A COMPARATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THE EDITORIAL POSITIONS
OF THE CHRISTIAN CENTURY AND CHRISTIANITY TODAY
ON SELECTED SOCIAL AND MORAL ISSUES

THESIS

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

For the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

By

Denton, Texas
December, 1985

This study compared the editorial positions of two magazines, The Christian Century and Christianity Today, on seven social and moral issues, then compared each magazine's positions with the opinions of their intended audiences.

A directional content analysis was conducted that determined the editorial positions. On all four issues for which comparison was possible, the magazines demonstrated a marked difference in direction.

These positions were compared with the published opinions of those social groups identified as representative of each magazine's intended audience. There was marked disagreement between each magazine and its intended audience on three of the five issues for which comparison was possible.
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. DATA COLLECTION AND RESULTS</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. INTERPRETATION OF THE DATA</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. SUPPLEMENTARY ANALYSIS</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. CONCLUSIONS</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Number and Percentage of Paragraphs in Two Magazines Relevant to Seven Social Issues</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. A Comparison of the Editorial Direction of Two Magazines on the Issue of Anti-abortion Legislation</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. A Comparison of the Editorial Direction of Two Magazines on the Issue of Increased Social Spending</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. A Comparison of the Editorial Direction of Two Magazines on the Issue of The Equal Rights Amendment</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. A Comparison of the Editorial Direction of Two Magazines on the Issue of School Prayer</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. A Comparison of the Editorial Direction of Two Magazines on the Issue of Anti-pornography Legislation</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII. A Comparison of the Editorial Direction of Two Magazines on the Issue of Enforcement of the Death Penalty</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII. A Comparison of the Editorial Direction of Two Magazines on the Issue of Homosexuals as Teachers</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IX. Number of Paragraphs and Per Cent of Total Space Devoted to Seven Assertions in Two Magazines</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X. Coefficients of Imbalance for Two Magazines on Six Social Issues, Ranked by Strength</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
XI. A Comparison of Favorable and Unfavorable Scores for Two Magazines and Their Intended Audiences on the Issue of Anti-abortion Legislation 49

XII. A Comparison of Favorable and Unfavorable Scores for Two Magazines and Their Intended Audiences on the Issue of Increased Social Spending 52

XIII. A Comparison of Favorable and Unfavorable Scores for Two Magazines and Their Intended Audiences on the Issue of the Equal Rights Amendment 54

XIV. A Comparison of Favorable and Unfavorable Scores for Two Magazines and Their Intended Audiences on the Issue of School Prayer 57

XV. A Comparison of Favorable and Unfavorable Scores for Two Magazines and Their Intended Audiences on the Issue of Anti-Pornography Legislation 59

XVI. A Comparison of Favorable and Unfavorable Scores for Two Magazines and Their Intended Audiences on the Issue of the Death Penalty 61
# LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Coefficients of Imbalance for Six Values in Two Magazines</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Comparison of Two Magazines and Two Social Groups on Anti-abortion Legislation</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Comparison of Two Magazines and Two Social Groups on Increased Social Spending</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Comparison of Two Magazines and Two Social Groups on the Equal Rights Amendment</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Comparison of Two Magazines and Two Social Groups on School Prayer</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Comparison of One Magazine and Two Social Groups on Anti-pornography Legislation</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Comparison of One Magazine and Two Social Groups on the Death Penalty</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background

When turn-of-the-century Christian liberalism needed a spokesman for its platform of idealistic social reform, the social gospel, one young magazine, The Christian Century, answered the call. Adopting the causes of social reform, pacifism, ecumenism, and civil rights, The Christian Century became the "house organ of Protestant liberalism"\(^1\) during the first half of the century. One researcher assessed The Century's influence in 1952:

> "Published weekly, this organ of liberal, social-gospel Protestantism has been among the most influential of religious publications among thoughtful people with ethical concerns. . . . In general, the magazine refractions an American middle-class Protestantism, rooted in the traditions of puritanism and pragmatism, and it is an organ intellectually committed to social, religious, and political liberalism."

However, in the same way that liberalism's hold on Christian theology would not go unchallenged later in the century, neither would The Christian Century's "house organ"

---
\(^1\) Dale Suderman, "A Failure of Liberalism," Post American, IV (October-November, 1975), 22.


1
status go unchallenged. Neo-orthodoxy had gained a foothold in American Christian thought in the 1930s and 1940s. Championed in the writings of Carl F. H. Henry and popularized in the preaching of Billy Graham, conservative Christianity offered an answer to traditional Protestant liberalism. Neo-orthodoxy, or neo-evangelicalism, would have its own opinion organ, and so, in 1956, Christianity Today was formed with Henry as its editor and Graham among its founders. Henry stated the case in the inaugural issue:

> Theological liberalism has failed to meet the moral and spiritual needs of the people. Neither the man on the street nor the intellectual is today much attracted to its preaching or theology.

> Christianity Today would draw from "an increasing group of evangelical scholars throughout the world," Henry promised, who would "expound and defend the basic truths of the Christian faith. . . ." In this capacity it became, in the words of historian Martin Marty, "chief spokesman for what is styled 'neo-evangelical' Christianity."

Over the years, these two magazines have continued in their respective roles as spokesmen for the Christian left and right generally. They have distinguished themselves among a crowded field of religious periodicals as the two

---

4 Ibid., p. 20.
chief independent opinion magazines that address a wide range of social issues.\(^6\) Therefore, *The Christian Century* and *Christianity Today* symbolize, and perhaps epitomize, the theological division among Christians today.

Yet the two publications have much in common. Both are independent of denominational control, though *The Christian Century* was in the early years a publication of the Disciples of Christ. Both are magazines of opinion and news aimed at leadership, both clergy and laity, in America's Christian churches and institutions. They are similar in format and formula. In both, articles are divided into three major sections—editorials, feature articles and news articles—and editorial opinion is expressed in all three divisions, though to a lesser degree in the selection and slant of news articles.\(^7\) Both are published in the Chicago area, though their readers are fairly well distributed geographically.\(^8\)

More important for this study, they both were born out of social conscience. *The Christian Century* devoted its

---


\(^8\) Consumer Rate and Data Service, *Consumer Magazines and Agri-Media*, LXVI (October 27, 1984).
energies to liberalism's promised social reform in the early years, and later opposed militarism, racial discrimination and a myriad of other perceived social ills. Christianity Today, though in many ways formed to oppose the social gospel emphasis of The Century, was itself a reaction to the failure of Protestant Fundamentalism to meet the social needs of "suffering humanity," in the words of Henry.

Although social concern provides a common bond between The Christian Century and Christianity Today, it also provides one of the clearest examples of their differences, according to their current editors. Century editor James Wall said Christianity Today tends to spiritualize social issues, but V. Gilbert Beers of Christianity Today said The Century politicizes matters of faith. With a subscriber list of only 35,500 heavily weighted with mainstream religious heirarchy, The Christian Century is open to criticism of elitism. With 185,000 subscribers,

---

9 Suderman, p. 22.


11 Wall and Beers.

12 Ibid.


14 Wall.

15 Ulrich's, p. 1331.
Christianity Today is considerably larger. While it cannot claim any mass appeal, it does rank among the popular, even populist, religious magazines.

Exactly how different are these two publications, and how well does each represent the thought of its intended audience? Does The Christian Century mirror mainline Protestantism? Does Christianity Today accurately reflect the opinions of those who call themselves evangelicals? Or are there members of these two faith groups who do not find their opinions represented in either publication? Finally, how well does the combined appeal of these two leading magazines cover the spectrum of Protestant opinion?

The successes of The Christian Century and Christianity Today can be attributed in some part to their historic abilities to identify and address specific areas of concern among Christians. Therefore, it is legitimate to ask if the magazines are now speaking to identifiable present-day concerns of Christians, particularly on social and moral issues, since this will be a major factor in any future successes of the magazines. The face of American Christianity is changing rapidly, with recognizable theological trends already on the horizon and presenting new challenges for the religious press. Will the new Religious Right find a spokesman in Christianity Today? Will The Christian Century benefit from the theological fallout of the new fundamentalism through a liberal/moderate backlash?
By some measure, these questions are being answered now in the way the two magazines are addressing social issues.

