When Sunday Meets Monday: American Evangelicals, their Gospel, and the Workplace

SHUTT, CASEY,SPENCER

ABSTRACT

Casey Shutt, ***When Sunday Meets Monday: American Evangelicals, their Gospel, and the Workplace*** (Durham, England: Durham University PhD thesis, 2011).

The relationship between American evangelicalism and contemporary society is a complex one. By looking at evangelical attitudes toward work, this study aspires to at least begin untangling some of this convoluted relationship. Drawing upon history, theology, and sociology, especially ethnographic methods and interviews, this study argues that when American evangelicals think about engaging their workplaces evangelism takes center stage. While, at a glance, this gospel and the effort to share it may seem at odds with contemporary sensibilities, a closer examination reveals certain concessions to culture among the evangelicals studied. More specifically, evangelical thoughts concerning work reveal that two central features of the gospel being shared, namely, sin and redemption, appear to be morphing in ways more congruent with contemporary culture. The evangelical relationship with their surrounding world reveals a tension between cultural distance and distinction, on the one hand, and cultural nearness or congruence, on the other. This tension does not mean that evangelicalism is necessarily on track to fail, as secularization proponents might argue. On the contrary, American evangelicalism, it will be suggested, actually finds a degree of sustainability in the world thanks to this tension. Moreover, some of this accommodation to culture accentuates important features indigenous to the evangelical tradition. Evangelical attitudes toward work, then, point to a complex and surprising relationship between evangelicalism and contemporary society.

DURHAM UNIVERSITY

WHEN SUNDAY MEETS MONDAY: AMERICAN EVANGELICALS, THEIR GOSPEL, AND THE WORKPLACE

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL AT DURHAM UNIVERSITY FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF THEOLOGY AND RELIGION

BY

CASEY SHUTT

DURHAM, ENGLAND

MAY, 2011

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation has been anything but a "solo" project. Behind it are many to thank. Mathew Guest, my supervisor, struck a fine balance between critique and encouragement that helped push me through what was at times a trying experience on a number of levels. During my first term, regular meetings with my secondary supervisor, Robert Song, were very helpful, particularly in the early—and overwhelming—stages of research. I am also thankful for several libraries that made their resources available to me. These include: the Oral Roberts University Library, Oklahoma State University's Edmon Low Library, and Oklahoma Baptist University's Mabee Learning Center. These past few years I have been an itinerant researcher and without the help of these libraries and their librarians the task would have been nearly impossible.

It is also safe to say that without the help and encouragement of the late Rev. Dr. Bill Ellis this research would not have happened. Along with Ellis' support, I am thankful for his life and example. The aid of Tony and Christy Capucille and Tom and Sonja Capucille was essential to my venture "across the pond." Pel and Linda Stringer as well as Ronnie and Lou Ann Tipps provided support. My parents, Gary and Sheryl, have been a perennial support and encouragement since my academic journey began during the fall of 1985. My mother, Sheryl, was an enormous help, transcribing many of the interviews and taking childcare duties on a regular basis. My in-laws, Mike and Connie Knight, also made sacrifices in helping me complete this thesis, even letting us live with them for more than two years. I would like to thank the four churches where the research was conducted. Thank you for allowing me to enter into your midst. And thanks must go out to the many interviewees who allowed a complete stranger to probe into their lives. Finally, my family; my wife, Sarah, after nearly nine years, has yet to know what it is like to be married to a non-student. Sarah, your patience throughout my many years as a grad student has been

a blessing. And my children, Cora and Henry, although oblivious to much of this work, your joy-filled grins greeting me upon my return from the library have been deeply refreshing.

INTRODUCTION

Work pervades life. If one is not working they are probably enjoying the fruits of someone else's labor. According to Robert Wuthnow, this enveloping aspect of life is not disconnected from the religious lives of many Americans.[1] As David W. Miller has observed, Christianity in particular has been engaged in an aggressive attempt to bridge what has been called the Sunday/Monday gap.[2] Understanding this Sunday/Monday relationship becomes all the more pressing when one considers the growing number of hours workers spend at work. Perhaps this is because, as Arlie Russell Hochschild suspects, the workplace has become a haven from the endless and overwhelming demands that exist at home.[3] It may be the case, then, that the mantra for many workers is: there's no place like *work*.

Given work's pervasive role in life, this study considers work's place in the minds of American evangelicals.[4] How do evangelicals engage the workplace? What part does their faith play at work? What theological resources activate evangelicals at work? These are the questions guiding this project. More generally, this project's interest extends beyond the workplace, seeking to understand how evangelicals relate to contemporary American life. This more general interest considers how contemporary society might affect evangelicalism. To pose it as a question, how is the evangelical impacted by contemporary culture? The workplace, then, is being used as a window into this "church and culture" relationship.

---

[1] Robert Wuthnow, *God and Mammon in America* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 5.

[2] David W. Miller, *God at Work: The History and Promise of the Faith at Work Movement* (Oxford: OUP, 2007).

[3] Arlie Russell Hochschild, "The Time Bind: When Work Becomes Home and Home Becomes Work," in *The Cultural Study of Work*, ed. Douglas Harper and Helen M. Lawson (Landham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003), 264.

[4] Unless otherwise noted, when I speak of "evangelicals" I am referring to the American variety.

Fortunately, I am not blazing my own trail in this endeavor. My findings are in continuity with several other studies looking at the relationship between faith and work. According to Wuthnow, the religious lives of many American workers affect their work yet the impact is fairly mild and therapeutic.[5] Similarly, the evangelicals I interviewed seemed very willing to integrate their faith with their working lives, however, that integration often occurred in undisruptive ways. Like Miller, who suggests that evangelical groups usually prioritize evangelism at work,[6] my interviewees highly regarded evangelism. The way this evangelistic strategy played out among the interviewees coincided with the "personal influence strategy" of engaging society that Christian Smith observes in his studies on evangelicalism.[7] In addition to these academic studies on evangelicals, popular publications and portrayals have pointed out the centrality of evangelism to the evangelical at work.[8]

Along with Miller, Smith, and the popular depictions of evangelicals, my interviewees widely consider evangelism to be an important workplace activity. However, beyond simply noting the importance of evangelism for evangelicals at work, this study seeks to unpack and understand this gospel that is being spread. I am arguing that both the method of sharing the gospel and even the content of the message can be understood by listening to the evangelical interviewees speak of the workplace. This gospel and what appears to be occurring to its connected doctrines of sin and redemption reveal noteworthy appropriations and adaptations to contemporary culture.

Focusing the discussion on the gospel seemed natural since the interviewees repeatedly underscore its importance for engaging the workplace. In theological terms, the gospel is central to evangelical soteriology, and it would be difficult to overstate the centrality of soteriology, or the doctrine of salvation, to American

---

[5] Wuthnow, *God and Mammon in America*, 5.

[6] Miller, *God at Work*, 117.

[7] Christian Smith, *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1998); Christian Smith, *Christian America? What Evangelicals Really Want* (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 2000).

[8] See, for example, Michael Blanding, "Jesus at Work: Christ is Coming to a Cubicle Near You," *Boston*, June 2005; *The Big Kahuna*, DVD, Directed by John Swanbeck (New York: Franchise Pictures, 1999).

evangelicalism. James Davison Hunter calls the doctrine as "equally central" to evangelical theology as biblical inerrancy.[9] Not only is the gospel central to soteriology but understanding how the gospel is conceived by the interviewees provides an illuminating focal point for explaining broader changes in the evangelical worldview. Put simply, an altered gospel could signal the transformation of other facets of the evangelical worldview. This is due to the prominence of the gospel within the evangelical worldview, a prominence that will be explained in more detail in chapter four. In that chapter, I will draw upon theologians within the evangelical tradition, which is not to suggest that the gospel as articulated by evangelical theologians is the same as the gospel held by the interviewees who are mostly ordinary evangelicals. Rather, the gospel described by these theologians will provide a helpful reference point for understanding the nature of the gospel that seems to be at play among the interviewees. The way evangelical elites (theologians and pastors) understand the gospel and the way ordinary evangelicals (the interviewees) employ and understand key doctrines related to the gospel seem distinct. The former seems to be more refined, oppositional to culture, and integrated with the evangelical worldview. The latter, that is, the gospel as conceived by ordinary evangelicals, appears less sophisticated, more congruent with cultural assumptions, and more fragmented. Although informing evangelicals in different ways and to varying degrees, the gospel nonetheless plays a key role in the evangelical consciousness. Furthermore, how this gospel seems to be understood by the interviewees will reveal something of the church and culture relationship.

My central argument is that evangelical thoughts about the workplace reveal a tension within the evangelical worldview. In many ways, the tension results from the milieu evangelicals find themselves in. It is a context that simultaneously challenges and aids the evangelical. The tension is between resistance to contemporary culture, on the one hand, and accommodation, on the other. Evangelicals negotiate their surroundings through both resistance and accommodation, and in many cases the accommodation is unintended.

---

[9] James Davison Hunter, *Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1987), 34.

First, evangelical resistance to culture. The evangelical worldview animating evangelical action at work represents, at least on the surface, divergence from culture. The evangelical, for example, has an identity of distinction. The evangelical is said to be a pilgrim in the world, belonging to God and not the world. The very identity of the evangelical is marked by separation or distinction from much of the world or culture. Not only the identity of the evangelical but the message of the gospel, which is inextricably bound to the evangelical worldview, is at odds with contemporary religious sensibilities. In a religiously pluralistic setting, the claim that all are lost and condemned apart from faith in Jesus causes unease. Drawing upon John Murray Cuddihy, Hunter calls this exclusivity of Jesus "the single most socially offensive aspect of Christian theology" and "the single most important source of contention between Christians and non-Christians."[10] When one considers the evangelical worldview along with the gospel, evangelicalism's posture toward culture seems apparent: evangelicals exercise a sturdy measure of *distance* from culture.

Yet, on the other hand, two important concepts within the evangelical worldview, sin and redemption, suggest a degree of *accommodation* to culture; sin and redemption appear to be diminished. From my research, it appears that evangelical understandings of these two doctrines, which are linchpins for the gospel, are not so countercultural. And this is not an unprecedented claim, for Hunter observed more than twenty years ago that evangelical notions of sin and salvation have been softened in ways making them less oppositional to the modern world.[11] Although these doctrines, sin and redemption, seem to be weakened, it does not mean that evangelicalism is doomed. On the contrary, the diminished views of sin and redemption actually contribute a degree of sustainability to evangelicalism's prospect in the modern world. Curiously, then, the evangelical worldview that, at a glance, reveals *distance* from culture also, upon closer examination, suggests a degree of *nearness*, or accommodation, to American culture.

---

[10] Ibid.

[11] James Davison Hunter, *American Evangelicalism: Conservative Religion and the Quandary of Modernity* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University, 1983); Hunter, *Evangelicalism.* Hunter's argument will be explained in future chapters.

This tension underscores the convoluted nature that is American evangelicalism's relation with contemporary culture. To reiterate, the central thesis is that: *the gospel provides a wellspring of nourishment for evangelical action in the workplace as well as a sense of distinction and resistance in the world. This gospel is inextricably connected to other key aspects of the evangelical worldview, including sin and redemption. Both sin and redemption appear to be affected, even diminished (in large part by contemporary culture), when evangelicals speak of the workplace. Contemporary society, the venue for one's work, appears to be resisted by evangelicals and yet, at the same time, that same society contributes to the evolving and eroding content of the evangelical worldview.*

Generally, the findings of this project suggest that evangelicalism appropriates, resists, finds strength, and experiences decay from its relationship with the world. How can the evangelical worldview provide a sense of resistance to culture and simultaneously indicate cultural nearness? Moreover, how can such cultural nearness or congruence be sustainable? Briefly consider what is happening to the concept of sin. The doctrine of sin has not vanished from the evangelical vernacular but has evolved to suit contemporary understandings of the self. For instance, emerging from the interviews is the sense that sin does not plague the Christian but primarily exists within the non-Christian. What this means for those interviewed is a less fettered relationship with God because they seem less entangled by the bondages of sin. The effects of this revised notion of sin include the widespread embrace of a decision-making process marked by unmediated dialogue with God. This decision-making model, which I call the dynamic model, actually heightens one's sense of God's presence rather than suppressing it.

