

## **Making Jesus Springs: The New Geography of American Evangelicalism**

The dedication of Focus on the Family's new headquarters in Colorado Springs, Colorado, was a day to remember. The ceremony, held Saturday, September 25, 1993, began with the Air Force Chorale performing "The Battle Hymn of the Republic." Next on stage was James Dobson himself, president of Focus, the man whose stern child-rearing advice had made him a hero to millions. Focus's \$30-million headquarters, sprawling over 47 acres, testified to his influence, as did the crowd of 15,000. But, Dobson told the audience, the headquarters "is not a monument to me. This is a gift from you, our friends, to help us stand up for the family in these critical times." After Dobson came speeches from prominent evangelicals, concluding with Prison Fellowship Ministries founder Charles Colson. Where Dobson was folksy, Colson was fiery: "There is a battle going on for the soul of America.... When there's a battle going on you want to be on the front lines, and this is the front line. God bless James Dobson." Yet this ceremony was not just an evangelical affair. Sharing the stage with Dobson and Colson were Robert Isaac, mayor of Colorado Springs, and Bill Armstrong, United States Senator from Colorado. Impressive as all this was, the crowning moment no doubt came when the Wings of Blue, the skydiving team from the United States Air Force Academy (located only a few miles from Focus's new headquarters), parachuted onto the site and handed Dobson the key to the building.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> "A Day in the Life of Focus," *Focus on the Family with Dr. James C. Dobson*, November 1993, Box 28, Folder 21, Citizens Project Papers [MSS0307], Special Collections, Pikes Peak Library District, Colorado Springs, Colorado (hereafter PPLD); Steve Rabey, "Thousands help dedicate new Focus headquarters," *Gazette-Telegraph*, September 26, 1993.

Some would later recall that the skydivers gave Dobson not the key to his new headquarters but the key to the city.<sup>2</sup> An understandable mistake, for the ceremony seemed to herald the start of an evangelical age in Colorado Springs. Focus on the Family was only one of more than fifty evangelical Christian ministries to move to the city between 1980 and 1995. Little wonder that observers began to give the city nicknames like “Jesus Springs” and “The Evangelical Vatican.” But why did these ministries, ranging from the colossal Focus on the Family to one-person operations run out of a basement, decide to relocate to the foot of Pikes Peak? The city did not occupy a special place in evangelical history. Before its reputation as “Jesus Springs,” it was known nationally, if at all, as the home of the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD), assigned to scan the skies for incoming nuclear missiles. Why, then, did so many ministries descend on the city during the 1980s and ‘90s?

Answering this question reveals the intersection between urban boosterism and entrepreneurial religion. Focus and the other ministries came to the city because they heeded the call, not of God, but of the city’s Chamber of Commerce. The chamber sought to revive a local economy devastated by a real estate crash and cutbacks in federal defense spending. The ministries, for their part, found in Colorado Springs a solution to *their* economic troubles. To stay afloat most ministries relied on cheap land, cheap labor, and low taxes—and the Chamber of Commerce promised all three. As a result, ministries relocated by the dozens. But it was a migration more of evangelical institutions than evangelicals. Taken together, these ministries brought only a few hundred people to the city. The result was an odd disjuncture: a cluster of Christian ministries in a relatively secular city. The gap between the city’s reputation and its

---

<sup>2</sup> Among them: David Antoon, “The Cancer from Within,” *Truthout*, 8 November 2007 <http://truthout.org/archive/component/k2/item/74298:david-antoon--the-cancer-from-within>; Diana Jean Schemo, *Skies to Conquer: A Year at the Air Force Academy* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2010), 6.

reality made possible the culture wars that roiled Colorado Springs in the 1990s. Conservative evangelicals, over-estimating their influence, launched an aggressive campaign to turn their beliefs into public policy. What the evangelization of Colorado Springs shows, then, is how capitalism shaped the culture wars.

### **The Foreclosure Capital of America**

Urban boosters founded Colorado Springs and guided its development over the following decades. The first and most important booster was William Jackson Palmer, a Civil War general turned railroad magnate. Palmer wanted a town that would anchor his railroad network while also serving as an oasis of culture in the American West. To those ends, he and his associates founded Colorado Springs in 1871.<sup>3</sup> From the beginning, the community's leading export was its own image. This was a matter of necessity; the new community, with few natural resources and situated in a less-than-ideal location, needed to attract outside money to survive. The Colorado Springs Chamber of Commerce, founded in 1892, took the lead in recruiting outside capital. When the tourism industry that had sustained the city since its founding began to flag in the 1930s, representatives from the chamber averted economic disaster by petitioning the federal government for defense-related spending. Their efforts paid off: the city received Camp Carson, an Army base that housed tens of thousands of soldiers during World War II.<sup>4</sup> The chamber won another prize in the early 1950s, when the Department of Defense decided to place the new United States Air Force Academy just north of Colorado Springs.<sup>5</sup> Despite these

---

<sup>3</sup> Marshall Sprague, *Newport on the Rockies: The Life and Good Times of Colorado Springs* (Denver: Sage Books, 1961); Thomas G. Andrews, *Killing for Coal: America's Deadliest Labor War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 43-49.

<sup>4</sup> Ann Markusen, Peter Hall, Scott Campbell, Sabina Deitrick, *The Rise of the Gunbelt: The Military Remapping of Industrial America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 178-179; *Fort Carson: A Tradition of Victory* (Colorado Springs, CO: Fort Carson Public Affairs and Information Office, 1974), 7-24.

<sup>5</sup> George V. Fagan, *The Air Force Academy: An Illustrated History* (Boulder, CO: Johnson Books), 16-47

successes, the chamber's leadership knew the city could not rely on military spending alone. They tried to diversify the local economy, with mixed results. To lure outside capital, the chamber formed two organizations: first the Colorado Springs Industrial Foundation, created in 1958, and then the Quality Economic Development program, which replaced the Industrial Foundation in 1971.<sup>6</sup> These programs plied businesses with offers of cheap land, which led several high-technology companies to relocate to the city, beginning with Kaman Sciences in 1957 and Hewlett-Packard in 1962. But descriptions of Colorado Springs as "Silicon Mountain" were less a reflection of reality than boosterish hype. The city's boosters excelled at coming up with nicknames, which included not only Silicon Mountain but also Newport on the Rockies, Little London, and the America the Beautiful City.

Little had changed by the 1980s; the Chamber of Commerce remained one of the city's most powerful institutions. As one journalist noted, in Colorado Springs "membership in the Chamber is almost a prerequisite to success."<sup>7</sup> At this point, it seemed as if the chamber had earned its pre-eminent position, as its industrial recruitment policy fueled a boom economy in the early 1980s. Every indicator suggested that the city's economy was on the upswing in these years. Its unemployment rate was down, dropping below 6% by the end of 1985. During the same period, its annual population growth rate of almost 4% made it one of the nation's fastest-growing cities.<sup>8</sup> While these numbers were good, the real estate figures were fantastic. From 1982 to 1984, the value of nonresidential construction in Colorado

---

<sup>6</sup> "History of the Chamber," *The Chamber Magazine*, May 1982, Regional History Collection, PPLD; Chamber of Commerce report; "Sixty-sixth Annual Report of the Colorado Springs Chamber of Commerce, 1958," Regional History Collection, PPLD.

<sup>7</sup> Neil Westergaard, "Retired general boss of Chamber," *Colorado Springs Sun*, December 26, 1981, Chamber of Commerce Information File, Tutt Library Special Collections, Colorado College, Colorado Springs, Colorado (hereafter TL).