Problem

How do *The Christian Century* and *Christianity Today* compare in their editorial positions on social and moral issues? How accurately do these positions reflect their intended audiences? What implications do these findings have on the abilities of *The Christian Century* and *Christianity Today* to represent Protestant opinion?

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to establish the editorial positions of *The Christian Century* and *Christianity Today* on selected social and moral issues by determining the direction of editorial and feature content of each magazine on these issues. A supplementary analysis compared these positions with the opinions held by each magazine's intended audience.

Hypothesis

To solve the problem posed in this study, research was designed to prove or disprove this hypothesis: There was a marked difference in the content direction in *The Christian Century* and *Christianity Today* when both treated, in editorials and/or feature articles during the period 1980-1982 inclusive, the following issues: a ban on abortions,
tougher pornography laws, the death penalty, the Equal Rights Amendment, homosexuals as teachers, school prayer and social spending.

Two additional hypotheses directed the supplementary analysis: 1) There was a marked difference between the editorial opinions expressed on the selected social and moral issues in The Christian Century and the opinions expressed on these issues by those identified as mainline Protestants in the Gallup survey, Religion in America: 1982; 2) There was a marked difference between the editorial opinions expressed on the selected social and moral issues in Christianity Today and the opinions expressed on these issues by those identified as evangelicals in the Gallup survey, Religion in America: 1982.

Review of Literature

The near absence of critical research in the field of Protestant journalism prior to 1960 led Martin Marty to label the phenomenon the "invisible" Protestant press. In 1961, historian Nelson Burr also found the presence and influence of the American religious press to be unexplored territory of research. Two studies from this

16 Marty, pp. 8-11.

early period did warrant our attention, however, and both were directed at The Christian Century.

In 1947, Virginia Beck Smith examined the treatment of Catholics in The Century during the period 1944-1945.18 John Theodore Hefley in 1952 conducted a topical study of The Century between 1920 and 1941 to record the magazine's treatment of politics, economics, the arts, social issues, philosophy and religion.19 Though the work provided a helpful history, it did not supply a useful methodology for content analysis.

More recently Dale Suderman studied the history of The Christian Century's opposition to the Vietnam War up to 1975.20 A study very similar to Suderman's was conducted by John Oliver in 1975, critiquing Christianity Today's treatment of the Vietnam War and civil rights.21 In 1976, Robert Zawoysky examined Christianity Today's position on racial conflict and capitalism between 1956 and 1968.22 None of these studies was a serious attempt at content analysis, however, and they served only to broaden the historical background for our research.


19Hefley. 20Suderman. 21Oliver.

Very few studies sought to compare two or more magazines. Two such efforts deserved mention here. In 1976, Henry S. Waterhouse surveyed changes in the editorial policies and physical makeup of Christian Life, Eternity and Moody Monthly, all evangelical lifestyle magazines, from 1954 to 1974. One aspect of that study placed each magazine's content into broad categories of news, features, advertisements, promotion, departments, fiction and art. The findings were irrelevant to our study.23

The most helpful research in the field came from James Wade Jewell, who in 1979 studied the social conscience of three evangelical publications—Christian Herald, Christianity Today and Moody Monthly.24 Jewell designed a content analysis that measured the amount of editorial space devoted by each magazine to seven areas of social concern during the period 1969-1978. The areas were peaceful coexistence, U.S. poverty, ecological awareness, care of the aged and impaired, prison ministry, world relief and general social concern. Since Jewell's study covered ten years, he was able to determine trends in the magazines' treatment of the issues, although he found little change in the amount


of their combined coverage of social concerns during the period. Christianity Today was the only magazine studied showing a significant increase in the amount of coverage.

The chief limitation of Jewell's research was that it did not gauge direction of content. Social concern was indicated by the amount of space dedicated to certain topics, with no consideration of the editorial positions taken on those topics. The study was further limited for our use because it examined only evangelical magazines, with no representation from mainline Protestant publishing.

Justification

Previous research efforts in the field of Protestant periodical journalism involved only one magazine or a group of magazines within a narrow theological range. No study sought to compare the editorial positions of major opinion magazines from opposing camps within the Protestant theological spectrum.

Studies by Smith, Hefley, Suderman and Oliver examined the editorial positions of either The Christian Century or Christianity Today on various social or moral issues, but none was a serious attempt at quantitative content analysis. Neither did any study establish the direction of editorial content devoted to social concerns in Protestant magazines.

25 Ibid., p. 61. 26 Ibid., p. 62.
Conspicuously absent from research in the field was any attempt to compare the editorial positions of Protestant periodicals with the opinions of their intended readers.

This study provided a content analysis of the editorial positions of two diverse Protestant opinion organs, and thus established a relationship between research factors that had previously only been studied independently. Additionally, this study measured not only the amount of editorial content devoted to selected social and moral issues in these two magazines, but also the direction of that content, adding a dimension of analysis missing from all previous studies in the field. Finally, we supplemented this primary study with a secondary comparison of the resultant editorial positions with the reported opinions of each magazine's intended audience on the selected social and moral issues, adding still another unexplored dimension of analysis.

Limitations

The content analyzed was limited to materials labeled as editorials and feature articles in the two magazines. Headlines, subheads, artwork, poetry, photographs, cutlines and author biographies were excluded. The social and moral issues studied were representative only, in no way comprehensive of all legitimate social concerns. Since the material examined appeared within a relatively narrow time span, 1980-1982, our study did not establish any trends in
editorial treatment. It did establish the direction of editorial treatment, but did not measure intensity of direction per se. While the number of items devoted to the social issues were of interest, the focus of the study was instead to establish the editorial position of each magazine on those issues. For the purposes of the supplementary comparison, the opinions of the intended audiences of each magazine were necessarily limited to those attributed to evangelicals and mainline Protestants in Religion in America: 1982.

Methodology

To test the proposed hypothesis, a directional content analysis was conducted of The Christian Century and Christianity Today. Serving as the universe for this study were the editorials and feature articles published in the two magazines during the period 1980-1982 inclusive.

Only those items identified in the table of contents of each issue as "Editorials" or "Articles" were considered, since these were singled out by the editors of both magazines as most expressive of editorial opinion. The 1980-1982 time frame was used in order to correlate our primary study with the supplementary comparison involving Religion in America: 1982, the research for which was conducted in our study's median year, 1981. The 1980-1982

27Wall and Beers.
time frame also protected us from most of the effects on editorial opinion caused by the change in editors that occurred at Christianity Today in late 1982. 28

The Christian Century, a weekly, is published forty-one times a year. Christianity Today is published twenty times a year. Since it is unlikely the two magazines would treat our selected issues more than a few times, if at all, in a three-year period, we did not sample the universe. We instead conducted a census of all editorials and feature articles that appeared in the magazines during the period.

Only the text of those editorials and feature articles were be studied. Headlines, subheads, artwork, poetry, photographs, cutlines and author biographies were excluded. While these materials would be relevant in any study of the impact of content, impact was not a part of this study.

The unit of analysis was the paragraph. We did not measure column inches, nor in any other way account for varying lengths of items or paragraphs. Comparisons between the two magazines were based primarily on the direction of editorial treatment, not on the amount of space devoted to the selected issues. Since the unit of analysis was important mainly for comparison within a magazine, we needed only assume paragraphic homogeneity for each magazine in order to establish a useful unit of analysis.

28 The November 12, 1982, issue was the first to list as editor V. Gilbert Beers, who succeeded Kenneth Kantzer.
Each paragraph in the universe that made reference to one or more of the selected issues was considered relevant and assigned to the coders, even if it appeared in an apparently unrelated article or editorial.

Three coders were used, each reading all relevant units. The coders' duties were three-fold: 1) to determine if a paragraph in the universe made reference to one or more of the selected issues, 2) to determine which issue or issues were involved, and 3) to determine the direction (favorable, unfavorable or neutral) of each relevant unit on each issue.

