PROTECTING PATRIARCHY: AN HISTORICAL/CRITICAL ANALYSIS
OF PROMISE KEEPERS, AN ALL-MALE
SOCIAL MOVEMENT

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
University of North Texas in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By

Libby Jean Eddleman, B.A.
Denton, Texas
December, 1998
The historical survey of social movements in the United States reveals that the movement is a rhetorical ground occupied by groups who have been marginalized by society. Today, however, the distinctions between those who are marginalized and those who are part of the establishment have become difficult to distinguish. This study considers the emergence of Promise Keepers, an all-male social movement, and the rhetorical themes that emerge from the group.

This study identifies five rhetorical themes in Promise Keepers. These themes include asserting authority of men in the home and church, the creation of a new male identity, sports and war rhetoric, political rhetoric, and racial reconciliation. The implications of these themes are considered from a critical perspective and areas for future research are provided.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A backward glance into the Christian tradition reveals the enduring legacy of female subordination and, more specifically, a patriarchal hierarchy in the home, the church, as well as secular areas such as the workplace. Gerda Lerner equates patriarchy to paternalistic dominance of men over women, reducing women to mere children and objects in need of protection by men in all aspects of life. Such an unequal relationship between men and women allows men to make decisions and enforce rules and norms that are “mitigated by mutual obligations and reciprocal rights” (Lerner 217). Men provide “economic support and protection...for subordination in all matters, [and] sexual service, and unpaid domestic service [is] given by the female” (Lerner 217). Patriarchal structures are reinforced through a number of means including “gender indoctrination; educational deprivation; the denial to women of knowledge of their history; the dividing of women, one from the other...and by awarding class privileges to conforming women” (Lerner 217). In essence, patriarchy represents a social system that defines for both men and women their reality. Cassandra Langer writes that patriarchy is based on “father-right that universalizes male experience, institutionalizes the values of that experience in all facets of social life, and presents these social norms based upon power relationships as objective truths” (113). The universalization of male experience gives those who define reality, men, “the power of originating, of naming...and with the power of defining what is good, right, proper, and significant” (Langer 113).
Within the context of Western culture, patriarchy has been reinforced in a variety of ways. One of the most influential strategies used by men in Western culture to protect patriarchy is the application of biblical passages that justify the subordination of women and reinforce messages of male leadership in the family and church. In the past, these messages generally have gone unchallenged by most women within and outside of the Christian faith. Over the past thirty years, however, a number of feminist scholars including Mary Daly, Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Margaret Fell and others have called attention to the ways that men have used Christianity to keep women in subordinate positions. Although these women certainly are not the first to consider the role the Christian church has played in protecting patriarchy (e.g. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Sarah Grimke, Susan B Anthony), their collective voices have gained momentum in their challenge to the present day structure of the church. The project to which these women are committed has taken form in a number of creative ways including the re-interpretation of Biblical passages, the creation of liturgies that acknowledge the experiences of women, re-discovering women in the Bible, examining the ways in which Biblical passages have been used to reinforce men’s agenda, and other perspectives. Each of these acknowledges the important role women play in Christianity and in the world at large. The challenge women have presented to the structures of patriarchy through the re-examination of Christianity and through other feminist means has reached the point in which men have developed rhetorical strategies of their own to respond to the threat that patriarchal structures could be replaced. One of the most notable responses of men is the recent growth of Promise Keepers, an all-male Christian movement.
Eight years ago, Bill McCartney, former football coach at the University of Colorado and zealous, evangelical Christian, created a group in which Christian men came together to forge relationships with one another. In time, the developing group called itself Promise Keepers, and committed itself to seven promises based on their Christian beliefs. Since Promise Keepers' first meeting of seventy-two men in the summer of 1990, this religious group has grown at a phenomenal rate. In 1997, Promise Keepers boasted over one million men who attended their weekend rallies. Given the rapid growth of the group, many are left to wonder if Promise Keepers is in fact a social movement.

Through the application of social movement research and the use of an historical/critical perspective, this study considers the rhetoric of Promise Keepers to determine if the group is a social movement. Furthermore, this study considers the rhetorical themes that emerge in Promise Keepers' rhetoric and how these themes correspond to patriarchal concepts.

Review of Literature

Social movements represent a unique rhetorical space available to groups who work toward a common goal. For the purposes of the study, social movements will be defined as a collection of persons who seek to alter, redefine, or reinforce the social order (Griffin 115). A social movement is born out of the recognition by persons that their vision cannot be accomplished through the means offered by the status quo (Smith and Windes 141). The goals of a movement are identified through the groups' rhetoric (Smith and Windes 140, Cathcart 284). Furthermore, social movements involve drama and are directed at achieving what the movement sees as the good (Griffin 472).
Defining social movements from this perspective places the rhetoric of the movement at the center of the study while drawing on a variety of scholarship that incorporates a number of perspectives, allowing for a rich discussion of Promise Keepers.

The study of social movements in the communication discipline dates back to 1952, when Leland Griffin recognized the rhetorical efforts of disenfranchised and marginal groups to channel their voices and challenge society through creating a rhetorical space outside of "legitimate" channels of communication (e.g. the courts, legislature, media). Since that time, the study of social movements has gained interest among scholars, producing a dynamic field of study.

Herbert Blumer's work in the study of social movements identifies the specific types of movements that exist, each with its own unique set of characteristics. Blumer identifies general, specific, expressive, revival, and nationalistic movements, each with a distinct form, purpose, custom, tradition, and organization (9). Ralph Smith and Russell Windes include innovational movements as well, noting that these movements are rhetorical efforts that do not seek to replace society's values, class arrangements, or existing hierarchies. Innovational movements are designed to protect existing structures. The distinguishing characteristic of the innovational movement from others is that they do not question "the symbols and constraints of existing values or modify the social hierarchy" (Smith and Windes 143). Innovational movements are comprised of persons who are sympathetic to the established order and who emphasize the need for a return to traditional values in order to secure traditional structures.

A second direction of social movement research considers the role that rhetoric plays in social movements. Utilizing a rhetorical perspective in the study of social
movements places rhetoric at the center of the movement and considers rhetoric as the
vehicle by which the movement is carried forward. According to Robert Cathcart,
movements possess “strategic [rhetorical] forms that bring identification of the individual
with the movement” (86). Griffin reinforces this belief as well. He writes:

To study a movement is to study a drama, an Act of transformation, an Act that
cends in transcendence, the achievement of salvation...for any movement is a
sequence of movements between the limits of before or after....It is to study the
essentially human agency that men use in making movements; which is to say,
to study rhetoric. (472)

The study of social movements from a rhetorical perspective recognizes the importance
of rhetoric to the movement and allows for the differentiation between other rhetorical
interactions.

As mentioned, a number of different social movements exist and each can be
identified, explored, and understood through the analysis of a movement’s rhetoric.
Clearly, different rhetorical efforts are unique, and a number of social movement
researchers have focused on the point at which collectives come to be social movements.
According to Cathcart, social movements exist when the movement creates a “dialectical
enjoinment in the moral arena” between itself and the establishment (269). The
recognition of a social movement often lies not in its rhetoric, but in the rhetorical
responses from those outside the movement. Outside responses determine the
perceptions of the movement and can help to guide the development of the movement.
Such responses often result in confrontation between those within and outside the
movement. This type of rhetoric is distinctive in its form (Cathcart 270).
The rhetorical responses of those outside the movement can take several forms. In the past, social movements that have challenged institutional administrations, such as those on college campuses, have produced the dialectical tension described by Cathcart. Andrew King identifies the rhetorical strategies employed by an administration as administrative rhetoric. When an administration believes outside forces are an effort to undermine or usurp authority, administrators employ rhetorical strategies to diffuse the threat. Theodore Windt’s examination of the 1964 student protests at the University of California at Berkeley University found that the Berkeley administration successfully undermined the protests through several rhetorical strategies. The administration shifted the specific issue at hand (the grievances of the students) to broader concerns, used unsavory political names, and created a defense that claimed the university was better able to defend the civil liberties of the students than the students could do for themselves. These strategies, taken together, undermined the effectiveness of the student protests (Windt 248).

A second rhetorical response used by those outside the movement is the creation of countermovements “spearheaded by private citizens or by public authorities” (Lucas 265). The consideration of countermovements within the communication discipline is minimal, but Stephen Lucas observes “the rhetoric of countermovement advocates is a subject that merits serious inquiry in and of itself. We need to learn more about the symbolic processes of social control, and investigating countermovement rhetoric in defense of established ideas and institutions is one route to such learning” (265).

Rhetorical responses to social movements, whether in the form of administrative rhetoric or as a countermovement, demonstrate Cathcart’s “dialectical enjoinder in the
moral arena.” This friction between two opposing groups warrants further investigation. For example, with regard to Cathcart’s commentary on the establishment, it is never clear what Cathcart intends by the use of the word establishment. Consider the case of the innovational movement. If we accept the idea that movements can work to strengthen existing institutions (the establishment) where does the observer turn her attention to identify “dialectical enjoinder”? Would Cathcart argue that the innovational movement is not a movement at all? He writes:

Collectives which are more concerned with means than ends, or which try to enhance their status in the hierarchy, or which engage in activities designed to improve or perfect the established order do not produce dialectical tension. Only when the clash is fundamental to the essences of the established order is a dialectical clash created in the moral arena. (272)

Cathcart’s work, however, does not address points in time when the establishment may be vulnerable to outside threats, or a time when it seems uncertain who the establishment is. Furthermore, Cathcart fails to consider groups who believe the establishment is being threatened. In these circumstances, it appears that perhaps collectives who work to uphold the establishment can co-opt the rhetorical ground of disenfranchised groups and function as a social movement. Comparing administrative rhetoric to the countermovement suggests another issue. How is one to distinguish between administrative rhetorical strategies and a countermovement?

Historically, social movements have been comprised of persons who are denied access to legitimate channels of communication such as the courts and media. Previous case studies demonstrate that groups such as women, minorities, students, and
homosexuals have used the social movement to challenge the structure. Many of these social movements were focused on those outside the movement, using rhetorical strategies to gain the attention of those at whom their grievances were aimed. At the same time, social movements provide groups with the opportunity to focus their rhetoric inward.

Richard Gregg characterizes rhetoric addressed to those within the movement as ego-function rhetoric, designed to allow the group to address itself (84). Ego-function rhetoric is able to create a sense of unity, solidarity, and esteem among those within the movement. In his study of subaltern environmental struggles, Lauro Pulido found that “people, regardless of how oppressed they might be, do not inevitably have a common identity. A shared identity must be cultivated and refined through interaction and struggle with other groups” (39). The counterdiscourse created by social movements is a rhetorical response to the recognition of the group that somehow it does not fit into the “identities, interests, and needs” of the dominant public (Fraser 67).

Pulido’s analysis of the United Farm Workers of Chicanos, a social movement in the 1960s, illustrates how social movements are able to cultivate a common identity and purpose among their participants. He concludes, “subaltern people, like anyone else, have a need to create an affirmative identity since their identities have been maligned, distorted, or subject to attempted erasure by the dominant society” (46). The process of creating an affirmative identity involves a number of rhetorical strategies including the naming of an enemy. By naming an enemy outside the movement, picturing the enemy, and identifying what they are not, those within the movement are able to come to understand themselves better. Gregg points out that the naming of an enemy “allows the
ego to experience and express feelings of ego enhancement, ego affirmation, and even ego superiority” (84).

Clearly, the study of social movements can be approached from a number of perspectives, allowing for a rich and diverse discussion of this rhetorical space. The diversity of social movement research, however, has been criticized for its lack of a unified center. Despite such criticism, social movement scholars agree that rhetoric is a central focus of study.

The study of social movements is an historical process that investigates a movement's rhetoric. An historical approach does not operate from a priori prescriptions, but instead places the meaning of the movement within its own set of circumstances and contexts, resulting in a process that separates itself from overarching theories or rules. Furthermore, the historical scholar acknowledges the inherent bias involved in any research and avoids making generalized statements about all social movements. At the same time, however, James Andrews points out that “historical investigation can identify complexities that have the potential for confounding or enhancing theory construction” (274).

In the past, a number of scholars have been critical of an historical approach to scholarship. Ralph Smith, for example, writes “the critic and the reader can enjoy new interpretations, encounters with dramatic situations, recognition of contemporary novel ideas as ancient notions” (296). Within the context of rhetorical studies however, an historical approach offers the opportunity for liberation.

Rhetorical methodologies such as a critical rhetoric have risen out of more traditional methods such as Neo-Aristotelian criticism to respond to contemporary
Barbara Biesecker argues that “rhetorical studies is a discipline animated by a profound utopian yearning...its practitioners operate out of the firm conviction that things can change, be otherwise, different—indeed better—provided that human beings intervene symbolically in a history that is of their own making” (351).

The potential to effect change has challenged rhetorical critics to create methodologies that address the needs of those outside of academe. Self-reflective criticism that ultimately results in “a lonely account of what culture is and how it functions” is being replaced by other methodologies such as a critical rhetoric.

Sustaining the relationship between academe and society lies in the acknowledgment that in the past, academe has ignored the local lives and situated knowledges of society in favor of abstractions (Wood and Cox 280). These tendencies have created a polarity between the generation of theory and practice by ignoring the material world, and results in discursive practices that have become sedimented. Julia Wood and Robert Cox write, “we are voicing a hope that scholars will confront more honestly the material dimensions of scene and the ‘situated knowledges’ that affect our own and others’ voices” (280).

Wood and Cox are not alone in their commentary on the failure of rhetoricians to put theory into practice. Cindy Griffin writes, “I worry about our continuing refusal to accept our professional responsibility to the communities in which we live” (150). On the same note, Celeste Condit concludes that the current use of partisan approaches to the study of rhetoric makes it impossible to move from critic to social agent. She notes:
The question remains, however, once we have saturated the academic critical space with a replaying of the myth of the omnipotent oppressor and the powerless oppressee, thus proving ourselves unable to influence the power structure by our elegant scribblings in academic journals, then what? (185)

Once the rhetorical critic has acknowledged the relationship between theory and practice, a move is made from mere critic to social agent.

The critical rhetorician employs a vocabulary of social activism using words such as power, freedom, knowledge, liberation, domination, and others to draw attention to power structures in society. The practice of using such a vocabulary allows the critic to produce “a description of what is, unfettered by predetermined notions of what ‘should be’ thereby allowing the critic to Aposit the possibilities of freedom” (McKerrow 100).

The critic who responds to the problems that arise in a post-modern world is able to create a “place for contemporary critical practice” in contrast to methods of the past that did not respond to the need for practice (Pollack and Cox 170).

The creation of a critical practice has taken form in a number of ways, ranging from Marxist perspectives to feminist perspectives. Each recognizes that all artifacts are value-laden, posing possible implications for society. At the same time, a critical rhetoric understands that it cannot operate outside of the artifact it considers, but instead is situated within an historical moment and brings with it all the ideological underpinnings present in other artifacts.

Critical rhetoricians are concerned with the issue of praxis, or the need for practice within the context of scholarship and research. McKerrow encourages the critical rhetorician to “challenge the status quo to be other than it is and to make critical
rhetoric relevant through praxis” (67). What, then, is the starting point for formulating a critical rhetoric? According to Maurice Charland,

one must begin with an examination of the discourses that ‘address publics’, the discourses that already constitute the field of public agents, agencies, and objects....Such an analysis then sets the stage for praxis by the engaged local intellectual....Critical rhetoricians would no longer be in the business of teaching princes and citizens how to formulate arguments, but would be engaged in an ongoing struggle against the oppressive formations of power specific to their own context. (72)

The challenge to create praxis within scholarship has been troublesome for most rhetoricians. Kent Ono and John Sloop maintain that a committed telos, or “the moment when a person’s pen is put to paper purposively, when ideas become words and when will becomes action” is a starting point for anyone concerned with being both scholar and social agent (48).

**Statement of the Problem**

Over the past three decades, social movement scholarship has focused exclusively on the study of marginalized groups. One possible explanation for this narrow focus is that over this time period, social movements have been the sacred ground of such groups. The growing popularity of Promise Keepers, however, is sharply contrasted with these “subaltern counterpublics” (Pulido 52). Unlike marginalized groups such as women, homosexuals, students, and minority groups, Promise Keepers is comprised of men (primarily middle class, professional, and white) who are Christians. In the United States it would be difficult, if not impossible, to argue that men are a marginalized group, nor
would it be easy to argue that Christians are marginalized either. Despite this contrast with marginalized groups, Promise Keepers have come to occupy a rhetorical space that is distinctly similar to that of a social movement. Because Promise Keepers is comprised of Christian men, and exhibit many of the characteristics of dominant American society, it is essential to investigate this group and to attempt a more thorough understanding of their rhetoric. To that end, the following research questions are advanced:

RQ₁: Do outside responses to Promise Keepers constitute a “dialectical enjoinder in the moral arena”?

RQ₂: What themes or patterns can be identified in Promise Keepers’ rhetoric identifying itself as a social movement, administrative response to other social movements, or a counter social movement?

