

Alexis Buss

**Promising to Keep Women
Down: The Real Agenda
of the Promise Keepers**

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Promise Keepers (PK) puts forward a public relations image of bringing men together to support each other in taking on more responsibility for their families. In reality, however, PK is using religion to promote a “kinder, gentler” version of white male domination. Its leadership is fiercely homophobic, anti-choice, misogynistic and has close ties to far-right organizations and individuals.

PK is Anti-Woman

In the group’s founding text *The Seven Promises of a Promise Keeper*, Rev. Tony Evans advised men that, “The first thing you do is sit down with your wife and say something like this: ‘Honey, I’ve made a terrible mistake. I’ve given you my role. I gave up leading this family, and I forced you to take my place. Now I must reclaim this role.’ Don’t misunderstand what I’m saying here. I’m not suggesting that you ask for your role back. I’m urging you to take it back.” He went on to say, “If you simply ask for it back, your wife is likely to refuse. . . . Unfortunately, there can be no compromise here.” This book also instructs women to submit to their husbands “for the sake of your family and the survival of our culture.”

At a PK event in 1996, speaker Gary Smalley advised the crowd to view their wives as “weaker vessels.” At yet another PK rally, Rev. Tony Evans stated, “Women were intended by God to be helpers to men.”

PK founder Bill McCarthy has made numerous statements in support of Operation Rescue. McCarthy and other PK leadership are opposed to abortion, in part because they espouse reproduction and care of children as the proper role of women.

PK is Anti-Gay

While lobbying extensively for a statewide anti-gay ballot measure in Colorado in 1992, PK founder Bill McCarthy stated that homosexuality is “an abomination of God.” He also stated that gays and lesbians do not deserve equal rights because they “do not reproduce.” PK received its initial funding from Gary Bauer’s far-right organization Focus on the Family, which is well-known for its homophobic politics.

PK is Pro-Theocracy

At all of its rallies, PK sells a book by Bill Bright, far-right leader of Campus Crusade for Christ. In this book, *The Coming Revival: America’s Call to Fast, Pray*

and Seek God's Face, Bright promotes the notion that Christians must take over country, including the government. He states, "Unless our nation returns to God from the top down, where our laws are made, permanent change will be extremely difficult." In recent rallies, men have been exhorted to "prophesy" to their wives and children in preparation for the time they will take the country back for God. In 1995, McCarthy told a rally of clergy that they need to prepare to "take this nation for Jesus Christ!"

Rev. James Ryle, Bill McCarthy's personal pastor and PK board member has expressed the belief that PK is part of a Biblical prophesy in which men will form an army to destroy nonbelievers. During an interview, he stated "Never have 300,000 men come together throughout human history except for the purposes of war."

PK has Right-Wing Ties

In addition to receiving start-up funds from Focus on the Family, PK got start-up help from Bill Bright's Campus Crusade for Christ. This organization practices shepherding, a type of religious mentoring in which the individual is heavily controlled by their spiritual leader and must submit all major decisions to their shepherd (mentor) for approval. Many college students have related incidents of abuse by their shepherds or likened the experience to being indoctrinated into a cult.

The Christian Coalition has been very active in promoting the events of PK. They are currently promoting a national level event in Washington, DC through a series of six shows on the 700 Club. When a magazine printed an unflattering article about PK, the Christian Coalition organized a massive letter-writing campaign to the magazine.

PK is Big Money

In 1996, PK took in over \$117 million dollars in revenue. \$14 million of this was in product sales alone. The organization had at that time 452 paid staff members. Bill McCarthy must be proud to have started an organization that rivals a mid-sized corporation in financial success. Yet when two men from a ministry that serves homeless people showed up at a recent PK rally with signs that pointed out their belief that Christians should help the poor, they were roughed up by PK staffers and forced to move far from the area of the rally.

PK Offers No Real Solutions, Only Oppression

What does the U.S. in the '90s look like? It remains the country with more people held in jail per 100,000 than any police state in the world. The criminalization of Black and Latino youth continues unabated. The death penalty has become an accepted "liberal" position. There is an escalating war on immigrants . . . and the declaration that millions are "illegal." The actual ability of women to obtain abortion is methodically [being] stripped away . . . The mean spirited, openly racist, misogynist, homophobic, Christian-fundamentalist demands for 'family values' and preparation for Armageddon continue to fester in growing organized networks.

PK does not challenge the status quo. It exists to reinforce old stereotypes and sex roles. It scapegoats women and gays who have struggled for equality, blaming them for society's problems. Their pledge of 'racial reconciliation' is paternalistic at best and fails to recognize or challenge institutional racism.

Rather than helping men to stand up against corporate greed, PK blames men for their economic woes. In *The Seven Promises of a Promise Keeper*, Rev. Tony Evans wrote that "Families today lack roots because they lack purpose and direction. They jump from place to place, job to job, looking for the good life. Their plans for the future are a muddle of self-centered whims." Nowhere is there a mention of corporate downsizing or exporting jobs overseas as the reason families are forced to move to find work.

In short, PK promotes a return to a version of '50s family life in which the man is the breadwinner and makes all of the decisions, the woman stays home and minds the kids, and the kids are servile and obedient, especially to the father.

This form of oppression has been tried before. During the Nazi period, women were rewarded with Honor Cross of German Motherhood medals for producing children for the fatherland. They were reminded constantly to be "good German wives" with the phrase "kinder, küche, kirche" (children, kitchen, church). Women who chose to practice reproductive freedom or who did not comply with their role were punished severely by the state. Is this what PK has planned for us if they "take over the nation for God?"

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