<sup>8</sup> "Forecast '86: Colorado Springs," 7, published by Schuck/Grubb & Ellis, Regional History Collection, PPLD; Dave Bamberger, "Economy: Booming or Bottoming Out?" *The Chamber Magazine*, February 1984, Regional History Collection, PPLD.

Springs jumped from about \$100 million to almost \$300 million.<sup>9</sup> Forecasters, looking at this growth, saw something more than a boom. They predicted a period of sustained growth that would continue into the indefinite future. No matter what one thought of the future, however, the facts of the present were undeniable—and they bore out the declaration of one real estate developer that in 1984 “Colorado Springs experienced its most spectacular year ever!”<sup>10</sup>

Colorado Springs had long relied on the military to sustain its economy, and the boom of the early 1980s was no exception. As the Chamber of Commerce’s magazine noted, as of 1980 “the Department of Defense directly employed over 47,000 people in Colorado Springs with a payroll of almost \$600,000,000. Combining that direct employment with other related and dependent activities the defense department is responsible for over 90,000 jobs and \$1.3 billion in annual payroll” in the city.<sup>11</sup> The military’s presence was poised to grow in the 1980s, as billions of dollars in aerospace-related funding flowed into the city. This influx began in 1979, when the city was awarded the Consolidated Space Operations Center (CSOC), which would coordinate all military-related activity in space.<sup>12</sup> Colorado Springs also won the National Test Facility (NTF), where supercomputers would run simulations to model combat in outer space. Per one estimate, the NTF would be worth as much as \$1 billion to the city.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> “Forecast ’85,” published by the Schuck Commercial Brokerage Company, 11-23, Regional History Collection, PPLD.

<sup>10</sup> “The EDC’s other full-time job is here at home,” *The Chamber Magazine*, May 1985, Regional History Collection, PPLD.

<sup>11</sup> Bill Tutt, “The Chamber Salutes Our Military Friends,” *The Chamber Magazine*, May 1982, Regional History Collection, PPLD.

<sup>12</sup> “Final Environmental Impact Statement: Consolidated Space Operations Center,” January 1981, Consolidated Space Operations Center Information File, TL.

<sup>13</sup> Kris Newcomer, “Pentagon Picks Springs for Star Wars Test Site” *Rocky Mountain News*, June 26, 1986, Consolidated Space Operations Center Information File, TL.

Business leaders, especially real estate developers, believed this federal money would transform Colorado Springs into a great city: the “Aerospace Capital of the Free World.” Real estate developer Martin List scoffed at one prediction that the military’s space program would not cause a boom: “The study should be discarded,” he declared. List certainly gambled on there being a boom. His ML Properties purchased 3,000 acres of land adjacent to the future CSOC, with plans to turn it into an “Aerospace Center” that would include a “List Institute for the Strategic Exploration of Space.”<sup>14</sup> Nor was List the only developer to engage in wild speculation. Other planned developments included the 1,082-acre Nova Technological Center, the 2,920-acre Colorado Center, and the 3,832-acre Aerospace Center.<sup>15</sup> When talking to the press, real estate developers used hyperbole as big as their properties. Martin List foresaw a new “industrial revolution” in the making in Colorado Springs, while another developer said that “Colorado stands at the leading edge of a new Renaissance.”<sup>16</sup> These exaggerations seemed almost plausible in light of soaring land values. Property once valued at \$2,000 an acre now sold for as much as \$12,000. An 800-acre ranch near the future CSOC was sold for \$5.6 million.<sup>17</sup> Real estate developers looked on with glee as defense contractors like Martin Marietta and Hughes Aircraft began placing offices in Colorado Springs. As one observer noted, “It’s the same thing they did in Houston. They come in and take 2,000 square feet, and then they come in with manufacturing space.”<sup>18</sup> The comparison to Houston was telling, as many observers predicted the military space program would transform Colorado Springs the same way NASA had transformed Houston.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> Jeffrey Manberg, “Speculating on an earthly space boom,” *New York Times*, January 19, 1986, Box 73, Folder 2, Marshall Sprague Papers [MSS0050], PPLD; Ken Western, “CSOC sending land values into orbit,” *Sun*, December 9, 1984, Consolidated Space Operations Center Information File, TL.

<sup>15</sup> Western, “CSOC sending land values into orbit.”

<sup>16</sup> Stephen Bobbitt, “Springs leaders praise Star Wars test center,” *Rocky Mountain News*; pamphlet published by SLB Company, Inc.; both from Consolidated Space Operations Center Information File, TL.

<sup>17</sup> Western, “CSOC sending land values into orbit”; Western, “Counting down to CSOC: Prairie people ready to take giant leap into Space Age,” *Sun*, December 9, 1984, Consolidated Space Operations Center Information File, TL.

<sup>18</sup> Amanda Ritchie, “Aerospace giants already here,” *Gazette Telegraph*, September 13, 1983, Consolidated Space Operations Center Information File, TL.

<sup>19</sup> Western, “CSOC sending land values into orbit,” Wayne Heilman, “Economic impact of CSOC on area unclear,” *Gazette Telegraph*, February 24, 1985, both from Consolidated Space Operations Center Information File, TL;

But within a few years, these dreams gave way to a harsh reality. Far from becoming “Aerospace Capital of the Free World,” the city instead became the “Foreclosure Capital of America.” Money from the Department of Defense proved less of a sure thing than the boosters had assumed. In the mid-1980s, Congress began to make cuts in the defense budget that drew blood in Colorado Springs. The first victim was the Shuttle Operations Planning Complex (SOPC), a \$500-million project that evaporated when Congress cut its funding in 1987.<sup>20</sup> Further reductions came in 1988, when Congress cut Ronald Reagan’s request for Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) funding from \$4.9 to \$4 billion.<sup>21</sup> These cutbacks coincided with instability in the city’s high-technology industry. As high-tech manufacturers began to feel the squeeze of foreign competition, particularly from Japan, they fled the city in search of cheaper labor.<sup>22</sup> Microelectronic manufacturing plant closures eliminated almost 2,000 jobs between 1985 and 1988.<sup>23</sup> These blows crushed the overbuilt real estate market and plunged the local economy into a recession. The dollar value of non-residential building permits slumped from \$275 million in 1984 to \$225 million in 1985 to less than \$150 million in 1986. Total land sales in that period slid from \$395.7 million to \$280.3 million, a drop of 29.1%.<sup>24</sup> Throughout the latter half of the 1980s the Colorado Springs *Gazette Telegraph* reported a seemingly endless stream of foreclosures, announcing dozens each month.

---

Manberg, “Speculating on an earthly space boom,” “Cities in Colorado and Texas Compete for the Unofficial Title of Space City,” *Wall Street Journal*, January 15, 1986, both from Box 73, Folder 2, MS0050, PPLD.

<sup>20</sup> Patrick Yack, “Pentagon’s \$70 million white elephant,” *Denver Post*, April 5, 1987, Box 73, Folder 2, MSS0050, PPLD.

<sup>21</sup> Dinah Wisenberg, “Defense budget sent to Reagan,” *Gazette Telegraph*, July 15, 1988.

<sup>22</sup> Ann R. Markusen, Yong-Sook Lee, Sean DiGiovanna, editors, *Second-Tier Cities: Rapid Growth Beyond the Metropolis* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 321.

<sup>23</sup> “Colorado Springs Economic Development Council Annual Report, 1985,” Regional History Collection, PPLD; “Business,” *Gazette Telegraph*, July 30, 1989.

<sup>24</sup> “Colorado Springs Real Estate Forecast, 1987,” published by Schuck/Grubb & Ellis, 25-26, Regional History Collection, PPLD.