RQ₃: What themes or patterns emerge in Promise Keepers’ rhetoric that correspond to traditional understandings of patriarchy?

The polarity between past social movements and Promise Keepers warrants research to fully understand this growing phenomenon.

Significance

The growing popularity of Promise Keepers has received a great deal of attention in the media over the past year. Outside of the healthy debate, discussion, and skepticism surrounding Promise Keepers, the communication discipline has not fully explored the rhetorical dimensions of the group. The opportunity to address Promise Keepers offers the chance to move beyond conversation and speculation and to extend current social movement research by considering the possibility that social movements are not the sacred ground of subaltern groups. Furthermore, the emergence of an all-male movement
suggests that perhaps this is another instance in which the dominant group (men) have co-opted the ground of those who are marginalized. If this is the case, then perhaps Promise Keepers is a rhetorical response to past social movements that contradict conservative, Christian values (e.g. the feminist movement and various gay/lesbian movements).

The study of Promise Keepers' rhetoric helps fill in gaps that currently exist in social movement research. Returning to the questions considered above, this study will help clarify the inconsistencies in past work, including Cathcart's commentary on "dialectical enjoinment in the moral arena". This study will demonstrate that although Promise Keepers is simply a microcosm of the establishment, a dialectical tension has arisen between Promise Keepers and those outside of the movement including the National Organization of Women, Humanists, and homosexuals. Finally, the emergence of Promise Keepers signals a moment in time when the establishment may be vulnerable, in the process of being re-defined, or presented with a substantial challenge by those outside of the establishment. Whatever the case, Promise Keepers indicates that the establishment or part of the establishment will co-opt the ground of the marginalized to insure their own safety.

The significance of the proposed study is not limited within the framework of academe. The use of an historical/critical perspective presents a liberating opportunity to effect change on a larger level. The goal of a critical rhetoric is to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Andersen writes "to the extent that ordinary citizens are unable to articulate or criticize the discursive conditions that cause or maintain unfair and destructive practices, we academic rhetoricians must bear some responsibility for their silence" (253). The discussion of Promise Keepers, and the investigation of Promise
Keepers' rhetoric, presents the chance to better understand the strategies used by dominant groups to reinforce their position. To that end, this study embraces the tenants of a critical rhetoric and will work to not only generate theory but to present the chance to effect change outside of academia.

**Methods**

**Data Collection**

Data for this study will be collected from primary and secondary documents generated between 1994 and 1997. Although Promise Keepers began in 1990, the organization only began to garner considerable attention within the last three years. Furthermore, the possibility of considering the last eight years of rhetoric is beyond the scope of this study.

The primary documents used in this study will be first-hand accounts of Promise Keepers and will be taken from Promise Keepers' publications, tapes, and information from Promise Keepers' web site. Secondary documents will include newspapers, journals, and magazines. These secondary documents will be gathered from a variety of sources including national newspapers such as *The Dallas Morning News* and magazines ranging from conservative publications like *The Christian Century* to liberal publications like *The Humanist*. Drawing on a variety of resources helps eliminate questions of bias toward one publication. In analyzing secondary documents, the commentary of the authors will not be used in formulating the themes in Promise Keepers' rhetoric. Rather, the analysis only will be concerned with direct quotes from those involved in Promise Keepers. By utilizing both primary and secondary documents, this study will determine
if any differences exist between the two thereby providing the best overall picture of Promise Keepers’ rhetoric.

Data Analysis

The documents used in this study will be coded in order to identify patterns and themes of rhetoric in the movement that directly address the three research questions considered in this study. The process of coding used in this study will begin by generating a list of topics that emerge in the documents used. Next, these topics will be clustered and arranged according to similarity. Each topic will be assigned a code and each segment will be given a corresponding code. Each code will then be given a descriptive name or title and assembled around the three research questions.

The qualitative nature of this study limits its generalizability to other areas and also recognizes that other findings or interpretations can emerge, recognizing that “different socially located viewers will activate the meaning of a text differently” (Fiske 406). In his principles for conducting criticism of an artifact, McKerrow warns, “fragments contain the potential for polysemic rather than monosemic interpretation” (107). Clearly, this qualitative study reflects my own values and beliefs. This reality, however, does not undermine the importance of the study. In proposing a sustained telos to rhetorical criticism, Ono and Sloop encourage critics to place themselves “in situ-related to the circumstance, situation, and history of the artifact and its world” (48). I clearly recognize my biases with regard to this project. I am female, Christian, heterosexual, and a feminist. While these characteristics may be regarded as bias, it is my position that any researcher has a set of biases that are impossible to bracket in conducting research. Despite what could be considered barriers to the study, the study of
Promise Keepers stands out as an important study within rhetorical scholarship and the communications discipline at large.

**Plan of Reporting**

This project will be organized into five chapters, beginning with the introduction as chapter one. Chapter two will provide the historical background of Promise Keepers. Chapter three will report the themes that emerge from the coding of primary and secondary documents. Chapter four will analyze the themes that are discussed in chapter three and will apply them to the three research questions advanced. Finally, chapter five will answer the three questions and relate the findings of this study to the critical position taken in this project. Chapter five will also provide commentary on future investigation into Promise Keepers and social movements in general.
CHAPTER II

THE HISTORY OF PROMISE KEEPERS

The small town of Boulder, Colorado, represents a microcosm of our nation as a whole, a community where liberal and conservative ideologies conflict with one another on a frequent basis and the fine line between politics and religion are challenged on a regular basis. In a time when society is plagued with countless problems including crime, rampant drug use, alarming rates of pregnant teenage girls, and others societal ills, communities such as Boulder find themselves knee deep with little agreement on how to tackle such problems. In the middle of Boulder's sharply divided population lies the growing religious movement known as Promise Keepers. Headquartered in Boulder, Promise Keepers represents an organized effort of religious, conservative men who present a Christian lifestyle and forging of relationships between men as the answer to these and other problems.

Eight years ago, Bill McCartney shared a three-hour car ride with close friend Dave Wardell, state chairman of the Fellowship for Christian Athletes. To make the time pass, Wardell asked McCartney to describe his greatest unfulfilled dream. Not known to take anything lightly, McCartney shared with his friend a vision he had of filling Folsom Stadium, in Boulder, with Christian men honoring Jesus Christ (Stodghill 38). What began as a conversation to pass time on the road, was partially realized the following summer when seventy-two men met together with McCartney to express and celebrate
their Christian faith. Unlike Billy Sunday's all male tent revivals in the past, Promise Keepers has experienced phenomenal growth. Eight years later PK stands out among other religious revivals as the fastest growing movement in the United States.

The development of the Promise Keepers organization signals a growing sentiment among a number of Americans that the moral structure in the United States is in turmoil. The challenge to restore the moral structure in our nation has been taken up by a number of groups including politicians (e.g. Dan Qualye's family values), political groups (e.g. the Christian coalition), religious figures (e.g. Billy Graham, James Dobson, Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell), and other interested figures. In many ways, the growth of Promise Keepers is influenced by all sides of the moral structure debate and is representative of the changing religious climate in the United States, the work of the religious right, and a waning secular men's movement begun by John Bly in the late 80s.

On a smaller scale, the events that precipitated the creation of Promise Keepers are the culmination of factors reflected in McCartney's personal and professional life. Much as Boulder represents a microcosm of American society, McCartney is a prototype for the American male living in a world influenced by a number of opposing forces that have blurred the lines of manhood. The creation of Promise Keepers is a direct response to social forces such as the feminist movement, a waning secular men's movement, and the religious right among others. At the same time, PK serves as the vehicle by which McCartney has made himself accountable for his failures as a father, husband, Christian, and as a man in general.

In the midst of these things lies the ultra-liberal town of Boulder, surrounded by a number of conservative forces. James Dobson's Focus on the Family, the International
Bible Society, Campus Crusade for Christ, and Young Life are all headquartered in and around Boulder. In the past, the intersection of these groups with more liberal organizations such as the Feminist Alliance, Lesbian/Bisexual/Gay Community Alliance, Students for Reproductive Freedom, and the Campus Women’s Organization have proven to be fertile ground for growing political, social, and religious tensions between evangelical Christians and liberal groups in the community (Eidenmuller 8). Eidenmuller notes that “in a community whose identity is grounded in such a wellspring of divergent interests and ideas, there are bound to be undercurrents and volatility, however, ‘tolerant’ its image may appear” (8). McCartney’s association with the Word of God community, and, specifically, the Vineyard Church in Boulder, worked as a catalyst in this conflicted community by appealing to his sense of responsibility to disciple and convert non-believers. McCartney adopted the Vineyard church mission that espouses a “power evangelism” and describes its members as “self-conscious members of God’s army sent to do battle against the forces of the kingdom of darkness” (Swomley 35).

The popularity of Promise Keepers over the last eight years represents the growing involvement of religious groups in society at large. Much like the Million Man March, spearheaded by Muslim leader Louis Farrakhan, “Promise Keepers is an example of how the country’s contemporary religious scene is marked by mass movements that often arise beyond the control of established evangelical leaders” (Murphy 3). Unlike religious revivals in our nation’s history, contemporary religious movements abandon the “hell, fire, and brimstone” rhetoric of notable religious figures such as Jonathan Edwards. Instead, Promise Keepers mixes pop-psychology with feel-good religion. The mixture of the two appeals to those Americans who “feel mired in a deep cultural recession and are
struggling to escape by restoring old-fashioned values to a central place in their lives” (Roberts 26).

The erosion of values and morals have come under fire over the past six years, gaining the national spotlight with Dan Quayle’s criticism of Murphy Brown, a fictional TV character who gave birth out of wedlock. Yale professor Stephen Carter believes the growing interest in religion as a means to solve the dilemma of our waning moral structure is a direct result of past pressure on Americans to pretend as though their faith does not matter (Sheler 48). The tides have turned, though, with numbers of people turning to religion “for solutions to some of the nation’s most intractable problems” (Sheler 50). Religious movements of the past, while challenging social issues directly or indirectly, did not stand in the face of a constantly changing society, fragmented along sexual, racial, religious, political, and class lines. Today, however, religious movements grow out of the ever-increasing friction between secular matters and religious solutions. This dynamic makes the emergence of Promise Keepers in the public sphere all the more interesting.

Beyond calling Promise Keepers a benign religious revival, the group has been labeled the strategic third wave of the Christian right, functioning as a cleverly designed political movement cloaked in religious rhetoric. According to Lee Cokorinos of the Center for Democracy Studies, “in its conception and execution, Promise Keepers is one of the most sophisticated political movements the right wing has yet conjured up” (Stodghill 36). Promise Keepers’ leadership adamantly denies any association with the religious right, but over the past eight years it has been linked to such figures as Pat Roberston, James Dobson, and members of the secretive Council for National policy, an
ultra conservative group which seeks political power (Swomley 36). According to Frank Clarkson, author of *Eternal Hostility: The Struggle Between Theocracy and Democracy* “PK is the most dynamic element of the Christian right of the mid 1990s and a front and recruiting agency for its political ambitions” (Rich 21).

The religious right’s success lies in its ability to appeal to “angry white men who find themselves declining in privilege and power” (Andrews 16). The work of the religious right to restore the American male to a place of power and authority has been channeled through Promise Keepers. Stuart Wright, a sociologist, observes “it [Promise Keepers] is part of the religious right to reconstruct the 50s” (Andrews 17). The resistance of Promise Keepers to claims that the group is aligned with the religious right may, in fact, be sincere. Many are concerned, including sociologist William Martin, about the guiding influence of the religious right over other groups with similar platforms. Martin warns, “there is no doubt that the leaders of the religious right will see [PK] as a major resource, and seek to strengthen ties with it. There is a danger it [PK] might be hijacked” (Andrews 17). The move to forge ties between the religious right and Promise Keepers has already begun with figures such as Pat Robertson and James Dobson endorsing the group, supporting the group financially, and speaking at PK events.

Outside of religious and political factors, Promise Keepers points toward the revival of a waning secular male movement in the United States. In the late 1980s, a number of baby boomers began attending seminars and weekend retreats coined “wild-man” weekends to ponder “the perplexing puzzle of being a man in America” (Gilbreath 25). These seminars and weekend getaways began to identify and attack the forces at
work that have undermined the male ego, leaving men unsure of their own manhood.

Those within the Christian, male movement claim no relationship to the secular men's movement arguing that "the secular movement has come and gone because it didn't have anywhere to go. You can only go so far with myths and tribal lore. Eventually, you've got to get to the Genesis spring, which is a Judeo-Christian foundation" (Gilbreath 25).

While the Christian foundation of Promise Keepers sets it apart from secular men's movements, Promise Keepers addresses the same dilemma of these movements: coming to terms with one's manhood in the face of uncertain expectations. Within a Christian context, Promise Keepers taps "into a mass identity crisis among American males, who have for a long time felt isolated, powerless and disenfranchised by a society in transition that seems to view them as expendable" (Andrews 16). The tribal lore and myths of the secular men's movement have been replaced with the use of biblical passages and the appeal of pop-psychology manifested in male-bonding rituals, the use of self-help and self-discovery therapy during rallies, and the use of literature that describes "levels of initiation rites to manhood" (Andrews 17). Although Promise Keepers separates itself from other men's movements, the dynamics of Promise Keepers are in many ways reminiscent of the rhetorical strategies used in the secular men's movement. Clearly, the group resists being defined by any previous movement, religious or secular. Instead, Promise Keepers leaders and followers draw on the failure and success of McCartney as the motivating influence behind the group.

McCartney's religious enthusiasm began years before the creation of Promise Keepers; he was "born again" in 1974, at a Campus Crusade for Christ conference. McCartney's life-changing experience led him to abandon the Catholic church to become
a member of a non-denominational, evangelical church. McCartney’s conversion made
an immediate impact on his character, demonstrated by “praying over his children,
fasting every Wednesday and Friday, and rising at 4 a.m. to read Scripture. He
evangelized his friends, neighbors, and total strangers” (Goodstein 8).

In 1982, the University of Colorado recruited McCartney to rescue their losing
football program. McCartney accepted, but made it clear to the Board of Regents that
“God would be his number one priority and dedicated the university’s football program
to the lordship of Jesus Christ” (Eidenmuller 11). As the McCartney family settled in
their new community, McCartney’s evangelical zeal took root both on and off the field.
McCartney, a registered Republican, became associated with several conservative and
radical groups including Operation Rescue, a pro-life group, and on several occasions
accepted invitations to speak at their events (Gilkeson 3). In 1992, McCartney was an
outspoken voice in the fight to deny equal rights to gays and lesbians and he actively
campaigned against Amendment Two, a gay rights bill that would have prevented
discrimination against homosexuals in employment and housing. McCartney openly
criticized homosexuals, characterizing such persons as “stark raving mad” and
undeserving of the same legal rights as “people who reproduce” (Howard E01).

In a community known for its liberal stand on social issues such as abortion and
homosexuality, McCartney’s controversial rhetoric and political affiliations came under
fire early. After he called homosexuality “an abomination of God” students at the
university organized protests. McCartney’s active campaigning against Amendment Two
prompted Colorado State Representative Pat Schroeder to refer to him as a “self-anointed
ayatollah” (Spalding 263). McCartney’s problems were compounded further when the
ACLU threatened to file suit against him if mandatory prayer meetings for his football players were not stopped. McCartney’s public persona could have been shaped around these events. Instead, his success on the football field overshadowed his conservative political and religious activity. After only eight years at the University of Colorado, McCartney led his team to the National Championship and won. In a nation that loves and worships football more than almost anything else, McCartney’s football success made him a hero in the state of Colorado.

While McCartney’s public persona was at an all time high, troubles with his own family began to surface. The time required to build a national champion football team was daunting, and in time McCartney’s family paid the price. McCartney reflects on this time noting, “When my daughter needed a father who would really involve himself in her life, I was off instead chasing another bowl game. While my sons were looking for a role model, I was busy playing father to a bunch of football players” (Spalding 263). McCartney’s feelings of failure were not dramatic or overstated, in fact, his family was falling apart all around him. McCartney’s only daughter gave birth to two illegitimate children, both fathered by Colorado football players. His wife, Lyndi, was also dealing with her own problems, fighting a battle with depression and eating disorders. To compound the problem, McCartney disclosed to his wife in 1993, just minutes before he took the field to play in the Fiesta Bowl, that twenty years earlier he had been unfaithful to her. The news sent Lyndi deeper into depression.

McCartney’s inability to juggle his professional success with his personal failures led him to alcohol for an answer. Lyndi recalls, “Bill was drinking really bad. He was never home. I just thought ‘I can’t keep living like this’” (Goodstein 8). Eventually
McCartney's growing involvement with the Vineyard church rescued him from the difficult situation he had created for himself and his family. In time McCartney acknowledged his failures as a husband and father, suspecting that other men suffered similar problems.

