbiology, and actors and police officers, as well as people who [are] out of work and down on their luck.”<sup>8</sup> A better cross-section of the contemporary white-collar service work force is hard to imagine. Immiseration has indeed produced a new constituency for a religion of the poor, but it has also cultivated a transnational, free-market, white-collar class with a marked affinity for revived forms of Protestantism. What is the relationship between these developments? What features of the new Christianity built a Bentonville Consensus across an archipelago of churches, Christian colleges, and multinational corporate offices?<sup>9</sup>

### **Post-Modern Christianity, Post-Fordist Work**

Pentecostal and charismatic varieties of Christianity are not the atavistic holdovers of a shrinking rural base, destined to disappear when the last mule is put out to pasture. Rather, they are produced by the specific experience of twentieth-century megacities and were born transnational, originating almost concurrently in India, Korea, Wales, and Los Angeles. The first Pentecostals in the United States emerged in 1906 from a multi-racial revival of casualized service workers--maids, janitors, and day-laborers--led by an unlettered African-American preacher in a marginal section of L.A., that Tomorrowland of post-modernity.<sup>10</sup> Subsequently, even non-Pentecostal Protestantism and the charismatic renewal among Catholics moved in the direction of experiential worship and core values, and away from the minefields of sectarian theological hair-splitting.<sup>11</sup> “What we are involved in,” reported a California woman of her “new paradigm” church, “is not a religion but a relationship.”<sup>12</sup> Like service work itself, this Christianity is people-oriented.

To be sure, evangelicalism and free-market capitalism are not automatic fellow-travelers; under some circumstances they have even faced each other as antagonists.<sup>13</sup> But for two reasons their specific “Wal-Martist” dialectic developed in agricultural peripheries that largely skipped the transformations Fordism had wrought on the core. First, these zones offered a workforce--both waged and salaried--that left the back forty for the back office without ever passing through the assembly line. And second, many

industries that grew up on these peripheries required a sanctification of service labor, embedded ever more stridently in gender exclusivity as men's work ceased to be visibly different from women's.

These developments shed light on a persistent blind spot in radical economic critique. The domestic rise of the deregulated capitalism in the U.S. itself, after all, makes little sense if we look for the rational, profit-maximizing actor: "What's the matter with Kansas?" runs this frustrated line of analysis; "Why do those people keep acting against their own best interests?" Even less self-explanatory, to this view is popular support for the Washington Consensus in Latin America in the face of the catastrophic data stream it produces.

To understand enthusiasm for economic visions that do not pay off, we need to stop imagining *Homo economicus* at the center of the story. It should be self-evident that emotional or spiritual "interests" regularly trump material ones. How many reading these pages could make more money outside the feminized, casualized service sector of classroom teaching? What veterans of MoveOn or ACT UP never voted to raise their own taxes for the sake of their social vision, or for that matter paid a premium for their gym socks rather than support Wal-Mart's own labor practices? Is it so difficult to imagine that people living on less, with fewer occupational options, might nevertheless prioritize their own concept of the greater good? Readers may disagree with the content of that concept, but surely not with the common human urge to honor it.

Christian business culture has managed the post-Fordist crisis in multiple sites by attention to these decidedly inefficient concerns, the emotional and spiritual yearnings for significance. One of the earliest prizes in play was the psychological wage of masculine producerism. Even before the bogey of the "other-directed" Organization Man haunted the collective imaginary, Americans in future Wal-Mart Country fought off a potential "nation of clerks." The fierce Southern opposition to chain stores in the 1920s and '30s was often expressed as fear of these feminized men, serving behind counters in aprons, destined always to work for a distant corporation rather than rising to self-mastery as shopkeepers in their own right. In chain stores, as in the growing service sector generally, a male store manager performed this women's work alongside women clerks and for women shoppers--a servant unto servants, dangerously

unmanly.<sup>14</sup> After World War II, as the rural U.S. South shed labor directly from farms into the service sector, the threat to manhood became ever more evident.