This complex relationship between evangelicalism and culture that I am arguing for is more attuned to the new theoretical map that Christian Smith has suggested for those working in the sociological study of religion. Rather than viewing the impact of modernity upon religion as monolithically and predictably corrosive, Smith suggests thinking about "multiple modernities" which understands modernity as impacting religious life in diverse and complex ways, producing

varying effects globally and even locally (e.g. various groups in a single society).[12] This approach, says Smith, is more "empirically realistic" and "metaphysically open."[13] Furthermore, a multiple modernities approach sheds the "older social-evolutionary and functionalist assumptions about social change which cast certain processes as universal and inevitable."[14] Universality and inevitability would be replaced by "contingency," "complexity," "timing" and "context."[15] In order to unpack such a convoluted picture one needs what Clifford Geertz has called a "thick description."[16]

Striving for a "thick description"

What I have sought to do in this research is provide a "thick description" of evangelical attitudes toward their working lives. It is a description that seeks to account for the richness of the evangelical's world. This has necessitated a rather broad disciplinary plunge, delving into history, theology and sociology. A time intensive portion of the research has been ethnographic. This ethnographic approach enabled me to get into some of the texture and depth of those evangelicals studied, which was accomplished by spending significant time involved in four evangelical churches (this will be explained in more detail below). I also spent hours interviewing members from each of these churches.

This ethnographic approach is not new. For example, in the sociology of religion the approach has been used to investigate Protestantism in an illuminating way.[17] American religious history has employed it as well. Robert A. Orsi admitted

---

[12] Christian Smith, "Future Directions in the Sociology of Religion," *Social Forces* 84, no. 4 (2008): 1561-89.

[13] Ibid., 1571.

[14] Ibid., 1574.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture" in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 3-30.

[17] See, for example, Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Bible Believers: Fundamentalists in the Modern World* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University, 1987); R. Stephen Warner, *New Wine in Old Wineskins: Evangelicals and Liberals in a Small-Town Church* (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1988); Penny Edgell Becker, *Congregations in Conflict: Cultural Models of Local Religious Life*

feeling concerned due to limited time with archived texts during his days as a young researcher. After all, were not these the historian's resources? Instead, Orsi was taking a less conventional strategy to understand history by interviewing, for example, Italian-American women amidst the hustle and bustle of their kitchens. This ethnographic approach gave Orsi a feel for religion as it is lived (or "lived religion").[18] Such a strategy takes into account the individual's "lifeworld," that is, "the domain of everyday existence, practical activity and shared understandings, with all its crises, surprises, satisfactions, frustrations, joys, desires, hopes, fears, and limitations."[19] This ethnographic turn is in some ways part of a larger trend that seeks to understand religion as it is played out "on the ground," among ordinary practitioners.[20] Giving an ear to the voices of ordinary religious adherents has even gained a following in practical theology.[21] This is evident in the work of Elaine Graham who argues for a shift in practical theology from the "moral reasoning of the congregation," "the activities of the pastor," and "'applied theology'" to "the practice of intentional communities."[22] This means looking into Christian activity that is embedded in the warp and woof of the cultural milieu. Here one gains a sense of the importance of seeing theology as embodied in the practices of its adherents. Pete Ward puts it this way: "disembodied theology is gradually being replaced by a concern to locate the doctrinal in the practices and expression of Christian communities and traditions."[23] This study seeks to put the practices of ordinary evangelicals in conversation with the theologians and thinkers of the evangelical tradition in order to gain insight into the continuity and incongruities that lay

---

(Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1999); Mathew Guest, *Evangelical Identity and Contemporary Culture: A Congregational Study in Innovation* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007).

[18] Robert A. Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 2002), x-xii. For Orsi's defense on the relevancy of this approach to religion, see Orsi, "Is the Study of Lived Religion Irrelevant to the World We Live In?" *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 42, no. 2 (2003): 169-74.

[19] Ibid., xiv.

[20] See David D. Hall, ed., *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1997).

[21] This trend in practical theology is connected to trends in theology. See Pete Ward, *Participation and Mediation: A Practical Theology for the Liquid Church* (London: SCM, 2008), 40-43.

[22] Elaine Graham, "Practical Theology as Transforming Practice," in *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology,* ed. James Woodward and Stephen Pattison (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 109.

[23] Ward, *Participation and Mediation*, 47-48.

therein. In the process, I hope to show the importance of looking to lived religion (or better, lived theology) in order to gain a stronger practical theology, that is, theology as it is *practiced*.

Talk of relating sociology to theology needs to be warranted as the two disciplines tend to have been divided by the same partition affecting philosophy and the social sciences more generally. That divide is largely between ideas, which have been the focus of philosophy and theology, and behavior, which has been the focus of the social sciences.[24] Robin Gill advocates allowing sociology to inform theology. He has identified three ways that theology might employ sociology, two of which are particularly important for this project. First, Gill calls social context a factor for theologizing.[25] He cites the secular and Liberation theologies as two examples of this approach. This project will subtly suggest that the theologian should keep in their toolbox the tools of sociological analysis. As an evangelical, I need to be clear: I am not suggesting that the winds of culture usurp the authority of the Bible. Rather, I am suggesting that the Bible's content be systematized, developed and articulated with references to cultural conditions. This is because theology is inextricably bound to the social context out of which it arises, which leads to Gill's second approach: sociology is a way to understand the "social determinants of theology."[26] This study suggests that the theology articulated and employed by the interviewees, most of them ordinary evangelicals, is constructed, often unwittingly, with reference to culture. Granted, as Gill observes, this may pose a "relativizing" threat to theology.[27] But my intent is not to *prescribe* a theology or understanding of the gospel as it plays out in the workplace but to *describe*. Such a description, I hope, will provide theologians with the hardware to better construct a theology for the workplace. This, then, is how I view Gill's two approaches as relating to one another: because, as the second approach claims, theology is affected by setting, then the theologian, as the first approach claims, should utilize sociological resources to

---

[24] Robin Gill, "Sociology Assessing Theology," in *Theology and Sociology: A Reader*, ed. Robin Gill, 2nd ed. (New York: Cassell, 1996), 154.
[25] Ibid., 147.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid., 150.

better understand that setting when constructing theology. This means that the theologian might benefit by considering how theology is conceived and lived out by ordinary practitioners.

Sociology does not only illuminate theology, but theology can illuminate sociology. Consider the importance of distinguishing the theologies of evangelical elites from ordinary evangelicals. Christian Smith argues that the "most common" mistake made by those studying evangelicals is to assume that the views, beliefs and attitudes of evangelical leaders accurately reflect the views, beliefs and attitudes of ordinary evangelicals.[28] This error is what Smith calls the Representative Elite Fallacy, a fallacy that this study will seek to avert and, as it turns out, affirm. In order to avoid the fallacy one needs to enter into the world of ordinary evangelicals. Unlike the thoughts of evangelical leaders which can be acquired at Border's bookstore, downloaded at church websites or subscribed to, the thoughts and attitudes of ordinary evangelicals are best gained by spending time with them and talking to them (and, at the same time, keeping in mind the thoughts of evangelical elites). Of course, the researcher could gain information via survey data. While helpful for gaining a good sense of the general contours of a group, survey data has its limitations. Smith likens the attempt to understand a subject with survey data alone to trying to understand New York City from a Lear jet. Survey data, while capable of gaining breadth, does not deliver the depth and texture that face-to-face conversations with evangelicals provide. Smith also points out the way surveys can often stifle the individual by forcing them into categories that they might not otherwise place themselves. And sometimes the categories themselves are ill-defined, yielding more confusion than clarity.[29]

This study then is "thick" in that it seeks to enter into the world of ordinary American evangelicals from four evangelical churches in Oklahoma.[30] Admittedly, this approach does not provide the orienting, bird's eye view that more

---

[28] Smith, *Christian America?*, 7-9.

[29] Ibid., 9-10.

[30] Although the selection of Oklahoma was primarily circumstantial (it was where I lived and was employed during the time of research), Oklahoma happens to be a fairly good place to conduct this sort of research. This will be explained later in greater detail.

comprehensive, quantitative data would provide. In order to compensate for this loss, I have kept my research in dialogue with similar studies relying upon more data and larger data sets. This study is also "thick" in the sense that it stacks multiple disciplines in order to build an understanding of these ordinary American evangelicals. It should also be said that this qualitative and ethnographic approach is not entirely foreign to any of the disciplines that I am using as sociology, religious history, and practical theology have employed such an approach.[31]

Methodology

During the spring of 2007 I began thinking about what, and how many churches to consider for study and conducting the interviews. The goal was to have enough churches to represent constituents from a fairly broad range of evangelicalism and avoid too many churches which might make the necessary involvement in each church too time intensive. In the end, I settled upon four churches. The churches (which will be described in more detail below) represent a fairly wide range of American evangelicalism. Christian Smith's 1998 study of American evangelicals divided up the qualitative interviews into these broad and historically distinct categories: Baptist, Methodist/Pietist, Lutheran, and Presbyterian/Reformed. Smith parsed out the liberal and conservative members from each of these four categories. Along with these older, more established denominations (or movements) Smith and his colleagues also included the usually conservative Holiness, Pentecostal, and Independent/Nondenominational traditions as categories.[32] The self-identified evangelical churches that I have selected are each from one of these categories that Smith has delineated. There was a Baptist church, a Methodist church, a Presbyterian church, and a Charismatic, evangelical church that would fall under Smith's Nondenominational category. By selecting these diverse traditions, I was

---

[31] David Martin has noted the "porous" nature of sociology and the other disciplines. Martin, "Christian Foundations, Sociological Fundamentals," in *Sociology, Theology and the Curriculum*, ed. Leslie J. Francis (New York: Cassell, 1999), 6.

[32] Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 221-22.

gaining a decent measure of diversity within the evangelical and Protestant traditions.

My involvement in each church varied. In the Baptist church I was quite involved from June 2007 through July 2008. In addition to regular Sunday attendance, I taught three different classes, sang in the choir as a substitute, and participated in a class on faith and the workplace called "Christianity 9 to 5." This class, which was based on the book by Os Hillman entitled *The 9 to 5 Window: How Faith Can Transform the Workplace*,[33] grappled with the topic at hand. The members of the class knew that I was doing both research on this subject and interviewing individuals in the church on the matter and, as a result, I was regularly looked to as someone who might have something to offer. I also attended countless social events and gatherings throughout the year where I was able to interact with a range of members. On one summer evening I joined a group of men in this church for a trip to "In the Zone." This event which carried a sports theme sought to help men balance their professional lives with other aspects of life, including faith and family.

This Baptist congregation was warm and inviting and the pastor's down-to-earth style seemed liked. He was often seen providing a hearty handshake to members within the church. The pastor also had a joking spirit that spilled over into the worship service. Seamlessly, one was taken from rapturous singing to a joke. The services at this church were casual and felt less serious than other churches. The preaching was energetic, riding the waves of well-timed inflection that incited affirming gestures and "Amens." The content of the sermon was less theological, seeming like a series of fiery slogans instead of being a more connected theological or even biblical exposition. Alan Wolfe's impression of some evangelical preaching applied at this church. He says, "Generally speaking, preaching in evangelically oriented growth churches, however dynamic in delivery, has remarkably little actual content."[34]

---

[33] Os Hillman, *The 9 to 5 Window: How Faith Can Transform the Workplace* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2005).

[34] Alan Wolfe, *The Transformation of American Religion: How We Actually Live Our Faith* (New York: The Free Press, 2003), 31.

The overall feel of the Baptist church was decidedly evangelical in both rhetoric and tenor. Every service included an altar call in hopes that individuals would embrace the mercy of Jesus made possible through the cross and be born again. Members in the church were encouraged to be incessantly active. Their activity was regularly based on whether or not it was "biblical." The church had ministry zones (areas of town where members could volunteer services) that provided a wealth of needs to be lovingly attended to. Although there has been much debate concerning the Southern Baptist relationship to American evangelicalism,[35] this church was evangelical both in its feel and identified itself as such by its staff.

I attended the Presbyterian church beginning in January 2008 and intermittently through August 2010. My Sunday attendance totaled more than twelve Sundays. I also downloaded the pastor's podcasts and listened to the sermons on my iPod occasionally. In addition to Sunday services, I spent time with the congregants. My wife and I enjoyed an evening with a group from the church. The time included a barbeque, yard games, and substantial theological conversation that lasted for more than two hours. On another occasion I met some men my age at a local bar. We had drinks and engaged in an exciting game of trivia that was played throughout the bar. I also took my daughter to The Bouncy Barn (a place with inflatables for children to play on) with a group of children from the church. Here I was able to have a good conversation with one of the associate pastors of the church.