McCartney's experiences as football coach, failed father and husband, active citizen in local and state politics, and "born again" Christian, channeled through the Vineyard's church mission to practice "power evangelism," prepared McCartney for the most important calling of his life. McCartney's approach to Promise Keepers models the determination he brought to other interests in the past, and it has paid off. Unlike many short-lived movements that die out from lack of interest, Promise Keeper's growth has been difficult to fathom. In the summer of 1990, the newly formed group, meeting without an official name, attracted seventy-two men. Just one year later the group drew over four thousand men. In 1997, the group now known as Promise Keepers brought together over two million men at different stadium events across the nation (Murphy B01).

Promise Keepers rallies are a unique blend of religion, sports, entertainment, and leading edge technology. These weekend events are held at large sporting venues across the nation, and like the excitement men experience Sunday football games, the same emotions and anticipation are felt at the beginning of a PK rally. Sports stadiums represent a culturally sanctioned ground for men. PK has transformed sports stadiums from a secular arena where men, who have been socialized to control their emotions, are freely allowed to release and express these feelings. This transformation channels men's love for football, baseball, basketball, and other sports into religious fervor. The range of
emotions experienced by men during PK rallies parallels the emotions seen during a Sunday afternoon football game.

Men are greeted by PK volunteers who shuffle them toward “ministry booths” where they can purchase T-shirts, caps, cups, key-chains, and other PK merchandise before entering the stadium. Books covering topics from finance to marriage are sold in large, circus sized tents through the course of the weekend. After men purchase PK gear, they can stop off at the refreshment stand to purchase hot dogs, nachos, cokes, and candy. John Higgins notes his surprise over the number of women at the rally noting “As I passed through the turnstile and entered the stadium itself, I could see that, outside the seating area, hundreds of women were taking care of the basic chores related to a well-run event of this size....They weren’t visible in the spectator section, however” (20).

The central area where the rally is held centered around a main stage where a podium stands for speakers and to the side an area is set for band musicians and the choir. There is not alter, cross, or other religious symbols on the stage (Higgins 21). While men take their places inside the stadium, the band and a few conduct a pep rally before the official events get under way with songs and words of encouragement to prepare the men for the speakers. Beach balls are passed across the aisles, men chant things such as “We love Jesus, yes we do. We love Jesus how bout you?” John Spalding’s visit to the Promise Keepers left him with these images:

Oakland Coliseum is packed with hooting, hollering, high-fiving men. Beside me...a half-dozen fathers in matching shirts and caps discuss their home improvement projects over coffee....I almost forget that I am not at a Raiders game—that this flurry of high-testosterone activity is filling not a half-time break
but a lull between speakers at a Christian men's rally. (260)

Men can watch all the action from big screen televisions placed throughout the stadium as they sing along to the music. On the floor of the stadium, a tent has been prepared at the center for men to come during the rally to dedicate their lives to Christ. Staff members, clad in bright colored T-shirts are prepared and waiting to disciple these men. By the time the first speaker takes the stage, men have been worked into a state of religious fervor, eager to get things underway. Speakers address the crowd on a number of subjects ranging from “God's holiness to racial reconciliation” with a heave emphasis on marriage (Gilbreath 25). A rally in Oakland, California featured topics including “Raising the Standards in Our Marriages” and “Becoming a Man of Worship and Prayer” and “Raising the Standard in the Brotherhood of Believers” (Spalding 261). Other PK rally sessions include “The Heart of a Godly Man: Captured by Christ,” “Purity of Heart: Living Clean Before God,” “The Disciples of a Godly Man: Motivated by Grace,” “Out of Isolation: Why a Small Men's Group” and “Personal Financial Integrity: How to Get Out of Debt” (Higgins 23). Videos are also shown that address important issues. These videos stress:

the idea that, beyond the secure walls of the stadium, the nation was in turmoil: violent crime, immorality, and strife reigned supreme--and all previous approaches to solving these problems had failed. Scenes of earlier PK stadium events were shown, with crowds of worshipping men seemingly changing their lives by communing with each other...(Higgins 21)

The second defining aspect of Promise Keepers is the careful organization and creation of accountability groups. Just as freshmen attend orientation at their new college
campuses, Promise Keeper weekend rallies serve as an orientation as well, preparing men to take the Promise Keeper message home.

Promise Keepers is carefully structured to respond to the challenge of maintaining the atmosphere created at weekend rallies after men return home. In the face of everyday demands such as family, marriage, and work, the lasting impact of Promise Keepers rallies are prone to wear off. To overcome this inertia, men are encouraged to participate in small accountability groups of four to five men to help them stay committed to the tenants of the Promise Keepers' "faith." Men are encouraged to purchase Promise Keepers literature such as "The Next Step--From the Stadium to the Small Group," a ready made kit complete with videotape, cassette tape, and a Promise Keepers study guide to be used at home in their accountability groups. One cassette tape entitled "What is a Promise Keeper" tells men "he [a Promise Keeper] needs his brothers to help him keep his promises." Dr. Howard Hendricks tells men "you haven't lived as a Christian until you have been mentored." Mentorship is one characteristic of accountability groups, channeling men into relationships with trained Promise Keepers who can mentor them by overseeing their day-to-day affairs.

Men who participate in accountability groups meet with one another weekly and are accountable to those in their group in all areas of their life including marriage, family, finances, sexuality, and business activity (Adlof 8). In a sense, the leaders of these groups model the shepherding practices popular in the Word of God community and specifically the Vineyard church, where McCartney is a member. Shepherding involves "close supervision of all personal activities including leisure activities, finances, politics, intimate marital details, and the like" (Gilkeson 6). Participation in an accountability
group requires that "each man willingly grants the others the right to inquire about his relationship to God, his commitment to his family, his sexuality, and his financial dealings" (Andrews 17). Leaders of accountability groups are called "key men" and answer to "ambassadors," who then report to Promise Keepers headquarters.

The Promise Keepers structure is modeled after a military structure, instilling in men a sense of discipline and authority through a top to bottom hierarchy. Promise Keepers rhetoric is shrouded in war terminology that urges men to "take this nation for Jesus" and claims that "whoever stands with the messiah will rule with him" (Swomley 10). Such rhetoric reinforces the military structure of the group. The organizing of an army filled with Christian men, however symbolic or literal also is reinforced through the use of retired military officers as leadership figures in Promise Keepers. Chuck Stecker, a retired Special Forces lieutenant colonel notes, "I believe with all of my heart that the military structure that we know and love so well is perfect for the accountable relationship which God is calling us to in Promise Keepers" (Swomley 10). Militaristic rhetoric coupled with Promise Keeper's organizational structure and the use of military figures in their leadership signals to many that Promise Keepers is in fact putting together an army of men, in almost every sense of the word. Randy Phillips, president of Promise Keepers maintains, "We do not want to build a monument. We want to serve this movement as a mission....It becomes a mission when it's focused on God's purpose and his son through the church" (Gilbreath 28). At the same time, however, McCartney and the Promise Keepers leadership have laid out a structured plan to place a key man in every church in the nation. McCartney admits that "the goal is to go into every church whether they like us or not" (Swomley 9).
The primary leadership of Promise Keepers is comprised of Bill McCartney, evangelical ministers, and pop and Christian psychologists (Escobar A01). In an effort to restore racial harmony to the Christian church, Promise Keepers leadership is guided by the influence of black and Hispanic men, serving in several capacities, including vice president, chairman, and chief operating officer. Overall, 37% of Promise Keepers staff of 368 belong to minority groups, and efforts are made to include four minority speakers at every stadium conference (Goodstein 12). Outside of the leadership of the group, the men who attend PK rallies have been characterized as "too white," which is not far from the truth. A *Washington Post* poll found that Promise Keepers “Stand in the Gap” weekend in Washington, D.C., touted as a time of racial healing, did not attract racially diverse groups. Only 14% of the group was black and 2% were Asian, while an overwhelming 80% was white (Maxwell 65).

A 1995 survey by the Kansas City, Missouri, based National Center for Fathering found that the men who attend Promise Keepers rallies are predominantly white, between the ages of 37 and 47 and hold college or masters degrees; 88% are married, and approximately 25% have been through a divorce. Furthermore, 57% of these men have wives who work outside of the home, 46% belong to evangelical churches, and 31% belong to a fundamentalist congregation. Of these men, 27% describe themselves as "workaholics" with 38% confessing that their work has conflicted with their home life. On a related note, 52% of the men believe their own fathers were absent from the home while they were growing up. Finally, the majority of the men who attend Promise Keepers rallies identify sexual sin as the number one struggle in their lives.
The goal of Promise Keepers, to have a presence in every church in the United States, has yet to be realized. Given the tremendous growth of the movement over the past eight years, however, the possibility may be more than wishful thinking. Aside from the goal of penetrating every church, Promise Keepers has remained true to its original purpose: to forge Christian relationships among men. During 1997, Promise Keeper's work in this area has been focused around racial reconciliation. The issue of race relations is one close to McCartney's heart, given his participation in the sports world where the majority of his players were African-American (including one who fathered his grandchild). The message of racial reconciliation may not have taken root, however, as the majority of Promise Keepers participants continue to be white. The challenge to heal the racial divide in the Christian church as well as other goals are reinforced through the use of Promise Keepers' "theology," such as the Seven Promises.

The seven promises of the Promise Keepers include honoring Jesus Christ; committing to pursue vital relationships with other men; pledging to practice spiritual, moral, ethical, and sexual purity; building strong marriages and families; supporting the ministry of his church; and influencing the world with the word of God. These promises are in line with Promise Keepers theology, one that is steeped in evangelical and fundamentalist principles. Promise Keepers theology includes the belief that the Bible is without error and should be read literally. Promise Keepers leadership requires men to accept their "Statement of Faith," which upholds the Trinity, the belief that Jesus Christ is God, that the Holy Spirit allows believers to live godly lives, that man was created in the image of God and, finally, that only faith and Christ's redemptive death and resurrection can lead to eternal life.
Promise Keepers is unique in its composition, membership, and doctrine compared to other social movements of the past. Notable social movements including the anti-war effort during Vietnam, the Civil Rights movement, and the feminist movement were designed around rhetorical strategies that responded to the institutional structures of American government. Today, groups such as Promise Keepers signal a time when Americans are abandoning efforts that are directed toward the government and instead work for change in new ways. Janofsky recognizes that “these events, including the Million Man March...and the Promise Keepers gathering...are like town squares, offering large numbers of people the chance to confront personal issues together...through common prayer and community action” (21). The search for moral restoration in our country has taken on a new face with Promise Keepers by appealing to men’s sense of manhood, spirituality, and responsibility. For a better understanding of this growing movement, I turn my attention to the rhetorical themes in Promise Keepers.
CHAPTER III

THEMES IN PROMISE KEEPERS' RHETORIC

Over the last eight years, Promise Keepers has grown at a phenomenal rate with the participation of Christian men who have adapted their spiritual practices around the Promise Keepers movement. The participation of these men in the group stands out among other popular Christian movements of the past or present, generating a unique rhetorical approach to the modern day social movement. Underneath the surface messages of Promise Keepers, five distinct rhetorical themes emerge. These include, refining the male standard, protecting male leadership in the home and church, sports and war rhetoric, political rhetoric, and racial reconciliation. In addition to the rhetorical themes evident in Promise Keepers, the rhetoric of those outside the group will be discussed. Finally, the descriptions and terminology used to describe PK will be considered in order to better understand the analysis of these rhetorical themes.

Rhetorical Themes

Refining the Male Standard

In contemporary society both men and women define themselves in the face of conflicting expectations. Today’s man is bombarded with messages to be aggressive, strong, and responsible while also feeling the pressure to be more caring and compassionate. Promise Keepers has responded to the confusion many men experience in defining themselves through rhetorical strategies that encourage men to adopt behaviors that traditionally have been reserved for women. Steve Farrar, a Promise Keepers leader, defines true manhood through the example of Jesus. He notes, “Jesus
could be tender and gentle, but Jesus could also walk in and clear out a corrupted temple” (Gilbreath 26). The message for men to adapt themselves to more traditional female behaviors has taken root for many of their participants, including baby boomers reared in an age of traditional stereotypes for men and women. “I cried my head off” comments a 45-year-old man. “Something touched me real deep... To see so many men struggling... that was just powerful. That’s why you see the crying. For the first time in our life, we could be real men of God” (Murphy B01).

In many ways, Promise Keepers offers grown men their first opportunity to express emotion outside of culturally sanctioned events where men are expected to be emotional, such as football and baseball games. Sports-related events, however, only reinforce stereotypes of men and do not encourage stereotypical female behaviors such as compassion and nonviolence. Promise Keepers’ focus on sharing pain with other men, exchanging hugs, and shedding tears challenges the somber image of Christian men from the past. Evangelical rhetoric that once emphasized “hell, fire, and brimstone” is being replaced with a kinder and gentler message. At the same time, Promise Keepers is careful to align this new man with a godly man, reinforcing the message that to express feelings and emotions does not come at the price of losing one’s manhood. One Promise Keeper sums up this feeling when he noted “You don’t come here and feel like you’re losing your masculinity because of your faith” (Mattox 41).

Promise Keepers speakers such as Chuck Swindoll accentuate the positive aspects of giving up one’s stereotypical male behaviors in exchange for feminine traits. Swindoll tells men “A man’s man is not a macho man. He’s vulnerable. He’s humble. He’s transparent. He makes mistakes” (Mattox 40). In the past, a vocabulary that included
words such as vulnerable, caring, weak, and nurturing was reserved strictly for women. Today, the prescription for a godly man is changing. One PK leader has noted that a godly man "is strong enough to be weak; successful enough to fail; wise enough to say 'I don't know'; compassionate enough to discipline; mature enough to be childlike; planned enough to be spontaneous; great enough to be anonymous; stable enough to cry; leading enough to serve" (Mattox 43). Stereotypical male qualities have been turned on their head; men are told failure, discipline, compassion, childlikeness, crying, and serving are the qualities of a truly godly man.

The Promise Keepers organization has been criticized by those outside the movement for excluding women from participating, but Promise Keepers maintains that the exclusive male audience is the only viable solution for helping men to change. PK literature explains that the restriction of women is necessary because in an all male setting "men are more apt to hear and receive the full instruction of the sessions" (What is a Promise Keeper?). Opening up to other people requires courage, and in an all male atmosphere, the trepidation of letting go is diminished. One PK participant noted that, "when a man sees a stadium full of other men crying, he figures it's all right to cry too. With women, he might not get that honest" (Stodghill 38). James Smith, a thirty-nine year old man, points out "We need to cry and break down, and we could never do that in front of women. It's too hard" (Montgomery A01). Men note that after leaving PK rallies they are better able to open up, communicate, and work on their relationships.

The opportunity for men to share their problems with one another is cathartic and reminiscent of "consciousness raising" groups popular among feminist circles in the 1970s. Jack Franklin, an independent oil producer from Texas explains, "they talked to
me about problems I had been dealing with for 50 years. I cried my heart out. I couldn’t believe it. That’s something grown men don’t do. But it felt good. I guess it was a release” (Housewright 1A).

Beyond crying, hugging, and sharing emotions with other men, men are encouraged to take these lessons home to their families by helping out with the day to day responsibilities of a home and family. Randy Phillips, PK president, emphasizes this point and notes, “we’re not asking men to go back with an iron fist. We’re asking them to go back on their knees with a spirit of service and respect for their wives and families” (Gilbreath 24). McCartney, in his own personal struggles, learned this lesson the hard way. He observes, “the heroes are not the guys scoring the most touchdowns. It’s the guys who wash the dishes, change the diapers, and take out the garbage. It’s these guys who will have the greatest return on their investment” (Escobar A01). Men respond positively to the message. Tony Santiago pledged to bring the message home after attending his first Promise Keepers rally, deciding “I felt I had to do more than just make love to her whenever and buy her dinner. After today, my wife has not washed a bag of laundry” (Bruni 43).

PK has addressed refining and redefining the American male by aligning manhood with godliness. In many ways, God and the model of Jesus Christ have been recast into more androgynous roles that reflect both feminine and masculine aspects. McCartney tells men “A man’s man, a real man, is a godly man. A man’s man is a tender man” (Weber 9). While PK employs rhetorical messages for men to be caring, nurturing, and attentive to their wives and families, PK rhetoric also reinforces the stereotypical model of manhood.
As mentioned, the undefined and uncertain expectations for men in society have resulted in confusion and frustration for men who need concrete expectations for themselves. One result of this confusion is the sissified male. McCartney tells men “You do know, don’t you, that we’re raising our children in a time when it’s an effeminate society. It’s not the proper climate. We need young boys that are launched to be men and that has to imitated for them by a godly man” (Novosad 26). Other PK speakers and leaders build on the image of the sissified male, calling men to change. Tony Evans admonishes men at PK rallies and declares, “I want to be a man again. I’m not asking you to ask for your role back, I’m asking for you to take it back” (Novosad 26). The feminization of the American male appears to be so pervasive that a number of ministers have been influenced. Steve Farrar points out “I think a lot of Christian ministers have been feminized. I don’t think they’re strong men, and most guys don’t relate to that” (Lee 35A). The lack of manly qualities such as “strength, decisiveness, and integrity” have resulted in a society of men who are too willing to adopt feminine qualities, leaving them open to accusations of being sissified. To remedy this problem, PK leaders and speakers encourage men embrace masculine traits such as aggressiveness and strength. Steve Farrar notes “Traits like tenderness and sensitivity are very important, but I think we sometimes elevate those over other traits like courage and aggressiveness” (Gilbreath 26).