To guide their judgments, each coder was given a list of seven assertions, that is, seven statements defining the seven selected issues. The assertions were as follows.

1) Legislation should be passed banning all or most abortions; this included legislation at any level of government, including a constitutional amendment, but allowed for exceptions, such as in the cases of rape, incest or to save the life of the mother, so long as the net effect was to ban "all or most" potential abortions;

2) Tougher legislation should be passed against pornography; this included legislation at any level of government and covered production, sale and/or use of pornographic materials, but since the definition of pornography is part of the pornography debate, no attempt to define pornography was made here;
3) The judicial system should use and enforce the death penalty; this advocacy covered any or all crimes deemed capital offenses and included both mandatory and discretionary use of the death penalty;

4) The Equal Rights Amendment should be ratified; this referred specifically to the proposed constitutional amendment; therefore any other argument for or against equal rights for women was relevant only if the Equal Rights Amendment was cited or implied, for instance as a way to achieve equity for women;

5) Homosexuals should be allowed to teach in public schools; since, of course, homosexuals do now teach in public schools, if only because their sexual preference is undetected or ignored, the focus of this issue was on action that would permit or deny avowed homosexuals the right to teach;

6) Vocal, group prayer should be permitted in public schools; this did not mean silent prayer or meditation, nor was it a question of the use of school facilities for non-curriculum religious activities ("equal access" issues), but referred to vocal prayer, either in unison or led by an individual, that is part of classroom exercises;

7) Government spending for social programs should be increased; since this was a broad area, it included support for or opposition to any specific social program that would require an expenditure of public funds.
The coders determined if each relevant unit favored, disfavored or was neutral toward the assertion or assertions involved. The coders were instructed to count as relevant any unit that stated or implied an opinion, cited others' opinions, or presented an argument to advance an opinion.

If a paragraph included references to more than one assertion, it was be coded for each relevant assertion. As a result, the total number of units coded from one article occasionally exceeded the number of paragraphs in that article. However, this did not skew the determination of direction since that determination was not based primarily on the amount of space devoted to the issues, but on the positions taken.

The scores of the three coders were averaged for each assertion, then percentages computed for favorable, unfavorable and neutral units for each assertion in each magazine.

These resultant percentages alone would perhaps have produced a satisfactory comparison of direction using Robert Batlin's index of imbalance.²⁹ His simple formula, applied to this study, would have taken the difference between the percentages of favorable and unfavorable units for each assertion in each magazine (that is, the net favorable/

unfavorable score), then computed the difference between the two magazines' scores to derive the index of imbalance for each assertion. 30

A more refined formula for determining imbalance was developed by Irving L. Janis and Raymond Fadner, called the coefficient of imbalance. 31 Two formulae were necessary---the first applicable when favorable units outnumbered unfavorable, the second when the reverse was true.

\[ C_f = \frac{f^2 - fu}{rt} \quad f > u \]
\[ C_u = \frac{fu - u^2}{rt} \quad f < u \]

Where:  
- \( f \) = favorable units  
- \( u \) = unfavorable units  
- \( t \) = number of units in total content  
- \( r \) = total units of relevant content

The coefficient of imbalance had several advantages over Batlin's index of imbalance. The coefficient produced a single figure that showed the relationships between favorable and unfavorable units. It also reflected the presence of neutral units in a statistically meaningful way. Finally, where units of nonrelevant material were involved,

\[ ^{30} \text{Ibid., p. 299.} \]
the coefficient of imbalance established a statistical relationship between units that expressed direction (favorable, unfavorable or neutral) and units that did not.

Applying the coefficient of imbalance to the study's seven assertions would provide a direct statistical comparison of the editorial positions of the two magazines on each issue, and therefore would prove or disprove our primary hypothesis.

The final step was to compare the editorial positions of each magazine with the opinions of each magazine's intended audience. This comparison was based on the Gallup public opinion survey *Religion in America: 1982*, which gauged the opinions of evangelicals and mainline Protestants on these same social and moral issues. Admittedly, these comparisons were somewhat precarious. The Gallup survey produced percentages of evangelicals and mainline Protestants favoring and disfavoring our seven assertions. Our study provided percentages of favorable and unfavorable editorial references, from which we deduced direction, and, through the coefficient of imbalance, gave fractional values analogous to intensity of direction. However, Gallup's percentages did not necessarily reflect intensity of direction, even if a favorable or unfavorable percentage was very high. We could, however, make some inferences about the agreement or lack of agreement between each magazine and its intended audience on our selected
issues by treating percentages of favorable and unfavorable opinion as roughly equivalent to editorial direction, and thus prove or disprove our study's supplementary hypotheses.

Organization of the Thesis

Chapter II will report on the collection of data from the content analysis. Chapter III will interpret the data. Chapter IV will report on the supplementary analysis involving Religion in America: 1982. Chapter V will state the conclusions reached.
CHAPTER II

DATA COLLECTION AND RESULTS

Coding

Each feature story and editorial in the universe was read in order to isolate the relevant units for coding. Any article that included one or more paragraphs judged to contain references to any of the seven assertions or values under study was assigned a reference number and coding card. In most cases, all paragraphs in a given article were judged relevant and assigned to the coders. However, if only certain paragraphs were deemed relevant, those units were isolated and only those were coded. Table I reports the number of units in the universe for each magazine and the number and percentage of relevant units isolated for study.

TABLE I

NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF PARAGRAPHS IN TWO MAGAZINES RELEVANT TO SEVEN SOCIAL ISSUES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Magazine</th>
<th>Total Paragraphs</th>
<th>Relevant Paragraphs</th>
<th>Percentage of Total Paragraphs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christian Century</td>
<td>14,434</td>
<td>366</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christianity Today</td>
<td>13,326</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Even though *Christianity Today* is published fortnightly and *The Christian Century* weekly, *Christianity Today* had about the same number of total units as *The Christian Century*. However, *The Christian Century* had 34 per cent more relevant units, or, relevant units comprised 25 per cent more of the total units in *The Christian Century* than in *Christianity Today* (2.5 per cent to 2.0 per cent).

A total of 638 units in fifty-six articles were isolated as relevant and assigned for coding. A coding card was designated for each article for each of the three coders. The cards indicated the number of relevant units and gave enough descriptive information to locate the assigned article.

Three coders were recruited and trained in use of the coding cards and identification of the seven assertions or values. A pretest was conducted in which all three coders scored two articles outside the study's universe. No significant problems surfaced with either the coding instrument or the coding instructions.

Results of the pretest, which involved forty recording units, were tested for reliability using Krippendorff's agreement coefficient.¹ For an article about abortion, agreement was .75, or 75 per cent above chance. For an article about the death penalty, agreement was .58, or 58

---

per cent above chance. The agreement coefficient for the second article was low enough to indicate a possible problem. However, only a complete reliability study of all data would determine if the problem was real and if its source was the coders, the value assertions or the particular article.

Reliability

Once coding was complete on the main body of data, an analysis was made of the reliability of the coding procedure. All units were tested. Basic agreement for coding on The Christian Century was 62 per cent. Adjusted for chance using Krippendorff's agreement coefficient, reliability was computed at .404, or approximately 40 per cent above chance.

Similarly low reliability was discovered for coding on Christianity Today. Basic agreement was 71 per cent, but allowing for chance agreement reduced reliability to .506, or about 51 per cent above chance.

Though no standard level of acceptable reliability exists in content analysis, agreement that does not exceed chance by 70 per cent is generally considered statistically insignificant and the conclusions drawn therefrom tentative at best. It was clear closer investigation was needed to determine and eliminate the source of disagreement.

\(^2\)Ibid. \(^3\)Ibid., p. 147.
As a measure of direction, the coding process required the three judges to score each unit or paragraph as favorable, unfavorable or neutral in relationship to the seven value assertions. This procedure resulted in a two-decision branching process, whereby the coder first had to decide if direction existed. If no direction was detected, the unit was coded as neutral. If direction was present, the unit was classified as having either favorable or unfavorable direction.