My initial contact with the pastor of this Presbyterian church provides a window into the uniqueness of this congregation when compared to its evangelical cohorts. For our first encounter, this pastor and I planned to meet at Starbucks. Our only contact had been through a series of emails so we knew each other by name only. When we met at Starbucks he said, referring to the androgynous nature of my name, something like, "Now that I know you are male, would you like to get a beer?" He continued, stating that he was not comfortable taking an unknown woman to a

---

[35] See Douglas E. Baker and Casey Shutt, "Southern Baptists and the Evangelical Future," *The Baptist Messenger* (November 5, 2009), 1, 6.

bar. I agreed and we went across the street to talk over a pint. As we approached the bar, the pastor said somewhat tongue in cheek, "I've done some good evangelism in this place." By linking something some American evangelicals find appalling (drinking beer in bars) with the pinnacle of evangelical activism (evangelism), the pastor was communicating an important subtext: Christians *can* spend quality time at a bar. The pastor even suggested using beer as a means of getting interviews with people. He said something to this effect, "tell them you'll buy them a beer and I am sure they'll agree to an interview."

This attitude toward alcohol is important for understanding the ethos of this Presbyterian congregation. It is a church that might be perceived by its evangelical brethren as teetering on the liberal side. Yet, ironically, this church was the most aggressive at maintaining its theology. And, theologically, it was the most conservative, holding to the Westminster Confession of Faith. Not only were these Presbyterians theologically conservative, but their worship service would be considered conservative by many as it included liturgy and weekly communion (although the music was contemporary in sound). In this way, again, the Presbyterian church stands apart from its more mainstream evangelical constituents, and, for that matter, American society as well. According to Wolfe, "American society is a nonliturgical society, its pace of life too fast, its commitments to individualism too powerful, its treatment of authority too irreverent, and its craving for innovation too intense to tolerate religious practices that call on believers to repeat the same word or songs with little room for creative expressions."[36]

The peculiarity of these Presbyterians appeared to be a significant appeal. Some of the interviewees from this church referred to its strong theology as the reason why they are members. The very thing that would make many evangelicals cringe is what made one Presbyterian so thankful to be Presbyterian. She says, "the catechism is incredible." Given this unique standing among its fellow evangelicals, it is little surprise that the pastor was ambivalent with the term "evangelical." When I

---

[36] Wolfe, *The Transformation of American Religion*, 17.

asked him whether his church was evangelical, he replied, "The label 'evangelical' is difficult." As the term has evolved the pastor confessed that it now stands for a political/social distinction as opposed to a theological one. Understood this way, this pastor does not like the term because, he says, "I am not interested in the politics of the Christian Right." Assuming the term is defined theologically, the pastor is willing to define his church as evangelical.

I attended the Methodist church several Sundays, mostly during January 2008 and the summer of 2008. After attending the Baptist church where I was a member I would make the drive downtown to attend the Sunday service at the Methodist church. I regularly found myself meeting the interviewees at the church building. In fact, the building seemed to be an important locale, having a powerful pull upon the members who spent time there in Bible study, choir practices, and other church activities. Having arrived early for these interviews, I would walk around the church building and look at the décor, library, materials that were laying around in an effort to better understand the ethos of this congregation.

This particular Methodist congregation epitomized the path to prominence marking Methodism's history in the U.S. Early American Methodism, according to historian John Wigger, garnered its greatest growth "on the peripheries of society."[37] As Methodism grew in America during the nineteenth century it began to creep from the peripheries to center stage, building impressive churches, schools and universities, and enjoying a more prestigious membership and a more educated leadership. This newer Methodism represents significant change from its nascent identity. The Methodist church I interviewed was very much a part of this newer Methodist form. The church's physical location was not on the periphery but in the heart of Tulsa. The building was impressive, a gothic style constructed amid the Tulsa oil boom. The pastor was well-educated, having studied at Princeton Seminary and he had gained a doctorate from Cambridge. The membership included many prominent Tulsans.

---

[37] John H. Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm: Methodism and the Rise of Popular Christianity in America* (Oxford: OUP, 1998), 13.

While the church building had an austere form, the worship service was lively, warm, and colloquial. The music was contemporary and energetic, employing recorded music played over speakers. The service sometimes included drama. The preaching was couched in familiar idiom. For example, during the summer of 2008 there was a sermon series entitled, "Not Your Summer Reruns: Biblical Stories Worth Looking at Again." The sermons were practical, engaging, employed the use of movie clips, and were laced with examples from popular culture. Whereas the Gothic architecture soared to the heavens, the sermons seemed content to focus on more immediate and earthly concerns. In this way, the sermons stressed horizontal relationships rather than the vertical relationship between humanity and God. Marriages, family, friendships, and relations with co-workers garnered the focus. This is in contrast to the Presbyterian church in particular which sought to understand horizontal relations *only by* understanding one's relation with God.

I attended the Charismatic, evangelical church from October 2008 through May 2009. Like the Baptist and Presbyterian churches, my entire family attended (my wife and, at the time, toddler daughter) which meant regular trips to the nursery (even helping in the nursery once) and, thanks to the help of my more socially-inclined wife, some good interaction with other church members. Nearly every Sunday after church we would meet with others from the church to eat at a nearby restaurant.

My first Sunday at this church was also the new pastor's first Sunday. Many of the interviews were completed prior to this new pastor's arrival. The new pastor is a well-known evangelical leader, has a ministry that takes him across the country and to the UK, and has taught at a prominent evangelical university. The church is younger, has a significant number of musicians and artists, and, perhaps as a result of these features, had a trendy feel. A few of the individuals that I came into contact with owned trendy shops in Oklahoma City. This was the only church located in Oklahoma City (the other churches were located in Tulsa).[38]

---

[38] In the midst of my research I moved from Tulsa to the Oklahoma City area which necessitated selecting a church that was close.

The music during the worship time was of a high standard and sounded more indie than mainstream. A number of the musicians were independent artists themselves. During the singing, the lights were brought down and one could see arms raised, lots of movement, even dancing, and at times unidentified mumbles in crescendo with the music. The pastor stated without qualification that the church could be characterized as evangelical. The pastor also characterizes the church as charismatic, although he was nuanced in his response. He explains that they are not charismatic in the Word of Faith or Prosperity Gospel way. Also, they are not charismatic in the sense that they simply believe the gifts are still alive and active (in other words, they are not simply non-cessationists). Instead, this church, the pastor says, "not only affirms belief in the gifts but also practices and pursues them in daily life and ministry and insists that they be governed and judged by biblical criteria." The pastor's preaching was very theological but certainly not dry. He preached expositionally, working his way through the text. He expressed favoring this approach because it forced him to deal with certain texts that might be more difficult to preach on. The church library was substantial, carrying books with a somewhat Reformed and decidedly evangelical hue. Simply browsing the content of this church library revealed much. Often times heady, theological preaching comes at a cost to the emotional side of the individual. This did not happen here, making the church unusual. The church was unapologetically charismatic yet theologically (more precisely, soteriologically) Reformed. This came through in the preaching, was evidenced by the books in the church library, and apparent from the pastor's speaking schedule which included trips to John Piper's Desiring God conference and Mark Driscoll's Acts 29 Boot Camps. Through all of my ethnographic work I kept track of notes, jotted down thoughts, kept church materials, newsletters, and bulletins, placing all the gathered material in separate folders for each church.

Having selected the four churches, the next step was to select interviewees from each of these churches. One option would have been to gain church member lists and select participants from those lists. While this would have provided some randomness to the sampling and better representation, it may have also provided uninvolved members. It seemed better to speak with those in the congregation that

were more involved and, in some cases, viewed as leaders in the church. In order to reach these key members of the congregation I asked each pastor (and multiple pastors from most churches) for a list of congregants that would be ideal to interview. This strategy, in addition to providing important members, also gave me some legitimacy as I approached complete strangers about a confrontational and intimidating prospect, a recorded interview; after all, I had the pastor's endorsement and would often pose the question this way: "I have spoken with the pastor regarding this project and she/he suggested you as a potential interviewee." While lending itself to a less representative sampling and perhaps skewed results, this approach nonetheless provided regular and involved members and gave me some credibility as I approached strangers about an interview.

In total, I completed forty interviews with evangelicals in the Tulsa and Oklahoma City areas (I also interviewed theologian John Stott). Six of these interviews were with pastors and evangelical leaders. Two interviews were with business professors at a Christian university that actively seeks to integrate faith and learning. The remaining thirty-two interviews were with evangelicals in the workforce from each of the four churches. Along with field observations, these interviews are augmented with evangelical literature, American evangelical history, evangelical theology, the evangelical blogosphere, and casual conversations with evangelicals.

The interview has not always been considered a legitimate source of information. During the 1960s and 70s, however, interviews gained increasing credibility as both a supplement and alternative to more quantitative research. Whether academically couth or not, interviews provide more natural, free-flowing responses that surveys cannot create. And for the purpose of understanding one's attitude to a subject like work, the interview is more capable. By qualitative interview, I am referring to an interview that has a more conversational hue. Unlike a survey interview, qualitative interviews allow more flexibility for the respondent and thereby make them more active in constructing a response. It is an approach

that quickly loses the tidiness of survey interviews but nonetheless creates an opportunity to better understand the respondent.[39]

     Following Bruce L. Berg, my interviews consist of four types of questions: essential, extra, throw away, and probing. *Essential* questions form the heart of the interview and seek to hone in on the important issues. For clarification, there are *extra* questions which are re-worded in order to confirm whether a similar response was yielded or if any misunderstanding took place. *Throw-away* questions are ice-breakers intending to make myself and the interviewee feel more comfortable. Finally, *probing* questions aim to delve deeper into the issues at hand.[40] The interviewees are American, evangelical, and residing in the state of Oklahoma (either the Tulsa or Oklahoma City areas) at the time of the interview. The interviewees are evangelical in that they attended evangelical churches.[41] Following each interview I would promptly transfer my interview from my iPod to my computer and back it up on CD. The interviews would then be transcribed for analysis.

     It needs to be said that I consider myself an evangelical Christian[42] with a desire to see what my fellow Christian sisters and brothers think regarding this important arena of work. In some ways, my evangelical identity will undoubtedly blind me to certain dynamics and themes. At the same time, however, this insider's perspective does have some benefits an outsider does not have. For example, I grew up attending evangelical churches and my summers were filled with Vacation Bible

---

[39] See Carol A. B. Warren, "Qualitative Interviewing." In *Handbook of Interview Research: Context and Method*, ed. Jaber F. Gubrium and James A. Holstein (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2001), 83.

[40] Bruce L. Berg, *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences* 5th ed. (Boston, MA: Pearson, 2004), 86-7.

[41] The churches were identified as evangelical by the leadership of the church. Before asking the church leadership how they would identify the church, I had a good sense that the churches were evangelical because of my visits to the websites of the churches. I noted statements of faith, the church's mission, activities, and the colleges and seminaries where the leadership had gained their theology degrees. This process gave me a good indication as to whether the church was evangelical. Following a preliminary browsing of the website, I attended a service to further investigate where the churches fit on the Christian landscape. My hunches were finally confirmed when I asked a pastor from each church whether or not they would characterize their church as evangelical. While some churches were more hesitant than others to use the label "evangelical," all the churches affirmed the label so long as it was stripped of its political connotations.

[42] Although I would quickly toss out caveats similar to those expressed by the pastors and congregants regarding what exactly is meant by the term "evangelical" (see footnote 41).

Schools and church camps. My tape players and CD players regularly contained Christian musicians like Amy Grant, Michael W. Smith, DC Talk and Petra. In middle school, I could be found wearing Christian Ts that said things like, "Life is short. Pray hard" (a spin on Reebok's early nineties slogan, "Life is short. Play hard."). Every month during my teenage years I would receive Breakaway magazine, a Christian magazine assisting teenage boys in navigating the rough waters of American teenage life. I attended university at a Christian school and spent three years of theological study at an evangelical seminary (an experience I will draw upon in future chapters). All of these experiences have provided a helpful perspective that contributes something to the overall project. Having said that, I am not uncritical of the movement of which I am a part. And when I speak of evangelicalism's "health" I do so in sociological terms more than theological terms. Having discussed the churches and my involvement in them as well as issues related to the interviews, I will now discuss details related to Oklahoma, the state where the interviews were conducted.

The State of Oklahoma

Oklahoma is often included in the American West. Portions of Oklahoma are part of a stretch of land running north to south known as the Great Plains. It was not long before this section of America was coined the Great American Desert because it contained little more than rolling hills of prairie grass. It is probably because of this desert reputation that this portion of America, while not westernmost, was settled later than the rest of the nation, notwithstanding Alaska and Hawaii. Rather than being a highly sought after piece of land, Oklahoma, or Indian Territory as it was called, was chosen as the space where ousted Native American tribes from the southeast part of the United States would be relocated.[43] The most infamous of these forced removals was the Cherokee removal known as the Trail of Tears. During the late nineteenth century land in Oklahoma was given away through land

---

[43] Oklahoma is Choctaw for "red-people" (it comes from "okla," meaning people, and "humma," meaning red).

runs, where pioneer families would race to stake claim of large land plots. It was not until 1907 that Oklahoma became a state.