The Chamber of Commerce and city government sought a magic bullet solution to these problems, which led them to embrace ideas that seem absurd in hindsight. One was “Liberty Park,” a theme park dedicated to the United States constitution. Robert Isaac, the city’s mayor, and Robert Scott, vice president of the chamber, endorsed Liberty Park, even though its founder could never explain where the money would come from. Fantastic claims about a Disneyland-sized park that would feature “a monthlong outdoor pageant of patriotic drama, song and dance” eventually yielded to reality. By 1992 even people who had once boosted the park admitted it would remain a dream.<sup>25</sup> Liberty Park looks like harmless whimsy compared with Aries Properties, the biggest, boldest, and most toxic attempt to revitalize the local economy. Frank Aries was a real estate tycoon who had made his fortune developing land around Tucson, Arizona. In the 1980s he turned his attention to Colorado Springs, whose similarities to Tucson he found “mind-boggling.”<sup>26</sup> With a \$225 million loan from Phoenix’s Western Savings and Loan, Aries purchased 22,000 acres of land east of the city and announced his plans to turn it into a self-contained community. The Colorado Springs City Council, browbeaten by Aries and blinded by their hopes for rejuvenating the economy, took the unusual step of annexing the entire 22,000-acre tract in one swoop. No one thought Aries’s scheme might fail—yet it did. Western Savings and Loan collapsed, followed soon after by Aries Properties. Aries fled Colorado for a 98-foot yacht anchored in Miami, leaving behind nothing but empty scrubland.<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> Russ Arensman, “Theme park, resort plans unveiled,” *Gazette Telegraph*, June 28, 1989; Russ Arensman, “Isaac: Park should be built—and built here,” *Gazette Telegraph*, June 28, 1989; Russ Arensman, “Liberty Park officials plan mascots, TV shows,” *Gazette Telegraph*, July 2, 1989; Joanna Schmidt, “Liberty Park design work might delay construction,” *Gazette Telegraph*, March 10, 1990; Jerry Mahoney, “So long, Liberty Park—write when you find a home,” *Gazette Telegraph*, March 8, 1992.

<sup>26</sup> Wayne Heilman, “A tale of two cities,” *Gazette Telegraph*, December 1985, Box 73, Folder 2, MSS0050, PPLD.

<sup>27</sup> Wayne Heilman, “Profile of a Gambler,” *Gazette Telegraph*, December 15, 1985, Box 73, Folder 2, MSS0050, PPLD; Wayne Heilman, “A tale of two cities,” *Gazette Telegraph*, December 15, 1985, Box 73, Folder 2, MSS0050, PPLD; Wayne Heilman, “Tucson developer has option to buy ‘future of Springs,’” *Gazette Telegraph*, October 4, 1985, Box 73, Folder 2, MSS0050, PPLD; Colorado Springs City Council Proceedings and Reports, June 28, 1988 and July 12, 1988, Regional History Collection, PPLD; Wayne Heilman, “S&L trying to reduce Aries loan,” *Gazette Telegraph*, January 11, 1989; Wayne Heilman, “Lender to Aries facing loss,” *Gazette Telegraph*, February 25, 1989; Andy van de Voorde “Greed Acres,” *Westword*, 13-19 December, 1989, Box 43, Folder 9, Banning-Lewis Ranches Records [MSS0098], PPLD.

The boosters fell back on their oldest strategy: luring outside capital to the city. This was not a foreordained result. For a moment, it seemed the recession might shatter the truths that had long guided the city's economic growth. The Chamber of Commerce commissioned the Fantus Company, a Chicago-based consulting firm, to study the city's economy and come up with a plan of action. Between September 1987 and May 1988 Fantus consultants interviewed dozens of local politicians and businesspeople and scrutinized reams of economic data. Their conclusions were grim. They noted that while Colorado Springs was growing, its growth lagged "megatrend" cities like Phoenix, Austin, and Orlando.<sup>28</sup> These cities all boasted greater amounts of available capital, superior educational facilities, and highly diversified economies.<sup>29</sup> The only solution, Fantus suggested, was for the Chamber of Commerce to merge with the municipal government, creating a public-private partnership to encourage business development.

The chamber's leadership was unenthusiastic about the possibility of merging with the city government, fearing it would rob them of their independence. They rationalized these fears by pointing to their past successes. As Robert Scott, the chamber's Vice President for Economic Development, said, "[If] we were starting from a blank sheet of paper with no history or successes, their recommendations would not be a bad idea. But we have had [a history of] successes."<sup>30</sup> The chamber did, however, implement one of Fantus's suggestions: expanding the Economic Development Council into an "Economic Development Management Council" (soon renamed the Economic Development

---

<sup>28</sup> Fantus Report, 1987, p. 2. "Megatrend" was an inescapable buzzword of the 1980s, popularized by futurologist John Naisbitt in his 1982 book *Megatrends: Ten New Directions Transforming Our Lives*.

<sup>29</sup> Fantus Report, p. 8-18

<sup>30</sup> Wayne Heilman, "Economic proposals draw mixed reviews," *Gazette Telegraph*; May 4, 1988; Wayne Heilman, "The path not taken: Most officials oppose separating Chamber and EDC," *Gazette Telegraph*, May 22, 1988

Corporation, or EDC), which would have the power to hire its own personnel and set its own policy.<sup>31</sup> Newly independent, and with a larger professional staff and operating budget, the EDC now took up the crusade to lure capital to Colorado Springs.<sup>32</sup> Leading that crusade was a woman named Alice Worrell.

### **Alice Worrell's Crusade**

Alice Neddo Worrell was an ideal person to balance the worlds of commerce and Christianity. Worrell graduated from Bethel College, an evangelical college in Mishakawa, Indiana. After a decade working for the Chamber of Commerce in South Bend, Indiana, Worrell moved to Colorado Springs in 1984 to take a job as vice president of the Chamber of Commerce's Economic Development Group (which would become the EDC). There, she had the all-important job of recruiting businesses to Colorado Springs. Worrell targeted companies ranging from plastic manufacturers to computer programmers, but in addition to these more traditional concerns she also courted evangelical Christian ministries. Here, she had an advantage, for—as she put it—she could speak the language of evangelicals. She was the daughter of evangelical missionaries and was herself a devout evangelical Christian. And it so happened that, just as Worrell was reaching out to evangelical ministries, many of those ministries were seeking to move.<sup>33</sup>

Christian ministries, like the city of Colorado Springs, confronted serious economic challenges in the 1980s. Christian parachurch ministries—voluntary organizations dedicated to a specific end, like distributing Bibles or evangelizing college students—had roots going back to the late seventeenth

---

<sup>31</sup> Wayne Heilman and Russ Arensman “Business group more independent,” *Gazette Telegraph*, August 24, 1988.

<sup>32</sup> Jerry Mahoney, “Solid job growth will come in small steps,” *Gazette Telegraph*, October 16, 1988.

<sup>33</sup> “Neddo joins EDD staff,” *The Chamber Magazine*, January 1985, Regional History Collection, PPLD; “A candid conversation with Alice Neddo,” *Colorado Springs Business Journal*, March 15, 1990.

century, but their golden age was in the United States in the decades after World War II.<sup>34</sup> The combination of an economic boom and a religious revival in the late 1940s and 1950s fueled the multiplication of these ministries.<sup>35</sup> The United States government contributed to this boom by channeling money for social services and foreign aid through nonprofit organizations, including religious ones.<sup>36</sup> Catholic and mainstream Protestant ministries benefited from this largesse, but it was evangelical Christian ministries that flourished in the postwar period.<sup>37</sup> As more evangelical Christians began to join the burgeoning American middle class, they used their discretionary income to fund ministries like the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, World Vision, and Youth for Christ.<sup>38</sup> By the late 1980s hundreds, possibly thousands, of Christian ministries existed in the United States.<sup>39</sup> But by that time the conditions that had enabled their growth were rapidly changing. Though data ministry finances are limited, it seems clear that charitable giving—the primary source of income for religious organizations—grew very slowly during these years. Between 1968 and 1991 per-member gifts to

---

<sup>34</sup> I take my definition of “parachurch ministry” from Robert D. Linder, Bruce L. Shelley, Harry S. Stout, eds., *Dictionary of Christianity in America* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 863, as quoted in Wesley K. Willmer, *The Prospering Parachurch: Enlarging the Boundaries of God’s Kingdom* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 201. On the long history of the parachurch movement, see Christopher P. Scheitle, *Beyond the Congregation: The World of Christian Nonprofits* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 26-29.