According to Krippendorff, the first decision in such a branching process is usually the least reliable decision. "For example, it tends to be much harder to obtain agreement on whether or not a particular characteristic is present in some unit than on how it is classified after that characteristic is judged present."\(^4\)

By eliminating the effect of this first decision, conditional reliability can be established by creating a subset of categories on which reliability is based.\(^5\) For our purposes, the neutral category was discarded from the reliability test and agreement computed for the favorable and unfavorable categories only. This produced much more acceptable results.

For coding units from The Christian Century, conditional reliability was established at .941, or 94 per

\(^4\)Ibid., p. 151. \(^5\)Ibid., p. 152.
cent above chance. For Christianity Today, the coding reliability was .962, or 96 per cent above chance agreement.

While these levels of conditional agreement were well within the range of acceptability, they did not provide a final answer to the reliability problem in our study. They represented the average agreement for all seven value assertions, but since the assertions would be treated, and conclusions drawn, separately, reliability would later have to be established for each value assertion.  

Results

The data were classified according to the seven assertions and the results tabulated for each. The average score of the three coders was determined for each unit. If no two coders could agree on the direction of a unit, the unit was eliminated from consideration. For each assertion, then, the number and percentage of favorable, unfavorable and neutral units were reported, as well as the number and percentage of total relevant units.

Anti-abortion Legislation

The study asked each magazine's editorial position on the assertion that legislation should be passed banning all or most abortions. Direction was expressed in 211 paragraphs of The Christian Century. Standard coder

6 Ibid., pp. 146-147.
reliability was .304 and conditional reliability was .984, or 98 per cent above chance.

Direction was expressed in 51 paragraphs of Christianity Today. However, standard reliability was .341 and conditional reliability only .352. Most of the disagreement came from one article that the coders apparently found ambiguous.\(^7\) By eliminating this article from consideration, conditional reliability was raised to 1.000, or perfect agreement. This reduced the units to 33.

Table II reports the findings for both magazines on this first assertion. There were 96 relevant units in

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE II</th>
<th>A COMPARISON OF THE EDITORIAL DIRECTION OF TWO MAGAZINES ON THE ISSUE OF ANTI-ABORTION LEGISLATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Magazine</td>
<td>Relevant Paragraphs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total Paragraphs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian Century</td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christianity Today</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Christian Century unfavorable toward restrictive abortion, but an almost equal number of units were neutral. The coefficient of imbalance was -.00233. This figure has no absolute meaning, but, as indicated in Chapter I, expresses the contents' negative direction in the context of favorable, neutral and nonrelevant material. While the figure may appear negligibly small, it is meaningful when interpreted in light of other scores for both magazines.

For example, Christianity Today displayed a favorable direction with a coefficient of .00074. With a higher percentage of favorable units in Christianity Today (55 percent) than were unfavorable in The Christian Century (45 percent), one might expect the coefficient of imbalance for Christianity Today to express more favorable direction than does the coefficient express unfavorable direction for The Christian Century. But in this case, The Christian Century's 96 unfavorable units comprise a greater percentage of all units in that magazine than do Christianity Today's 18 favorable units among its total units, and the direction expressed by the coefficient is increased proportionately.

Social Spending

On the issue of increased government spending for social programs, coding reliability was again a problem for one magazine. Standard agreement for The Christian Century was .152 and conditional reliability was .414. Again, one
article was apparently the source of the reliability problem.\textsuperscript{8} Once it was removed from the coding procedure, conditional reliability was elevated to 1.000, or perfect agreement between the favorable and unfavorable categories.

Coder reliability presented no such problem in Christianity Today. Although standard reliability was a low .095, conditional reliability was a perfect 1.000.

As with the topic of anti-abortion legislation, the two magazines showed a difference in direction on the issue of social spending (see Table III). After eliminating the one unreliable article, thirty-one relevant units were identified in The Christian Century, of which 28 showed a

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|l|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
\textbf{Magazine} & \textbf{Total Paragraphs} & \textbf{Favorable Paragraphs} & \textbf{Unfavorable Paragraphs} & \textbf{Neutral Paragraphs} & \textbf{Coefficient of Imbalance} \\
\hline
Christian Century & 31 & 28 & 0 & 3 & 0.00175 \\
\hline
Christianity Today & 53 & 1 & 29 & 23 & -0.00115 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{A Comparison of the Editorial Direction of Two Magazines on the Issue of Increased Social Spending}
\end{table}

favorable direction. The coefficient of imbalance was .00175.

Fifty-three relevant units were isolated in Christianity Today. Most were judged unfavorable to the notion of increased social spending (29 units, or 55 per cent). This unfavorable direction was expressed in a coefficient of imbalance of -.00115. The unfavorable direction found in Christianity Today was not as strong as the favorable direction found in The Christian Century.

The Equal Rights Amendment

The issue of passage of the Equal Rights Amendment was apparently the most ambiguous of the seven assertions discussed in The Christian Century, if coder disagreement is to be taken as an indication of ambiguity. Standard agreement was reported at .118, but was reduced even further by conditional reliability between the favorable and unfavorable categories (.108). Elimination of two troublesome articles raised conditional agreement to a marginally acceptable .579, while reducing the number of relevant units from 54 to 35.9

Coder agreement of 58 per cent above chance was high enough to permit analysis of the data, but any conclusions

based on the direction of The Christian Century's content on the issue of the ERA would be necessarily tentative.

It should be noted that, after eliminating the two ambiguous articles, all disagreement on this topic was contained in one unit. The disagreement on the one ambiguous paragraph appeared to be legitimate and sincere, while coding on the rest of the article produced near perfect agreement. Were this one unit isolated from the study, conditional agreement for The Christian Century would be perfect (1.000).

Perfect conditional reliability was established for coding units from Christianity Today on the topic of passage of the Equal Rights Amendment, probably because only 11 units were involved in the study. Standard agreement was also relatively high (.407).

The majority of relevant units in The Christian Century were scored neutral, according to Table IV, again indicating the ambiguity of the material. While the resultant direction was established as favorable toward passage of the Equal Rights Amendment, the coefficient of imbalance was a slight .00016.

An unfavorable direction was established for relevant units in Christianity Today. Although 73 per cent of the units were judged as unfavorable, the coefficient of imbalance was only -.00044 because relevant units comprised only .08 per cent of total content under study.
TABLE IV

A COMPARISON OF THE EDITORIAL DIRECTION OF TWO MAGAZINES ON THE ISSUE OF THE EQUAL RIGHTS AMENDMENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Magazine</th>
<th>Relevant Paragraphs</th>
<th>Total Favorable Paragraphs</th>
<th>Unfavorable Paragraphs</th>
<th>Neutral Paragraphs</th>
<th>Coefficient of Imbalance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christian Century</td>
<td></td>
<td>35</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christianity Today</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Though the measure of direction for both magazines would have to be termed weak, they again found themselves on opposite sides of the issue, this time passage of the Equal Rights Amendment.

School Prayer

In contrast to the preceding assertion, the issue of permitting vocal, group prayer in public schools produced the most reliable coding of the study. Although standard agreement for The Christian Century was only .193 on 24 units, conditional reliability was 1.000.

Standard agreement on Christianity Today's 49 relevant units was .617, highest for any of the seven assertions. Conditional agreement was also 1.000.
The direction detected in the two magazines was about equally strong in opposite directions, as shown in Table V. Seventy-five per cent (18) of the relevant units in *The Christian Century* expressed opposition to prayer in schools. No units were favorable and 25 per cent (6) were neutral. *The Christian Century*’s disapproval of school prayer was registered in a coefficient of imbalance of .00094.

**Table V**

A COMPARISON OF THE EDITORIAL DIRECTION OF TWO MAGAZINES ON THE ISSUE OF SCHOOL PRAYER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Magazine</th>
<th>Relevant Paragraphs</th>
<th>Total Paragraphs</th>
<th>Favorable Paragraphs</th>
<th>Unfavorable Paragraphs</th>
<th>Neutral Paragraphs</th>
<th>Coefficient of Imbalance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>The Christian Century</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-0.00094</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Christianity Today</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>49</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0.00119</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Christianity Today*, on the other hand, argued in favor of vocal, group prayer in public schools, with 63 per cent of relevant units (31) rated favorable to the assertion. Twice as many units were devoted to this topic in *Christianity Today* than in *The Christian Century*, which partially accounts for the fact the former’s favorable
direction (.00119) is slightly stronger than the latter's unfavorable direction.