That Oklahoma was settled late is important. For example, its two largest cities, Oklahoma City and Tulsa, were mostly developed with cars in mind and their infrastructure reflects this. As such, space has always been relatively ample. If churches, for example, outgrow their buildings they can simply move to an ever-expanding, usually cheaper, fringe of the city and have a well-developed road system to get the congregants there. Oklahoma is a fitting locale for the type of minister and religion that the American West engenders. According to historian Ferenc Morton Szasz, there are two things unique to religion in the American West.[44] First, there has always been religious diversity in the West. Whether it was Native American religions, outcasts such as the Mormons, Asians entering California from the East, vestiges of Spanish and French Catholicism, or a whole host of European national churches being planted by pioneers (mostly from northern and western Europe), the West was marked by religious diversity. Consequently, it was a fiercely competitive religious market.

In addition to religious diversity and given the competitive market, along with a rigorous, pragmatic, unsettled ethos that marked the pioneer, Western ministers were *utilitarian*. A minister's roles were many and could include being a "distributor of relief, social worker, librarian, counselor, good Samaritan, and public lecturer."[45] As suggested by these many roles, ministers were willing to extend their service beyond denominational boundaries and enter into the heart of society.[46] The ingenuity typical of the Western minister is still seen in Oklahoma today. Consider Oklahoma City area's LifeChurch.tv, a church that in 2001 went online. The church's innovated, multi-campus approach to church, all made possible by Internet feeds,

---

[44] See Ferenc Morton Szasz, *The Protestant Clergy in The Great Plains and Mountain West, 1865-1915* (Albuquerque, New Mexico: University of New Mexico, 1988); and *Religion in the Modern American West* (Tucson, Arizona: University of Arizona, 2000).

[45] Szasz, *The Protestant Clergy*, 50.

[46] Ibid.

has contributed to its massive growth: from around 130 attendees in 1996 to reaching more than 21,000 in 2007.[47]

Szasz's suggestion that religion in the West has a particular diversity and the Western minister must have a strong utilitarian sense is a suggestion that religion in the West is an accentuated form of quintessentially American religion (a subject to which I will return). It should be noted that while Oklahoma is considered a Western state by Szasz, its Western status is at times murky. It is at the easternmost fringe of the West and shows signs peculiar to other states in the region. For example, Szasz contends that while "evangelical Christianity did not shape the 'religious character' of the [Western] region," Oklahoma remains a "more heavily Protestant region of the West."[48] For example, Oklahoma, along with other states steeped in evangelicalism and fundamentalism, showed far more interest in the evolution debates of the 1920s than any other Western state, even "pass[ing] the nation's first anti-evolution law in March 1923."[49]

While Oklahoma has elements unique to the West, it also has a Southernness about it as well. Sociologist Mark A. Shibley's book which looks at Southern Christianity includes Oklahoma as part of the South. Shibley's book considers how evangelical Protestantism has enjoyed such influence and visibility during the second half of the twentieth-century. For Shibley, this visibility has been a result of a decidedly Southern form of Christianity migrating beyond the South and encountering a more secular and modern culture which demands a careful appropriation and accommodation in order to avoid obsolescence. Shibley employs two metaphors to capture this process: 1) "Southernization of American religion" and 2) "Californication of conservative Protestantism."[50] A number of circumstances have contributed to the spread of Southern Christianity. One has been the Dust Bowl which drew many Oklahomans (among others) to California. Many of these migrant workers, who were popularized by John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, brought

---

[47] Lifechurch.tv, http://www.lifechurch.tv/history (accessed September 11, 2009).
[48] Szasz, *Religion in the Modern American West*, 4, 73.
[49] Ibid., 73.
[50] Mark A. Shibley, *Resurgent Evangelicalism in the United States: Mapping Cultural Change since 1970* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, 1996), 1.

with them a distinctly Southern form of Christianity.[51] Also, the work of evangelist

Billy Graham has transported a Southern gospel across the world.[52] But in order to

survive, these churches were forced to extract some of the Southerness from their

approach to church. It is this process that Shibley observes in two churches in

California (hence "Californication"). Shibley describes the mood and objective of

these more culturally privy evangelicals as follows:

> The new evangelicals strive to meet the needs of modern individuals
> rather than condemning secular culture. In other words, they are
> essentially service oriented, social and spiritual filling stations. The
> new evangelicals do not condemn secular culture; they are not a
> coherent, reactionary social movement. They resemble early
> twentieth-century fundamentalism less than they resemble culture-
> affirming organizations.[53]

Christian Smith, David Sikkink, and Jason Bailey, while challenging Shibley's thesis,

still agree that "regional differences matter," and that the "American South

[Oklahoma included] retains a religiously distinctive regional culture which sustains

higher levels of religiosity among lifelong Southerners than among non-

Southerners."[54] This heightened religiosity found in the region is suggested by the

popular phrase "Bible belt."

If a Bible belt in America does exist, then the case can be made that, at least

on the surface, Tulsa is its shining buckle. Tulsa is home to Oral Roberts University,

RHEMA Bible Training Center, and a plethora of evangelical churches. Oral Roberts

University was even the choice alma mater of *The Simpsons*' quintessentially

evangelical character, Ned Flanders.[55] Yet with all its history and reputation, the

statistics represent an alarming scene for many churches in Tulsa. From 1990 to

2000 Tulsa has experienced slight growth of evangelical churches (from 114,532

---

[51] Ibid., 39-40.
[52] Ibid., 2.
[53] Ibid., 114.
[54] Christian Smith, David Sikkink, and Jason Bailey, "Devotion in Dixie and Beyond: A Test of the 'Shibley Thesis' on the Effects of Regional Origin and Migration on Individual Religiosity," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 37, (1998): 504.
[55] Mark I. Pinsky, *The Gospel According to The Simpsons: The Spiritual Life of the World's Most Animated Family* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 43.

attendees to 116,036).[56] Yet such growth has not kept pace with Tulsa's population growth. When one considers evangelical church growth in terms of the percentage of the population there has been decline (from 16.2% to 14.4%). In sum, the Tulsa evangelical constituency, like the evangelical constituency in most of America, is in decline.

Not only are the statistics discouraging but evangelicalism's effectiveness in shaping the character of the Tulsa area has been questioned. During the 2006 Tulsa Mayor race, candidates threw around staggering crime statistics for Tulsa as a way to critique the efforts of the current Mayor. The often quoted number was that Tulsa had a crime rate that was two times more than the national average. More recently, famous Tulsa pastor, Carlton Pearson, was covered in a CNN story for his new views on homosexuality. Pearson, who now considers homosexuality a biblically legitimate lifestyle, challenged the efficacy of all the "hyper-conservative, fundamentalist religion" pervading Tulsa because it appears not to be working.[57] Pearson drew upon Oklahoma in general to make this point, citing the high divorce and out-of-wedlock teen pregnancy rates that plague the state. For Pearson, there is clearly a problem with the transforming power of what he terms hyper-conservative, fundamentalist religion. For all its apparent strength as an evangelical epicenter, Tulsa's prospect for evangelicalism is statistically daunting and efforts to impact society also appear to be enfeebled.

Oklahoma City does not have the same international evangelical cachet as Tulsa. Oklahoma City lacks major evangelical institutions like Oral Roberts University and RHEMA Bible Training Center. And yet Oklahoma City appears to be the stronger of the two cities when it comes to evangelical statistical vitality. In 2000, 24.2% of Oklahoma City residents attended a Christian church. By comparison, Tulsa only saw 20.2% of their residents attending a Christian church. Both Oklahoma City and Tulsa have a higher percentage of residents attending church weekly (18.7% of Americans attend church weekly). Like Tulsa, Oklahoma

---

[56] This information was provided through consultation with the Tulsa Metro Baptist Network. It was derived from work done by David T. Olson (www.theamericachurch.org).
[57] "Gospel of Inclusion," 5:09 min., USA: CNN, 24 June 2007.

City witnessed growth in the number of evangelicals attending church from 1990 to 2000 (from 158,938 attendees to 197,462). Whereas the numerical growth of evangelicalism was not able to keep pace with the growth of Tulsa County as whole, the Oklahoma City area represents a different story. When one considers growth in terms of the percentage of the population, there has still been growth (from 16.8% to 18.6%).[58]

Having briefly looked the religious contours of Tulsa and Oklahoma City, I will now consider some other demographic figures.[59] Tulsa County has a population close to 600,000 people. Oklahoma County is slightly larger with a population of around 700,000 people. Racially, Tulsa and Oklahoma City are somewhat representative of the nation.[60] According to data from 2000, Homeownership and those with bachelor degrees in Tulsa and Oklahoma City areas are also fairly representative of the national averages.[61] Those living in the Oklahoma metros make less money than the national median household income.[62] For both Oklahoma City and Tulsa, the most popular to least popular occupations[63] and industries[64] are

[58] Again, this information was provided through consultation with the Tulsa Metro Baptist Network. It was derived from work done by David T. Olson (www.theamericachurch.org).

[59] The following information has been obtained from the U.S. Census Bureau: www.census.gov/.

[60] According to 2007 information, the Tulsa and Oklahoma City areas are mostly made of Caucasians (77.7% for Tulsa; 74.5% for Oklahoma City; compared with 80% of U.S. population) with African Americans coming in at a not-so-competitive second (11.6% for Tulsa; 15.5% for Oklahoma City; compared with 12.8% of U.S. population). Behind African Americans, Hispanics are a growing presence, making up 9.4% of the Tulsa area population and 12.3% of the Oklahoma City area population (compared with 12.7% of the U.S. population according to 2008 data). Another significant racial group is Native Americans which make up 5.1% of the Tulsa area population and 3.3% of the Oklahoma City area population (compared with 1% of U.S. population). Other groups include: Asians (2% for Tulsa; 3.4% for Oklahoma City; compared with 4.4% of U.S. population) and Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders (0.1% for both Tulsa and Oklahoma City; 0.2% for U.S. population).

[61] According to data from 2000, nearly 27% of Tulsans have Bachelor degrees and 61% own homes. Similarly, 25% of Oklahoma City area residents have bachelor degrees and 60% own homes. Comparatively, 66.2% of the U.S. population owns homes and 24.4% have bachelor degrees.

[62] According to 2008 data, the median household income is $46,857 for Tulsa area residents and $44,144 for Oklahoma City area residents (compared with $52,029 for U.S.).

[63] The most popular occupations are those falling under the management, professional, and related occupations (34.3% for Tulsa County; 32.2% for Oklahoma County).[63] Those occupations related to sales and office jobs lag close behind (29.8% for Tulsa County; 29.4% for Oklahoma County). Service occupations make up 13.8% for Tulsa County and 15.3% for Oklahoma County. Production, transportation, and material moving jobs make up 12.2% for Tulsa County and 12.7% for Oklahoma County. Construction, extraction, and maintenance occupations account for 9.9% and, finally, farming, fishing, and forestry jobs supply work for 0.1% of Tulsa County. For Oklahoma

the same. Both Oklahoma City and Tulsa have been considered a "best place for business and careers" according to Forbes (with Oklahoma City landing the 12th place spot and Tulsa the 72nd).[65] Oklahoma City in particular enjoys a vibrant and healthy economy. In 2008, Oklahoma City was considered the most recession proof city in the U.S according to Forbes.[66]

While Tulsa and Oklahoma City were selected because of my own employment and housing circumstances, the two areas provide an illuminating field of study. Demographically, the areas share features with the nation as a whole. The Christian church in both areas is statistically strong when compared to the nation as a whole. And if Szasz is correct, the religiosity of the area, given its western locale, represents an accentuated form of American religion in general. Economically, both cities are doing well amidst troubled economic times.

Plan of Study

This study assumes that in order to understand the relationship between evangelicalism and culture, one must understand three things. First, there must be an awareness of the cultural landscape and its impact upon religion. This is the task of chapters one and two. Second, there should be an understanding of the religious body in question, in this case, American evangelicalism. Chapters three and four

County, construction, extraction, and maintenance occupation account for 10.1% of the population and farming, fishing, and forestry jobs account for 0.2% of the population.