<sup>35</sup> On post-World War II prosperity, see James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945-1974* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 61-81. On the religious revival of the era, see Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith Since World War II* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 35-53.

<sup>36</sup> Axel R. Schäfer, “The Cold War State and the Resurgence of Evangelicalism: A Study of the Public Funding of Religion Since 1945,” *Radical History Review*, vol. 99 (Fall 2007), 19-50; Axel R. Schäfer, *Piety and Public Funding: Evangelicals and the State in Modern America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012); Stephen V. Monsma, *When Sacred and Secular Mix: Religious Nonprofit Organizations and Public Money* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996).

<sup>37</sup> Joel Carpenter describes the evangelical dilemma of postwar years: “Postwar evangelicals, by and large, have decided to come in from the sectarian margins of American life. They have decided, for various reasons, that they need to move to some new middle ground, leaving the realm of world-flight, entering the territory of world-engagement, but resisting the temptation to slide all the way over to world-embrace.” Ministries provided a solution to this dilemma. From “Contemporary Evangelicalism and Mammon,” in *More Money, More Ministry: Money and Evangelicals in Recent North American History*, Larry Eskridge and Mark A. Noll, editors (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000),

<sup>38</sup> Tim Stafford, “Anatomy of a Giver,” *Christianity Today*, May 19, 1997.

<sup>39</sup> Robert Wuthnow identified roughly 800 such ministries as of 1988. Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion*, 108. More recently, Christopher Scheitle has observed that as of 2007 there were “somewhere between 47,000 and 58,000 parachurch organizations,” which, even accounting for some growth since 1988, suggests Wuthnow’s estimate may have been conservative. Scheitle, *Beyond the Congregation*, 14-15.

churches, measured as a share of personal income, dropped from 3.1% to 2.5%. That was among all churches. Among evangelical churches the drop was even sharper, from 6.1% to 4.1%.<sup>40</sup> Talk of a “financial crisis in the churches” was rampant in the late 1980s and early 1990s, as numerous studies found churches and ministries struggling to make ends meet.<sup>41</sup> Ministries faced a choice: continue on the present course and hope the crisis passed or adjust to the new conditions.

Ministries, unlike congregations, were rarely tied to a specific place, and so many responded to these economic challenges by relocating. Relocation looked particularly appealing to ministries headquartered in regions with high costs of living: southern California, suburban Chicago, and the metropolitan Northeast. Many evangelical ministries moved south. SIM, a missionary ministry, moved from Cedar Grove, New Jersey, to Charlotte, North Carolina, in 1986, choosing that city over Atlanta, Georgia, and Tampa, Florida.<sup>42</sup> Trans World Radio moved from New Jersey to Cary, North Carolina in 1991. It was one of several evangelical ministries to move there, leading the *Raleigh News & Observer* to dub Cary a “Christian mecca.”<sup>43</sup> The Salvation Army moved its national headquarters from Verona, New Jersey, to Alexandria, Virginia.<sup>44</sup> Other ministries looked west: the leaders of Youth for Christ considered relocating their suburban Chicago headquarters to Dallas, Indianapolis, and Orlando before ultimately deciding on Denver.<sup>45</sup> But while these cities attracted some evangelical ministries, Colorado

---

<sup>40</sup> The figures are from John Ronsvalle and Sylvia Ronsvalle, “The State of Church Giving Through 1991,” *Yearbook of American and Canadian churches 1994* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 12, as quoted by Thomas Berg, “‘Too Good to Be True’: The New Era Foundation Scandal and Its Implications,” in *More Money, More Ministry*, 383.

<sup>41</sup> Among those books that explored this crisis were John Ronsvalle and Sylvia Ronsvalle, *Behind the Stained Glass Windows: Money Dynamics in the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996); Robert Wuthnow, *The Crisis in the Churches: Spiritual Malaise, Fiscal Woe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Willmer, *The Prospering Parachurch*.

<sup>42</sup> Kathleen McLain, “SIM Missionary Group Will Move to Charlotte,” *Charlotte Observer*, October 7, 1986.

<sup>43</sup> Debbi Sykes, “Christian organizations flocking to evangelical pastures of Cary,” *News & Observer*, February 18, 1991.

<sup>44</sup> Kathleen Bowling, “Ministries look for the Promised Land,” *Christianity Today*, 25 November 1991.

<sup>45</sup> “Youth for Christ Moving to Denver,” *Religious News Service*, June 2, 1990.

Springs was the most popular destination—partly because of Alice Worrell and partly because the city had much to offer.

With its combination of scenic beauty and cheap property, Colorado Springs had attracted evangelical ministries since the end of World War II. Young Life, which catered to high school students, became the first evangelical organization to move to Colorado Springs when it opened Star Ranch there in 1946.<sup>46</sup> Young Life was followed by the Navigators, which evangelized to college students, businesspeople, and the military. Evangelist Billy Graham, who had himself considered moving to Colorado Springs, urged the Navigators to purchase Glen Eyrie, the “castle” built by city founder William Jackson Palmer in 1871. After a frantic fund-raising campaign, the Navigators purchased Glen Eyrie in 1953.<sup>47</sup> Colorado Springs lured other ministries over the following decades. Evangelist and anti-communist Billy James Hargis purchased land there in 1962 with dreams of founding a Christian college. Those plans fell through, but a fragment of Hargis’s mission remained in the form of Summit Ministries. Led by David Noebel, Summit Ministries became a summer school teaching a conservative Christian worldview.<sup>48</sup> Then came the Christian Booksellers Association, which moved from Chicago in 1970; Bethesda Associates, which moved from Omaha in 1979; and Compassion International, which relocated in 1979.

This pre-existing evangelical community helped draw the ministries that moved to Colorado Springs after 1980. One of these was the Christian and Missionary Alliance, a denomination founded in New York City in 1887 by a Presbyterian minister. The rising cost of living drove the Alliance from

---

<sup>46</sup> Jim Rayburn, *Dance, Children, Dance* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1984), 69; Staff Bulletin, October 16, 1947, Jim Rayburn; Young Life Archives, Colorado Springs, CO.

<sup>47</sup> Betty Lee Skinner, *Daws: The Story of Dawson Trotman, Founder of the Navigators* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1974), 346-353.

<sup>48</sup> Tom Morton, “The Summit--Conservative ministries program basks in national prominence,” *Gazette Telegraph*, July 1, 1990.