**Anti-pornography Legislation**

Only four units in *The Christian Century* spoke to the issue of legislation against pornography. Standard coder agreement was .201 and conditional agreement was 1.000. In contrast, *Christianity Today* devoted 85 units to the topic of pornography, more than for any other assertion. Reliability was, however, a problem. Standard agreement was .204 and conditional agreement was .421. Unlike previous assertions, no one or two articles proved too ambiguous to score. Instead, coder disagreement between favorable and unfavorable categories was confined to two ambiguous paragraphs in an otherwise well-coded, 40-unit article. In all other cases where articles were excluded from consideration, it did not change the percentage of favorable, unfavorable or neutral scores appreciably. Such was not the case with this lengthy, definitive article. Rather than skew the results of the study, it was preferable to operate with questionable reliability for this assertion.

As noted in Table VI, the four units in *The Christian Century* showed a direction slightly unfavorable to tougher pornography laws (−.00002). However, it is doubtful any four units could lend enough evidence to establish direction. For this reason, these scores will be ignored in analysis.
TABLE VI
A COMPARISON OF THE EDITORIAL DIRECTION OF TWO MAGAZINES ON THE ISSUE OF
ANTI-PORNOGRAPHY LEGISLATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Magazine</th>
<th>Relevant Paragraphs</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total Paragraphs</td>
<td>Favorable Paragraphs</td>
<td>Unfavorable Paragraphs</td>
<td>Neutral Paragraphs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian Century</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christianity Today</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Christianity Today's treatment of the pornography issue, on the other hand, gave the study its clearest expression of editorial direction. Seventy-seven units spoke in favor of anti-pornography legislation, with no paragraphs scored unfavorable. The coefficient of imbalance, the strongest in the entire study, was .00523.

While the direction of content on this issue in The Christian Century was questionable at best, there is no question the editors of Christianity Today wished to endorse tougher laws against pornography.

Death Penalty

Similarly unequal treatment between the two magazines was also present on the issue of enforcement of the death penalty. The Christian Century's editorial content included
36 units relevant to the death penalty. Standard coder agreement on those units was .244 and conditional agreement was .706.

In the opinion of the coders, Christianity Today did not mention enforcement of the death penalty during the period of study. There were no relevant units detected.

The editorial direction of The Christian Century on the death penalty, reported in Table VII, was strongly unfavorable. In fact, no units were judged favorable and only four were neutral. Eighty-nine per cent (32) were unfavorable, producing a coefficient of -.00197.

TABLE VII

A COMPARISON OF THE EDITORIAL DIRECTION OF TWO MAGAZINES ON THE ISSUE OF ENFORCEMENT OF THE DEATH PENALTY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Magazine</th>
<th>Relevant Paragraphs</th>
<th>Total Favorable Par-</th>
<th>Unfavorable Par-</th>
<th>Neutral Par-</th>
<th>Coefficient of Imbalance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>graphs</td>
<td>graphs</td>
<td>graphs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christianity Today</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-.00197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian Century</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The issue of enforcement of the death penalty did not attract the attention of the editors of Christianity Today
during the period of study, but the content direction of *The Christian Century* expressed strong disapproval for the idea.

**Homosexuals as Teachers**

The final value assertion with which our study was concerned was the right of avowed homosexuals to teach in public schools. Apparently, this assertion was defined too narrowly to produce useful results, since only eight relevant units were detected in the two magazines combined.

The *Christian Century's* three units resulted in a standard agreement only equal to chance (.000) and conditional agreement of 1.000. The five relevant units found in *Christianity Today* yielded a standard agreement of .267, but conditional reliability was even lower (.160).

**TABLE VIII**

A COMPARISON OF THE EDITORIAL DIRECTION OF TWO MAGAZINES ON THE ISSUE OF HOMOSEXUALS AS TEACHERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Magazine</th>
<th>Relevant Paragraphs</th>
<th>Favorable Paragraphs</th>
<th>Unfavorable Paragraphs</th>
<th>Neutral Paragraphs</th>
<th>Coefficient of Imbalance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total Paragraphs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian Century</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.00002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christianity Today</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-0.00003</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For comparison, the results are reported in Table VIII, but no analysis will be offered on such minimal data.

Validity

The editorial persuasions of both magazines under study match well-defined theological categories. Suderman has shown The Christian Century to be representative of mainline Protestant liberalism, and Marty has assigned Christianity Today to the evangelical camp. In fact, both magazines confirm those assessments in the masthead of each issue. One would expect the results of our study, which seeks to identify the editorial direction of the magazines' contents, to confirm those observations.

In each instance where our study can establish direction (i.e., five assertions for each magazine), the editorial positions taken by the two magazines roughly match the generally held views of their respective theological camps, views that have been well documented in public opinion surveys.

This establishes an adequate level of predictive validity for our study.


CHAPTER III

INTERPRETATION OF THE DATA

General Observations

Only four of the seven value assertions under study were prominent enough in the editorial content of both The Christian Century and Christianity Today to permit comparisons to be drawn about editorial direction. The four concerned anti-abortion legislation, social spending, the Equal Rights Amendment and school prayer.

Additionally, each magazine addressed one assertion that was all but ignored in the other magazine. In the case of The Christian Century, the issue was enforcement of the death penalty. For Christianity Today, it was anti-pornography legislation.

The seventh assertion, homosexuals as public school teachers, was not addressed sufficiently in either magazine to warrant analysis.

To the extent that commitment of editorial space to an issue is an indication of the importance assigned it by a magazine, we can infer several things about how our two magazines viewed the assertions. Table IX reports the number of units and per cent of total space devoted to each assertion by each magazine. While The Christian Century
chose to devote the most units to the issue of anti-abortion legislation (211, more than for all six other assertions combined), this assertion ranked no higher than fourth in number of units in *Christianity Today* (33 units).  

**TABLE IX**

**NUMBER OF PARAGRAPHS AND PER CENT OF TOTAL SPACE DEVOTED TO SEVEN SOCIAL ISSUES IN TWO MAGAZINES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issues</th>
<th>Christian Century</th>
<th>Christianity Today</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Paragraphs</td>
<td>Per Cent of Space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-abortion Legislation</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>1.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Spending</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal Rights Amendment</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Prayer</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pornography Legislation</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death Penalty</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homosexual Teachers</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1It should be noted, however, that the number of abortion units in *Christianity Today* was reduced by 18 with the elimination of one unreliable article. Similarly, *The Christian Century*’s totals were reduced by nine units concerning social spending and 21 units on the ERA.
Even more noticeable, the issue that ranked highest in Christianity Today, anti-pornography legislation (85 units), was represented by only four units in The Christian Century. Clearly, the two magazines established different priorities for treatment of at least these two social concerns during the period 1980-1982. Moreover, in the limited context of the seven issues studied, Christianity Today evidenced a marked concern with pornography legislation, while The Christian Century developed a near preoccupation with restricted abortion.

Other issues were treated about equally in The Christian Century—the death penalty, 36 units; the Equal Rights Amendment, 35 units; social spending, 31 units; and school prayer, 24. Christianity Today's handling of these issues showed more variation—social spending, 53 units; school prayer, 49 units; the Equal Rights Amendment, 11 units; and the death penalty, no units.

This analysis of the use of editorial space is of small consequence to our study, however, since it offers no insight into the direction of content.

Analysis of Direction

We need now to turn to the analysis of editorial direction through use of the coefficient of imbalance. The coefficients reported in Chapter II tell us even more about the treatment afforded our seven assertions.
The two issues that occupied the most editorial space in the two magazines also produced the strongest coefficients of imbalance, as seen in Table X. Christianity Today's favorable position on anti-pornography legislation was the strongest direction detected in the study (.00523). The next three strongest coefficients, however, were all for assertions from The Christian Century---anti-abortion legislation (-.00233), the death penalty (-.00197) and social spending (.00175).