[64] As far as industry is concerned, education, health and social services rank first in both Tulsa and Oklahoma City areas (18.2% for Tulsa area; 18.7% for Oklahoma City area). Retail trade (11.9% for Tulsa County; 11.9% for Oklahoma County) and professional, scientific, management, administrative, and waste management services (10.9% for Tulsa County; 9.4% for Oklahoma County) are fairly evenly distributed industries. The next level of industry includes finance, insurance, real estate, and rental and leasing (7.7% for Tulsa County; 8.3% for Oklahoma County), arts, entertainment, accommodation, and food services (7.7% for Tulsa County; 8.8% for Oklahoma County), and construction (6.1% for Tulsa County; 6.6% for Oklahoma County). The two areas are notably different in the percentage of those working in the manufacturing industry, with 11.6% for Tulsa County and 9.9% for Oklahoma County.

[65] Forbes, "Best Places for Business and Careers," http://www.forbes.com/lists/2009/1/bizplaces09 _Best-Places-For-Business-And-Careers_Rank.html (accessed August 9, 2010).

[66] Forbes, "America's Recession-Proof Cities," http://www.forbes.com/2008/04/29/cities-recession-places-forbeslife-cx_jz_0429realestate_slide_11.html?thisSpeed=20000 (accessed August 9, 2010).

seek to answer this with a historical (chapter three) and theological (chapter four) survey of American evangelicalism. Finally, there should be a sense of what is happening "on the ground." This is what chapters five and six seek to provide primarily through interviews, although other means will be employed. Chapter five explores issues related to career choice. This involves a consideration of the way evangelicals choose a job and the criteria used in such a choice. Chapter five suggests that among those interviewed, sin, while alive and well in evangelical parlance, does not enjoy much prominence functionally concerning evangelicals themselves. Chapter six focuses upon how evangelicals engage the workplace. This chapter concludes that evangelism is central to evangelical engagement in the workplace. Moreover, evangelical engagement with the workplace actually correlates to the evangelical's view of the gospel. Chapter seven concludes the study by developing the themes and issues raised in chapters five and six. This introduction has begun explaining the local context, but more remains to be done. It is the task of the next two chapters to investigate how contemporary culture might impact religion in general and American evangelicalism in particular.

1

**CONTEMPORARY CULTURE AND AMERICAN EVANGELICALISM: A
DESTRUCTIVE RELATIONSHIP?**

In the 1966 Beatles' hit, "Eleanor Rigby," Paul McCartney wrestles with the subject
of loneliness and religious obsolescence. While singing of "all the lonely people,"
McCartney describes Father McKenzie as one "writing the words to a sermon that
no one will hear." The Beatles' choice of a clergyman to convey solitariness to the
masses is telling. During the same year, on the other side of the Atlantic, *Time*
magazine devoted its cover page to the question: Is God Dead?[1] The article dealt
with whether the purported secularizing forces of modernity had taken their toll on
religious life.

As these popular examples suggest, the 1960s was a time when Christianity
was scrambling to be relevant; in the words of sociologist Grace Davie, "The world
into which they [British churches] appeared to fit so well was being challenged on
every front."[2] Observing this situation in which the church found itself, many
concluded that the longstanding claim of the secularization thesis was correct:
religion would wither away under the forces of modernity. During the 1960s this
secularization thesis was largely unquestioned, at least as it related to conservative
Protestantism.[3] But as the 1960s gave way to the 70s something changed. Religion
and spirituality began to hold a more prominent place in public discussion in the
United States. For example, ten years after *Time* was wondering whether God was
dead, another major news magazine, *Newsweek*, was hailing 1976 as the "year of the

---

[1] *Time*, 8 April 1966.

[2] Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 33. Davie is not
proponent of secularization

[3] See James Davison Hunter, "Conservative Protestantism," in *The Sacred in a Secular Age:
Toward Revision in the Scientific Study of Religion*, ed. Philip E. Hammond (Berkeley, CA: University of
California, 1985), 152.

evangelical." It was not only evangelicalism that enjoyed increasing prominence in public life as a whole host of spiritualities worked their way to the fore.[4] The Beatles' dabbling in Hare Krishna, for instance, was indicative of widespread interest to experiment and take-up non-traditional religion, at least from the perspective of the West.

This chapter attempts to describe how sociologists have understood evangelicalism's (more generally, religion's) relationship with contemporary culture, and offer the beginnings of a theoretical framework for thinking about this relationship. To put it in more theological terms, this chapter is concerned with the "Christ and culture" relationship, as H. Richard Niebuhr described it.[5] Niebuhr understood culture to be what results from human activity upon the earth.[6] For Niebuhr, culture arises out of the rhythms of human activity, or, one might say, human work; the buzz of the saw, the blow of the hammer, the stroke of the brush, the threshing of grain, and the flow of ink all work together to build culture. Workers, both past and present, collectively give shape to culture. Culture, in turn, performs a "work" upon the worker, shaping the individual in profound ways.

Understanding culture as the cumulative effect of human work, this chapter explores how work's collective effect, culture, might shape American evangelicalism. It will begin by describing the theory dominating the discussion concerning this religion and culture relationship: the secularization thesis. Having dealt with the secularization thesis, two important challengers to secularization will be discussed. These two challengers raised important concerns yet did not give an adequate explanation for how modernity affects religion. If the secularization thesis failed to see modernity as providing new opportunities for religion, these challenges failed to

---

[4] See Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven: Spirituality in America Since the 1950s* (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1998), 53.

[5] H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1951).

[6] Niebuhr says, "What we have in view when we deal with Christ and culture is that total process of human activity and that total result of such activity to which now the name *culture*, now the name *civilization*, is applied in common speech. Culture is the 'artificial, secondary environment' which man superimposes on the natural. It comprises language, habits, ideas, beliefs, customs, social organization, inherited artifacts, technical processes, and values. This 'social heritage,' this 'reality sui generis,' which the New Testament writers frequently had in mind when that spoke of 'the world,' which is represented in many forms but to which Christians like other men are inevitably subject, is what we mean when we speak of culture." *Christ and Culture*, 32.

grapple adequately with the social conditions that shape religion. The end of the chapter will begin to explicate a middle way, one that recognizes the complexity and fluidity of modernity and religion. It will be argued that modernity at the same time constrains religion in certain ways and opens up new opportunities for religion's flourishing. This argument will be developed by investigating the work of two important scholars of contemporary American evangelicalism, James Davison Hunter and Christian Smith. Although American evangelicalism is the primary target for this project, a consideration of religion more broadly will help to complete the backdrop for pressing forward. Indeed, in this chapter and the next, I will frequently move between discussing "religion" and "evangelicalism." Prior to looking at the secularization thesis, it will be helpful to first look at Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. One of the problems of the secularization thesis was its temptation to view religion too passively. Weber's proposal provides a corrective, implying that religion plays a more active role in shaping culture.

The Christian Shapes Modern Work

When one considers evangelicals and their attitudes toward work Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* is bound to come to mind. Weber, writing at the dawn of the twentieth century, sought to explain how capitalism took root in the West, most prominently in Protestant locales.[7] Drawing upon excerpts from Benjamin Franklin, Weber describes the ethos, or spirit, of capitalism as the individual's aggressive pursuit to acquire wealth. This ethos, which was understood as a virtue by Franklin, would have been considered, Weber says, both "the lowest sort of avarice and as an attitude entirely lacking in self-respect" in previous times.[8] But something happened in the intellectual soil of Western civilization that provided the conditions for the growth of capitalism. The answer, Weber argues, was Protestantism, more specifically the Calvinist variety. The Protestants' insistence upon the sanctity of all of life, including one's working life, coupled with their

---

[7] Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: Scribner, 1958), 35.

[8] Ibid., 56.

unblinking gaze to eternity provided the ingredients that fertilized this spirit of capitalism.

"Calling," in the Protestant sense, deemed the "fulfilment of duty in worldly affairs as the highest form which the moral activity of the individual could assume."[9] The Protestant notion of calling sanctified the most mundane of activities. There existed no two-tiered levels of work, one sacred and one secular. Weber says, "The only way of living acceptably to God was not to surpass worldly morality in monastic asceticism, but solely through the fulfilment of the obligations imposed upon the individual by his position in the world. That was his calling."[10] This Protestant notion of calling is unique, claims Weber.[11] Weber believes that while Luther broke down the clergy/lay rift (a rift pervading Catholic life and thought) and thereby sanctified all of life he still held an antiquated idea of calling understood as a fairly stagnant state imposed upon the individual via eternal decree. It was the Frenchman, John Calvin, who would do most to provide the intellectual foundation for the spirit of capitalism to find a home in the consciousness of Europeans and Americans.

Calvin's systematization of Protestant theology propelled his popularity beyond that of his predecessors. What is readily associated with Calvin's theology is his soteriology, more precisely, Calvin's belief in the unconditional election of God's people. The Christian did not become such because of a decision or act of their own, rather they were predestined according to God's unconditional choice for salvation. This belief, Weber maintains, echoed ominously in a culture that was absorbed with questions of one's eternal state.[12] Whereas Calvin gladly acquiesced to the infinite wisdom of God's eternal decrees, the masses were not so willing to do so. What was needed was a set of criteria to assuage the lingering anxiety spawned by God's unilateral sovereignty in salvation. In other words, Weber believed that lived religion took on a different hue than formal theology as ordinary Christians could not be content to passively defer to God's eternal decree. It was, Weber contends,

---

[9] Ibid., 80.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid., 79.
[12] Ibid., 109-10.

"intense worldly activity" that provided "the most suitable means" for coping with one's eternal angst. "It and it alone disperses religious doubts and gives the certainty of grace," says Weber.[13] Adding cushion to the coping process was a careful, methodical and systematic record-keeping of one's this-worldly affairs. Weber explains, "The life of the saint was directed solely toward a transcendental end, salvation. But precisely for that reason it was thoroughly rationalized in this world and dominated entirely by the aim to add to the glory of God on earth."[14] Other Protestant movements and offshoots such as the Pietists, Methodists, and Baptists, contributed their own nuance to worldly asceticism but in every case there was a highly rational accounting for one's productivity and efficiency *in the world*. Weber says,

> Christian asceticism, at first fleeing from the world into solitude, had already ruled the world which it had renounced from the monastery and through the Church. But it had, on the whole, left the naturally spontaneous character of daily life in the world untouched. Now it strode into the market-place of life, slammed the door of the monastery behind it, and undertook to penetrate just that daily routine of life with its methodicalness, to fashion it into a life in the world, but neither of nor for this world.[15]

This worldly asceticism, while keeping its eye on other-worldly horizons, functioned in the warp and woof of this-worldly experience. As a result, it had a profound effect upon attitudes toward work, an effect providing a sturdy foundation for the growth of capitalism.

Weber's thesis has garnered much attention. R.H. Tawney has remarked that "It is the temptation of one who expounds a new and fruitful idea to use it as a key to unlock all doors, and to explain by reference to a single principle phenomena which are, in reality, the result of several converging causes."[16] One might add that Weber's thesis is characteristically modern in this regard. Not only does Weber's thesis extend too confidently and broadly, Tawney notes that the spirit of capitalism found a welcome home in Florence and Venice during the fourteenth century, places both

---

[13] Ibid., 112.
[14] Ibid., 118.
[15] Ibid., 154.
[16] Ibid., 7.

geographically and chronologically removed from worldly asceticism.[17] Third,
Weber neglects the Renaissance and its impact upon the spirit of capitalism.[18]
Finally, Weber's study, Tawney observes, relies heavily upon English Puritans of the
seventeenth century.[19] Such a limited use of the writings from the group in question
might skew Weber's results. Related to this, one must wonder how a doctrine that
emphasized the human's impotency and passivity in salvation could spawn such a
proactive response in order to confirm that salvation. Notwithstanding these
critiques, Weber's thesis underscores religion's potential to impact concrete
realities of the individual's everyday existence and, collectively, the entire shape of
that everyday world. The relationship between religion and culture, though, remains
a two-way street. Ironically, the spirit of capitalism would breathe life into the
technological changes that created industrialization. And industrialization would
spawn a constellation of conditions that would shape Christianity in profound ways.
It is to that relationship that I now turn.