New York City to Nyack, New York, in 1974, but within a decade the denomination found that Nyack's high housing costs made it impossible to hire new staff.<sup>49</sup> They began to look for new headquarters—and this was where Alice Worrell intervened. She not only lobbied the Alliance herself but also enlisted the aid of evangelical ministries already located in the Springs. In November 1987, as the Alliance's relocation committee deliberated between Colorado Springs and three other sites, Glenda Wenger of Compassion International wrote a letter to the Alliance's president. "We recently received a telephone call from Ms. Alice Meddo [sic] of the Economic Development Council in Colorado Springs," Wenger began. "She indicated to us that Christian & Missionary Alliance is considering a relocation to the Colorado Springs area." Wenger listed the factors that drew Compassion International to the city, including cheap real estate, an attractive climate, and the presence of other Christian organizations: "Colorado Springs has acquired a nickname as the 'little Wheaton of the West,'" she wrote, referring to the Illinois town that was home to the evangelical Wheaton College.<sup>50</sup> The Alliance's president received a similar letter from Lorne Sanny, president of the Navigators. Sanny extolled the city's virtues, writing "I believe you would discover Colorado Springs to have a warm supportive evangelical community as well as provide an excellent location for you." Like Wenger, Sanny noted that Worrell had contacted him.<sup>51</sup> When the Alliance's relocation committee visited Colorado Springs in January 1988, Worrell made sure they met representatives from the city's evangelical community, including Compassion International, the Christian Booksellers Association, and the Navigators.<sup>52</sup> The denomination's board of directors was convinced, and the Alliance relocated to Colorado Springs in 1990.

---

<sup>49</sup> Bowling, "Ministries look for the promised land," *Christianity Today*.

<sup>50</sup> Letter from Glenda Wenger to David Rambo, November 17, 1987, RG901, Series 2 Book 3, Christian and Missionary Alliance Archives, Colorado Springs, CO [Hereafter CMA].

<sup>51</sup> Letter from Lorne Sanny to David Rambo, November 19, 1987, RG901, Series 2 Book 3, CMA.

<sup>52</sup> Agenda, January 11, 1988, RG901, Series 2, Book 4, CMA.

Just as important as the evangelical community was the economic climate created by the real estate crash. The economic downturn had driven down wages in the city—and ministries needed cheap labor. The Alliance’s relocation committee might have been attracted by the presence of other ministries, but their report also made sure to note that “COLORADO SPRINGS IS AN ECONOMIC PLACE TO HIRE HELP” and that “new hiring can be done at noticeable savings over the present costs and competitive rates.”<sup>53</sup> Within a year of moving to Colorado Springs the Alliance expanded its workforce from 75 employees to 110. Cheap labor also mattered to the OC International. Founded by missionary Dick Hillis in 1950, by the late 1980s the ministry had changed its headquarters four times. The OC International was now hobbled by the high costs of labor and housing in California’s San Jose metropolitan area. Moving to Colorado Springs was an attractive way to cut costs, particularly labor costs, for, as the ministry’s relocation committee noted: “Currently, there is under-employment in the area, with a large labor pool and labor rates [that] are significantly less than the Milpitas area and less than the Sacramento area.”<sup>54</sup> Many other ministries that moved to Colorado Springs over the following years took advantage of the area’s cheap labor, demonstrated by their decisions to quickly expand their workforces on arriving. HCJB Radio hired 20 people in Colorado Springs, compared to the 30 employees that relocated from Miami; the Association of Christian Schools International planned to move 10 to 15 people from La Habra, California to Colorado Springs and hire another 15 to 20 people there; Every Home for Christ planned to move 30 employees from Los Angeles and hire another 30 in Colorado Springs.<sup>55</sup> Low wages proved as useful in winning ministries as in winning manufacturers.

---

<sup>53</sup> “Report of Relocation Committee to General Council 1989,” RG901, Series 2, Box 4, Folder 1, CMA.

<sup>54</sup> Paul Yaggy and Don Wyckoff, “Report of a Feasibility Study,” June 1, 1989, Box 70, Folder 6, OC International records [CN222], Billy Graham Center Archives, Wheaton, IL [Hereafter BGC].

<sup>55</sup> Steve Rabey, “Ministry to move to Colorado Springs—Radio group to bring 50 jobs,” *Gazette Telegraph*, October 9, 1991; Rabey, “Christian school group follows Springs move of Focus on the Family,” *Gazette Telegraph*; “Christian group picks city,” Morton, *Gazette Telegraph*; “1991 Annual Report,” Box 30, Folder 16, Citizens Project Papers [MSS0307], PPLD.

Cheap property mattered even more than cheap labor, and, thanks to the real estate crash, Colorado Springs had plenty to offer. This, even more than the labor pool, swayed OC International. Their relocation committee wrote that “[T]he only assets available to OC for this move are represented in the Milpitas building and property,” meaning any move was contingent on finding property cheaper than their existing headquarters.<sup>56</sup> Of all the cities the committee considered—which included Dallas, San Antonio, and Phoenix—Colorado Springs was the only one that “offered...possible deals for a new headquarters building, including a proposed trade.”<sup>57</sup> One possible deal was the city’s Union Pointe building. Built in 1984 at the height of the real estate boom, it had struggled to find tenants. No more than 10,000 of its 36,000 square feet was leased at any one time. The property was ultimately taken over by the Resolution Trust Corporation (RTC), chartered by the federal government to handle foreclosed property. OC International eventually spent \$750,000 to purchase Union Pointe.<sup>58</sup> They were not the only ministry to move into foreclosed property. If any one building symbolized the evangelical migration, it was the Lexington Center at 7889 Lexington Drive. Foreclosed on by a Chicago mortgage company in 1988, by 1991 the center was home to four ministries: Global Mapping International, Every Home for Christ, Athletes in Action, and NavPress.<sup>59</sup> From foreclosed property to evangelical property: Colorado Springs in microcosm.

Colorado’s changing tax system also lured ministries. In 1989, the state exempted almost all religious bodies from property taxes, a drastic change caused by two developments. The first took place in the Colorado legislature, where Senator Terry Considine, a Republican and evangelical, sponsored a bill that would allow religious bodies, rather than the tax assessor, to define what “religious worship”

---

<sup>56</sup> “Project Blue—An Interim Status Report,” Paul Yaggy, OC International Records, Box 70, Folder 6, BGC.

<sup>57</sup> “Project Blue—Decision Matrix Rankings,” OC International Records, Box 70, Folder 6, BGC.

<sup>58</sup> Steve Rabey, “Missionary Group to Buy Office Building in Springs,” *Gazette Telegraph*, August 24, 1991.

<sup>59</sup> Steve Rabey, “Building in Briargate finds religious niche,” *Gazette Telegraph*, August 18, 1991.

meant. This empowered religious organizations to decide what was exempt from property taxes. The bill responded to complaints by churches upset about being taxed for engaging in seemingly non-religious activities like running a kindergarten. Considine called a diverse group of religious figures to testify in the bill's favor, including William Frey, Episcopal bishop of Colorado; Raymond Howard, consultant to fifty of the state's evangelical churches; and Charles Goldberg, attorney for the Catholic Archdiocese of Denver. They all delivered some variation on Frey's message: "The current practice in Colorado seems to put the state in the unenviable role of trying to define what religious worship is. I'm grateful for that burden being shifted back to the churches."<sup>60</sup> This argument—that taxing religious bodies forced the state to decide what was and was not religious—persuaded the Colorado legislature to pass Considine's bill and Governor Roy Romer to sign it into law.<sup>61</sup>

The second development was the Colorado Supreme Court case *Maurer v. Young Life*, decided in 1989. Young Life, a Christian ministry that relocated to Colorado Springs in 1946, had a long-running feud with the state's property tax assessor over the status of several campgrounds it owned. Young Life argued that these camps were used for religious worship and therefore should be exempt from property taxes. The assessor's office countered that hiking and horseback riding did not count as "worship" and that the properties should be taxed. Young Life and the assessor had already clashed once over this issue, a clash resolved by the Colorado Supreme Court in *Young Life v. Chaffee County* (1956), which had held that the camps ought to be taxed. But circumstances had changed by the 1980s. When the Colorado tax assessor sought to collect property taxes on the camps, Young Life appealed to Colorado's Board of Assessment Appeals, which declared the properties tax exempt. The case eventually reached the Colorado Supreme Court. Their decision in *Maurer v. Young Life* reversed their 1956 decision. The

---

<sup>60</sup> Testimony to the Senate Finance Committee, March 2, 1989, audio recording, hearing on SB237, Colorado State Archives, Denver, CO.