In the same way that the models of God and Jesus Christ are used to demonstrate how men can embrace feminine qualities, God and Jesus also are used to personify the stereotypical male. Again, Steve Farrar’s emphasis on Jesus as a model for manhood draws on the same example given to men to be more feminine. This time, employing the
same biblical references, ("Jesus could be tender with the woman at the well but he could also walk into the temple and clear it out because he was angry") Farrar justifies masculine traits such as anger by aligning these traits with the persona of Christ. Likewise, God takes on a more masculine image as well. According to one man "Promise Keepers are sinners in the hands of a loving, macho (my emphasis) God who is eager to forgive their transgressions, restore their manhood, and fix their broken lives and families" (Spalding 262).

PK speakers take men through a series of chants and exhortations used to help them identify with manhood. For example, one PK speaker uses tactics such as having men turn to one another after an important point and say "He’s talking ta you already" and Ed Cole has men follow the expression “And when I became a man” with “I put away childish things” (Spalding 261). Cole then exhorts, “Act more like a man! Why? Because when a man acts like a child it forces his wife to act like his mother [meaning] she does two things for him. She makes decisions...and she corrects him. Now there’s a problem with that! ...The problem is you can’t make love to your mother!” (Spalding 262).

Another rhetorical strategy to reinforce a strong sense of manhood is identification through incongruity. While men are characterized as strong, aggressive, and courageous; women are defined in submissive terms, further reinforcing the message. Dennis Rainey, a featured PK speaker urges men “to put women back in their rightful place, a place of honor, a place of value, a place to be cherished, a place to be protected” (Wicker 1A). According to McCartney, putting women back in their rightful, submissive place can only benefit women. He writes, “Almighty mighty God will restore her self
Our women need a man providing the spiritual tempo and leadership in the home” (Swomley 35).

The challenge to restore manhood to its rightful place while also adopting feminine behaviors appears to be internally flawed. Despite such contradictions, the mixed messages men receive have been met with enthusiasm. The responses given by the men who attend PK rallies indicate that many men are ready to be more nurturing and compassionate while reaping the benefits of maintaining a more traditional model of manhood. Among the messages that reinforce traditional manhood, the leadership of men in the home and church stands out.

Protecting Male Leadership in the Home and Church

Over time, the family structure and the structure of the church has changed, resulting in a re-definition of the traditional nuclear family. Father, mother, and children as the standard family type has changed dramatically with the growing one parent household and other non-traditional family structures. According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census, in 1991 only 25% of American households are comprised of mother, father, and children, and families where the father is the sole breadwinner comprise only 8.2% of all American homes (145). The changes in the economy along with social changes in the United States have produced changes in the family structure. Susan Lehrer writes, “We are again in a time when these larger social forces are visibly changing the ways families function” (185). The changing family structure in the United States has sent shock waves among baby boomers who came of age in a time when these changes began to take effect on the social structure. The rising numbers of unwed mothers and increase in divorces
have resulted in "new arrangements, multiple parents, kids shuffling around, and a lot of
guilt" (Roberts 26).

The changes that have taken place in the family structure over the past twenty
years have had little impact on the structure of the church. Church structures continue to
model the traditional nuclear family, with men playing the primary role of minister and
leader, and women completing what have been considered secondary tasks such as
teaching Sunday school and preparing meals for the church family. There are churches,
however, that have reluctantly begun to allow women to play more primary roles in the
church leadership, with women serving as deaconesses and serving ministerial positions
as well.

The changes that have taken place in the family and church structure are a
culmination of many factors including the emergence of women into the public sphere.
Today, many women are financially independent, well educated, and successful in a
number of careers and some women pursue leadership positions in the church such as
senior pastor. The admission of women into the public sphere is not the only cultural
change in our society, but this change along with others have worked together in
changing the face of the family and church structure. The effort to counteract the
influence of these factors has been addressed by Promise Keepers through rhetorical
strategies that emphasize the God given leadership of men in both the family and the
church.

A number of today's marriages do not mirror those of the past. The husband is no
longer necessarily the sole bread winner and the wife no longer necessarily stays at home
to rear the children and keep the home. In fact, a vocabulary of equality, partnership, and
cooperation where husband and wife work together is common, with no one person assuming leadership over the other. In sharp contrast to these changes stands PK and rhetorical strategies that emphasize the leadership role of man over his family as ordained in the Bible. Tony Evans, one of PK’s more controversial speakers, tells men it is time for them to take charge of their marriages and families. He notes, “the first thing you do is sit down with your wife and say something like this: ‘Honey, I’ve made a terrible mistake. I’ve given you my role. I gave up leading the family, and I forced you to take my place. Now I must reclaim that role’” (Spalding 262). Evans emphasizes the biblical foundation for these ideas and tells men “Don’t you understand, mister, you are royalty, and God has chosen you to be priest of your home?” (Novosad 26). Bill Bright, a featured PK speaker, reinforces messages of male headship telling men “wives should be treated with love and respect and included in decision making, but the man is the head of the household and women are responders” (Thompson A16).

The advice given by Evans, Bright, and other PK speakers resonates among the crowds. According to one Promise Keeper, “men are no longer the leaders of the family because of the feminist movement in America. Men need to take a stand and become the head of the household again” (Lee 35A). Dennis Christener, 42, has attended six PK rallies and supports the message of men’s leadership role in the home. He notes, “I firmly believe in what they stand for taking this country back, making the man the spiritual leader of the house. When the family breaks down, this nation is in bad shape. The way things are deteriorating now, it’s only a matter of time before this country is totally destroyed” (Morin and Wilson 3).
The belief that men are the chosen leaders in their homes is justified through the application of biblical passages used to reinforce the subordination of women. One man explains, “Man’s role is laid out in the Bible. As God is to man, man is to the family and it is to take charge of his family. This means listening to their needs and wishes, then deciding what is best for them” (Pharr 28). PK leaders draw on several biblical passages in defense of this perspective such as Genesis 3:16, which reads, “…and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.” New Testament passages also are cited. Ephesians 5:22, “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the Church”, and First Timothy 2:11 reads “Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve.” Such passages are used as evidence that men are the heads of the marriage and family structure.

The submission of women in the marriage structure is accentuated by a number of PK speakers who explain the need for men to reclaim their leadership role. According to Ed Cole, “If your wife no longer trusts your word, she can no longer respect you and she can no longer submit to you. And if she can no longer respect you and submit to you, then she no longer wants to bear your name” (Spalding 262). PK leaders equate the leadership of men as essential to the survival of the family and American culture. Tony Brown insists “the emphasis on the patriarchal family must involve no compromise” and he tells men the submission of women is essential “for the survival of our culture” (Swomley 35).
PK employs messages of submission by women in the marriage structure as essential and necessary while justifying such submission as the will of God. PK speakers such as James Dobson cast these messages in a positive light, suggesting to men that women want to be submissive to their husbands. He notes, “Christian women complain more about men’s nominal character and their unwillingness to assume leadership in their families than anything else” (What is a Promise Keeper?). McCartney also characterizes these messages as positive for women saying that PK “is an answer to the cry of women’s hearts” (Weber 9). Huron Claus, PK board member, reinforces the idea that women benefit from men becoming involved in PK, noting, “I think we address the needs of women. We address the issue of respect, of honor. We address the issues of the family. So even though it [PK] is centered in addressing the needs of men, still, we do look at whole picture itself” (Hetherly 15). Men also are led to believe that wives are the possession of their husbands. Howard Hendricks, a PK speaker, tell men “someday you will appear before the judgment of Jesus Christ and God will ask you what did you do with the wife I gave you?” (What is a Promise Keeper?).

In addition to the submission of one’s wife, men also are admonished for failing to discipline their children. Men are told “We must be willing to discipline our children. For God’s sake, discipline your children. But to command you’ve got to know what’s going on” (Novosad 26). The authoritarian emphasis on leading and disciplining resonates throughout PK literature. One PK brochure states “If a man is to truly lead and protect his family he must actively discern his culture, defend his convictions, and discipline his children” (Housewright 1A).
As discussed earlier, men are told to provide the spiritual tempo in their homes. Male leadership also applies to the structure of the church. The authority of men in the church is justified through the application of biblical passages used to elevate the status of men over women. Men are told “Manhood and Christlikeness are synonymous” thereby identifying the figure of Christ with his maleness rather than his humanity. By aligning men with Christ, the preservation of male leadership comes to be seen as logical and necessary (Spalding 262). According to Steve Farrar, “We feel the answers to life are contained in the Scriptures and in Jesus Christ. When all else fails, read the directions” (Lee 35). Much like the twelve tribes of David, PK men see themselves as central to the restoration of Christianity in our nation. Bill McCartney tells men “By the year 2000, the strongest voice in America, a booming voice, is going to belong to the men (my emphasis) of God” (Novosad 25).

The leadership of men in the home and church signals to many women a concentrated effort by PK to subject women to a man’s authority. PK leaders maintain, however, that the emphasis placed on leadership ignores the approach men are instructed to use. In an interview with the Washington Post, McCartney responds to these concerns. He notes, “We can understand why ladies are skeptical...We’re calling men to do what the Bible says: Lay down your lives for your wives...The biblical definition is service. And so if a man really is leading his house, he’s doing it as a servant” (Washington Post C07). McCartney echoes this message in most interviews. He observes, “For the guy to be the leader means he out-serves his wife” (Niebuhr 25). The transformation of the leadership model from one of authority to one of servanthood helps to diminish these concerns for some women who criticize the strong messages PK sends men about their
roles in the family and church. McCartney elaborates on the servant-centered aspect of leadership. "You know what a woman is told [in the Bible]? Respect your husband...she would come alongside him and let him take the lead, and he in turn would lay down his life. He would serve her, affectionately and tenderly serve her" (Stodghill 39).

The prescription for a godly man, according to PK, is blurred and often hard to distinguish. In many instances, men are encouraged to behave like women, only to be told later that men have been “sissified” in our society. In response to the “sissification” of American men, PK calls for men to behave in more traditional ways that in the past have been characterized as macho. Within the messages that encourage men to be macho lie numerous references to war and sports, two arenas that have long been considered male ground.

"Rally the Troops" and the "Super Bowl of Christianity"

The use of sports and war analogies in PK rhetoric is rampant, relating to the all-male audience and appealing to images of the warrior male. Symbolically, football stadiums used for PK rallies function as battlegrounds on which men fight a number of evils. In the same way, McCartney, the football coach, represents a "General Patton type" who creates images of armies and cosmic battles between the forces of good and evil. Most war and sports rhetoric seen in PK come directly from McCartney as he works the crowd into a state of excitement and fervor. He tells men:

We’re calling you to war. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we capture every thought to make it obedient to Christ. We have divine power...We have
McCartney's militaristic approach resonates throughout his speeches. In a PK video entitled *The Next Step: From the Stadium to the Small Group*, he says, “Many of you feel like you have been in a war for a long time, yet the fiercest fighting is just ahead. God has brought us here to prepare us. Let’s proceed. It’s wartime” (Swomley 10).

McCartney carefully lays out the plan of organizing a Christian army in his speeches. For him “the first principle of war is unity of command. The second principle of war is unity of effort...We don’t want you to volunteer if you’re just going to be a guy but aren’t going to be a PK and live up to all of the tenets which I’ve presented to you” (Novosad 26). To enlist in McCartney’s army, one must adhere to the doctrine and theology of PK. Steve Farrar reinforces McCartney’s message noting, “If you don’t understand that a war has been declared on the biblical family, then you are missing the boat. We are at war in this nation. War has been declared” (Lee 35A).

The war messages espoused by McCartney and other PK leaders encourage men to fight on a number of battlegrounds. McCartney warns, “We are going to war as of tonight. We have divine power; that is our weapon. We will not compromise. Wherever truth is at risk, in the school or legislature, we are going to contend for it. We will win” (Swomley 36). Those outside of PK wonder who it is that PK is going to war against. According to McCartney “…we will retreat no more. We’re going to contest anything that sets itself up against the name of Jesus Christ” (Gilbreath 96). Furthermore, McCartney sets PK up as the defender of morality and tells men “We have divine power...We have see immortality corrupting our nation...We have a holy cause” (Novosad 26).
Two important aspects of organizing the PK army are the role of the clergy and the development of smaller armies who can work in their communities and home churches. In The Next Step: From the Stadium to the Small Group, McCartney tells men "We have a great army that we are assembling. They're Christian men of this nation. However, our leadership, our clergy are not in uniform. Our clergy are divided...There's no unity of command...There is tremendous division in our clergy. We have to assume that responsibility" (Swomley 11). McCartney also addresses pastors, noting the absence of men's participation in services that hold the church family together such as prayer meetings, bible study, teaching children, cooking meals, and visiting shut-ins. He tells these men "Now pastors, you are our leaders. You've been working with half a squad. You've been working with mostly women. But that's going to change" (Thompson A16). Furthermore, the role that key men play in accountability groups reinforces the military mission of PK. According to PK leadership "If there's at least one key man for every church we develop a relationship with, there will be at least 200,000 men in America—that's an army!" (Novosad 26).

In the same way that militaristic rhetoric appeals to many men, references to sports also helps to deliver the PK message. On one occasion, Tony Evans sets the stage for other speakers at the rally by preparing men for the PK theology. He exclaims, "Tonight, God's starting team has taken the field, and they have said it's time to rumble. We could call it a cosmic bowl...We are ready to do cosmic battle for Jesus Christ" (Caldwell 23). Men are asked "Where are the men willing to step up to the plate?" creating the image of a baseball player ready to take on the world (What is a Promise Keeper?). McCartney incites excitement among the crowds, using his rhetoric to make
men feel as if they are preparing to take the field for a big game. He tells them, "This is not locker room half-time rhetoric. This is real life. You know how we can get into the end zone? Together" (Weber 9). In the same fashion, McCartney tells men, "You ain't going to the endzone without the Holy Spirit" (Weber 9). Another example of McCartney's use of football talk is demonstrated in his analysis of society's problems. He points out "In my view, every society needs the restraint of the people of God, who act as bulwarks against people's ill-informed and destructive choices, like offensive linemen protecting the quarterback" (Gilkeson 2).

The application of sports analogies proves effective for many men who are able to relate larger issues with a vocabulary that employs words such as touchdown, endzone, and other sports metaphors. The decision to hold PK rallies in football stadiums throughout the nation indicates that PK leaders believe men respond to sports images. Men are bombarded with speakers, literature, and advertisements that employ references to sports, such as one ad flashed across a football stadium for a men's Christian book titled *Go the Distance* that reads "This book will help you cross the finish line confident you've run a good race" (Bruni 22). Men also sport T-shirts on sale in the PK sales tent that read "Lord's Gym: His Pain, Our Gain" (Bruni 22).

These strategies, taken together, prove effective. One man shares how McCartney's use of sporting terminology made an impact on him. He notes, "He related sports to religion. And I appreciated that. Also, I have a lot of respect for him. I remember when Colorado was a nothing team" (Weber 9). Other men also use sports analogies to describe their experience at a PK rally, such as the man from Houston who summed up the weekend as the "Super Bowl of Christianity" (Mattox 40).
The rhetorical strategies employed by PK that involve war and sports metaphors describe PK men in terms of a competition they are engaged in with forces outside the movement. These forces are sometimes specific and at other times vague and difficult to identify. Those outside the movement wonder “Who is in this war PK is fighting? Who is the enemy?” On one level, the enemy, always in the process of being defined and redefined, is an enemy that falls outside of PK theology and fundamentalist Christian faith. At the same time, the enemy has been identified in more political terms, providing insight into the third rhetorical theme.

Political Rhetoric

Since the inception of Promise Keepers eight years ago, watchful observers have challenged PK leadership on the grounds that the movement is more than a simple religious revival and instead represents a covert attempt to influence the political world. PK maintains, however, that the group does not have political aspirations. Randy Phillips, president of PK, maintains, “Is it to demonstrate political might? No. It is to take back the nation by imposing our religious values? No” (Escobar and Murphy A01). An analysis of PK’s rhetoric suggests the contrary.

The militaristic and sports-related “talk” of McCartney, PK founder and unofficial leader, is often cloaked in an underlying political message. For example, McCartney tells men, “Wherever there is truth at risk, in the school or legislature, we are going to contend for it. We will win” (Swomley 36). Other PK organizers, such as Raleigh Washington, have echoed McCartney, noting, “there is no way this group can restrict itself when it comes to public policy. We are producing leaders in this organization. They will enter the public sphere” (NOW website). Other PK rhetoric deals
more specifically with political issues such as education. For example, one chapter of a PK study guide tells men they must not back down from school board members who “soften your stance on abstinence based sex education” (Swomley 36).