A Seemingly Prescient Prophecy: The Secularization Thesis

Defining Terms

"Modernity" and "religion" are loaded words requiring definition. Aptly, then, much
of the discussion on secularization begins by explicating terms, giving particular
attention to "religion," and at times the conversation is clouded by differing
definitions.[20] By modernity, I am referring to a reality or setting that has come about

---

[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid., 8.
[19] Ibid., 9.
[20] For example, Phillip E. Hammond, in the *The Sacred in a Secular Age*, makes the distinction between the "sacred" and "religion." Drawing upon Émile Durkheim, Hammond contends that the *sacred* does not become *religion* until three things occur: beliefs are expressed, beliefs are systematized, and a group unites around these beliefs (4). Hammond uses the analogy of love and marriage. Love can exist outside the institution of marriage and, alternatively, there are marriages without any trace of love. Likewise, the sacred can exist outside of religion (5). For Hammond, when one speaks of secularization they are referring to religion, *not* the sacred. In the very same volume, Edgar W. Mills describes the sacred as the "human apprehension of reality that transcends empirical experience and to which power and purpose are attributed" (167). Mills says the sacred gives

through the interrelated processes of industrialization, urbanization, and production; and one should add to these three processes other offshoots including sociocultural pluralism, bureaucratization, consumption, and technology. The concept of modernity will be further developed in the following paragraphs. Religion is an even more delicate term to define. According to Graham Ward, how religion is defined is inseparable from one's context.[21] Which perhaps is why, in Western settings, the term often carried with it an "intellectual" definition that emphasized religion as propositional.[22] Such a definition, which gave a preference toward Protestantism, was followed by an "affective" definition that gained traction during the nineteenth century. Affective definitions, which were largely a reaction to intellectual definitions, stressed the emotive side of faith.[23] Both of these strategies for defining religion were too reductionistic. More recently, Martin Stringer has offered a broad definition of religion that seeks to move beyond the Christian/Protestant-minded definitions that tend to dominate the defining task. Stringer's definition understands religion as being situational, unsystematic in its doctrinal formulations, non-empirical and arising out of the exigencies of everyday life.[24] Realizing the contentiousness of defining this term, I understand religion to be a way of inhabiting the world that employs some type of supernatural or extraordinary cosmology. Functionally, such cosmology is intended to provide the individual with depth and meaning in life. Given this fairly broad understanding of religion, the terms sacred and religion will be used interchangeably. The term

---

"meaning to taken-for-granted structures and processes in daily life" (167). This would imply the systematization of beliefs, according to Durkheim, a step towards religion. And when Mills defines the secularization thesis he does so by referring to the sacred, *not* religion. Whereas Hammond describes the sacred as a general mood that fails to crystallize meaningfully in the activities of ordinary life, Mills describes the sacred, in part, as a way to give meaning to ordinary life. Furthermore, Mills' definition of secularization describes the *sacred* as diminishing, while Hammond would describe *religion* as diminishing. Hammond, *The Sacred in a Secular Age.*

[21] Graham Ward, "The Future of Religion," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 74, no. 1 (2006): 179-86.

[22] Victoria S. Harrison, "The Pragmatics of Defining Religion in a Multi-Cultural World," *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* 59, no. 3 (2006): 133-34.

[23]Ibid., 134-36.

[24] Martin Stringer, *Contemporary Western Ethnography and the Definition of Religion* (London: Continuum, 2008).

secularization will refer to the weakening of religion in both the private and public realm by the cultural and societal forms and assumptions that comprise modernity.

Modern Work Shapes the Christian

Most sociologists during the 1960s were arguing that modernity poses a unique and stifling context for religion, a narrative known as the secularization theory. This section will briefly describe this secularization thesis. Prior to looking at the theory, I will consider the influential role society wields on its members. Peter Berger speaks of a three-pronged dialectic at work in society: externalization, objectivation, and internalization.[25] By externalization, Berger refers to the things which humans create through both physical and mental activity. Once created, these products become distinct from the producer (objectivation) and as they are used they begin to enforce their logic on the producers and users, leading to unpredictable appropriations that assist in the formation of individual and corporate consciousness (internalization).[26] This is the dialectic at work between cultures and individual psyches. Due to this interplay, any given culture must be thoroughly understood in order to give an accurate account of any system within that culture, like religion.

Since this project is concerned with the area of work, an apt entry point for understanding modernity and its purported corrosive impact upon religion is to look at how different ways of doing work shaped the modern world. Whereas Weber's thesis maintained that Protestantism leveled a heavy impact upon the economy, this section looks at the way those fundamental changes in the economy gave rise to a world that would allegedly undermine religion. Technological innovation fueled the industrial revolution which in turn dramatically altered the way people both performed and thought about work. Patience, diligence, and craftsmanship were to be challenged by expediency, efficiency, and results. These latter values pose challenges to religion. For example, ethical inquiries that concern

---

[25] Peter Berger, *The Social Reality of Religion* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), 3-4.
[26] Ibid.

religion such as how the products are produced and who is producing them tend to be tucked away in favor of efficiency and results. Berger has characterized modern, industrialized work by its *mechanisticity*, *reproducibility*, and *measurability*.[27] These characteristics create several peculiarities for work in the modern world. For example, the focus of the worker's job is so isolated from the rest of the company's process that it is easy to separate means from ends. Stemming from the specificity of the worker's task is the tendency to compartmentalize work life from other spheres, such as religion.[28] With a job so specific no one really knows exactly what one does at work and with their job in some sense cut-off from other social relations it is easy for the job to become cut-off from who they are outside the workplace. At the same time, however, the habits and processes acquired in the workplace spill over into other spheres. Berger gives the example of the home that is filled with delegated tasks and important procedures for accomplishing tasks on the family message board as an example of how bureaucratic thinking has leaked into the home.[29]

The relations between workers have changed as well. The technological logic associated with the modern workplace encourages workers to perceive one another as utilities or functionaries. True, workers still have friendships with their co-workers but the utilitarian nature of many of their relations is pronounced, leading to a "double consciousness."[30] Finally, the technological workplace is marked by a flurry of activity all occurring simultaneously.[31] Such an environment has a disorienting affect. For Berger, all these factors create a sense of psychological alienation, what he terms "the homeless mind," a consciousness that severs individuals from, among other things, religion.

Although these features of modern work contribute to a psychological homelessness, industrialized work has also been remarkably successful, and its successes have arguably diminished the need for religion. While discussing the rise of consumer culture in America, William Leach cites an early twentieth century

---

[27] Peter Berger, Brigitte Berger, and Hansfried Kellner, *The Homeless Mind: Modernization and Consciousness* (New York: Vintage, 1973), 26.

[28]Ibid., 27-9.

[29] Ibid., 47-8

[30] Ibid., 32.

[31] Ibid., 36-7.

merchant suggesting a discrepancy between traditional religious mores and the burgeoning consumer culture. This new culture claimed the merchant "does not say, 'Pray, obey, sacrifice thyself, respect the king, fear thy master.' It whispers, 'Amuse thyself, take care of yourself.'"[32] In other words, the comforts, conveniences, and products emerging out of the steam and smoke of industrialization have arguably prodded individuals toward this-worldly pursuits. Industrialization has also had the effect of divorcing workers from the rhythm of nature, an environment bound up with mystery and vulnerability. By contrast, many work environments in industrialized settings are highly controlled and predictable.

The successes of industrialization also had an important demographic effect, drawing throngs of people from the country to cities. Furthermore, industrialization provided the conditions to better sustain life—although the quality of life might be questioned. For instance, from 1780 to 1831 the population of Britain doubled.[33] With more people living in smaller vicinities, societalization began to take place. Societalization refers to the shift from more communally organized groups of people to more societally organized groups. It often employs the German terms *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. *Gemeinschaft* describes the more stable, traditional relationships that have marked much of human history. Contemporary relationships, however, have moved toward *Gesellschaft*, that is, they are less stable and more fragmented, akin to the kind of relations Berger observed at modern workplaces. Whereas religion is deeply woven in communal, *Gemeinschaftlich* relations, it migrates to the fringes of life in societies, argues Bryan Wilson.[34] Wilson notes that in societies education, production, consumption, and the ordering of society is organized not by religion—as in communities—but on "practical, empirical, and rational prescriptions."[35]

---

[32] William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Pantheon, 1993), 3.

[33] Kenneth O. Morgan, ed. *The Oxford Illustrated History of Britain* (Oxford: OUP, 1984), 25.

[34] Bryan Wilson, *Religion in Sociological Perspective* (Oxford: OUP, 1982) 153-5.

[35] Ibid., 155. Anthropologist, Mary Douglas, in Durkheimian fashion, also emphasizes social relations' impact upon religion but does not consider these relations so contingent upon modernity, as Wilson and others would. Douglas draws upon comparisons in tribal societies to contend that proclivities toward materialism are not necessarily the result of the –tions and –isms of modernity,

The differences in the bonds holding these two types of relations together are important as well. *Gemeinschaft* relations are forged over time, based on trust, commitment, and stable authority structures.[36] On the contrary, *Gesellschaft* relations are ephemeral and based on role. Given Berger's dialectic discussed above, the logic of this social organization seeps into other facets of life. Religion, for example, might take on one among many roles and one's relation to the divine might be more akin to the fleeting relationships marking a *Gesellschaft* social organization. Steve Bruce adds that in societies, as opposed to communities, a variety of religions are often mingling together and consequently lose their "taken-for-grantedness," becoming a preference.[37]

Finally, societalization fetters the individual's sense of identity. The multiple roles that individuals inhabiting modernity must play cultivate identity confusion. In such a setting, being religious is far more plausible in church than in other settings that individuals are stretched between, like work. As individuals grow increasingly oblivious to religion in non-religious settings, the cognitive certainty of religion becomes tenuous. Put simply, societalization, it is believed, creates a culture that makes religion more difficult to sustain at both the corporate and psychological level.

In addition to industrialization, technology, and societalization, differentiation is also an important factor in the secularization thesis.[38] Differentiation is the process whereby the functions of society are diced into smaller and more particular functions, often held together bureaucratically. This heightens the sense of fragmentation and role-playing. In such a setting, religion finds difficulty breaking forth from its relegated role. The bureaucratic mindset often

---

but inextricably bound up in what it means to be human. See Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (New York: Pantheon, 1970).

[36] Ibid.

[37] Steve Bruce, *God Is Dead* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 14.

[38] Anthony Giddens has chosen to call this phenomenon, not differentiation, but the disembedding of social institutions, for this term better explains the "'lifting out' of social relations from local contexts and their rearticulation across indefinate tracts of time-space." For Giddens, this phenomenon propels the "time-space distanciation" that is a key part of modernity. Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University, 1991), 17-18.

associated with a highly differentiated context, says Berger, is "activist, pragmatically oriented, not given to administratively irrelevant reflection, skilled in interpersonal relationships, 'dynamic' and conservative at the same time."[39] Not only the mindset, but bureaucratic settings themselves pose unique challenges to religion. On the one hand, an almost divine consciousness is cultivated by bureaucratic thinking. Berger says, "There is bureaucratic demiurge who views the universe as dumb chaos waiting to be brought into the redeeming order of bureaucratic administration." Yet, on the other hand, those in the midst of bureaucratic organization often feel weak and helpless, jostled between a plethora of seemingly careless workers all directing the impotent individual through a labyrinth of lines and booths to accomplish what seems like a simple task.[40] For those on the inside, bureaucracy eradicates the perceived need for God because they become gods; for those on the outside, the sense of helplessness bureaucracy engenders leaves one to think there is no god.

Closely related to societalization and differentiation is pluralization. For Berger, pluralism gives way to the demonopolization of religious traditions.[41] By pluralism, Berger does not mean simply a variety of religions operating in the same context, but it includes the way religion is often diced into limited roles.[42] When religion is reduced to limited roles—often designated to the private realm—it loses its plausibility, or to use Bruce's phrase again, its "taken-for-grantedness."[43] The certainty surrounding one's belief is chipped away and in the place of unassailable certainty comes mutual tolerance.

According to the secularization thesis, the workplace in particular promises to be a difficult environment for the maintenance of one's faith because it epitomizes many of the cultural forms and assumptions purportedly taking their toll on religious life. The work one does is often dominated by the logic of technology and efficiency. Work relations are often less stable and based on role. Many

---

[39] Berger, *The Social Reality of Religion*, 140.
[40] Berger, *The Homeless Mind*, 60.
[41] Berger, *The Social Reality of Religion*, 134.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Bruce, *God Is Dead*, 14.

workplaces are highly differentiated into various functions serving small aspects of the business. Finally, workplaces are diverse. Discriminatory laws have created the conditions in which companies strive for diversity. Wilson underscores the workplace's significance by claiming that work has been transformed "by the development of new economic techniques and procedures that are increasingly dictated by more and more rational application of scarce resources and which, in consequence, ignore and abrogate rules of sacrality."[44] But, as already suggested, this secularization thesis did not go uncontested.