The demise of the Fordist economy and the disappearance of small-scale farming famously threw their manly ethic of producerism into a crisis from which it has never recovered. The Wal-Mart stores and Christian colleges of the Sunbelt helped furnish a new animating spirit in its place, one suited for the feminized post-Fordist workplace. As they trained small-town Protestants to manage the service economy, managers and business professors found a way for men to retain their authority even as they took on a work environment demanding skills they coded female--patience, humility, communicativeness, eagerness to please.

But wage-earning women in early Wal-Mart stores brought a variety of meanings to “family values,” of which gender-based subordination was not the most salient. Their elevation of workplace humility, mutuality, and sociability shaped the company’s corporate culture and its self-presentation to stockholders and the consuming public without directly confronting the gendered hierarchy. On their jobs as at their churches, Wal-Mart’s core constituency demonstrated that women’s increasing legal and economic autonomy did not necessarily foster a desire for equality on liberal terms. As anthropologist Saba Mahmood has pointed out in another religious context, the subject is not always that imaginary rational individual, eternally demanding of his universe “Who am I?”<sup>15</sup> A popular evangelical author of women’s advice books directs us instead to the subject with a different burning question: “Whose am I?”<sup>16</sup>

Both the original Fordist labor mythos and the liberal sex-neutral corrective devalued women’s skills, work, and personal priorities. The post-Fordist solution was to lionize women’s contribution and, indeed, to raise it to the status of managerial gospel. Drawing on an idealized agrarian family model that resonated with the new economy’s Sunbelt recruits, the male manager figured his authority as “servant leadership.” In this cosmology, men earned their power through their superior ability to serve. Thus with service the leading sector of the economy, women found an appreciative audience for the labor that Fordism would call unskilled, while men finessed the gender danger of service by discovering their own

inner servant. In response to the new work environment, a Christian-inflected management theory of servant leadership made a virtue of necessity.

### **Servant Leadership and the Service Economy**

The career of the rhetorical trope “servant leadership” reveals the productive relationship between mass religion and mass education in the post-1973 service economy. By the early nineties the term was hard to escape, and had attached itself with particular tenacity to the down-home, how-may-I-help-you image of Wal-Mart and its modest-living founder, Sam Walton. A *Fortune* article from 1994 explained away the discrepancy between low wages and high employee loyalty at the firm with “‘what Walton called ‘servant leadership.’ The role of an executive is not to dictate but to provide workers with whatever they need to serve the customers in the stores--merchandise, capital, information, inspiration--and then get out of the way.’”<sup>17</sup>

In the business advice genre, the term actually dated to a 1968 essay by a former AT&T personnel trainer, Robert K. Greenleaf. Greenleaf, a sometime Quaker and restless devotee of human potential movements from phrenology to LSD, had taken early retirement from the communications company to pursue consulting, with the hope of spreading his humanistic values to other large bureaucracies. With that peculiarly blinkered approach to organizations in the abstract, he encouraged non-hierarchical management on clients as distinct as a Catholic sisterhood and the Business Roundtable, a lobbying consortium comprising the CEOs of the nation’s 200 largest corporations which was responsible for many notable anti-labor and deregulation victories of the conservative ascendancy.<sup>18</sup>

The explicit inspiration for Greenleaf’s “servant-leader” was Hermann Hesse’s *Journey to the East*, an indispensable text for a seeker in the sixties. Yet from the time of its first publication in 1970 (under the title “The Servant as Leader”) the essay’s theological echoes were obvious to the Biblically literate.<sup>19</sup> The Episcopal bishop of Atlanta, for example, heard of it soon after his appointment to the see in 1971. He was so inspired by the notion that he dedicated himself to “putting theology at the service of business” via an executive training institute at Emory University.<sup>20</sup> Christian periodicals as well as

management ones reviewed Greenleaf's work, and *Business Horizons* stated the obvious: "Christ was a servant leader."<sup>21</sup>