While the PK organization does not take an official stand on political issues, a number of leaders readily share their position on controversial subjects. According to McCartney, “Abortion is a violation of the heart of God” and goes on to explain “that’s a human life. It’s precious to God, created in his image, and potentially that life will carry the very Spirit of God” (Stodghill 37). Likewise, unofficial publications such as Promise Keepers News argues, “the legal undermining of the sanctity of human life, from the pre-born to the old and infirm, represents a rejection of America’s two-century-old tenet that mankind is made in God’s image, and is a repudiation of morality as a factor in court decisions” (Swomley 11). Promise Keepers appeals to men’s sense of guilt by placing the blame for abortion on their heads. Another article from Promise Keepers News blames the number of men who “have remained idle as 34 million unborn children have been legally slain” for the numbers of abortions performed every year (Swomley 12). In addition to PK’s disdain for abortion and sex education, homosexuals have been targeted as well. According to Tony Evans “I am here to serve notice on you today, if black homosexuals can get together with white homosexuals...and produce immorality in the name of hell, then black and white Christians can get together and bring the kingdom of God in the name of heaven” (Novosad 26). As discussed earlier, McCartney himself holds strong views on homosexuality, characterizing homosexuals as “stark raving mad” and “undeserving of the same legal rights as those who reproduce” (NOW website).
An additional source of conflict for the PK organization is its association with figures linked to the religious right: James Dobson, founder of Focus on the Family, Pat Robertson and the 700 club, Bill Bright and the Campus Crusade for Christ, as well as Jerry Falwell. Each of these men are noted for their ultra-conservative positions on political issues and their association with the Republican Party. Jerry Falwell, for example, came under scrutiny when he bailed out Randall Terry, Operation Rescue Founder, after his group violently attacked a women's health clinic during the 1988 Democratic National Convention in Atlanta, Georgia (NOW website). The list of men involved in the activities of the religious right have helped in “[launching] Promise Keepers financially, lent the organization hundreds of staff members, continue to host and speak at Promise Keepers rallies, publish Promise Keeper books and sell their own treatises at Promise Keepers events” (NOW website). After hosting a PK rally in 1995, Jerry Falwell wrote, “It appears that America’s anti-Biblical feminist movement is at last dying, thank God, and is possibly being replaced by a Christ centered men’s movement” (Gilkeson 4). Bill Bright, a Promise Keepers leader, reinforces ideas that PK has political intentions when he observed that Supreme Court decisions have too “sharply defined the separation of church and state” (Gilkeson 4).

Accusations by outsiders that PK has political aspirations was further reinforced by PK’s national gathering of men, “Stand in the Gap” which was staged on the Mall in Washington D.C. in November of 1997. McCartney answered the mounting accusations by characterizing the gathering on the Mall “as a place of worship,” going on to point out “...there’s no agenda. And they can stick around for another four hours and wait for an agenda, but there won’t be one. How boring” (Washington Post A20). McCartney
further reinforces PK's position by shifting the focus away from politics. He explains, “the reason you won’t see any political statements and no political agenda is we don’t believe that’s where the solutions are” (Washington Post A20). Randy Phillips reinforces McCartney’s sentiment, noting, “Though we stand in the political center of arguably the most influential nation on Earth, it is not political preferences we are concerned with, but biblical convictions. When it comes to politics and faith, we confess that we have had too high a view of the ability of man and too low a trust in the sovereignty of God” (Washington Post A20). Phillips also emphasizes the group’s reliance on the living truth of the Bible, explaining “We believe that the ultimate answer to the moral crisis of society is not in partisan agendas but living truth. We have nothing to offer any special-interest group but the mercy and grace that is available to all in the Bible” (Washington Post A20).

Outside of the PK leadership, men who participate in PK events appear oblivious to political labels given to the movement. Tim Cowin, a 31-year-old theological student, hopes to keep the focus of the group on religious matters. He explains, “my hope is that it stays on course from where it started, which is not political at all. It’s a spiritual renewal movement. I hope it spreads man by man across the country” (Morin and Wilson 4). At the same time, Don Bread notes, “there’s no rule saying we shouldn’t be political. But what we need to do is stand up and speak boldly for God. But banging this into the heads of individual people, that should be between the individual and God” (Morin and Wilson 5). During the “Stand in the Gap” events, David Beck remarked “I haven’t researched the Promise Keepers and this is my third event...Maybe there is a political agenda, but I haven’t see it. There’s nothing about a political agenda in all the mail, books, or
materials I get from PK” (Adlof 8). Other participants echo the same feelings. Jeff (last name withheld), from New Mexico, maintains “Promise Keepers is not political. NOW isn’t offering any solutions. They don’t understand Christ is the solution” (Adlof 8).

While PK has been attacked from all sides for their controversial position on political issues such as abortion and homosexuality, many have defended the goals of the organization. Over the past year one goal of the group characterized by those outside the movement in positive terms is PK’s call for racial reconciliation.

Healing Through Reconciliation

Seven years after PK held its first meeting of seventy-two men in Boulder, CO, the organization has grown into the premier religious movement in the United States. In October 1997, PK men, numbering over 700,000, descended onto the Mall in Washington, DC. PK organizers touted the weekend as a sacred assembly to “call on Christian men of every race and color, of every social and economic background, and from every corner of our nation” (Stand in the Gap brochure). In preparation for the event, McCartney shared the vision of the meeting, explaining “our dream is to have men of every race and color, every social and economic background, and every geographical corner of our country gather together in the spirit of reconciliation and unity” (Stand in the Gap brochure). The events leading up to the weekend were a culmination of efforts on the part of PK leadership, growing out of McCartney’s own sense of frustration about race relations. In an interview with the Washington Post, McCartney explains, “I want to say as a white guy that what I have learned is there’s a tremendous amount of pain among people of color in the nation, and they suffer from a spirit of superiority that exists in many places where they feel stifled and stymied” (C07).
In the history of the United States, Washington, D.C., the center of political and social activity in our country, has played host to a number of gatherings such as PK’s sacred assembly of men. In an effort to create a connection between past civil rights work and the present efforts of Promise Keepers, literature for the event equates the weekend with Martin Luther King’s march on Washington in which he “expressed the dream that Black and White, Jew and Gentile, Protestant and Catholic would one day hold hands in a spirit of reconciliation and unity, and see each other based on the content of their character rather than the color of their skin” (Stand in the Gap brochure). They go on to say, “We’re praying that October 4, 1997 will be that day. That’s why we’re encouraging every man to invite his friends and brothers of all races to attend the Sacred Assembly with him. We challenge you to reach across racial lines in faith, and “Be One Who Brings One” to D.C.” (Stand in the Gap Brochure).

The media attention surrounding the monumental gathering of men in Washington to tout racial unity allowed PK leadership to send their message beyond those who attended the assembly. McCartney’s commitment to racial reconciliation resonated during the gathering, encouraging men to meet on the steps of their state capitals on January 1, 2000, as evidence of their own commitment. He notes, “I look to the year 2000...to mark the end of racism inside the church of Jesus Christ, and then it will have a dynamic impact on society” (RNS 934).

The goal to end racism by the year 2000 is a lofty one and the majority of men involved in PK have eagerly accepted their role in accomplishing such a mission. According to Raleigh Washington, a black pastor, “Promise Keepers is trying to be a light beacon that will raise the consciousness of Christian churches throughout America
and to say to them ‘America is racially polarized and so is the church of Jesus Christ’” (Greene and Harris D01). Mark Wade, 43, a black pediatrician, observes “the color of our skin is just the house we’re in. When men are following Jesus Christ, color is secondary. We are here united to show that we should not allow the small things that make us different to overshadow all else” (Greene A16).

The message of racial unity resonates throughout PK rhetoric both among its leaders and followers. PK literature addresses the issue of racism throughout its books, videos, and tapes. For example, in its tape series “What is a Promise Keeper,” PK rallies are described as “black and white hugging each other”. Harmony among men of all colors, cast in the light of brotherhood, works to bring racially diverse groups together under the direction of PK. The language of brotherhood diminishes issues such as skin color or racial background and according to Pastor Jeffrey Johnson, “if God is your father, you are my brother” (Higgins 22).

One of the more popular speakers on racial reconciliation, Wellington Boone, challenges men to face their own prejudices and stereotypes. In the tradition of moving and eloquent prose among great black ministers, Boone’s message is hard hitting and effective. Over the noise of cheering and clapping Boone delivers his message. Boone asks “Who have you given yourself to Christ or Culture? You can please your race, and miss your faith! You can please your friends, and miss grace! The issue of racism is the issue of carnality. Your present stewardship will determine your future responsibility” (Spalding 264). In the same way that other PK speakers and leaders equate manhood with the figure of Christ, Boone invokes images of Jesus and compares them to contemporary society. “If you were the example Jesus used as the model for the world,
would there be racism? When I'm with the brothers and I talk condescendingly about white people, talk about 'em in a way I wouldn't in front of 'em, then I'm not a slave to Jesus. I'm a slave to my culture” (Spalding 264). Finally, Boone references well-known biblical passages to further intensify his message. “Love your enemies! Do good unto those you hate! Rednecks belong in my church. Some of you know what I'm talkin' about' cuz you is it' t'bacca spittin', Confederate-flag-wavin rednecks! I love 'em 'cuz until I love 'em I can't drive the hate out of 'em” (Spalding 264).

While the demographics of men who attend PK functions are predominantly white, PK leadership has gone to great lengths to provide a racially diverse picture among its featured speakers. At the “Stand in the Gap” weekend, Modesto de la Cruz points out the racial diversity to skeptical reporters, saying “Look at this group of men right here: Native American, Hispanic from the Dominican Republic, and an African American. That can show you a little bit of what PK is doing. If that doesn’t speak racial reconciliation, I don’t know what does” (Hetherly 16).

The message for racial harmony and a call for united brotherhood is channeled by PK leaders through the knowledge that men who attend PK functions do so in their need to repent. The majority of men who descended on the Mall for “Stand in the Gap” cited their need to confess their sins and ask for forgiveness as the guiding reason for their attendance (Morin and Wilson 1). This need for forgiveness was channeled for a number of men through a call for reconciliation. John Dawson, a featured speaker during “Stand in the Gap,” asked the crowd to forgive him for his sins as a white man, saying

Lord, I confess that we are an arrogant people, that we have deeply wounded

African Americans and Jewish and Native American and Hispanic friends in the
story of this land. Even unconsciously, the way we stand, the way we talk, the way we think about ourselves projects an incredible sense of superiority about everything. We don’t even see it. (Greene A16)

The courage and difficulty of Dawson’s admission of guilt serves as only one example of the numbers of men moved by PK’s call for unity. John Jenkins points out, “it is a challenge to men to be real men, a challenge to confront our prejudices is helping men to visualize, through training, what the true Christian man looks like” (Greene and Harris D01). The challenge to accomplish the goal of confronting one’s prejudices is realized for many men through their participation in PK.

These messages of inclusion for men from diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds have made a lasting impact on the fabric of the organization. Over the last eight years, more and more racially diverse men have responded to the PK message, embracing the call for harmony. Among these men, Cezar Simeon, an Asian man, credits the work of a white man for bringing him to Christ. He explains, “I became a Christian because a white person came up and shared the gospel with me. Promise Keepers’ efforts must be working, because when I look at people here, I am not seeing colors. I’m seeing brothers” (Green A16). Samuel Lee, another Asian PK, traveled with over 200 men from his home church to attend the “Stand in the Gap” assembly. He has also been struck by the call for racial harmony, noting that the goal of PK is to “[create] genuine brotherhood of all colors and cultures” (Green and Harris D01).

The rhetorical themes seen in Promise Keepers have not only caught the attention of Christian men, but have gained the interest of those who fall outside the theology of PK. Taken together, the themes discussed signal to many a massive effort of
conservative, fundamentalist Christian men to advance their world-view in the attempt to put forth a patriarchal worldview.

**Dialectical Tension**

The dialectical tension described by Robert Cathcart is a defining quality of any social movement. The phenomenal growth of the Promise Keepers group over the last eight years has certainly not gone unnoticed, creating tension between those within and outside of the group. While a number of politicians, Christians, and women support the work of PK, others have sounded an alarm against the agenda of PK. Leading the way against PK’s growth and influence is the National Organization for Women (NOW).

The project to undermine PK by NOW has taken a number of forms. From press releases to protests, Patricia Ireland, president of NOW, other NOW leaders, and the rank and file of NOW have created a concerted effort to respond to the rhetorical messages of PK that endorse the submission of women to men. In preparation for “Stand in the Gap” in Washington, D.C., NOW organized their own rally, advertising on their Webpage “NOW will launch an accelerated national campaign against them [PK] with a news briefing and protest, Monday, August 25th on the eve of Women’s Equality Day, when U.S. women won the right to vote” (NOW Website). NOW also has produced their own video, titled “The Chosen Women,” documenting what they feel is the overarching theme of PK rhetoric: “taking back America for Christ, but they also mean to take back the rights of women” (NOW website). The video, available through mail order, warns, “The PK’s slick PR makes them a difficult target to attack but now you can see the proof. This video illustrates the anti-woman, homophobic, political agenda of the Promise Keepers” (NOW website).
NOW leadership warns women of “feel good male supremacy,” and this message has taken root among the rank and file of NOW members. In October, as men gather in Washington, D.C., feminist women joined together to demonstrate their resistance to PK. Among those women, Sheila Ogea explains why she drove nine hours to support the equal rights of women. She says, “They want to take away women’s equality and create theocracy with laws I don’t agree with. I came here to try and educate society as to what their agenda really is” (Thompson A16). Wendy Weinhold, a 20-year-old college student, also turned out to protest Promise Keepers, noting, “My objection to Promise Keepers is that they say it is the men who must lead in the household. They don’t talk about equality; they talk about submission” (Thompson A16).

Law student Cat Flanagan also came to Washington for the same purpose explaining, “I had to come here because silence is acceptance. We need to create awareness of what PK leadership is about” (Adlof 8). Caroline Karcher shares the views of these women. She notes that PK is a group “organizing to roll back women’s gains. I believe this country was founded on the principles of separation of church and state. They’re trying to impose evangelical Christianity on the entire nation” (Adlof 8).

The reaction of feminists to the growth of PK is not limited to young women such as Ogea and Weinhold. Geraldine Brittain, a 76 year old woman, traveled to Washington, D.C., to protest the gathering of men. She says, “I’m very concerned about this group; I think it sort of smacks of fascism. They’ve done away with the notion of separation of church and state, and that makes me feel very uncomfortable. I’m a Jew, but
I wouldn’t want this to be a Jewish movement either. I think it’s fanatical, and that’s what scares me" (Moreno A17).

Eleanor Smeal, president of the Feminist Majority, shares the concern of the leadership and rank and file in NOW. She advises women who are attracted to the messages of male responsibility to “read about the PK. If you husband is involved, ask to see their written material. Ask questions! On the surface this sounds like a good deal. They’re going to do the diapers. That’s great! What price is being put on that diaper? What is this really about?” (Adlof 8). Other women have become involved as well, including a number of women in academe. After researching PK, Dr. Catherine Kroeger concludes, “Any time you take a bunch of simple human beings and impress upon them that they’re the boss and somebody else is the subservient one, you are likely to get in trouble” (Housewright 1A). Carol J. Adams, a graduate of the Yale Divinity school, shares the same concerns, noting, “It’s [Promise Keepers] part of the religious right’s agenda to mobilize and maintain men’s control over culture, interpretation and the Bible” (Housewright 1A).

The concern for PK rhetoric that emphasizes male leadership and female subordination is not limited to feminist groups such as NOW and the Feminist majority. A number of women are concerned that a rhetoric of male authority in the family works against women and children instead of for them. Pamela Coukos with the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence cautions that “the apparent goals of PK in reinforcing a sense of men’s entitlement with the home and family, and strengthening men’s authority over women and children are incompatible with our nation’s continued progress to eliminate violence against women and children” (Hetherly 15).
Finally, women who identify themselves as both feminists and Christians have taken issue with PK’s message of male leadership in the church. Dr. Mary Hunt, co-director of the Women’s Alliance for Theology, Ethics, and Ritual, warns, “This is not the 50s. It’s kind of a backlash against the progress that’s been made. A Christian men’s movement seems almost redundant. The church has in some ways been the functional equivalent of a men’s movement” (Housewright 1A). The concern that has been lodged against PK by women who come from diverse backgrounds and the work of groups such as NOW, the Feminist Majority, and other religious and liberal groups took on a more organized effort in 1996, with the creation of Equal Partners in Faith, “whose goal is to build opposition to the PK within religious communities” (Adlof 8). The work of Equal Partners, as well as the interest of other religious groups, signals another form of dialectical tension between Christians and Promise Keepers.

Christians outside of the movement have issued their own responses to the “theology” of PK, noting that PK and their churches are remarkably different from other churches in their understanding of faith. The Fellowship of Fundamental Bible Churches has said, “Promise Keepers teachings are a strange mixture of truth and error. Its methods for promoting those teachings are questionable” (Swomley 13). The Fellowship encourages Christians “to be wise, to be warned, and to beware of this false movement” (Swomley 13).