**TABLE X**

**COEFFICIENTS OF IMBALANCE FOR TWO MAGAZINES ON SIX SOCIAL ISSUES, RANKED BY STRENGTH**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issues of Imbalance</th>
<th>Christian Century</th>
<th>Christianity Today</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anti-abortion Legislation</td>
<td>-0.00233</td>
<td>Pornography Legislation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death Penalty</td>
<td>- .00197</td>
<td>School Prayer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Spending</td>
<td>.00175</td>
<td>Social Spending</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Prayer</td>
<td>- .00094</td>
<td>Anti-abortion Legislation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal Rights Amendment</td>
<td>.00016</td>
<td>Equal Rights Amendment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pornography Legislation</td>
<td>-0.00002</td>
<td>Death Penalty</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It can also be noted that each magazine's ranking by coefficient differs in only one instance from the rankings by number of units. Since the order is changed only slightly by adding the variable of direction, it can be argued that measurements of editorial space are a good predictor of the intensity of opinion, if not direction proper. This is important given the popularity among researchers of space measurements in content analysis.

It still remains for us to compare the two magazines' editorial directions on specific issues. As was demonstrated in Chapter II, *The Christian Century* and *Christianity Today* took opposing positions regarding anti-abortion legislation, social spending, the Equal Rights Amendment and school prayer. Let us look more closely at those differences.

On the issue of abortion, *The Christian Century* expressed forceful opposition to restrictive legislation. The unfavorable coefficient of -.00233 was the strongest for all of that magazine's positions. The editors stated their case with 96 unfavorable units and 22 favorable.

Meanwhile, *Christianity Today'*s favorable position was argued strongly, but less frequently (18 favorable and no unfavorable units), for a coefficient of imbalance of .00074. The interval between the positions, illustrated in Figure 1, was .00307, representing the second largest interval among the seven assertions.
Fig. 1—Coefficients of imbalance are compared for editorial direction on six values in two magazines.
Variation of near equal degree (.00290) was detected on the assertion that the government should increase social spending. This was an issue about which *The Christian Century* apparently felt strongly and showed very little ambivalence. The magazine's 28 favorable units and 3 neutral units (no unfavorable units) yielded a coefficient of .00175.

*Christianity Today* expressed more ambiguity on this topic. Though there were more total relevant paragraphs here (53), they were more equally divided between unfavorable (29) and neutral (23), with one favorable unit present. The coefficient that resulted, -.00115, was still among the magazine's strongest.

The issue of the Equal Rights Amendment surprisingly showed the least variation of any of the assertions (.00060). The discussion was prominent on the pages of *The Christian Century* (35 paragraphs), but most of the units were scored as neutral (26). Although there were 9 paragraphs in favor of the amendment and none opposed to it, the coefficient of imbalance was only slightly favorable (.00016).

*Christianity Today* spent less space on this topic, but evidenced a stronger direction, in this case unfavorable (-.00044). The 11 relevant units were divided as eight opposed and three neutral.

One possible explanation for *The Christian Century*'s apparent ambivalence on the ERA was the timing of the study.
During the period 1980-1982, the amendment was nearing the deadline for ratification with little prospect for passage. Several articles in the universe acknowledged this fact while addressing broader issues of women's rights, which probably resulted in more neutral scores. This factor could also account for the relatively weak direction in both magazines.

The arguments presented in the two magazines on the issue of school prayer produced the study's most nearly equal coefficients, though of course in opposite directions. The Christian Century was opposed to measures to reintroduce vocal, group prayer in public school classrooms. An unfavorable coefficient of -.00094 resulted from the 18 negative units and 6 neutral ones.

Christianity Today devoted twice as many units to this assertion (31), but they were more balanced, with 31 favorable, 6 unfavorable and 12 neutral. The coefficient of imbalance was favorable to school prayer (.00119).

The difference between the two coefficients on the issue of school prayer was .00213, which was approximately the mean variation between the two magazines on all four assertions for which comparisons were possible (.00218).

The strongest direction detected in Christianity Today concerned tougher anti-pornography legislation (.00523). This topic also accounted for more units (85) than any other. Obviously, it was a concern of major importance to
the magazine's editors, which made its omission from the pages of *The Christian Century* all the more curious. It was apparent the two periodicals differed not only in the positions taken on issues, but in the criteria that defined matters of social concern.


Regardless, we are left with these two assertions that stand alone in the two magazines during our period of study. And, like *Christianity Today* 's treatment of anti-pornography legislation, *The Christian Century* saved some of its strongest rhetoric for an argument against the death penalty. No units were judged to favor enforcement of capital punishment, but 32 paragraphs lobbied against it and 4 were neutral. This final coefficient of imbalance was -.00197, second strongest for the magazine.

**Summary**

Not only did *The Christian Century* and *Christianity Today* differ in editorial direction on four social issues, but on three of those issues their disagreement was quite
strong. The coefficients of imbalance showed an average variation of .00270 on the topics of anti-abortion legislation (.00307), social spending (.00290) and school prayer (.00213).

On the fourth assertion that provides comparison, the Equal Rights Amendment, weak approval in The Christian Century was paired with only scant attention to the topic in Christianity Today to produce the least variation of any assertion (.00060).

There were a variety of reasons for the disagreements. On the assertions of social spending, school prayer and the Equal Rights Amendment, both magazines argued their cases strongly in opposite directions. But occasionally the directions expressed were not of equal strength. On the topic of anti-abortion legislation, the strong disagreement was primarily produced by The Christian Century's adamant dislike of restrictive abortion laws. Similarly, if the absence of relevant material in a magazine could be treated as absence of direction, strong disagreement would be evident on anti-pornography legislation and enforcement of the death penalty as a result, in each case, of one magazine's strong opinions.

It is apparent, then, that The Christian Century and Christianity Today differ not only in their editorial direction on social issues, but often in the way they select, define and address those issues.
CHAPTER IV

SUPPLEMENTARY ANALYSIS

Introduction

One final aspect of analysis was to compare the editorial directions detected in *The Christian Century* and *Christianity Today* with the views of each magazine's intended audience on the same issues.

For this comparison, we will use the opinions expressed by mainline Christians and evangelicals in the Gallup public opinion survey *Religion in America: 1982.* Research for this publication was conducted in 1981, the median year of our period of study, and reported, among other things, public opinion on the six issues under consideration here.

The Gallup survey produced percentages of mainline Christians and evangelicals favoring and opposing our six assertions. However, these percentages gave no indication of the intensity of opinion, as our coefficient of imbalance claims to do with direction. Nor was there any equivalent statistical relationship between the percentages and the coefficients we reported.

---

However, by treating Gallup's percentages as roughly equivalent to our percentages of favorable and unfavorable units, we could make some cautious inferences about the agreement or lack of agreement between each magazine and its intended audience.

**Anti-abortion Legislation**

Both *The Christian Century* and the majority of mainline Christians were opposed to legislation to restrict abortion, as seen in Figure 2.

![Graph showing the comparison of the direction of editorial content of two magazines with the opinions of two comparable social groups on the issue of anti-abortion legislation.](image)

Fig. 2--A comparison of the direction of editorial content of two magazines with the opinions of two comparable social groups on the issue of anti-abortion legislation.
However, while *Christianity Today* argued strongly for such restrictions, most evangelicals were opposed to them. Table XI shows the percentages of favorable and unfavorable scores, as well as the net favorable/unfavorable score for each. From these figures we calculated the index of imbalance,² that is, the (algebraic) difference between the two scores, as a measure of the difference of opinion between the magazine and its theological group. This was also done for *The Christian Century* and its intended audience.