But at the same time that the servant leader was finding a mass audience in the office, Christian theological interest in service was working its way through other channels. Like the changed nature of work, women's legal and economic emancipation posed new challenges to manhood. They were met in some circles with an emphasis on male "headship" and female "submission" within marriage. In the mid-seventies, a rash of cult-like home-based churches popularized an extreme form of patriarchal authority. This "shepherding" or "discipling" movement assigned an older man as the servant leader of younger men and women. Under this shepherd's authority, they performed unpaid labor and submitted the details of their domestic lives to his direction, from arranged marriage to medical care to the purchase of a car.<sup>22</sup>

Shepherding was an extreme case, but the general trend was widely in evidence. By the early nineties, the flagship Southern Baptist seminary had shifted its bottom line of faculty orthodoxy from Biblical inerrancy to gender exclusivity: of the four questions put to prospective teachers, three concerned abortion, homosexuality, and the ordination of women. (Why is tonight different from all other nights? Because it admits no sexual transgression.)<sup>23</sup> The 1998 amendment on family life to the Southern Baptist Faith and Message--that is, the basic statement of the beliefs of the country's largest Protestant denomination--explicitly couched its controversial message about female submission in terms of husbands' "servant leadership."<sup>24</sup> The best-selling author of such Christian advice manuals as *Your Wife Is Not Your Momma* demanded of a multiracial all-male audience, "Who is the servant in your house? You should be, and you should learn how to praise and affirm your wife."<sup>25</sup>

The feminization of men demanded by the post-1973 economy, then, found in the new Christianity both an ally and an alibi.<sup>26</sup> Anthropologist Elizabeth Brusco has supplied the useful term "reformation of machismo" to describe the work of evangelical and Pentecostal Christianity in this context. In contrast to liberal feminism, Brusco argues, the Colombian Protestantism she studied "is not attempting to gain access for women to the male world; rather, it elevates domesticity, for both men and

women, from the devalued position it occupies as the result of the process of proletarianization. It *does* serve to transform gender roles, primarily by reattaching males to the family.”<sup>27</sup>

This proved a dangerous move, to be sure, and within conservative Christianity generally there was no ambiguity about the nature of the threat. “Don’t you know what kind of society we have today?” demanded the Promise Keepers’ founding football coach in 1991. “It’s an effeminate society. It doesn’t raise men.”<sup>28</sup> The former chaplain to the Dallas Cowboys was even blunter: “The demise of our community and culture is the fault of sissified men who have been overly influenced by women.”<sup>29</sup>

As long as “servanthood” could explain why a loss of formal masculine prerogatives actually *elevated* men’s authority, however, then the danger to manliness might be contained. Organizations like Promise Keepers and Focus on the Family strove fiercely to theorize a Christian masculinity for home and office, one with soft hands but not limp wrists. In a world where production was disappearing from sight, reproduction would be the central ideological battleground. Anxiety about reproduction flared throughout the seventies and eighties, producing such sites of contention as Anita Bryant’s campaign to “Save Our Children” from sterile homosexual recruitment; the anti-abortion mobilization; and Christian opposition to “test-tube babies,” cloning, and, more recently, stem cell research. The same concerns underwrote the increasing currency of “family” as an adjective. In a 1992 article tracing the political rise of the “family values” trope, *Christianity Today* decoded its content as, first and foremost, opposition to abortion and to “pornography, the promotion of homosexuality, condom distribution in schools, sexual education that does not emphasize abstinence, violent and sexually exploitative entertainment media, and the National Endowment for the Arts” which at the time was under attack by a Christian Coalition direct-mailing campaign for supporting sexually-themed art, especially by gay artists.<sup>30</sup> A 1979 article in *Eternity* magazine noted approvingly “all this talk about ‘spiritual’ parenthood and reproduction.”<sup>31</sup> Not only were they quite clear on the novelty of the emphasis, but likewise many architects of the new popular concepts of authority and family were well aware that old Fordist models could not fit the post-Fordist world they were

encountering. “Words such as fatherhood came forcibly upon us as leaders,” recalled one influential founder of the 1970s discipling movement, “causing us to recognize that the Church was not designed to be a frustrated General Motors, but a family built relationally, with spiritual fathers.”<sup>32</sup>

Thus the “reproducerism” by which evangelical culture increasingly defined itself was a key technology of social control, but not a univocal one. Multiple meanings of “family values” make emotional sense in contexts which shared the common experience of post-war urbanization and articulation into the world economy--places in the U.S. South as well as the global South. Under post-Fordism, women’s domestication of men became all the more crucial for the service work they both performed. Moreover, the elevation of service naturalized managerial authority in an economic sector that coaxed profits from the traditional devaluation of women’s work by Fordist capital and labor alike. The new economy has had little use for brawn and speed, but it desperately needed “people skills.” Servant leadership, in other words, was how the service economy made patriarchy safe for post-modernity.