<sup>61</sup> Brian Weber, "Despite no new taxes, taxpayers will pay more," *Gazette Telegraph*, May 21, 1989.

court now held that “any nonreligious aspects of the outdoor activities sponsored by Young Life are necessarily incidental to Young Life’s use of its properties for religious worship and reflection.”<sup>62</sup> Their ruling dovetailed with Considine’s argument: the only way to keep government and religion separate was to broaden the tax exemptions for religious bodies.

Even with its low-wage labor, cheap property, and favorable taxes, Colorado Springs sometimes lost in the struggle for ministries. Such was the case with Campus Crusade for Christ. Campus Crusade had enjoyed success in evangelizing college students since it was founded by Bill Bright in 1951, but the ministry never achieved financial stability. In the mid-1980s the ministry sought to put its finances in order by moving its headquarters out of San Bernardino, California. In November 1988 Bill Bright announced that Campus Crusade would choose between Atlanta, Dallas-Fort Worth, and Charlotte. In January 1989 Colorado was added to the list. Representatives from Colorado Springs quickly pressed their case. Alice Worrell traveled to Campus Crusade’s headquarters in early March 1989 and promised to provide the ministry with cheap property and financial contributions from local businesses. Her case was persuasive: Campus Crusade signed a “letter of intent” in late July to purchase a Colorado Springs mall left vacant by the real estate crash.<sup>63</sup> But the deal fell through, because Campus Crusade wanted its new property to be a blank slate—and to move into a mall would force them to tailor their operations to the existing architecture. When a Florida real estate developer offered Campus Crusade 275 acres of land for free, the ministry tore up the letter of intent and announced it would move to Orlando.<sup>64</sup>

---

<sup>62</sup> *Maurer v. Young Life*, Colorado State Archives, Denver, CO.

<sup>63</sup> Tom Morton, “Campus Crusade keeps Springs in running,” *Gazette Telegraph*, August 12, 1989; “Affordable Colorado Springs,” editorial, *Gazette Telegraph*, August 12, 1989.

<sup>64</sup> Wayne Heilman, “Tiffany Square leaseholder sues owners,” *Gazette Telegraph*, August 18, 1989; Tom Morton, “Campus Crusade lured to Orlando,” *Gazette Telegraph*, September 7, 1989; Adelle Banks, “Campus Crusade base moving to Orlando area,” *Orlando Sentinel*, September 6, 1989; Adelle Banks, “Donated land may be ministries new home,” *Orlando Sentinel*, June 22, 1990.

Though it missed out on Campus Crusade, Colorado Springs soon won an even greater prize: Focus on the Family, perhaps the most powerful evangelical ministry in the United States in the 1980s. James Dobson, founder and president of Focus, built his empire on a simple argument: “permissiveness” had destroyed the traditional family and threatened to destroy the United States itself. Dobson set out to reverse the decline of nation and family by preaching discipline. His 1970 book *Dare to Discipline* became a surprise bestseller and was soon followed by a seminar series called “Focus on the Family.” Dobson turned this seminar into a radio series of the same name in 1978.<sup>65</sup> Focus grew rapidly, and by 1990 it boasted over 700 staff members and an annual budget of almost \$50 million. In a single month, the ministry received tens of thousands of phone calls and hundreds of thousands of letters from people seeking family advice.<sup>66</sup> As it expanded, the ministry quickly outgrew the space available in southern California, where Dobson had begun his career.<sup>67</sup>

At this point the needs of Focus on the Family meshed with those of the El Pomar Foundation, a Colorado Springs philanthropy. Founded in 1937 by mining millionaire Spencer Penrose, El Pomar had long promoted education and culture in Colorado, mostly through grants to institutions like Colorado College and the University of Denver.<sup>68</sup> But the economic downturn of the 1980s led El Pomar to shift its focus to economic development.<sup>69</sup> Now, their goal was to make Colorado Springs a mecca for nonprofits. El Pomar CEO Bill Hybl explained this as a matter of economic necessity, but also as

---

<sup>65</sup> For Dobson’s biography, see Tim Stafford, “His Father’s Son,” *Christianity Today*, April 22, 1988; on Focus on the Family in general, see Dan Gilgoff, *The Jesus Machine: How James Dobson, Focus on the Family, and Evangelical America Are Winning the Culture War* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2007).

<sup>66</sup> Laura Stepp, “The empire built on family & faith,” *Washington Post*, August 8, 1990; Peter Steinfelds, “No church, no ministry, no pulpit, he is called Religious Right’s star,” *New York Times*, June 5, 1990.

<sup>67</sup> Joanna Schmidt, “Focus on the Family moving to Springs,” *Gazette Telegraph*, June 15, 1990; John Dart, “Dobson’s influence based on family issues,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 2, 1988; Joanna Schmidt, “Ministry move will boost demand for area housing,” *Gazette Telegraph*, June 17, 1990.

<sup>68</sup> Thomas J. Noel and Cathleen M. Norman, *A Pikes Peak Partnership: The Penroses and the Tutts* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2000).

<sup>69</sup> Wayne Heilman, “El Pomar looks after city: Foundation shifts its focus towards Springs’ economy,” *Gazette Telegraph*, February 24, 1991, found in the El Pomar Information File, Special Collections, TL.

something more: nonprofits provided “a sense of where this community could go, rather than being locked into where this community has been.”<sup>70</sup> And so, as Hybl later said, “We decided it was in the community’s best interests to encourage [Focus on the Family] to move to Colorado Springs,” a phrase that illuminates El Pomar’s approach to economic development.<sup>71</sup> The decision was made in the community’s “best interests,” but without consulting the community. Most people learned that El Pomar had enticed Focus on the Family with a \$4 million grant only by reading about it in the *Gazette Telegraph*.

Focus was only the largest of the numerous ministries that moved to Colorado Springs early in the 1990s. In August 1990, Every Home for Christ, an organization that distributed evangelical literature, announced it would follow Focus from southern California to Colorado Springs. Every Home for Christ, like Focus, was tempted by El Pomar money in this case a \$30,000 grant funneled through the Economic Development Corporation.<sup>72</sup> The next year, HCJB, an evangelical radio broadcaster, decided to move from Miami to Colorado Springs. They singled out Alice Worrell’s efforts as a key factor in their decision—hardly surprising, as Worrell’s parents were former HCJB volunteers.<sup>73</sup> The Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) announced plans to relocate to Colorado Springs from La Habra, California in 1992. Despite having built a new headquarters in La Habra in 1987, ACSI needed room to expand, and in Colorado land could be had for cheap. The city secured yet another evangelical prize in 1993: the David C. Cook publishing company, which decided to move some of its operations from Elgin, Illinois, to Colorado Springs. With annual sales of more than \$100 million, Cook

---

<sup>70</sup> “An interview with William Hybl, C.E.O. of El Pomar Foundation,” *Colorado Springs Business Journal*, April 15, 1990.

<sup>71</sup> Oral history with William Hybl, conducted by Amy Ziegler, July 24, 2007 in Colorado Springs, CO, Special Collections, PPLD.

<sup>72</sup> Tom Morton, “Christian group picks city,” *Gazette Telegraph*, August 28, 1990; Dick Eastman, *The Purple Pig and Other Miracles* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2011), 156-157.