Challengers Emerge

During the 1970s the secularization thesis was beginning to be challenged. Previously, others had questioned the viability of secularization. For example, in the late 1960s Talcott Parsons claimed modern society to be more conducive to religious life than previous societies.[45] This was because, for Parsons, the individual autonomy that was at the heart of Christianity was being nurtured in a context increasingly sensitive to individual rights and concerns. Parsons' claim remained in the minority, however. The majority of sociology during the 1960s assumed the viability of the secularization theory as a narrative for understanding religion's fate. As one approaches the 1970s, however, the secularization theory that was so theoretically robust and philosophically sophisticated seemed increasingly out of touch with the empirical evidence. Accordingly, a number of voices arose challenging the theory.

In 1972, Dean Kelley proffered his strictness theory to the discussion of religion in the modern world. In *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing*, Kelley contends that religion is about individuals finding meaning and the more convincing religious bodies are those placing more strict, binding and disciplined demands on

---

[44] Hammond, *The Sacred in a Secular Age*, 12.

[45] Talcott Parsons, ed., *Sociological Theory and Modern Society* (London: Collier Macmillan, 1967), 417.

their adherents.[46] It is the more lenient religious bodies that are less persuasive for individuals because they fail to make "clear" and "exacting" demands on their congregants.[47] For Kelley, the success of religion relied less on external conditions like modernity and more on the internal mechanisms at play. Kelley's focus, though fruitful in understanding the internal dynamic at play within religious bodies, was less helpful in explaining the way the external forces of modernity shape religion.

Like Kelley, Stark and Bainbridge also propound the "unfashionable" argument, saying that while "secularization is a major trend in modern times," it is "not a modern development and does not presage the demise of religion." Rather, they contend that "secularization is a process found in all religious economies; it is something always going on in all societies."[48] As certain dominant religions are secularized, or made worldly, religion does not die, but gives way to "more vigorous and less worldly religions."[49] This is because, like Kelley emphasized, people seek to make meaning. It is religion, say Stark and Bainbridge, that provides the best "compensator," or reward, for this meaning-making enterprise. Compensators, explain Stark and Bainbridge, come in two varieties: general and specific. Specific would include being healed from something like the flu. A more general compensator would be well-being. This latter compensator gives religion its appeal. The search for compensators is a universally human endeavor, and it is religion, argue Stark and Bainbridge, that quenches a universal, existential thirst in a way that competing secular compensators cannot. Religious compensators carry more clout because they appeal to a transcendent God and grapple with a transcendent reality extending beyond the individual's world. They are also usually accessible, providing great promises, such as eternal life, to even the marginalized. This is why

---

[46] Dean M. Kelley, *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972).

[47] Kelley's thesis has had a number of challengers. Recently, Mark A. Shibley has argued that "conservative" churches are really not that conservative because they have employed innovation and a tweaking of their message to better resonate with the populace. For example, Shibley contends that these conservative churches have appealed to the more popular private and therapeutic needs of individuals instead of social and corporate problems. Congregants, then, rather than seeking strictness, are after "community and personal well-being." See Shibley, 5-6.

[48] Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge, *The Future of Religion: Secularization, Revival and Cult Formation* (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1985), 1-2.

[49] Ibid., 2.

religion is such a resilient aspect of life: "trying to drive out religion is like driving in a nail—the harder you hit, the deeper in it goes."[50] Historically, this proposal is persuasive. According to its founders, Methodism, for example, was a more "rigorous" and "less worldly" offshoot of the Anglican Church. In America, for example, it was not until Methodism made a conscious effort to boost its respectability and prestige by becoming more worldly that the fervent flames marking early nineteenth century Methodism shrank to glowing embers.[51] The shortcoming of Stark and Bainbridge, however, is that they fail to account for the uniqueness of modernity.[52]

These challenges have been helpful, yet their weakness is that they do not engage thoroughly with modernity itself. Even if it is the case that religion is a key aspect of being human, as Kelley and Stark and Bainbridge argue, the question remains as to how religion might be altered under contemporary social conditions. In an effort to avoid the pitfalls of secularization theory, these critiques largely neglected the way modernity does shape religion. This brief survey of the sociological material has highlighted two possible extremes. On the one hand, secularization proponents assumed that modernity imparted mostly ill-effects toward religion. On the other, were critics of secularization that, while touching upon the inner-workings of religion in a helpful way, failed to sufficiently deal with the unique forces modernity enacts on religion.[53] Having underscored these two

---

[50] Ibid., 17.

[51] See Wigger, *Taking Heaven By Storm*.

[52] It should be pointed out that this is a perennial tendency for Stark and another colleague of Stark's, Roger Finke. See, for example, *The Churching of America 1776-1990: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University, 1991); And, more recently, *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion* (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 2000).

[53] Other challengers to secularization emerged during the 1990s, making the secularization debate, more specifically, the question of how pluralism affects religious participation the central question for the sociology of religion, according to Christian Smith. On one side were the challengers to secularization operating from a "religious economies" theory, and, on the other side, were secularization proponents. For about the last decade, Smith suggests, this secularization question has struggled to gain much attention, perhaps due to the publication of David Voas, Alasdair Crockett, and Daniel V. A. Olson's "Religious Pluralism and Participation: Why Previous Research is Wrong." In this article the authors argue that within the debate the wrong correlations were drawn between religious participation and pluralism. See Smith, "Future Directions in the Sociology of Religion"; David Voas, Alasdair Crockett, and Daniel V.A. Olson, "Religious Pluralism and Participation: Why Previous Research is Wrong," *American Sociological Review* 67, no. 2 (2002): 212-30.

pitfalls, and provided a backdrop for the way the conversation of religion and modernity has gone, I am now ready to offer a mediating position that recognizes a complex and multi-faceted relationship between modernity and religion. It will be argued in what follows that religion is less mechanistic than the secularization theory tends to view it and more organic.

Viewing religion more organically, one can liken it to a tree sprouting and growing in an environment that at first glance seems threatening to its growth. Despite the odds, the tree grows, albeit in a unique way. The tree wraps itself around a fence in order to avoid collision with a nearby building. On the other side, the tree has formed a perfect canopy over the road with just enough clearance for the tallest of trucks. The tree's external environment has given the tree an especially odd look, but it has not squelched the tree's ability to thrive. Instead, the tree has become a symbol of endurance and pliability, inviting observation from many pedestrians enamored by its bizarre shape. In a similar fashion, religion has endured and in doing so has demonstrated its flexibility to adjust to its external conditions in a way that has and continues to attract observation.

The following will discuss the works of James Davison Hunter and Christian Smith. Both Hunter and Smith's studies are crucial to any discussion of American evangelicalism in contemporary culture. Their works are separated by more than a decade and each came to very different conclusions as to the health and promise of evangelicalism in the modern world. In an effort to demonstrate the unpredictability and pliability of religion, it will be argued that Hunter and Smith, although arriving at seemingly irreconcilable conclusions, are not mutually exclusive.

American Evangelicalism and Modernity According to Hunter and Smith

James Davison Hunter's Works

In 1983, evangelicalism, at least as represented by the social sciences, was an understudied phenomenon. Hunter's *American Evangelicalism* sought to fill this void by focusing on three important aspects of modernity and their impact on

evangelicalism. Hunter argues that three influences of modernity—functional rationality, cultural pluralism, and structural pluralism—were harmfully affecting the purity of evangelicalism.[54] Hunter came to this ominous conclusion by looking at evangelical demographics, survey data, and literature. The areas where evangelicalism was strongest were enclaves less affected by the encroachment of modernity. Hunter says, "Evangelicalism is located furthest from the institutional structures and processes of modernity."[55] Consequently, evangelicalism's relative success in the modern world is its "social and demographic distance" from it.[56]

Hunter's second book, *Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation*, develops his first book by demonstrating the way modernity has worn down evangelicalism in a broad range of areas. In the area of theology, for example, Hunter noticed a decay of boundaries. Hunter claims that "on the surface" the Bible remains a key source of authority for evangelicals; however, upon closer investigation many evangelicals do not see the Bible "inerrant on all technical, historical, or scientific points."[57] This, believes Hunter, is a dramatic departure from late nineteenth and early twentieth century understandings of the inerrancy of the Bible.[58] And what is so insidious about these shifts is their subtlety. The semantic field of what constitutes "orthodoxy" has been stretched. Consequently, evangelicals often sound very much in agreement with a nineteenth century evangelical and yet when terms are unpacked and meanings exposed there is a sharp discrepancy, so much so that the nineteenth century evangelical might consider the contemporary evangelical heretical.[59]

Similar erosion of boundaries is seen in the ways evangelicals live out their lives. Work among evangelicals, for example, has lost its sense of calling. Moreover, Hunter believes that the idea of asceticism has greatly dwindled in evangelical notions of work and has been replaced by a desire to develop one's personality.[60]

---

[54] Hunter, *American Evangelicalism*, 12-14.
[55] Ibid., 59.
[56] Ibid., 60.
[57] Hunter, *Evangelicalism*, 30.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid., 163.
[60] Ibid., 56.

Whereas Protestants of old gained a great sense of satisfaction from work, Hunter argues that the majority of evangelicals get "more satisfaction in life from friends, family, and hobbies."[61]

These examples, for Hunter, suggest that when evangelicalism encounters modernity, modernity prevails. This creates a number of ironies. For example, evangelical accommodation to modernity has created tension between evangelical conviction and evangelical action. Hunter noticed that many evangelicals express outrage at the moral laxity marking American life and believe it right to turn the tide of moral apathy. Yet, says Hunter, the pressures society places on evangelicals to be tolerant and civil "essentially neutralizes their ability to counteract."[62] These changes within evangelicalism that Hunter documents suggest that evangelicals are on the same track as the culture which they so disdain, albeit moving at a much slower pace.[63]

Another irony exists within evangelical academic institutions. These institutions seek to solidify the evangelical worldview of their students and better equip them to serve Christianly in the world. However, as Hunter observes, the modern notions and ideas embodied in academic institutions actually erode faith, and "the more Christian higher education professionalizes and bureacratizes, the more likely this process will intensify."[64] Perhaps the greatest irony in all this is that the Protestant faith that nursed the modern world into its maturity is now greatly threatened by its rebellious offspring.[65]

In closing, Hunter draws upon John Bunyan's pilgrim to eloquently state the woes within which evangelicalism finds itself. Hunter states that while enduring some of the same difficulties Bunyan's pilgrim faced, contemporary evangelicals are even more beset by hardship because they must wrestle with a "long and sustained season in the Labyrinths of Modernity." Emerging from the maze of modernity, evangelicals find themselves "a little dizzy and confused." But more than a feeling of

---

[61] Ibid., 55.
[62] Ibid., 164.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid., 178.
[65] Ibid., 191.

disorientation, evangelicals are "transformed." Hunter continues, "The pilgrim

becomes a tourist" and is "now travelling with less conviction, less confidence about

his path, and is perhaps more vulnerable to the worldly distractions encountered by

Bunyan's pilgrim."[66] For Hunter, then, the influence of modernity towards religion is

largely a negative one.

While argued well and charming in their neatness, Hunter's studies on

evangelicalism do not account for the complexity and pervasiveness of modernity.

For example, Hunter suggests that those working full-time, having more exposure to

the public sphere, are more prone to modernity's influences than those staying at

home.[67] Modernity's influence, however, is not so orderly. Instead, and this is

increasingly the case, modernity pervades so much of life that generalizing its

effects between those that work full-time and those that stay at home is too

limiting.[68]

Furthermore, Hunter's criteria for what constitutes the weakening of

evangelicalism are at times debatable. For example, Hunter describes a loosening in

evangelical mores towards playing cards, pool, dancing and attending certain kinds

of films.[69] Rather than interpreting this as a weakening of evangelicalism, perhaps

one could interpret these changes as the dismantling of legalism and a heightened

sense of Christian freedom or a more accurate grasp of priorities. While Hunter does

acknowledge an expansion of what constitutes "Christian freedom," he does not

leave open the possibility that this represents a stronger, more nuanced ethic and a

dismantling of a perennial enemy of the gospel: legalism.[70] A more recent study,

---

[66] Ibid., 213.
[67] Hunter, *American Evangelicalism,* 69.
[68] Also see Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 75-6.
[69] Hunter, *Evangelicalism* , 58-9.
[70] Legalism, according to evangelical apologist Greg Koukl, is something that stymies Christian growth. The dangers associated with legalism come when "we take things that are not actually commands, maybe general principles, and find an applicational rule, and we make that rule equal with God's law," explains Koukl. Koukl provides some examples of how this might play out. He says, for example, that Christians are commanded not to be "worldly" and according to some in recent Christian history, dancing was considered worldly activity. So these Christians determined that dancing was a sin. Subsequently, any Christian caught dancing would have been viewed as engaged in sin. Not only does Koukl believe this sort of judgment toward the dancer to be misguided but he even calls it sin because "the Bible does explicitly say that we should not judge our Christian brother exercising his liberty, and no one should be our judge with regards to food or drink. That is

using the same methods as Hunter, indicated that since Hunter's 1987 study sexual moral boundaries for evangelicals have remained relatively stable while mores concerning drinking, smoking, and movie-going fluctuated.[71] This dynamic is consistent with evangelical understandings of morality and does not indicate that evangelical moral boundaries are weakening, but instead evangelicals are maintaining rigid boundaries on more clearly articulated commands (like sexual ethics) and exercising freedom on issues that allow freedom (like drinking and movie-going).