### **Outsourcing Foreign Policy**

For Wal-Mart, the elevation of service found its male management constituency through the vocational business department of small Christian colleges, where the new principle of servant leadership interpreted management as the foot-washers of the corporate congregation. The timing was crucial, for the countercultural revolts of the late 1960s had produced a crisis of confidence among Sunbelt businessmen.<sup>33</sup> Their need for technologically competent middle managers pushed them to recruit increasingly from colleges, but the campus atmosphere seemed hostile and anti-capitalist. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Christian colleges helped meet that need with new undergraduate business degrees for a population more suited to Sunbelt corporate life than the urban and coastal radicals making headlines. As the United States underwrote mass higher education after World War II and culture wars erupted over the canon, students voted with their feet for America’s real core curriculum: business.<sup>34</sup>

Meanwhile, in Reagan's America, the straightforward nationalism of the Cold War was shifting beneath the surface. In 1985 the President's National Bipartisan Commission on Central America called for increased cultural ties between the U.S. and the region in which it was becoming increasingly embroiled. The Kissinger Commission, as it was known, addressed what it understood to be the economic liberation of the subcontinent. Central America must now commit itself to economic policies sure to "encourage private enterprise and individual initiative, to create favorable investment climates, to curb corruption where it exists, and to spur balanced trade."<sup>35</sup> In fact, the region had been pursuing this sort of export-led development for a generation. During that time, subsistence farming gave way to coffee and bananas for foreign markets, and indicators like child malnutrition reversed their earlier gradual improvement.<sup>36</sup>

But the struggle was not just on the high plains of policy. The Kissinger Commission also raised the alarm that communists were providing seventy-five hundred university scholarships to Central Americans, versus fewer than four hundred to the United States, and invited the corporate sector to help rectify this imbalance. The first respondent to this challenge was the founding family of Wal-Mart Stores, Inc. Sam and Helen Walton established one hundred and eighty four-year scholarships each year to educate young Central Americans in free enterprise at a trio of Christian colleges in the Arkansas Ozarks. "Reports show that several thousand Central Americans are studying on scholarships in Communist Bloc countries," Walton explained. "If we want future leaders of Central America to know the benefits of a free society, we need to get large numbers of the student generation up here to the United States."<sup>37</sup>

Building on pre-existing missionary networks, the chosen colleges set out to create a transnational circuit equal to this vision. As with the professor quoted above, the Ozarkers' encounter with America's near abroad often shook up the strict Cold War binary and paved the way for a more nuanced transnationalism after the revolutions of 1989-91. For their part, the students found themselves at one of three small campuses arrayed on a rough continuum of American Protestantism, from frontier Presbyterianism to what B'nai B'rith had earlier proclaimed the "largest producer of radical right

propaganda in the country.”<sup>38</sup> There the Walton Scholars overwhelmingly majored in business administration or marketing. They led student business clubs, participated in organizations like Campus Crusade for Christ, and performed at least ten hours a week of community service, often among the Mexicans and Central Americans recruited for the area’s industrial poultry plants. Back home in Central America, the program “impacts our country more than [Sam Walton] could have known,” emphasized an engineering student from Belize. “All the people from Belize who were Walton students are leaders and policy makers. They are making an impact that is tremendous.”<sup>39</sup>