**TABLE XI**

A COMPARISON OF FAVORABLE AND UNFAVORABLE SCORES FOR TWO MAGAZINES AND THEIR INTENDED AUDIENCES ON THE ISSUE OF ANTI-ABORTION LEGISLATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Per Cent Favorable</th>
<th>Per Cent Unfavorable</th>
<th>Net Score (+/-)</th>
<th>Index of Imbalance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christian Century</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>-35</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainline Christians</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>-56</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christianity Today</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+55</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evangelical Christians</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>-16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Christianity Today showed greater imbalance with its audience (71) than did The Christian Century (21). There is apparently a significant difference of opinion between Christianity Today and its intended readers on the issue of restrictive abortion. The disagreement between The Christian Century and its intended audience, on the other hand, was probably not great enough to be significant, given the limitations of this type of analysis.

Social Spending

On the issue of increased social spending, reported in Figure 3, The Christian Century was at odds with mainline Christians. The magazine was strongly in favor of more money for social needs, but its potential readers were less enthusiastic (only 38 per cent favorable).

Evangelicals, on the other hand, narrowly favored the idea (49 per cent to 47 per cent), but their magazine, Christianity Today, was strongly opposed.

Regarding social spending, then, each magazine seemed to be speaking the convictions of the other's audience. The Christian Century and, to a lesser degree, evangelicals called for more government involvement in meeting social needs, while Christianity Today and mainline Christians said enough was being done. This was our study's clearest indication of significant disagreement between the magazines and their theological groups.
Fig. 3--A comparison of the direction of editorial content of two magazines with the opinions of two comparable social groups on the issue of increased social spending.

The index of imbalance between The Christian Century and mainline Christians was greater for the issue of social spending than for any other issue involving either magazine (111). Table XII indicates this disagreement was more than twice what was found to exist between Christianity Today and evangelicals on the issue of social spending (55). Still, this latter score indicates significant disagreement between Christianity Today and its intended audience. In reality, neither magazine can claim to have represented the views of their theological colleagues on this assertion.
TABLE XII
A COMPARISON OF FAVORABLE AND UNFAVORABLE SCORES FOR TWO MAGAZINES AND THEIR INTENDED AUDIENCES ON THE ISSUE OF INCREASED SOCIAL SPENDING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Per Cent Favorable</th>
<th>Per Cent Unfavorable</th>
<th>Net Score (+/-)</th>
<th>Index of Imbalance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christian Century</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+90</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainline Christians</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>-21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christianity Today</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>-53</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evangelical Christians</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>+2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Equal Rights Amendment

The Christian Century came much closer to matching the opinion of its intended audience regarding passage of the Equal Rights Amendment. Both favored the proposed amendment, as witnessed by Figure 4, though there was apparently some ambivalence among mainline Christians (62 per cent favorable and 35 per cent unfavorable).

There was evidently strong disagreement between Christianity Today and evangelicals, however. A small majority of evangelical Christians endorsed the amendment (51 per cent), while Christianity Today argued against its ratification.
Fig. 4--A comparison of the direction of editorial content of two magazines with the opinions of two comparable social groups on the issue of the Equal Rights Amendment.

A close look at the indices of imbalance for this issue, contained in Table XIII, bears out these impressions. The net favorable/unfavorable scores for The Christian Century and mainline Christians were very close. In fact, the index of imbalance was the lowest of the study (1). This was the first instance of substantial agreement noted between a magazine and its intended readers. It is ironic, and perhaps informative, that this agreement surfaced on an the issue that reported the weakest measure of editorial direction in The Christian Century.
TABLE XIII
A COMPARISON OF FAVORABLE AND UNFAVORABLE
SCORES FOR TWO MAGAZINES AND THEIR
INTENDED AUDIENCES ON THE ISSUE
OF THE EQUAL RIGHTS AMENDMENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Magazine</th>
<th>Per Cent Favorable</th>
<th>Per Cent Unfavorable</th>
<th>Net Score (+/-)</th>
<th>Index of Imbalance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christian Century</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+26</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainline Christians</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>+27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christianity Today</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>-73</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evangelical Christians</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>+5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The index of imbalance also confirmed the apparent disagreement between *Christianity Today* and evangelicals on this issue. The index of 78 was the highest among *Christianity Today*'s scores (although there were two other scores in the seventies). The extent of this difference should not be exaggerated, however, remembering there were only eleven relevant units in the magazine on which direction was based. The disagreement is significant, nonetheless.

Therefore, on the issue of the Equal Rights Amendment, we had an interesting comparison. This issue produced the least variation between coefficients of imbalance for the two magazines (.00060; see Figure 1); that is, their
positions were closest on this issue. Yet, at the same time, Christianity Today was furthest from agreement with its intended audience and The Christian Century was closest to agreement. If this proved true with other assertions, it would seem to indicate that Christianity Today's opinions are repeatedly too weak or near center for evangelicals and that The Christian Century's opinions are consistently too strong for mainline Christians.

But such an observation is only conjecture at this point and may be too taxing on the data, given the limitations of this type of analysis.

School Prayer

The topic of school prayer produced quite opposite results from the previous assertion about the ERA. Here it was The Christian Century's turn to differ strongly with its theological group, while Christianity Today came closest to agreement. Figure 5 reports these agreements and differences.

Sixty-three per cent of evangelicals surveyed favored returning formal prayer to the classroom, and half of mainline Christians agreed. However, The Christian Century was firmly opposed to the suggestion. It can be argued that mainline Christians had not made up their minds about school prayer, but their magazine showed no such ambivalence on the issue.
Fig. 5--A comparison of the editorial direction of two magazines with the opinions of two comparable social groups on the issue of school prayer.

_Christianity Today_ was in basic agreement with evangelicals on school prayer and was closer to the opinion of mainline Christians than was _The Christian Century_. The index of imbalance between _Christianity Today_ and evangelicals was six, as reported in Table XIV, lowest for any assertion involving the magazine.

Between _The Christian Century_ and mainline Christians, however, the index of imbalance was 76, third highest for that magazine. This was a significant difference of opinion on school prayer.
TABLE XIV
A COMPARISON OF FAVORABLE AND UNFAVORABLE
SCORES FOR TWO MAGAZINES AND THEIR
INTENDED AUDIENCES ON THE ISSUE
OF SCHOOL PRAYER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Per Cent Favorable</th>
<th>Per Cent Unfavorable</th>
<th>Net Score (+/-)</th>
<th>Index of Imbalance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christian Century</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>-75</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainline Christians</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christianity Today</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>+51</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evangelical Christians</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>+57</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Anti-pornography Legislation

There was not enough relevant material in The Christian Century to establish editorial direction on the issue of pornography. However, Christianity Today, evangelicals and mainline Christians were unanimous in their endorsement of tougher pornography laws. Interestingly, mainline Christians took what generally would be considered a more conservative position than did evangelicals.

Figure 6 shows that mainline Christians favored the proposal by 82 per cent, compared to 78 per cent for evangelicals. Christianity Today's endorsement of anti-pornography laws appeared stronger than all others, with 91 per cent of relevant content in favor.
Despite this strong opinion, there was relatively little difference between the magazine and its audience. The index of imbalance between Christianity Today and evangelicals was 33, as shown in Table XV.

While this could be considered a significant difference in some other application of the index, given the limitations of this particular analysis, it should be treated as unimportant, particularly since there is basic agreement on the issue between the magazine and its audience.
TABLE XV
A COMPARISON OF FAVORABLE AND UNFAVORABLE SCORES FOR TWO MAGAZINES AND THEIR INTENDED AUDIENCES ON THE ISSUE OF ANTI-PORNOGRAPHY LEGISLATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Per Cent Favorable</th>
<th>Per Cent Unfavorable</th>
<th>Net Score (+/-)</th>
<th>Index of Imbalance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christian Century</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainline Christians</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>+65</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christianity Today</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+91</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evangelical Christians</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>+58</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It would be precarious to draw conclusions from the absence of direction expressed by *The Christian Century* on pornography legislation. However, it is valid to note that the magazine apparently ignored an issue about which both mainline Christians and evangelicals felt quite strongly.

**Death Penalty**

As with pornography, only one magazine expressed direction on the assertion that the death penalty should be enforced—this time *The Christian Century*. Once again both mainline Christians and evangelicals were in agreement on the issue, both favoring capital punishment. However, *The Christian Century* chose to advance the apparently unpopular
position that the death penalty should not be used. There was sharp disagreement between the magazine and both social groups, as demonstrated in Figure 7.