The fundamentalist leanings of the PK organization as seen through their theology, statement of faith, and seven promises, equals “a Christian nation or theocracy” (Swomley 10). For many Christians, blurring the lines between the church and the state is troublesome and unscriptural as well. Using the example of Jesus, liberal Christians
point out how he “repudiated a politics of domination when he said ‘You know that those who are supposed to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them and their great men exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you; for whoever would be great among you must be your servant (Mark 10:43-44). Furthermore, the militaristic rhetoric discussed transforms Jesus as the ‘Prince of Peace’ into a ‘military messiah’ speaking the language of war” (Swomley 10).

A final concern among Christians is PK’s message to break down denominational walls to unite the church. John Swomley, a Humanist and president of the Americans for Religious Liberty, points out, PK does not want to alert existing churches and denominations to its intent to supplant them, but it has developed a centralized headquarters with thirty-six regional offices serving all fifty states and about 16,000 local groups. Dick Gilkeson warns:

I can predict that increased PK activity will begin to divide the congregations of mainline churches. If the war rhetoric used by McCartney and other PK leaders accurately captures their approach, a divide and conquer strategy should surprise nobody. A focus on personal rather than denominationalized faith, although touted as useful for biblical unity, is more likely to create sharp rifts. (6)

As Christians argue over the implications PK will have on the church and the possibility of division, atheists share their concerns over PK’s mixed political and religious messages. Alongside feminist protesters during PK’s “Stand in the Gap” weekend, atheists marched along the Mall carrying signs that read “These Heads Don’t Bow. These Knees Don’t Bend” (Thompson A16). Ellen Johnson, president of the American Atheists, notes her disapproval of PK’s use of Christian ideals to solve
society’s problems, saying, “This is all about Jesus and God. It’s not about families. There’s this cultural angst men are going through, and this is a quick fix” (Thompson A16). The intersection of social issues and religious solutions troubles groups such as atheists, who do not subscribe to the fundamentalist position of PK.

Among the groups who oppose PK’s growth are gays and lesbians who have been criticized by PK leaders and speakers. Journalist Marian Hetherly calls attention to PK’s usage of catch phrases such as “Christian values,” and notes that within PK’s language lies an understood intolerance of homosexuality. PK speakers such as David Castro offer faith in Jesus Christ as a means to “cure men of their ‘homosexual tendencies’” noting that Castro’s prescription is situated within a larger conversation surrounding “sexual impurity,” “lust,” “pornography,” “sexual abuse,” and “filth on the Internet” (Heatherly 16). Placing homosexuality along the same lines as sexual impurity puts gays and lesbians on the defensive. Kerry Lobel, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, interprets such messages as intolerance noting that PK blames “women and gay people...for the collapse of family and community...Justice-seeking people will not stand by and let this bigotry go unchallenged” (Heatherly 16).

Homophobic rhetoric that appears in PK targets gay men in particular. Wayne Besen observes, “As a gay man, you have...people who believe in order to go to Heaven, you have to make my life hell. They only love you if you’re exactly like them” (Thompson A16).

Although PK portrays homosexuals, and specifically gay men in a negative light, messages of unity are popular among PK speakers. These messages are not all-inclusive, however, and are directed primarily toward unity between racially diverse groups. In the
landscape of American culture lies the deep seeded root of prejudice and racism. For decades, African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and others have struggled to level the playing field with white men and women. The involvement of the Christian faith in the struggle to bring equality to people of color has been minimal in past efforts. In fact, Sunday morning continues to be characterized as the most segregated day of the week, with whites, blacks, Hispanics, and others attending their own churches. Mandy Carter, an outspoken voice for the fight for equal rights for minority groups, challenges PK’s call for reconciliation, pointing out that PK does not offer “concrete measures to right the historic inequities imposed on people of color” (Swomley 12). She continues by saying “We are concerned that Promise Keepers call for racial harmony but does not speak to its 96 percent white membership about the racial advantage that whiteness gives them in this society. Institutionalized racism is not healed by hugs” (Swomley 12). Other critics point toward PK’s language choice of “the warm and fuzzy word reconciliation instead of equality exemplifies the regressive racial politics that underlie Promise Keepers’ carefully coifed image and avoids the demand for jobs, community, self-determination, freedom from police and criminal violence, and access to housing and educational opportunity” (Heatherly 16).

The choice to use words such as reconciliation and unity signals some level of insincerity on PK’s part. Drawing on PK’s fusion of politics and religion, David Love suggests that the emphasis placed on racial harmony is simply a front to recruit new bodies to PK’s fundamentalist agenda. He writes, “throughout history...conservative White Christians justified enslavement of Africans and the genocide of Native Americans, participated in Jim Crow, burned crosses and blocked schoolhouse doors.”
He concludes that PK is a front to recruit voters to elect right-wing politicians who will represent the interests of the Christian coalition and the Religious Right (Heatherly 16). Chip Berlet, a writer, reinforces the idea that PK is using racial reconciliation as a recruiting effort noting, “What happened here [in the case of Promise Keepers] is that the boys’ club has expanded to include people of color. When push comes to shove, what’s more important, race or gender?” (Novosad 27). For Berlet, the inclusion of minority men in Promise Keepers indicates a period when the patriarchy is in the state of redefinition. He observes “Power in America has traditionally been accorded to straight, white, Christian men” whereas today there is more pressure on the patriarchy to include others in the structure “[redefining] who ‘we’ are as opposed to ‘them’”(Novosad 27).

On a larger level, the concerns shared by feminists, atheists, homosexuals, and people of color all signal an overarching rhetoric used by PK that mixes religion and politics. While PK continues to deny political interests, critics such as John Swomley maintain “it [PK] has a political agenda [and] their various public statements and their list of enemies clearly define them as the army of the far right” (11). Swomley demonstrates the inconsistencies in PK messages noting, “As a nonprofit organization, PK claims that none of its funds are used, directly or indirectly, for political purposes. But, this only means that it has not engaged in partisan politics or the support of candidates; it does not mean that it refrains from taking stands on or promoting positions on issues like abortion, homosexuality, and related far-right hot buttons” (13).

The political position that PK advances through more covert tactics signals for many its association with the religious right. Protestors such as Connie Hannah, who marched on Washington during “Stand in the Gap,” shares with reporters her concern
about Promise Keepers, saying “We don’t mind men keeping promises, but I really believe they’ve been hypocritical. They have a long-term agenda that is being bankrolled by the religious right” (Thompson A16). Mohammed Elleiphee with the Interfaith Alliance also sees the politics of the religious right in the PK movement observing, “The men who came to the PK rally [came] for very legitimate needs. But the leaders of the movement are manipulating these needs to promote the political agenda of the religious right” (Thompson A16).

PK leaders who claim no political aspirations or association with the religious right do not convince those who equate PK with a political movement. Instead, PK recognizes a clearly directed effort to influence the American male towards their fundamentalist beliefs through the use of subtle messages cloaked in religious rhetoric. According to Dick Gilkeson:

It is also particularly difficult to determine right wing agendas in an age where leaders have developed media savvy and political correctness and are able to create comfort zones by speaking of inexplicit notions everyone can get behind such as “individuals responsibility” or “immoral behaviors”; where neutral “reconciliation” is carefully used rather than controversial “equality” or “integration”, where “leadership” becomes “servanthood”; where membership is in a “holy race” superseding all other racial issues; where “traditional” is code for patriarchy...or where abortion and homosexuality as issues are now carefully avoided; and where minorities are recruited to overcome the image of white fundamentalists as intolerant bigots, and to strategically gain a foothold in the Black community. (5)
The inclusion of political messages within the larger religious themes in PK produces rhetorical themes that contradict one another. Author Frederick Clarkson points out “there is a great deal of opportunistic double talk. Love your wife, (but demand submission). Serve your pastor, (but undermine his denomination). Seek racial unity, (but only among the biblically correct). Gather in Washington D.C. (but claim it’s not political)” (Gilkeson 7). PK’s ability to blur the lines between religion and politics has been equated with fascism by other critics such as Alfred Ross, director of the Center for Democratic Studies, who notes that PK “threatens democracy by blurring the distinction between church and state, and dividing the country along gender and religious lines” (Gilkeson 6).

The influence of any movement can be overwhelming if not checked by those within and outside of the group. Swomley points out the dangers of PK noting, “Any disciplined religious movement can exercise control over government and social organizations if people do not expose it, organize counter movements, and educate their fellow citizens about the importance of separation of church and state” (13). The participation of men in accountability groups—mentored by trained PK men—represents the guiding force behind PK’s ability to influence men. Gilkeson warns others that shepherding can serve as a tool to indoctrinate men. He writes, “Beware of those who would shepherd us with their own agendas. The mechanisms are being built to facilitate control by few over the many. They may well be being put in place with the best of intentions. Never doubt that there are people out there who will be trying to use the structures to further their own ideologies” (7).
John Higgins, a Unitarian-Universalist pastor, experienced the influence of PK when he attended a weekend rally. After leaving the rally he observed, “the picture of so many men being directed in minute activities—such as repeating phrases and gestures—is not a comforting one to a person like me who believes that democracy is challenged by mindless believers following those who lead” (24). Higgins noted men who operated under the control of PK speakers “lured by a generic theology of great simplicity, then manipulated by ring masters who played upon prior conditioning [was] a comprehensive ploy aimed at reinforcing ideas from an era long past” (24). Higgins concluded his visit with the Promise Keepers with a warning for everyone observing, “Promise Keepers knows full well that it can mentally soften up a crowd so as to enjoy more success with later, more complex actions: purchasing PK merchandise, starting accountability groups, taking charge of the family, and perhaps advocating right-wing political causes. History is no stranger to such a pattern of control” (24).

The control of PK over unsuspecting men represents for many critics more than a simple religious revival. According to writer Conrad Goringer, PK’s rhetorical themes and strategies model dangerous cults. He points out:

the cultish admiration and worship of a strong leader, [the] use of mass spectacle as an instrument in proselytizing, [the] construction of a totalistic ideology, [the] division of the world into good and evil, [the] suspension of skepticism, critical judgment, and disbelief and the pressure to conform, [the] fabrication of a crisis, or last days mentality, which defines the actions of the group all serve as indicators that the group may be far more than a religious revival.

(Gilkeson 5)
Jewel van der Merwe, a European writer, also equates PK with cultish groups, aligning the movement with Hitler’s army. He writes, “The large mass rallies, the exaltation of emotion over reason, the lack of doctrinal integrity, the taking of oaths, the focus on fatherland and fatherhood, and the ecumenical inclusion of aberrant esoteric doctrines, bears a disconcerting similarity to an era which gave rise to one of the most dreadful armies in history” (Swomley 13).

The popularity of PK among Christian men has been met head on by a number of interested groups, all who feel threatened by the messages that are extolled by PK. Those who have launched the effort to undermine PK have approached this task from different perspectives, suggesting to many that PK is more than a religious revival.

Characterizations of Promise Keepers

Explaining the phenomenon of PK has been difficult for those outside the movement. The characterization of PK by the media has taken on a number of forms such as “The Third Great Awakening” (Gilkeson 1), a simple religious revival, a renewed men’s movement, a “seedbed for revival” (Rabey 90) and a savvy political movement. Others have labeled the group as “the evangelical Christian men’s movement,” “a spiritual beacon” and “mass conferences of fellowship and renewal” (Niebuhr 25). According to PK vice-president Paul Edwards, “this is a revival movement, not a reform movement” (RNS 935). Other PK leaders have labeled the group as a “revival and spiritual awakening.” As Dale Schlafer notes, “We’re in a prerevival state with little pockets springing up, but it’s not a full-blown revival yet” (Rabey 90). This prerevival state described by Schlafer is centered around the recruitment of Christian men to revive the church and “fall squarely within a long revivalist tradition in the United States that
stretches back to Colonial times” (Murphy B01). Mark Noll, professor of American religious history observes:

Voluntary associations inspired by the creative visionary idea of a charismatic leader, mobilizing a wide number of people for a specific cause, expertly using up-to-date communications techniques and aimed at a revival of ‘heart religion’ are as old as the work of George Whitefield and the Great Revivals in the 1740s. (Murphy B01)

Edward Gilbreath traces PK growth to past evangelical responses that failed to produce solutions to society’s problems, noting “Not until Promise Keepers has there been a large-scale mobilization of men to counter the problem” (22).

The Promise Keepers religious revival is accomplished through large weekend rallies and small accountability groups. According to journalist Frank Bruni, “The Promise Keepers pursue this mission largely through huge spiritual pep rallies around the nation. Yesterday’s was the first in New York City, and reflected the group’s rapid expansion into a religious movement” (43). PK defines itself as one piece of the religious renewal taking place in our country. A PK fact sheet reads: “PK is not a membership or dues-paying organization, but is part of a larger movement of Christian men becoming more active through their local churches...PK is not a political or partisan organization, nor is it affiliated with any denomination”.

Beyond a simple religious revival, others characterize PK as a political movement. According to Alfred Ross and Lee Cokorinos of the Center for Democracy Studies, “In its conception and execution, Promise Keepers is one of the most sophisticated political movements the right wing has yet conjured up” (Stodghill 36).
Ross and Cokorinos conclude, “Promise Keepers is a product of the leadership of well-financed religious, conservative organizations designed to create a men-only movement to promote their ultra-conservative social and political agenda” (NOW website). On a more dramatic note, Humanist John Swomley writes “Bill McCartney and his right-wing allies intend to build a disciplined and authoritarian army” (35).

The emphasis on shepherding and mentorship of PK men lends further insight into the composition of the group and its purpose. According to McCartney, “Nobody can go home without the same plan. Every man connected to a church, every church connected to each other. We propose that every man returns home and submits to the authority of a local shepherd” (Escobar and Murphy 2). Critics equate the use of shepherding in PK:

- to another controversial religious movement that gained prominence in the 1970s, then went underground because of the backlash it created. Called ‘shepherding/discipleship’, the movement set up a strict hierarchy and gave women a submissive role. PK denies any link, although McCartney has acknowledged being ‘discipled’ in the 1970s by one of the leaders. (Escobar and Murphy 2)

In addition to characterizing PK as a religious revival and/or a political movement, PK also works on one level as a countermovement. Randall Balmer, professor of religion at Barnard College, writes, “For many American males, feminism has been disruptive. Promise Keepers, wittingly or not, taps into a symbolic world that resonates” with them (Murphy B01). The impact of the feminist movement on the American culture has been perceived negatively among many men, specifically conservative Christian men.
PK serves as a rhetorical response to combat the efforts of feminists who call for the equal treatment of women.

Murphy argues that "McCARTNEY has marshaled the traditional Christian metaphors of militarism and athleticism to combat feminism, all behind the guise of a benevolent patriarchalism" (B01). In many ways, the rhetorical themes that emerge in Promise Keepers work on one level to undermine the feminist movement. In this way, PK works within the structures of a countermovement.

The rhetorical themes in Promise Keepers, taken together with the dialectical tension that has been created between the group and its critics give insight into the form of the group. In some ways, PK models the traditional social movement but on a deeper level, Promise Keepers challenges our current conceptualization of this rhetorical space.
CHAPTER IV

IMPLICATIONS OF PROMISE KEEPERS' RHETORIC

Leland Griffin describes social movements as a drama. The characterization of movements as dramatic in their form encompasses the dynamic aspects of any group who occupies this rhetorical space. Promise Keepers is certainly dramatic as evidenced by their rhetorical themes. These themes, controversial separately and together, have produced a dialectical tension between PK and other groups who are diametrically opposed to their world perspective. Three implications emerge from the five themes identified with Promise Keepers' rhetoric. These implications suggest that the goal of the movement is to restore men to a place of power and authority. These implications include rhetoric that shapes the group's identity, rhetorical themes that work to together to undermine the groups who oppose PK, and rhetoric that challenges the current social order.

Shaping the Identity of the Group

The success of PK depends entirely upon the ability to attract men to the organization, and to encourage future and lasting participation in their day-to-day lives. These men, including the leadership of PK, constitute the immediate audience. The audience in general, however, represents any person who has come into contact with PK, whether through a conversation with a Promise Keeper, reading an article in the newspaper, or seeing PK rallies featured on television. The private audience of PK, the men who attend weekend rallies and participate in weekly accountability groups, are shaped and molded by rhetorical messages that are more concentrated and direct than the
public rhetoric espoused by PK men. In theory, the men who come to PK rallies for the first time leave as different men. Men who are confronted every day with moral dilemmas in their families and careers leave rallies with solutions to their problems and the problems of society. The solution for both is a strong male model. Men who have difficulty being “real men” have their manhood re-defined according to PK’s prescriptions.

Promise Keepers’ rhetoric represents a strategic form aimed at redefining the male standard. As Cathcart points out, these rhetorical messages bring identification of the individual with the movement (86). PK succeeds when the group is bound together by a common identity. This identity is achieved through aligning the group with other social movements and characterizing the group as marginalized. As Pulido observes, marginalized groups do not inherently share a common identity. The process to build a shared identity among the participants of PK is achieved in a number of ways including PK “interaction and struggle with other groups” (39).