Inspired by the ethos of service, graduates worked in trade ministries, the media, development organizations, and advisory commissions, as well as in pulpits, parachurch philanthropies, religious broadcasting, and Christian schools. Many others took active volunteer roles in their churches, leading study cells at charismatic evangelical temples like Guatemala City's El Verbo--spiritual home of former military dictator Efraín Ríos Montt. Still others became favored recruits to the offices of multinationals like Coca-Cola, Purina, and Exxon, for the returning “*Waltones*” brought with them fluency in English and technology as well as the specific business culture of the Sunbelt service sector. Addressing a group of Walton alumni, the president of the Guatemalan Christian Businessmen’s Association described their shared vision in terms that would resonate in Bentonville: “There’s no shame in starting small: cut people’s hair, change the oil in people’s cars, make hamburgers, whatever--just make the best hamburgers, offer the best service, and you will succeed.”

### **A Great Commission**

Despite the clear concentration of resources on the U.S. side, however, the transnational network of the Walton Program did not represent a straightforward export of an American creed. A more apt metaphor would be an export processing zone, where the component parts of the missionary gospel are assembled and then re-imported to the north. The reconfiguration does not simply move an ideology from one point to another, any more than off-shoring builds a Detroit on the Rio Bravo. Rather, it transforms landscapes at both ends of its supply chain.

When the Walton Scholarship Program was first unveiled, a business professor at one of the participating colleges recalls with regret, his initial reaction was “very hostile . . . I felt like they would be there with an agenda, trying to get something for nothing--I was a typical redneck in my response!” But at about the same time the Walton students began appearing on campus, the professor experienced an epiphany. On a parachurch retreat in Tennessee, “I heard a big strapping football player break down crying over the experience he had on a mission trip to Haiti.” He couldn't get the image out of his mind--a tough athlete brought to tears by his exposure to the Third World--and after praying over it he organized a group of students for a short-term mission trip to Mexico with his local church. “That was my first glimpse of Latin culture, and it took me back to zero, made me realize how little I knew of the world.” Word of his new interest spread among the Central American students back in Arkansas, and the subsequent web of relationships sustains his annual sojourns in the region. There he teaches business by day and at night joins a local ministry to bring food, medicine, and human contact to sometimes violent street boys whose other chief succor is inhaling industrial solvent through a rag.

This personal transformation within the Walton program captures in microcosm a momentous paradigm shift in the overall missionary movement. In the years following World War II, decolonization movements laid bare the power relations that had supported the missionary enterprise. Without colonial administrations backing them, American and European missionaries often found themselves less welcome abroad than they had supposed. But the same creative pragmatism that made Biblical literalists a force in domestic culture after 1968 likewise produced a constructive response to the challenge of the global revolution against white supremacy.

The roots of the new dispensation lay in the mass mobilization of World War II. Hundreds of thousands of landlocked small-town men found themselves deployed across the globe, often operating communication technologies that collapsed time and space. For Christians concerned with the Great Commission, the world seemed suddenly, tantalizingly reachable. Many veterans founded new overseas missionary organizations outside the ossified denominational structures; other existing parachurch missions were reinvigorated by the returning generation.

This triumphalism, however, ran up against the hard reality of Third World national liberation movements. What one theologian has called the “post-imperial missiology”--the recognition of Christianity’s increasingly Southern character and the reorientation it demanded from the global North--became explicit at the 1966 Berlin World Conference on Evangelism. In a key theological shift, attention was drawn to a one-line text from John 20:21. In place of the imperial command of Jesus recorded in Matthew 28:19--“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations”--the Berlin gathering emphasized John’s rather different rendering of Jesus’ commission to evangelism: “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”

Here was a radically different image. Evangelical authority derived not from Christ’s kingship of all nations, but from the patriarchal family relation within the Trinity. A familial version of the Great Commission explicitly repudiated the sins of racism and arrogance, and pledged itself with humility to a servant heart. The support for this altered emphasis grew after Berlin, and its further elaboration at the 1974 International Conference on World Evangelization in Lausanne, Switzerland, gave its advocates the name of the “Lausanne Movement.” “The countries of Africa and Asia,” explained an influential mission text, had become “masters in their own house.”<sup>40</sup>

