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Are Evangelicals Obsessive About Sex?

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Do evangelicals care only about issues of sexuality, marriage, and personal behavior? That's what Michelle Cottle thinks, and that's what she argues in "[Prayer Center](#)," her article in the May 23 edition of [The New Republic](#). Cottle offers a sympathetic portrait of [Sojourners](#) founder [Jim Wallis](#), reporting that, since his student days, Wallis "has been struggling to mobilize Christians against social problems traditionally identified as concerns of the political left, such as poverty and racism." Nevertheless, Wallis and his agenda have been frustrated by the fact that, "in U.S. religious circles, such issues have long taken a backseat—especially in the political arena—to matters of personal morality like abortion and gay rights."

Cottle also casts a positive light on [Rich Cizik](#), vice president of [government affairs](#) at the [National Association of Evangelicals](#). Cizik, like Wallis, wants to see the evangelical political agenda widened to include issues such as environmentalism, economics, tax policy, and poverty. She argues that Cizik and Wallis both lament the approach of the "far right." Cizik led the NAE to sponsor a broader call for action known as "[For the Health of the Nation: An Evangelical Call to Civic Responsibility](#)."

Yet, these efforts have been thwarted, she argues, by the conservatives' insistence on confronting issues of sexuality, abortion, and marriage. To her credit, Cottle does offer a fairly sophisticated historical analysis of how evangelicals developed these concerns. What she—along with so many others—fails to acknowledge is the fact that conservative evangelicals did not start the war over sexuality and life issues. As a matter of fact, evangelicals were mobilized for political and social action precisely because they would not accept sexual anarchy, the denial of human dignity to the unborn, and now, the destruction of marriage. Beyond this, the most thoughtful Christian conservatives *do* recognize the need for a broader moral engagement, but are convinced that nothing meaningful can be done about poverty and related issues if civilization's most basic institution is dismantled and if sexual sanity is abandoned. If the leaders of the evangelical left really want to alleviate poverty, they should start by focusing on marriage and rebuilding a culture of responsibility. But, if they make this shift, they might lose the admiration of [The New Republic](#).

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