<sup>73</sup> Steve Rabey, “Ministry to move to Springs,” *Gazette Telegraph*, October 9, 1991.

was the largest ministry to relocate since Focus.<sup>74</sup> There were smaller ministries as well, ranging from the Green Cross, an evangelical environmentalist organization, to the Foundation for Israel, a pro-Israel ministry that distributed literature about Biblical prophecy, to the Cowboys for Christ, whose name was self-explanatory.

### **Myths of the Evangelical Vatican**

By 1991 Colorado Springs had established its reputation as the “Wheaton of the West.” Some people even began to use a grander nickname: the “Evangelical Vatican.” The size of the evangelical migration was impressive: there were 33 ministries employing 2,200 people as of November 1991, 53 ministries employing 2,400 people as of December 1992, and more than 60 ministries as of February 1994.<sup>75</sup> These numbers were tabulated by Steve Rabey, the journalist who popularized the city’s image as the capital of American evangelicalism. Rabey surveyed the city’s evangelical community in 1991, sending every ministry a questionnaire and a letter that began: “Is Colorado Springs the Wheaton of the West? Or has is [sic] Wheaton now the Colorado Springs of the Midwest? That’s what our readers—and the readers of *Christianity Today*—want to know.” The questionnaire asked the ministries about, among other things, their mission, their annual income, and the number of people they employed. Rabey turned the results into a front-page *Gazette Telegraph* story that declared: “The map of the Christian world is being revised in Colorado Springs, literally and figuratively.”<sup>76</sup> A version of the story also appeared in *Christianity Today*. Both stories invoked Wheaton, but they also made loftier comparisons. The *Christianity Today* article described Colorado Springs as a “‘mecca’ of American evangelicalism,” and

---

<sup>74</sup> Wayne Heilman, “Companies to bring in 650 jobs,” *Gazette Telegraph*, October 2, 1993.

<sup>75</sup> Steve Rabey, “Evangelical groups reach out to world,” *Gazette Telegraph*, November 24, 1991; Steve Rabey, “Ministries flocking to Springs: Groups big and small boost economy,” *Gazette Telegraph*, December 20, 1992; Steve Rabey, “Area Christian groups continue to grow in size, number,” *Gazette Telegraph*, February 27, 1994.

<sup>76</sup> Rabey, “Evangelical groups reach out to world,” *Gazette Telegraph*.

the *Gazette Telegraph* story referred to the city as a “virtual Vatican of American evangelicalism.” When Rabey surveyed the ministries again in 1992, he affirmed that the city had “cemented [its] reputation as the Vatican of the American evangelical movement.”<sup>77</sup> Colorado Springs now carried the “Evangelical Vatican” nickname that would define its image in the 1990s.

Yet the Evangelical Vatican label requires qualification. Though the migration of ministries was impressive, it was more a movement of institutions than people, meaning it did little to change the local religious demographics. One reason ministries moved to the city in the first place was because its low-wage labor pool allowed them to hire new employees. Focus on the Family, for instance, hired 400 employees from the community, doubling its workforce.<sup>78</sup> And so while these ministries employed thousands of people, they did not simply uproot these thousands of evangelicals and plant them in Colorado. Catholicism remained the single largest denomination in El Paso County. More striking is that, according to one survey, more than half the county’s population was religiously unaffiliated in 1990. That number barely changed by 2000.<sup>79</sup> Moreover, reports of dozens of ministries moving to the city were deceptive, for most of these organizations were small. Focus on the Family, with over a thousand employees, was an outlier. More typical were the Art of Family Living, with four employees; the Dave Dravecky Foundation, with two; and the Foundation for Israel, with one.<sup>80</sup> The religious landscape of Colorado Springs was defined by a few large ministries surrounded by dozens of smaller ones.

---

<sup>77</sup> Rabey, “Ministries flocking to Springs,” *Gazette Telegraph*.

<sup>78</sup> Steve Rabey, “Ministry to move to Colorado Springs-Radio group to bring 50 jobs,” *Gazette Telegraph*, October 9, 1991; Rabey, “Christian school group follows Springs move of Focus on the Family,” *Gazette Telegraph*; Morton, “Christian group picks city,” *Gazette Telegraph*; “1991 Annual Report,” Box 30, Folder 16, Citizens Project Papers [MSS0307], PPLD.

<sup>79</sup> These statistics come from the Digital Atlas of American Religion, published by the Polis Center at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis: <http://religionatlas.org/> They come from the examining “Largest Denominational Family per County” for El Paso County in the years 1980, 1990, and 2000.

<sup>80</sup> Rabey, “Ministries flocking to Springs,” *Gazette-Telegraph*.

Furthermore, the migration of ministries in the 1980s and '90s was only a small part of a larger movement of businesses. The Economic Development Corporation recognized that ministries could provide a few thousand jobs at most, hardly enough to help the city escape its economic slump. Even Alice Worrell did not focus solely on religious organizations, but spent most of her time courting manufacturers.<sup>81</sup> The same year Focus on the Family announced it would move to Colorado Springs, 1991, there were two other relocations whose economic significance dwarfed that of Focus. On March 20, Apple Computers announced it would build a manufacturing facility in the nearby town of Fountain, employing 1,000 people. A week later MCI announced it would consolidate its engineering division in Colorado Springs, bringing another 1,700 jobs.<sup>82</sup> Other businesses that relocated to Colorado Springs in 1991 were Hewlett-Packard's accounting program, with 400 employees, and Principal Financial Group's administration center, with 300 employees.<sup>83</sup> Each was larger than almost any ministry. The arrival of these businesses overshadowed the arrival of the evangelical organizations. When the *Colorado Springs Business Journal* lauded the city's economic resurgence at the end of 1991, it lavished attention on MCI and Apple but did not mention Focus on the Family at all.<sup>84</sup>

Ministries boasted thousands of employees and millions of dollars in income, but their impact on the local economy was limited. Data collected by the Census Bureau shows that in 1993, at the end of the great migration, "religious organizations" (a term that included churches as well as ministries) employed 6,747 people in El Paso County out of a workforce of 146,463. This 4.5% figure was higher than that of other large Colorado counties, but it nonetheless indicates that ministries did not dominate

---

<sup>81</sup> "A Candid Conversation with Alice Neddo," *Colorado Springs Business Journal*, March 15, 1990.

<sup>82</sup> "MCI to establish division headquarters in Springs," *Colorado Springs Business Journal*, April 1, 1991; Charles B. Shelden, "Apple, MCI signal resurgence," *Colorado Springs Business Journal*, April 1, 1991.

<sup>83</sup> Jan Ellen Spiegel, "1991: A Perspective of the Year," *Colorado Springs Business Journal*, January 1, 1992.

<sup>84</sup> Shelden, "Apple, MCI signal resurgence," *Colorado Springs Business Journal*.

the local economy.<sup>85</sup> Employment figures for individual firms tell the same story. Of El Paso County's twenty-four largest private employers in 1991, not one was a ministry.<sup>86</sup> The top seven private employers as of 1991 all employed over 1,300 people, more than Focus on the Family ever did. Private employers were dwarfed in turn by the county's public employers, especially the military. Fort Carson employed 20,541 people as of 1991, meaning that if one took the total employment of all the ministries in Colorado Spring and quadrupled it, it would still be smaller than the fort's workforce.<sup>87</sup>

Yet statistics do not tell the whole story. The arrival of so many ministries changed perceptions, creating a new self-consciousness among the city's evangelicals while arousing fears within the city's liberal community. Ted Haggard, pastor of New Life, an evangelical church with over 10,000 members, celebrated the arrival of these ministries: "I think God is sovereignly moving them here," he said. Others worried over this development. A member of the city's Council of Neighborhood Organizations feared that "if [evangelicals] got in any positions of power—on school boards or in local government—that they might come down on others and begin imposing their views."<sup>88</sup> The events that unfolded over the next few years were filtered through the belief that the city was the "Evangelical Vatican."