The events that led to the creation of PK are represented in the persona of Bill McCartney, PK founder. McCartney’s personal and public life, in a community known for its political and religious diversity, models the reality of many men in the United States today. The picture of the average PK man is white, middle class, Christian, married, and well educated. How can PK organizers successfully argue that they, and other men just like them, are a marginalized group? The number of all-male groups that emerged across the nation in the late 80s and early 90s demonstrates the need for men to affirm their identities. Contemporary society is fragmented along many lines, one of the most noticeable lines is gender. All-male groups, while different in their approach, point
toward the growing feeling among men that their "identities have been maligned, distorted, or subject to attempted erasure by the dominant society" (Pulido 46). Changes over the latter half of the century have changed the face of the family and the church. Women's participation in the public sphere is one of those changes. While seen as positive by most people, many men's groups point the finger at the Women's movement, particularly feminists, as being responsible for the breakdown of society. The emergence of women into arenas that had one time been the exclusive domain of men is threatening to some men. Do men believe they have become expendable? However one might answer such a question, the point remains that as long as men perceive themselves to be expendable, and remain confused over their place in society, such a perception works as reality. The changes in our social fabric have reached a point where men feel compelled to respond. The response of PK is to recapture a time past. Craig Gingrich-Philbrook notes that this process is one which attempts "to recover the past [and] always reflects our disability and/or refusal to acknowledge or counter-represent our contemporary situation(s)" (22).

PKs' success in drawing huge crowds of men to their weekend rallies is the first step in rebuilding men's broken egos and confused identities. Before men are introduced to the first speaker, or participate in the weekend activities, the male ego begins its journey by way of a football stadium. The stereotypical vision of men bonding over football is cleverly adapted by PK where the home team is replaced by God, Jesus, and Christian men, the opposing team the Devil, feminists, homosexuals, atheists, non-Christians, and any other group who does not embrace PK theology. The playbook is a mixture of biblical passages and PK theology barked out by a lineup of Christian coaches
who instruct men the way a high school football coach would prepare his team for the state championship. Men are able to construct a positive identity through participating with other men in the culturally sanctioned arena where violence and competition are commonplace and men compose the teams, the sidelines, and the crowds.

The use of sports arenas for PK events and the lineup of PK speakers who employ sports and war terminology does little to re-define the male identity. In fact, these rhetorical strategies only work to reinforce the image of the macho man. Men's faith is channeled through simulating football games, baseball games, and wars within the context of Christianity. Men are motivated to act on their Christian faith by speakers who draw on men's love for sports. Bill McCartney, who works as a source of identification for men, further reinforces the image of the macho man.

McCartney represents the ideal image of the college football coach. Inside or outside the locker room, McCartney's persona is always the winning coach and he addresses his audience as if they were his own team. McCartney responds to men's confusion over their identity by placing the blame on society. He incites men's emotions by characterizing today's man as effeminate. Effeminate men are at the other end of the spectrum from a truly macho man, and McCartney's rhetoric sends the message to men that in order to be godly men, they must be macho men. McCartney's emphasis on the sissified male builds a sense of identification among PK men by allowing men to visualize themselves in contrast to gay men. As noted, McCartney and other PK leaders openly condemn homosexuality. A godly man, then, is not homosexual. Again, the macho standard is strengthened.
Aligning God and Jesus Christ with essential maleness further reinforces the image of the macho man. PK speakers emphasize Jesus’ maleness by referring to one story from the life of Christ in which he clears the temple because he was angry. The figures of God and Jesus are cast in a militaristic image as both are characterized as the generals of an all-male army preparing for war. McCartney tells men “God has brought us here to prepare us” (Swomley 10), indicating to men that it is God’s plan for them to fight the war against every “pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God” (Novosad 26).

Finally, PK completes the picture of the macho male by defining women according to an outdated feminine standard. Men are told that women need and want to be led, protected, and set up on a pedestal. Women are described as submissive and passive. As one PK speaker notes, women should be treated like queens. The problem with such treatment is that women are left in a state of inaction. Women are told to sit back and let men make all the decisions regarding family, home, and faith. PK’s prescription of the macho man leading his submissive woman attempts to resurrect a time and place in the past. These men do not take into consideration the changes that have occurred over the later half of this century, namely the fact that most women are not passive or inactive but dynamic agents in their homes, churches, and careers.

PK’s attempts to re-build the wounded male identity become interesting as one considers the next step in the process, namely the call for men to act more like women. Just as McCartney and Jesus are used to cast the macho male image in a positive light, they also are used as a source of identification as men embrace their more feminine sides. McCartney, for example, shares with PK audiences his failure as a father, husband, and
man. He tells stories that are deeply personal, reaching out to other men and proving that even a football coach can be vulnerable. Jesus is described as tender and gentle. Men embrace one another, cry openly, and share their own personal stories with one another.

The call for men to embrace more feminine qualities such as tenderness and sensitivity, smacks of hypocrisy given the emphasis PK leaders place on men to move away from the sissified male standard perpetuated by society. The identity of men is accomplished by two strategies that are in sharp contrast to one another--in one moment men try to recapture the lost macho male of the past and in another men are told to act like women. These contradictions, however, do not appear to cause any dissonance among the all-male audience, in fact, these men eagerly accept the message.

The project to redefine the male identity is reinforced through the participation of men in accountability groups. Men are certainly more likely to model their behavior around PK theology if their participation is ongoing. Men who attend accountability groups are able to take the rhetorical messages handed out at rallies to their small groups. PK organizers recognized early on that their rallies would be just like church camp--the thrill would wear off after a few weeks. The creation of small groups keeps men accountable to PK and allows the group to carry out the large scale mission to refine men along an internally conflicted model of manhood that emphasizes traditional male stereotypes such as aggression and competitiveness with feminine stereotypes including tenderness and compassion.

The rhetorical strategies employed to redefine manhood may contradict one another, but they also compliment one another by appealing to men's sense of
victimization and their need to affirm their identities in positive ways. PK capitalizes on men's sense of victimhood, challenging the very notion of what it means to be the victim.

**Trivializing the Victim**

Rhetorical strategies to redefine the male ego extend the boundaries of our understanding of the victim. PK's efforts to solve the confusion felt by many men over their identity works to further marginalize those groups who are already oppressed by a patriarchal structure. After years of unsuccessful attempts to subvert the work of the feminist movement, PK has come onto the scene with a new and innovative solution: co-opt the ground of women, homosexuals, and other marginalized groups by turning the relationship between the victor and victim around. Now, men are the victims in the hands of liberal interests who consider men expendable.

Until the emergence of PK, men have not had their own large scale movement designed to specifically address identity problems experienced by men. Restoring the broken male ego is achieved by telling men to continue to act out their macho impulses, while at the same time adopting the positive behaviors of women. In the past women have been defined as hysterical, intuitive, submissive, passive, unintelligent, unassertive, and with other disparaging terms. Nowhere does PK rhetoric encourage men to adopt these behaviors. Instead, PK participants co-opt the positive qualities that are considered feminine. This strategy works to further marginalize women as a group and undermine their legitimate claims to equality. These claims are transformed into the very reasons that men's authority has been usurped. Women are reduced to two categories—those who embrace PK theology and are willing to assume a submissive role in the home and church, and those who reject PK's rhetorical schemes. The latter are characterized as
trouble-makers, who are not only anti-men but anti-Christian. PK rhetoric places Christianity and feminists at opposite extremes, forcing women to choose between two equally oppressive standards. On the one hand, women may hold to their Christian ideals at the cost of submission and, on the other, women are faced with being labeled anti-Christian in order to work for equality.

Another striking aspect of this rhetorical strategy lies in PK's resistance to accepting blame for the problems that exist in society. PK men point to forces outside of their immediate control as being responsible for the crumbling moral structure of society. The conservative and fundamentalist men who comprise the majority of men in PK blame the feminist movement for the breakdown of the family and the displacement of the male from the authority role in the family and church. Jerry Falwell has even gone so far as to suggest that PK will replace the "anti-Biblical feminist movement" (Gilkeson 4). Men as aggressive leaders are offered as the solution to our nation's problems. Placing the blame on the feminist movement and other groups who fall outside of PK theology further allows PK to label themselves as victims, thereby justifying the need for these men to build for themselves a positive group identity. These groups are demonized and given responsibility for the ills of society.

PK has cultivated an us-versus-them mentality, creating a clear distinction between themselves, as the protectors of all things good, and those outside their theology as the harbingers of evil in American society. Those who have been identified by PK as enemies make up, in part, the public audience. Groups who do not support the work of PK range from the far left to the far right, and both have created a dialectical tension between themselves and PK. As Cathcart points out, responses from outside the
movement play a key role in shaping the perceptions of the movement, and also work to
guide the development of the movement. The responses of groups such as feminists,
homosexuals, and atheists to PK has produced a distinctive conversation in the public
sphere that addresses the concerns of each.

In the same way that PK has co-opted the ground of marginalized groups, these
groups have played a role in the direction of the group. Over the last two years, as PK
has become more and more popular, media attention to the group has been shaped in part
by the concerns of those who oppose PK. Accusations lodged at PK that challenge their
theology and ask PK to answer questions surrounding their political intentions are
answered by PK leaders in half-truths. PK redirects the attention of its critics by
emphasizing their benign religious purpose. Groups, including NOW, accuse PK of
being anti-woman, intolerant, and narrow minded. Atheists, homosexuals, feminists, and
other concerned people continue to warn others of the politically charged rhetoric of the
group. In response, PK denies these accusations with broad and general references to
their main purpose, forging relationships between Christian men.

The dialectical tension created by groups outside of PK gives rise to a larger
question centered on the goals of the movement. Given the enormous negative response
of groups to the astronomical growth of PK, it appears that PK’s goals are diverse. Given
this diversity, it would seem difficult to reduce PK to one overarching theme. This, in
fact, is not the case. Overall, the dialectical tension that has risen between PK and other
groups points toward the efforts made by PK to protect a waning patriarchy.
Patriarchy and the Social Order

Over time, men have created a patriarchal world view that has guided the social order. The patriarchal structure in the United States has been reinforced in a number of ways. These measures include gender indoctrination, educational deprivation, denying women access to their own histories, dividing women from one another, and rewarding women who conform to these restrictive standards. All of these measures are aimed at the submission of women. Today, however, given the changes in family life, the economy, religion, and other social forces, men have been forced to face the reality that the patriarchy they inherited is in jeopardy. In essence, PK is the contemporary answer for men who miss a patriarchy that goes unquestioned and is allowed to operate without outside agitation. PK trains men to resurrect a male standard that operates on the premise that men are the sole leaders in their families, churches, and society at large.

The training men receive to reclaim their male authority takes place within the context of a social movement. Given their demographic profile, it would appear these men have little need or reason to create a social movement. The project to protect patriarchy has taken on a new face by casting men as victims of an unfriendly social order. Rhetorical themes that work together to reinforce a patriarchal world view are cloaked in religious talk, thereby appearing to those within the group that PK’s goals are for the good of society at large. One cannot help but take a close look, however, at the words of PK speakers such as Tony Brown, who tell men “the emphasis on the patriarchal family must involve no compromise” (Swomley 35).

The strategies used within the movement to reinforce patriarchy are numerous. Men’s egos and identities are re-built around appeals to traditional stereotypes that elicit
images of the athlete and soldier. While there are female athletes and soldiers, PK rhetoric molds men using a standard that tells them they must be macho in order to be godly men. Nick Trujillo, in his analysis of media representations of Nolan Ryan, points out the features of hegemonic masculinity prominent in American thinking that emphasize physical force and control, occupational achievement, familial patriarchy, frontiersmanship, and heterosexuality (290). PK utilizes several of these features, reinforcing the macho male standard. American society celebrates athletes and our enthusiasm for sports is unparalleled. The application of sports and war metaphors "encourage men to forever compete with one another, never trusting and never feeling, and to regard women as frail underlings who are far removed from the panoply of patriarchal pugnacity and privilege" (Sabo and Runfola 334). At the same time, PK co-opts the positive behaviors of women, further marginalizing women as a group, and pushing them further away from the social order. Women are simply left with the negative characteristics associated with being female. PK also creates a false dichotomy between godly men and sissified men. Men understand that to be sissified means either to be gay or to be submissive to a woman: both of which are considered sinful in their version of the Christian faith.

PK events are touted as religious gatherings of men. Men who attend PK rallies for the first time are primarily drawn by PK's religious emphasis. Historically, Christianity and patriarchy go hand in hand. The message to protect patriarchy is addressed through a Christian context by applying a limited number of biblical passages that are patriarchal in nature. Furthermore, Jesus Christ, the central figure in Christianity, is characterized around a macho male standard. Essential manhood is equated with the
figure of Christ. Men are left to interpret the message, and the message is cleverly linked
to their strong faith. The mark of any outstanding Christian is someone who is Christ
like. In the end, men understand that they must be their own patriarch in order to
measure up to the standard of Christ.

Patriarchy is further reinforced through political appeals to the PK audience.
While PK maintains, and will continue to maintain, that they are not political, this is not
the case. Griffin's reminds us that all movements are political, whether they are overtly
political or not. He writes, “all movements are essentially political, concerned with
governance or dominion, the wielding and obeying of authority, that politics above all is
drama” (Griffin 456). In the case of PK, the immediate need to reinforce patriarchy is
channeled through appeals to men to take the messages they receive at PK events and
apply them in the political world. Notable leaders of the group, including McCartney, are
politically active and willing to share their position on these issues. The association of
PK with controversial political and religious figures such as Jerry Falwell further
demonstrates their political position. These figures support PK monetarily and as
featured speakers at PK events. Finally, PK's largest event, “Stand in the Gap,” held on
the Mall in Washington, D.C., demonstrates the link between a Christian patriarchy and
politics. The weekend event was attended by a number of men, including notable
politicians such as Senate Majority Leader Republican Trent Lott, Republican Strom
Thurmond, Republican Mike Enzi, and Republican David McIntosh (PK Watch 1). The
enthusiastic support from conservative, Republican politicians only reinforces these
ideas.
PK rhetoric that is politically charged undermines the voices of marginalized groups in society who fall outside of PK's theology. These political issues include curbing the rights of homosexuals, banning abortion, curbing the separation between church and state, and eliminating the feminist movement. All these concerns point toward PK's desire to replace the existing social structure with a more narrowly defined patriarchy, one that leaves little room for groups such as women and homosexuals.

In the past, the patriarchy instituted in the United States has not been inclusive of all men. Instead, white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant men constituted the patriarchy. PK has expanded the boundaries to include men of color in this elite group. It appears then, that PK men are more willing to allow men of color to participate in the patriarchy than to stretch the boundaries to include women or homosexual, sissified men. The rhetorical appeals for racial reconciliation in PK are designed to appeal to men of color who are willing to accept, adopt, and implement a patriarchal way of life. The call for racial harmony only skims the surface of racial tension and turmoil within our country. PK does not address the institutional racism rampant in the United States. While PK is willing to call men to action in the political arena to fight against issues such as abortion, PK does not encourage men to fight for racial equality in a political sense. Instead, PK offers hugs and tears as the solution to racial inequality. The absence of any substantive rhetoric in this area clearly indicates PKs' unwillingness to solve the problems faced by men of color. It seems that PK is simply interested in new recruits to fight the battle to restore patriarchy.

The goal to restore the waning patriarchal structure in the United States is a lofty one. PKs' rhetorical themes all work together to accomplish such a goal. It appears
though, that perhaps the rank and file of PK has not gotten the message, or is reluctant to admit it. The men discussed earlier, who are not identified as PK leaders and speakers, seem to share a common interest in affirming their faith and solving the problems of society. Their comments and observations indicate that they do not perceive PK to have an agenda, particularly a political one. Given the dynamics of a social movement, and its capacity to forge a group identity among its members, the men of PK hear the message but do not characterize it the way their critics do. The emphasis on Christianity clouds the underlying rhetorical themes in PK, making it difficult for men to identify any hidden agenda. Critics of the group warn that “the vast majority of men who attend PK rallies probably know very little about the beliefs or church affiliation of the speakers who appear. The lecturers are accepted as authorities on Christian living simply because they say they are Christians and believe the bible” (Andrews 16). The possibility arises that these men, motivated by their Christian faith, will become sponges, soaking up any and every message of the PK leadership. Journalist Frank Rich, however, does not buy the warnings. After attending a PK weekend rally, he concludes “the Promise Keepers I met at Shea [stadium] seemed more motivated by Robert Bly-esque hunger to overcome macho inhibitions and reconnect with God than by any desire to enlist in a political army” (Rich 21).

The implications that arise from the five rhetorical themes in PK are all related in the goal of PK to restore a strong patriarchy to the family and church. These implications lead toward answering the three research questions posed in chapter one, and point toward future areas of inquiry surrounding Promise Keepers.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

McCartney's vision to find other men who shared his tribulations and trials began with seventy-two men in Boulder, Colorado, and has grown into the Promise Keepers movement that has swept across the United States. Promise Keepers has come to represent the collective voice of men who adhere to a fundamentalist and conservative world-view, directed by the belief that a strong patriarchy is the answer to our nation's problems. The rhetorical themes discussed thus far demonstrate these ideas and allow for a better understanding of the three research questions posed in Chapter One. First, Promise Keepers and the rhetorical responses of outside groups constitutes a dialectical tension. Second, Promise Keepers does operate as a social movement, but is unlike other movements of the past. Finally, the project to protect patriarchy has been assumed by PK, expanding our traditional understanding of the means by which patriarchy is reinforced. These three questions, as well as the implications discussed in chapter four suggest future questions to be asked by the critical scholar.