And back in the Northern missionaries’ own house, guess who was coming to dinner? Increasingly, the former heathen were themselves bringing the gospel to the old seats of Christendom. At the South Pacific Consultation on World Mission in 1989, a Melanesian pastor apologized to “our brothers and sisters from Australia, New Zealand, Europe and America, for killing and eating the missionaries you sent us.” He then continued, “Why did you treat us like children? Did you think we were only good at receiving but not good enough to give? Well, let me tell you . . . we are coming to you whether you like it or not. You can kill us and eat us, but we are coming to you.” Weeping, the Australian delegation responded, “[W]e are sorry to you our Melanesian, Micronesian, and Polynesian brothers and sisters for the paternalistic attitudes we have shown to you,” and U.S. spokesman apologized “for the damage we brought to you during the Second World War.”<sup>41</sup> Like the domestic racial reconciliation

movement in the United States, atonement was spiritually sincere but structurally vacant and temporally distant, and it shared the blame between the oppressors and the oppressed.<sup>42</sup>

This new mastery also challenged U.S. missionaries to put their own house in order. The key to galvanizing missions lay in raising the status of the calling, and a crucial component to this was masculinizing the work force. Echoing generations of concern over female preponderance in missions, many evangelicals in the early years of decolonization pointed enviously to the Peace Corps' favorable male-female sex ratio--three men to every two women, the reverse of the missionaries' own ratio. The most conservative branches of Protestantism kept the obsession with missionary manliness on display well into the new era, and the constant harping on "softness" left little to the imagination. In 1976, the Southern Baptist Convention launched a twenty-five-year missionary campaign called, incredibly, "Bold Mission Thrust."<sup>43</sup>

But the surplus of women was only a symptom of the real problem. Simply put, the desirable recruits--educated men, with sociological and linguistic sophistication--had too many options to find mission work attractive. The massive redistribution of wealth into education had done its job all too well; the children of the Protestant heartlands had college degrees and high hopes now, and even second- and third-generation evangelical men were staying away from church work in droves. "How," demanded a mission handbook, could the church "compete with Hollywood, Madison Avenue, and the Dallas Cowboys?"<sup>44</sup>

How indeed? Faced with these new challenges from a post-agricultural economy and a post-colonial polity, the service ethos could save the church as well as the office and the store. Whereas missionaries in the 19th-century mold had been "the astronauts of their day," this moment had passed. "At home he was a hero; on the field he was a leader. Now he is neither hero nor leader--just a plain servant."<sup>45</sup> This servant would win followers by humbling himself; he would lead men by declining to command them. Of course, there is no merit in humbling yourself if you are already genuinely outranked. It is specifically the act of *choosing* humility that proves your superiority--choice, that key moment of

Protestant conversion, that signal virtue of contracts and consumption, that irreducible constituent of freedom defined for all the world in market terms.

In its encounters abroad, then, American evangelicalism was as profoundly altered by the shift to a service ethos as its domestic counterpart. Faced with new “masters,” the missionary enterprise absorbed the imperative to reject Western cultural specificity. But for many the fall was cushioned by St. Paul’s compensatory hierarchy of sex, now refigured as common to Biblical and Third World societies. African Anglicans’ vociferous intolerance of homosexuals, for example, is offered as a reproof to the Northern Christians who have become too much conformed to the things of this world.<sup>46</sup>

In adapting to the post-1973 economic dispensation, evangelical Christian capitalism helped knit together a transnational white-collar accord that explicitly disavowed white supremacy. To bind communities widely dispersed in time and space and holding radically different stakes in the neoliberal order, both Protestantism and Catholicism offered sexual probity as the terrain of transnational equality. The ideal became a multicultural adoption narrative, reproduction across “race” but without sex. Both the Walton Program’s American directors and many of the Central American beneficiaries repeatedly emphasized the formers’ fatherly role (all have been men). In the murderous context of the eighties in Central America, of course, literal fatherlessness was not a rare experience for Walton Scholars. Central American alumni of all three schools recalled with gratitude the personal concern shown by faculty and staff, who invited the students into their homes and counseled them on spiritual concerns.