Favorable
100%
80%
60%
40%
20%
0%
59% 57%
mc mc mc mc
mc mc mc mc
0% 0%
20% 40%
39% 40%
mc mc mc mc
cc cc cc cc
cc cc cc cc
cc cc cc cc
89% 89%
100%

Unfavorable
Mainline Christian Christians
Evangelical Christians
Today Christians

For the second time in our study, mainline Christians as a whole were slightly more conservative than their evangelical counterparts, with 59 per cent of those surveyed favoring the death penalty. Fifty-seven per cent of evangelicals held that position.

There was strong disagreement between both groups and The Christian Century. Table XVI reports the index of
imbalance between the magazine and mainline Christians was 109, second highest in the study for either magazine.

**TABLE XVI**

**A COMPARISON OF FAVORABLE AND UNFAVORABLE SCORES FOR TWO MAGAZINES AND THEIR INTENDED AUDIENCES ON THE ISSUE OF THE DEATH PENALTY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Per Cent Favorable</th>
<th>Per Cent Unfavorable</th>
<th>Net Score (+/-)</th>
<th>Index of Imbalance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christian Century</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>-89</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainline Christians</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>+20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christianity Today</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evangelical Christians</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>+17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If the absence of direction in *Christianity Today* is meaningful at all, then, as with *The Christian Century* on pornography, the magazine has chosen to avoid an issue about which many Americans, including *Christianity Today*’s intended readers, felt strongly. However, the impact of this choice was not so great here, since evangelicals were less in agreement on the death penalty than on pornography.

More important was the conclusion that a significant difference of opinion existed between *The Christian Century* and mainline Christians on enforcement of the death penalty.
Summary

The supplementary analysis allowed comparison between our two magazines and their intended audiences on five issues apiece. For both *The Christian Century* and *Christianity Today*, there was significant disagreement on three of the five assertions.

*The Christian Century* was in substantial agreement with mainline Christians in opposing anti-abortion legislation and approving the Equal Rights Amendment. However, regarding increased social spending, prayer in schools and enforcement of the death penalty, there was strong disagreement between the two. On these three issues, the average index of imbalance was 98.7, which indicates mainline Christians and their magazine have very little in common in these areas. The average imbalance for all issues was 63.6, which denotes significant disagreement on the whole.

*Christianity Today* and evangelicals found substantial agreement on the need for formal prayer in schools and tougher legislation against pornography. However, they could not agree on anti-abortion legislation, increased social spending and the Equal Rights Amendment. Here the index of imbalance was 68.0. For all issues, their disagreement was less pronounced than between *The Christian Century* and mainline Christians, however, with an average imbalance of 48.6. This still represents a noticeable and
significant departure from the opinions of evangelical Christians.

On a majority of assertions in our study, then, there were marked differences of opinion between the magazines and comparable social groups. Therefore, neither *The Christian Century* nor *Christianity Today* can claim to have represented consistently the opinions of its target audience.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to establish the editorial positions of The Christian Century and Christianity Today on selected social and moral issues. This was accomplished through the use of a directional content analysis of the feature and editorial content of each magazine on these issues. This produced a coefficient of imbalance for each magazine on each issue, which then permitted comparison of direction between the magazines.

The resultant editorial positions were then compared to the surveyed opinions of the intended audience of each magazine--mainline Christians in the case of The Christian Century and evangelicals in the case of Christianity Today.

The research was designed to prove or disprove three hypotheses. The primary hypothesis stated there would be a marked difference in the content direction in The Christian Century and Christianity Today when both had treated, in editorials and/or feature articles during the period 1980-1982 inclusive, the following issues: a ban on abortions, tougher pornography laws, the death penalty, the Equal Rights Amendment, homosexuals as teachers, school prayer and social spending.
The content analysis was able to establish direction on five issues in each magazine. The topic of homosexuals as teachers was not addressed sufficiently in either magazine to establish direction. From each magazine's list of five issues with established direction, four were common to both. Sufficient relevant material was not found in *The Christian Century* to establish direction on the issue of tougher pornography laws, nor in *Christianity Today* on the issue of the death penalty.

On all issues where comparison was possible, there was a marked difference in the editorial positions of the two magazines. Strong disagreement was detected on three issues—a ban on abortion, social spending and school prayer. Disagreement on the fourth issue—the Equal Rights Amendment—was not so pronounced. Since data reliability for *Christianity Today* was only marginal on this issue, little else could be said with confidence than that the two magazines apparently disagreed once again.

As would be expected, *The Christian Century* took what could be called the traditional liberal positions against an abortion ban and school prayer and in favor of increased social spending and the Equal Rights Amendment. *Christianity Today* argued the traditional conservative positions for school prayer and a ban on abortions and against more governmental social spending and the Equal Rights Amendment.
The nature of the disagreements was fairly consistent. On abortion, spending and prayer, both *The Christian Century* and *Christianity Today* argued their positions forcefully, producing an average variance of .00218 between their respective coefficients of imbalance. On the Equal Rights Amendment, however, the difference in direction was not as definite as with the other issues. The variance between coefficients was .00060, the significance of which was questionable given the low data reliability.

Neither could much significance be placed on the absence of an issue from a magazine. *The Christian Century* argued strongly against enforcement of the death penalty, while *Christianity Today* was silent on the issue. Likewise, *Christianity Today's* strongest direction was detected in defense of tougher pornography laws, but *The Christian Century* gave little space to the topic. Though useless in testing our primary hypothesis, this information indicated the two magazines differed not only in their positions on issues, but in the way they defined and addressed social concerns.

Once the editorial positions of each magazine had been established, they were compared to the surveyed opinions of mainline Christians and evangelicals found in a 1981 Gallup survey *Religion in America: 1982.*

---

hypotheses directed this supplemental study of intended audiences: there would be a marked difference between the editorial positions expressed on the selected social and moral issues in *The Christian Century* and the opinions expressed on these issues by those identified as mainline Protestants in the Gallup survey, and, correlative to this, there would be a marked difference between the editorial positions expressed on the selected social and moral issues in *Christianity Today* and the opinions expressed on these issues by those identified as evangelicals in the Gallup survey.

The supplementary analysis compared the positions of our two magazines and their intended audiences on five issues apiece. The results were surprising. For both *The Christian Century* and *Christianity Today*, there was significant disagreement on three of the five assertions.

*The Christian Century* was in substantial agreement with mainline Christians in opposing an abortion ban and endorsing the Equal Rights Amendment. However, on spending, prayer and the death penalty, there was strong disagreement.

*Christianity Today* and the evangelicals found substantial agreement on the need for formal prayer in public schools and tougher legislation against pornography. However, they disagreed strongly on the need for an abortion ban, increased social spending and the Equal Rights Amendment.
On a majority of assertions, then, there were marked differences of opinion between the magazines and comparable social groups. Therefore, neither The Christian Century nor Christianity Today can claim to have represented consistently the opinions of its target audience during our period of study.

Summary

Although this study was able to determine editorial direction in both magazines on only four of the seven social issues, the primary hypothesis was proved true. There was a marked difference in the content direction of The Christian Century and Christianity Today when they treated the same issues---in this case, an abortion ban, social spending, school prayer and, conditionally, the Equal Rights Amendment. Lack of relevant content prevented the study from determining comparative direction and drawing conclusions on the issues of pornography legislation, the death penalty and homosexuals as teachers.

The two supplemental hypotheses were proved partially true in each case. On three of the five issues for which comparison was possible, there was a marked difference between the editorial opinions of each magazine and its intended audience.

To the extent that these issues are representative of social concerns in general, the weight of the data leads us
to conclude that *The Christian Century* and *Christianity Today* differ not only with each other, which could be expected, but to a significant degree with those they consider allies.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books


Krippendorff, Klaus, Content Analysis: An Introduction to its Methodology, Beverly Hills, California, Sage Publications, 1980.


**Articles**


**Reports**


Unpublished Materials


Interviews