The first question put forth in this analysis of Promise Keepers considers the direct, confrontational responses of those outside the group. These responses have not arisen from one group or interest but have come from both conservative and liberal voices. Christians, atheists, feminists, homosexuals, and non-Christians have all paid close attention to the growth of PK, warning society that their goals and intentions are not honorable. Among these groups, the National Organization for Women (NOW) has deployed its own counter-attack by organizing as a collective to undermine the PK
organization. While NOW does not model the establishment, on one level their efforts work as a counter-movement against PK. Lucas notes, "investigating countermovement rhetoric in defense of established ideas and institutions" is an important aspect of studying the social movement (265). NOW does not represent mainstream ideas overall, but with regard to women's rights, NOW does advocate equality among the sexes. Given the changes in the family and workplace that have been discussed, the belief in equality is mainstream. This support for equality is the momentum behind NOW's efforts to destroy the PK movement. These women, like most others, do not object to men taking responsibility for their actions with regard to family and work. At the same time, the underpinnings of such changes work to create an inequality between men and women with the creation of a safe and loving patriarchal world. NOW and other women maintain that a patriarchy--no matter how it is characterized--works against their efforts to bring equality to all human beings.

The interplay between PK and outside groups who oppose their growth addresses the second research question. The analysis of PK rhetoric suggests a distinct set of patterns working together to understand the form of the group. These patterns indicate that PK is far different from social movements of the past, as seen in their composition, theology, and rhetoric. Given these differences, our current understanding of the social movement is challenged. Earlier in this study, social movements were defined as a collection of persons who work together to alter, redefine, or reinforce the social order. Clearly, PK's mission to change men and change society represents the form of a social movement. The men within PK agree that their needs and goals cannot be accomplished
in any other way. They have been let down by the social structure in the past, making the social movement an attractive alternative. In keeping with scholars such as Smith, Windes, Cathcart, and Griffin, PK’s rhetoric is the vehicle by which the movement is carried, and their goals are apparent from an inspection of their rhetoric.

Beyond the broadly defined movement, PK challenges our understanding of social movements. This challenge is bound up in the complicated aspects of PK. These complications revolve around how one defines the establishment. Those within the group would agree that men no longer constitute the establishment. Instead, PK believes women, homosexuals, atheists, and other liberal groups constitute the establishment and have replaced men. On the other hand, those outside of the group who oppose the growth of PK would argue that men still make up the establishment, and the patriarchal structure is alive and well. Cathcart writes, “only when the clash is fundamental to the essences of the established order is a dialectical clash created in the moral arena” (272). PK, working either to replace the order or reinforce the existing order, creates dialectical tension in the moral arena. Just as McCartney’s home, of Boulder, Colorado, is divided along religious, political, and social lines, so too is society. This division makes it difficult to determine who is in fact, the established order. This diversity, then, helps to explain why PK has co-opted social movement strategies, thereby displacing truly marginalized groups in society such as minorities, women, and homosexuals.

The division between groups in contemporary society further reinforces the argument that we live in a period where people are fragmented along a number of lines. Such fragmentation makes it difficult to identify the innovational movement. Perhaps in 1975, when Smith and Windes coined the term innovational movement, the ability to
describe and define the establishment was possible. Today, though, the effort to reinforce the existing structure, class arrangement, value and moral code, and other components of the establishment depends on how one conceptualizes it. From the perspective of groups such as women and homosexuals, Promise Keepers represents a concerted effort by men to reinforce the existing social structure. PK men would argue that they are the victims of an unsympathetic social order that has pushed them out of their leadership positions.

In one sense, PK indicates a point in time where men have joined forces with one another to combat the progress made by liberal social movements of the past. Drawing on the work of scholars such as King and Andrews, PK modifies the administrative responses used against social movements in the past. PK has adopted the rhetorical strategies employed by the Berkeley administration in the 1960s in response to student protests. In the same ways that Berkeley downplayed the concerns of student, PK has responded to their opposition by shifting the grievances of these groups to broader concerns. PK also uses a number of politically loaded phrases to demonize their enemies, such as equating the feminist movement with the breakdown of the American family. Finally, PK maintains that through their theology the "rights" of everyone will be better protected than the existing liberal establishment.

On a larger level, administrative responses to social movements sometimes gain enough momentum to work as their own social movement, namely as a countermovement. Private citizens or public authorities, in response to an existing movement, organize countermovements. Just as PK presents complications in understanding innovational movements, so too does the countermovement become difficult to recognize. The countermovement’s fundamental purpose is to defend the
establishment. As I have discussed, defining the establishment is no longer a simple pursuit. For that reason, it can be argued that PK is a countermovement, or that groups who oppose PK are a countermovement. The efforts of interested groups such as NOW, who have launched their own campaign against PK could also be defined as a countermovement.

Unlike other more notable social movements, PK's popularity has grown out of its religious theme. All the rhetorical themes in PK are shrouded in religious references, and men who attend PK functions most often cite their religious faith as motivation for attendance. PK's success at blending old time religion with popular issues works to reinforce the patriarchy and represent the new prototype of the American religious movement. PK has tapped into the sentiment among many Americans that our traditional morals and values have gone astray. The movement to reinstill these values within the fabric of our society has been taken up by PK. Unlike most religious revivals of the past, PK is a shrewdly marketed movement that incorporates multi-media communication, men's love for sports, and their sense of faith. This blend appeals to men and women alike in ways that other Christian groups such as the Christian Coalition have not. PK's success indicates that many Americans respond kindly to men labeling themselves as victims, and those who support the movement, within and outside of the group, are willing to trade off some of their freedom for a patriarchy that will protect them. Quite simply, many Americans believe that Christianity and patriarchy are the solutions to the problems in society today.

Promise Keepers is remarkably different from other social movements of the past in its structure. The pairing of large weekend rallies with small accountability groups
works together to build a permanent structure driven by PK theology. Russ Bellant observes, “these [rallies and small groups] give PK an ongoing, durable membership, local presence, and capacity to mobilize. PK calls this ‘the funnel model’ and it is unique in scale and conception” (2).

On another level, the Promise Keepers movement models the feminist movement during the 1960s and 70s. Just like women were perplexed about their identities during this period (and continue to be today), today’s men are confused over their identities and many have responded to the “perplexing puzzle of being a man” (Gilbreath 25). The weekend getaways and retreats with John Bly and his Iron John workshops paved the way for the growth of PK. In the 1960s and 70s, consciousness raising groups became popular among feminists. These groups were essentially focused inward and gave women the opportunity to bond with other women by sharing stories and emotions. PK has adopted this aspect of the feminist movement, encouraging men to do the same.

The parallels between PK and the feminist movement are ironic, given the tension between the two groups. Furthermore, PK’s co-optation of these aspects of the feminist movement work to demonstrate how the group has capitalized on the positive aspects of the feminist movement in order to undermine feminists.

Promise Keepers functions as a social movement. Beyond this simplicity, understanding PK within the context of other social movements and social movement research becomes troublesome. PK challenges the descriptions and prescriptions of social movement scholars who all appeared to work under the guise that the establishment was a constant variable that could be defined at any time. This is not the reality in contemporary society. PK demands that we expand our horizons with regard to
the social movement, no matter how PK describes itself or how others describe the group. The current political and social climate complicates the analysis of social movements today. People divide themselves along many lines, and each believes that they are the victims of those groups who are in opposition to their worldview. The result is an establishment that can be defined and redefined according to the observer. The lack of clarity concerning the establishment opens the door to any group who wants to channel their voice through the vehicle of the social movement.

PK’s co-optation of the rhetorical ground known as the social movement indicates that any group, whether they are truly marginalized or not, can occupy this space to give voice to their grievances. PK is complicated in that it represents a number of aspects of the social movement. In one moment, PK appears to be an innovational movement working to reinforce the existing social structure. PK would hesitate to label itself an innovational movement, arguing that liberal groups who are in direct opposition to their conservative perspective have displaced them. PK’s modeling of administrative responses to social movements in the past also demonstrate that these strategies can be expanded and applied within the context of a movement. Now, administrations can go one step further to discount social movements by becoming their own social movement. The clever adaptation of the vocabulary of a social movement, such as labeling oneself a victim, turns the table on its opposition by co-opting their ground.
Reducing Promise Keepers to one type of social movement ignores the
dynamic and clever adaptation of a number of aspects with regard to this
rhetorical space. Promise Keepers operates on different levels thereby expanding
our current understanding of social movement theory. PK clouds the distinctions
between victor and victim, confusing the ways we understand or identify the
marginalized or victimized group. The current state of ambiguity with regard to
the establishment allows any group to pit itself against the establishment, leaving
the definition of the establishment up to the group at hand. PK has defined itself
in direct opposition with the established social structure, thereby allowing them to
work outside the structure as a social movement. These changes suggest that
social movement terms are losing their quasi-independent status producing a more
complicated standard by which we analyze the social movement. In the end, the
emergence of PK affirms that social movements are not the sacred ground of
marginalized groups. Instead, social movements, like most every other rhetorical
space, can be co-opted by the dominant group. The emergence of PK into the
world of the victimized allows the group to advance its theology and perspective
from the vantage point of the victim. The final research question addresses the
relationship between PK and patriarchy. This relationship is plainly established in
the analysis of PK’s rhetorical themes. Unlike rhetorical strategies in the past
which reinforced patriarchy, PK does not directly reinforce the patriarchy by
addressing women, but instead they focus on men. The effort to re-establish a
waning patriarchy demonstrates the changes that have taken place in American
society. Although groups such as women continue their fight for equality, the
face of the family, church, and workplace have changed over the years as more and more women have taken leadership roles in these arenas. These changes, while not suggesting that equality has been achieved for women, threaten a patriarchal structure. James Fredal observes, "patriarchy is not a monolith, nor is it ever finished. Like other ideologies and practices of domination, patriarchy constantly must be reproduced and maintained rhetorically" (175). The project to defend patriarchy has been assumed by PK, who recognize that numerous American men have been impacted by these changes and tempted to abandon patriarchy. PK tackles these concerns through the application of rhetorical strategies such as advocating male leadership in the home and church, co-opting the positive behaviors of women while hanging on to a macho male standard, applying sports and war terminology to appeal to men's inner warrior, the use of political rhetoric, and the call for racial reconciliation between men in order to broaden the scope of the patriarchy. These strategies acknowledge that a patriarchal society depends on both sexes learning to adapt and adopt this belief system.
In her 1991 book, *Backlash*, Susan Faludi writes,

hostility to female independence has always been with us. But if fear and
loathing of feminism is a sort of perpetual viral condition in our culture, it is not
always in an acute stage; its symptoms subside and resurface periodically....these
episodes of resurgence, such as the one we face now, can accurately be termed
‘backlashes’ to women’s advancement. If we trace these occurrences in
American history, we find such flare-ups are hardly random; they have always
been triggered by the perception--accurate or not--that women are making great
strides. (423)

Faludi traces a number of backlashes that have occurred in the United States, noting that
in the late 1970s, the evangelical right worked together to undermine the work of
feminists. Later, in the 1980s, a fundamentalist theology took root in the American
consciousness, working its way through politics, all the way to the White House. Today,
Promise Keepers have assumed the tradition of backlash against the achievement of
women. Unlike its predecessors, PK does not work within the social structure, but
instead has co-opted the ground of women. This crafty strategy takes blaming women to
new heights, allowing men to label themselves victims who are at the mercy of feminists.
One basic tenet of the feminist movement is its belief in equality for all people. Today’s
feminist movement not only addresses the concerns of women, but also works for
equality of other groups who have also been victimized by the patriarchal structure.
Truly marginalized groups share this common bond, and in the past many of these groups
have worked together in their efforts to address the abuses of the social structure.
PK's list of enemies goes beyond the feminist movement, blaming all liberal groups for the lack of strong values and morals in today's society. Our traditional concept of patriarchy has been broadened and redefined by PK. Unlike past efforts, PK adopts a new perspective to re-enforce patriarchy. Its efforts are directed at men who have given over some of their leadership role to their wives, producing more egalitarian marriages. PK blames everyone but themselves for the breakdown of contemporary society, hoping men will return to a time when men were the sole leaders in every aspect of life. In addition to broadening our horizons with respect to current social movement theory, the growth of PK is an alarm to the critical scholar. The challenge to the critical scholar lies in one’s ability to call attention to discourses that become so dominant that other types of discourse are supplanted and characterized as troublesome and disruptive to the status quo. Like every type of domination, those who control the rhetorical space for all people must constantly preserve this state. Sonja Foss observes, “to maintain a position of dominance, a hegemonic ideology must be constructed, renewed, reinforced, and defended continually through the use of rhetorical strategies and practices” (295).

Today, Promise Keepers has introduced a new strategy to maintain their dominant status, thereby marginalizing already victimized groups. A critical perspective on PK looks beyond the surface messages of this group that encourage men to build lasting relationships with one another. Under the surface, PK advances a world view that undermines the voices of alternative groups who do not adhere to a patriarchal viewpoint.
The historical perspective taken in this study of PK rhetoric allows for a deeper understanding of the forces that work to keep one group dominant over all other groups. The benefit of this viewpoint goes beyond the generation of new theory, bridging the gap between academe and the outside world. Patriarchy does not benefit everyone who willingly participates. In fact, patriarchy denies all people their right to self-determination and freedom from oppressive forces. The men who reap the rewards of a patriarchal world pay the price by diminishing the participation of those who fall outside of their paradigm. Every group offers their own unique insights and the opportunity to fully appreciate all people, but PK makes such an opportunity unlikely. Scholars who employ a critical perspective in their own work can continue to call attention to the Promise Keeper movement by exploring other areas of the group that are equally important. An investigation of the responses of women, whose husbands and boyfriends are Promise Keepers, offers a better understanding of how PK has impacted the daily lives of women. A wife of a Promise Keeper was quoted in the *Dallas Morning News* saying, “a true Promise is the true solution to Women’s rights.” What differences separate the women who endorse the PK movement and those who oppose it? Perhaps better understanding these differences will allow for an improved comprehension of the ways by which men reinforce patriarchy and the way that women participate in their own subjugation by patriarchy. A second area in need of exploration is the treatment of PK by the media. Aside from alternative publications such as *The Humanist*, more mainstream publications have shed the PK movement in a positive light. The relationship between patriarchy and the media has been observed in the past, confirming that dominant groups are able to create a hegemonic ideology by controlling the means of communication.
The differences and similarities between the public and private discourse of PK are also in need of attention. One of the goals of this study was to ascertain the differences and similarities between primary and secondary documents. The number of primary documents used in the study does not compare in number to the secondary documents used. PK literature needs to be assessed more fully in order to discover whether there is a notable difference between public and private discourse in the organization. The majority of rhetorical messages considered in this project are taken directly from second hand accounts of journalists and writers. Interviews of PK men and attending actual PK rallies will provide the critical scholar with direct means of analyzing PK rhetoric. Finally, the relationship between the rhetorical messages of PK leaders and speakers and the influence these messages have on the rank and file of the movement need to be established.

To continue the inquiry into Promise Keepers by addressing these questions and others will help to confirm the statements made here about PK’s impact on current social movement theory. Social movements have been, and continue to be, a unique rhetorical space in the landscape of American history. The effort to understand movements through a rhetorical lens will remain a dynamic field of study within the context of communication studies.
In Chapter One, I recognize that in any study “different socially located viewers will activate the meaning of a text differently” (Fiske 406). Were a Promise Keeper to consider the rhetorical themes of the group, he would certainly identify themes that do not emphasize the controversial rhetoric discussed here. The organization of PK rallies does not call attention to the more covert messages such as politically charged rhetoric. Speakers do not title their sessions “The Political Agenda of Promise Keepers” or “The Army of Men Fighting to Undermine the Rights of Certain Groups”. Despite this, the themes identified in this study consider the rhetoric of PK over a four year period. These themes, however uncomfortable they would make a Promise Keeper, must be recognized and addressed by those within the organization and those outside of PK. The five rhetorical themes considered here, indicate that there is far more to this group than their religious motivation.

The call for men to be more responsible fathers and husbands is a project that cannot be limited to Promise Keepers or a patriarchal structure. Labeling men as the leader and placing on them the responsibility of making decisions in all aspects of life places an unnecessary burden on men and does not acknowledge the leadership abilities of women. PK places the blame for the problems in society on women and other disenfranchised groups while ignoring the reality that patriarchy has been in place far longer than the efforts of these groups to bring about equality for all human beings. In the end, no matter how one characterizes patriarchy, the continued project to protect it insures that solving contemporary problems in American society will never come to pass.
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