Some in Colorado Springs used the newly-arrived ministries as cover to conduct a campaign of harassment. Therapist Greg Snyder, founder of the Colorado Springs Men's Council, received a phone call telling him that his work was leading men to the devil. The owner of the clothing store Regina's

---

<sup>85</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, *County Business Patterns, 1993*, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1995. <https://www.census.gov/prod/3/97pubs/cbp-9307.pdf> For comparison, the figure was 1% in the City and County of Denver, 1.2% in Jefferson County, and 1.6% in Arapahoe County, the three largest Colorado counties after El Paso.

<sup>86</sup> "Largest Colorado Springs Area Private-Sector Employers," *Colorado Springs Business Journal*, "1991 Book of Lists" (1991).

<sup>87</sup> "Largest Colorado Springs-Area Public Employers," *Colorado Springs Business Journal*, "1991 Book of Lists" (1991).

<sup>88</sup> Rabey, "Evangelical groups reach out to world," *Gazette Telegraph*.

Unique Botique also received three harassing phone calls over the course of three months.<sup>89</sup> In every case, the callers claimed to be affiliated with Focus on the Family. This was almost certainly untrue, but it reflected the name recognition Focus had in the community—and the willingness of some to exploit that. There were also reports that someone claiming to be associated with Focus was calling local schools and asking for lists of either (depending on the teller of the rumor) single or homosexual teachers. These stories were never verified, and the superintendents of the city’s two largest school districts stated that no such thing had happened, but these reports stoked panic among local liberals.<sup>90</sup> These incidents coincided with several campaigns that targeted “un-Christian” elements in local schools. Complaints from parents led one school district to drop gay and pagan participants from a planned “diversity symposium” and caused an elementary school to restrict access to a book series, featuring a dragon named “Pumsy,” intended to teach self-esteem.<sup>91</sup>

The most-publicized battle over religion in the public schools concerned not Jesus but Zeus. It began when David Skipworth, pastor of the Cowboy Church of the Rockies, attacked an eight-week course on mythology taught at Woodland Park High School. “This material is a misleading way to get kids' eyes on gods other than the almighty God,” said Skipworth. “They aren't teaching about God, and Satan is filling the void with other paganistic religions, and these pagan gods are misleading children.”<sup>92</sup> Skipworth and two other parents withdrew their children from the course, which the school accepted. But Skipworth and the other parents then demanded that the school do away with the entire course. When that failed, they filed a lawsuit against Colorado’s commissioner of education, demanding that passages from the Bible be included in the lessons. Skipworth argued that his lawsuit was about fairness:

---

<sup>89</sup> “Business harassment,” *Freedom Watch*, vol.1, no. 2, September 1992, Box 47, Folder 7, Citizens Project Papers [MSS0307], PPLD.

<sup>90</sup> “Single teachers,” *Freedom Watch*, vol. 1 , no. 2, September 1992, Box 47, Folder 7, MSS0307, PPLD.

<sup>91</sup> “Pressure on our schools,” *Freedom Watch*, vol. 1, no. 2, July 1992; “School censorship,” *Freedom Watch*, vol. 1, no. 1, September 1992, both from Box 47, Folder 7, MSS0307, PPLD.

<sup>92</sup> Steve Rabey, “Ancient myths under attack,” *Gazette Telegraph*, February 1, 1991.

it was not fair that Greek and Roman mythology received more time than Biblical teachings.<sup>93</sup> But his lawsuit quickly slipped from the “equal time” argument into a demand to restore Christianity to the classroom. The plaintiff’s brief argued: “Since 1962, when religion was effectively banned from public schools, morality has been perceived as a religious issue, and also prohibited in public schools... The result has been an abandonment of the moral principals [sic] upon which our free society's existence depends.”<sup>94</sup> The judge, unpersuaded, dismissed the case as frivolous.<sup>95</sup>

What would have otherwise been treated as a local dispute was refracted through the mirage of the Evangelical Vatican. When Skipworth announced his challenge, he clearly believed he would be supported by local Christian ministries: “I’m going to contact every Christian organization, and all the churches, and we’re going to rally the troops.” The largest of those organizations politely declined to get involved; a spokesperson for Focus on the Family told the press, “Mythology is an important part of Greek and Roman culture, which is an important part of Western civilization, so teaching about that is appropriate... [If] someone in Woodland Park starts a cult and begins worshipping Thor, call me again.” But though Skipworth received no outside support, progressive activists warned that his suit was part of a broader right-wing assault on public education. A representative of People for the American Way said, “This is part of a systematic effort by right-wing groups to control and narrow the public school curriculum in this country.”<sup>96</sup> Both sides saw the conflict as something more than just the efforts of one small group of parents to change the curriculum.

---

<sup>93</sup> Letter from David Skipworth to *High Mountain Sun*, n.d., Box 43, Folder 3, MSS0307, PPLD.

<sup>94</sup> Plaintiff’s memorandum brief in support of response to defendant, District Court, County of Teller, Case No. 92CV59, July 6, 1992; Box 43, Folder 3, MSS0307, PPLD.

<sup>95</sup> Order, District Court, County of Teller, Colorado, Case No. 92, CV59, Division 8, October 14, 1992; Box 43, Folder 3, MSS0307, PPLD.

<sup>96</sup> Rabey, “Ancient myths under attack,” *Gazette Telegraph*.

Skipworth's lawsuit led to the formation of the Citizens Project in early 1992. Billed as the "voice of opposition" to conservative Christians, the Citizens Project was the brainchild of Amy Divine and Doug Triggs, a Colorado Springs couple. Its leadership included several prominent members of the community, among them the chair of the Department of Behavioral Sciences at the Air Force Academy and a professor of geology at Colorado College.<sup>97</sup> *Freedom Watch*, their newsletter, declared, "We are dedicated to maintaining the traditional American values of separation of church and state, freedom of religion and speech, pluralism, individuality, and tolerance and compassion for others." In practice, this meant keeping an eye on right-wing activism in Colorado Springs. The Citizens Project tried to dispel some of the rumors racing around the community. They noted, for instance, that Focus on the Family probably had nothing to do with the harassing phone calls to businesses.<sup>98</sup> Still, Citizens Project warned its members to stay vigilant. They feared that right-wing evangelicals would run "stealth" candidates to win local office, as they had ostensibly done in San Diego (a city whose example became paradigmatic for opponents of the Christian Right).<sup>99</sup>

Just how deep the hopes and fears about the Christian Right ran is unclear. As of September 1992, the Citizens Project had 150 names on its mailing list—not bad for a new organization, but paltry in a city of almost 300,000 people. The number of people involved in Christian Right organizations was likely even smaller. But this would soon change. Evangelical Christians in Colorado Springs, motivated by their new-found sense of cultural power, would launch a campaign to roll back the advance of gay rights in their city, a campaign they would then extend to the state and national levels. They believed

---

<sup>97</sup> Warren Epstein, "Group formed to counteract religious right's political activism," *Gazette Telegraph*, July 4, 1992.

<sup>98</sup> "School case update," *Freedom Watch*, vol. 1, no. 2, September 1992, Box 3, Folder 43, MSS0307, PPLD.

<sup>99</sup> "Elections," *Freedom Watch*, vol. 1, no. 2, July 1992; Barry Horstman, "Christian Activists Using 'Stealth' Tactics," *Los Angeles Times*, April 8, 1992; Box 3, Folder 43, MSS0307, PPLD.

William Schultz  
Making Jesus Springs

“gay rights” had no place in Jesus Springs; more than that, they believed their city could set an example for the rest of the nation.