The political violence that ushered in the Washington Consensus cleared a space for the program’s symbolic adoptees. “I remember the *años ochenta*,” recounted one graduate grimly:

People were getting killed all the time. They killed professors at the university [Guatemala’s San Carlos], just wiped out the whole educated group in the country. Imagine the impact that has had on the education there. It’s worse even than just killing people, because it hurts the whole country to lose all these intelligent, educated people,

professors, writers, artists. And they killed the students who were in the student association, the leaders.

In Guatemala and El Salvador especially, a cultural vacuum was created for a transnational white-collar class by the literal physical extermination of the educated left. Upon the arrival of the post-Cold War peace in Latin America, the terms of debate had effectively been narrowed to those neoliberalism chooses to address: democracy as personal liberty rather than social security. A politics which excludes economics only took root through the explicitly political murder of tens of thousands of civilians. In historian Greg Grandin's words, "the conception of democracy now being described as the most effective weapon in the war on terrorism is itself largely, at least in Latin America, a product of terror."<sup>47</sup>

With that legacy of terror largely invisible to its North American sponsors, the Walton Scholarship Program helped create a new cadre of student leaders. Many in Guatemala went on to graduate business classes at the hard-right Universidad Francisco Marroquín. UFM was founded in 1970 by a group loyal to the Austrian School of fiercely free-market political economists; its library is named in honor of Ludwig von Mises. Its largely self-taught organizers, heavily dependent on the U.S. Foundation for Economic Education and a circle of Central American businessmen, intended UFM as a "non-political" alternative to the Universidad San Carlos to which the alumnus refers above, where the government killers regularly dumped the mangled corpses of students and professors at the entrance.<sup>48</sup> On the mass graves of the eighties, Central America's depoliticized economics of the nineties was built.

### **Good News?**

Sociologist William I. Robinson argues the winners in Central America's upheavals of the seventies and eighties were neither oligarchs nor peasants. Rather, a new transnational class of technocrats triumphed, and their interests lay in rearticulating the Central American economies to new global chains of production and distribution.<sup>49</sup> By his reckoning, free elections and promises of popular prosperity are just handmaidens to this endeavor: "[T]he transnational elite wants to stabilize its project in

Guatemala not to democratize and develop the country but to secure Central America for global capitalism.<sup>50</sup>

But earlier systems of economic exploitation produced baroquely elaborated ideologies that justified them to the exploiters themselves. Arguments for the divine sanction of slavery appear in private letters and diaries as well as public sermons and broadsheets. Robber barons gloried in their emancipatory project of free labor, and colonial planters brought soap and Bibles to the heathen along with machine guns. Why would free-market technocrats, alone among history's economic victors, arise each morning with the clear-eyed intent to plunder their fellow men unmercifully? Why would neoliberalism alone have no soul?

There is soul to neoliberalism, and a refusal to accord it respectful attention not only makes caricatures of its many sincere adherents, but leaves no terrain for engaging them. One version of its inner light is a new form of Christianity, one that ties together places like Bentonville and Chichimula with corporate support, transnational personnel, and a common cosmology. With all its uneven topography, the Bentonville Consensus derives from a shared heritage of recent urbanization, the historically unique condition of entering the post-agrarian economy under the regime of Wal-Mart and not Ford.

The classical liberal theories of the long nineteenth century created the mythic economic individualist only by fencing off the economy from the rest of human life and pressing into the service of industry concerns that, Eric Hobsbawm reminds us, “had nothing to do with the logic of the free market”—concerns like producerism, the Protestant ethic, delayed gratification, family loyalty.<sup>51</sup> The neoclassical, neoliberal versions introduced in the early 1970s had to draft a new suite of non-market concerns for the new context. After all, the post-industrial economy depended on people who understood themselves as consumers, but it could not have survived them as workers, parents, neighbors, or citizens. The post-modern economy can no more operate on perpetual force and cold economic logic than could the modern economy in its heyday. It must metabolize new human concerns—reproducerism, a service ethic, a desire for transcendence, a yearning for individual significance within a communal endeavor.