Another challenge to Hunter's work has been raised by José Casanova who argues that what Hunter considers orthodox evangelicalism was nothing more than evangelical accommodation to nineteenth century sensibilities.[72] What Hunter is documenting then is not a departure from an unadulterated, pure version of evangelicalism to a world-accommodating version, but of one type of world-accommodating evangelicalism to another type of world-accommodating evangelicalism. These critiques aside, Hunter's studies do draw attention to the ways modernity challenges evangelicalism.

Christian Smith's Work

If for Hunter sociocultural pluralism enfeebles evangelicalism, for Christian Smith evangelicalism is "thriving" as a result of its encounter with cultural pluralism and social differentiation. Smith claims that "evangelicalism maintains its religious strength in modern America precisely because of the pluralism and diversity it confronts."[73] And in a statement that perhaps has Hunter's work in mind, Smith adds that "American evangelicalism…is strong not because it is shielded against, but

---

explicit in the Scriptures" (see Romans 14:3). In other words, rigid moral boundaries, the kind of moral boundaries Hunter sees eroding, are detrimental to a healthy Christian church, believes Koukl. Gregory Koukl, "Christian Liberty," str.org, http://www.str.org/site/New s2?page=NewsArticle&id=5 173 (accessed August 12, 2010).

[71] James M. Penning and Corwin E. Smidt, *Evangelicalism: The Next Generation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002), 75.

[72] José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1994), 163.

[73] Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 89.

because it is—or at least perceives itself to be—embattled with forces that seem to oppose or threaten it."[74] Smith calls his theory of religion in its confrontation with modernity the "subcultural identity" model.[75]

Smith offers the illustrative example of "sacred umbrellas" to demonstrate what is occurring within evangelicalism. Berger used the example of a sacred canopy to describe the meaning system individuals adopt to make sense of their lives. In most Western, pre-modern societies, this canopy was the Christian faith, and it was reinforced in the institutions and systems pervading the society. The modern world, argued Berger, has severely severed that canopy with the result that individuals have "homeless minds," that is, they lack the overarching meaning system reinforced in public life and feel a sense of psychological homelessness. Smith suggests that this psychological homelessness need not be the case and does so by pushing Berger's analogy a bit further. Smith claims that as the canopy split and "their ripped pieces of fabric fell toward the ground, many innovative religious actors caught those falling pieces of cloth in the air and, with more than a little ingenuity, remanufactured them into umbrellas."[76] For Smith, then, evangelicalism has shown the adaptability that many religious groups have demonstrated in their encounter with modernity.

While evangelicals have a robust sense of identity and are in many ways thriving, Smith has found that evangelical success engaging with the world is not as strong.[77] First, Smith says that evangelicals have a "public relations" problem as the evidence suggests that they are not making "good impressions on those they are proselytizing."[78] Also, evangelical tactics for social engagement are insufficient. Smith terms the evangelical approach to social ills the "personal influence strategy," a strategy typical of evangelical individualism.[79] One of Smith's interviewees captures this tactic nicely. While speaking of the woes of corporate America, this Christian began touching upon structural problems such as economic inequalities

---

[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid., 90.
[76] Ibid., 106.
[77] Ibid., 178.
[78] Ibid., 181, 186.
[79] Ibid., 188.

and wealth distribution. Yet her critique is "neutralized" by her "*a priori* relationism*,*" says Smith.[80] So rather than a critique of the deeper structural problems behind contemporary capitalism, the critique shifts to "existential emptiness and lack of fulfilment" of an individual, in this case, greedy corporate leadership.[81] Smith summarizes by saying for this woman the "solution is not a more equitable restructuring of income distribution, but for rich people to come to Christ and then practice voluntary generosity toward those around them."[82] Smith later points out that the notion of Christianity critiquing business and economic structures and not just individual morality was "so foreign…that many evangelicals simply could not understand what we were asking."[83]

Smith views his study as a challenge to Hunter's works on evangelicalism, arguing that "Evangelicalism appears to be thriving…*because of*…the fact that it is very much engaged in struggle with the institutions, values, and thought-processes of the pluralistic modern world."[84] Moreover, Smith argues that the vitality of evangelicalism in no way is related to its proximity with modernity, as Hunter does.[85] For Smith, any deficiency within evangelicalism is related to its own internal problems, not to the external forces of modernity. It should be said that Smith uses a criteria for a thriving religious body that is strikingly congruent with what an evangelical is.[86] This is part of the reason why his forecast is so promising for evangelicalism in the modern world. Historian David Bebbington has given four essential characteristics of evangelicals: 1) conversion, 2) activism, 3) Biblicism, and 4) Crucientrism.[87] One of Smith's categories measures how close evangelicals adhere to essential Christian beliefs. Given the strict Biblicism that marks evangelicals, it is little surprise that a self-identified evangelical would do well in a category measuring adherence to "traditionally orthodox Christian theological

---

[80] Ibid., 191-2.
[81] Ibid., 192.
[82] Ibid., 192.
[83] Ibid., 208.
[84] Ibid., 75.
[85] Ibid., 82.
[86] See Guest, *Evangelical Identity and Contemporary Culture*, 15n.
[87] D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 3.

beliefs."[88] Furthermore, since evangelicals are also marked by activism, it would only be expected that they do well in the categories Smith uses that measure participation in church activities and programs and efforts to serve the mission of the church.[89] Once again, Smith's criteria for what constitutes a successful religious body is in such strong agreement with evangelical essentials that it to find evangelicalism weak on such grounds seems unlikely.

The Works of Hunter and Smith: Mutually Exclusive?

The works of Hunter and Smith are not mutually exclusive. Before seeking to demonstrate this, it is worth stating some differences in their approaches. Hunter is working with a broader understanding of evangelicalism than Smith. In describing the evangelical tradition, Hunter repeatedly harks back to the Protestant Christian tradition. By contrast, Smith is more inclined to root evangelical orthodoxy in the neo-evangelical movement of the mid-twentieth century. Hunter's study is looking at those considered evangelical by their association with evangelical institutions. Smith, on the other hand, uses self-identified evangelicals for his study, even distinguishing them from fundamentalists who are often lumped under the evangelical umbrella. As such, his sampling is more likely going to include those that have a more nuanced understanding of their religious tradition and their own evangelical identity.

Despite the seemingly conflicting conclusions of Hunter and Smith, in principle their works need not be seen as mutually exclusive. As such, the works of Hunter and Smith when taken together support the contention that modernity enacts both positive and negative effects toward religion, more specifically evangelicalism. Hunter who sees modernity enacting ill-effects on evangelicalism still allows for modernity to contribute to "sectarian backlash."[90] In other words, Hunter acknowledges that modernity can both rally a staunch engagement with it as

---

[88] Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 22.
[89] Ibid., 32-47.
[90] Hunter, *Evangelicalism,* 195.

well as influence those engagements in ways that rupture evangelical mores and strategies.[91] In a moment strikingly reminiscent of Smith, Hunter surmises that perhaps the reason that students at secular schools maintain stronger commitment to their faith than Christian students at evangelical schools is that the students at secular schools are always on the defense. By contrast, students at evangelical institutions are more apt to feel safe and with their intellectual guards down, they are more vulnerable to theological corruption.[92] Hunter's logic in this instance takes a form remarkably akin to Smith's thinking.

As noted above, Smith recognizes weaknesses in evangelicalism, particularly in their attempt to transform society. Smith attributes this weakness not to external forces but deficiencies within evangelical theology.[93] He says that the "individualism of the personal influence strategy…has not been imposed upon a reluctant evangelicalism by encroaching forces of modernity. Rather, it reflects a key cultural element native to a long religious tradition."[94] In other words, the enfeebled efforts of evangelicalism to transform society are a result of problems within evangelicalism, *not* external cultural forces.

But is this correct? Is the evangelical aversion to dealing with structural and societal woes in favor of a personal influence strategy inherent to evangelicalism and not the encroachment of modernity? It may be that the evangelical inability to critique social problems has been in part a result of the encroachment of modernity. Agreeing with Smith, the evangelical tradition has certainly cultivated an individualism that lingers to the present, however, the encroachment of modernity has exposed that individualism and as a result remains somewhat responsible for evangelical ineptness on structural and social woes.

Consider the milieu out of which American evangelicalism emerged. American evangelical theology grew out of a context that, in some ways, reinforced Christian assumptions. Hunter agrees, stating that evangelicalism remained a

---

[91] See Hunter, *Evangelicalism*, 164-5.
[92] Ibid., 176-7.
[93] Smith., *American Evangelicalism*, 216-17.
[94] Ibid., 217.

dominant cultural force in Anglo-Saxon countries into the twentieth century.[95]
Likewise, Smith recognizes the "relevance" nineteenth-century evangelicalism
enjoyed in America in particular.[96] As a result of the institutional and ideological
support that conservative Protestant Christianity enjoyed during the nineteenth
century and even into the early twentieth century, any evangelical critique of the
structural problems of institutions and systems may have remained somewhat
undeveloped.

With the expansion of modernity and all of the assumptions driving it,
evangelicals found themselves struggling because they come from a tradition that
has left them ill-equipped to wrestle with much more than individual morality. To
be sure, Smith is correct in saying that this individualistic strategy has emerged out
of the evangelical tradition, but going a step further than Smith, the reason, in part,
for evangelicalism's inability to wrestle with structural "sin" is due to the relatively
supportive Christian environment in which evangelicalism burgeoned.[97] And when
the *external* force of modernity with all its pluralities began to replace the largely
Protestant Christian setting, the *internal* atrophy of evangelical social critique was
exposed.

When one weighs in Smith's later works, it appears that the health and
vibrancy found by Smith in *American Evangelicalism* has been somewhat moderated.
For example, in *Christian America?*, Smith's description of the "triumph of
ambivalence" that marks evangelicalism's political outlook seems to weaken the
strong forecast made two years earlier in *American Evangelicalism*.[98] Furthermore,

---

[95] Hunter, *Evangelicalism* , 4, 191.

[96] Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 4-5. The obvious question arising here is how could
evangelicalism be "thriving" during the nineteenth century without any sense of embattlement.
Nineteenth-century American evangelicals did perceive themselves to be embattled. With expanding
spaces, an uncertain future for the American democratic project, and a flood of Catholic immigrants
entering the country, early American evangelicals demonstrated a sense of anxiety and responsibility
to lead the young nation toward the dominion of Christ.

[97] This does not mean that evangelicals did not have enemies or did not perceive themselves
to be at odds with their cultural context. Yet some of their "enemies" (see footnote 97) from, say, the
nineteenth century are now evangelicals' closest allies. Consider the Manhattan Declaration that was
put together jointly by a group of evangelicals and Catholics during the fall of 2009. That this alliance
occurred with some of evangelicalism's former enemies points perhaps to the depth of their
differences.

[98] Smith, *Christian America?*, 194-95.

the embrace of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism by many evangelical teens is problematic for evangelicalism's thriving.[99] Alongside a thriving evangelicalism, Smith also wants to maintain in *American Evangelicalism* that any evangelical weakness is due to forces within evangelicalism. This position seems to have been tweaked more recently. When discussing *Soul Searching*, Smith attributes the therapeutic culture as having a levelling impact upon evangelicals, even citing the works of Hunter *et al.* as support. Smith also calls a pluralistic culture a contributor to the inability of evangelical teens to articulate their faith.[100]

To reiterate, in principle Hunter and Smith are not mutually exclusive. It is the case that modernity, like the environment that seems threatening to the growth of the tree, can both enfeeble evangelicalism, as Hunter claims, and vitalize evangelicalism, as Smith claims, and both may occur simultaneously. While at times Hunter's analysis might be somewhat forced, his overall suggestion that modernity challenges evangelicalism seems warranted. At the same time, Smith is right to claim that pluralism has the effect of rallying evangelical fervency and cultivating a strong identity. Like Hunter, Smith does acknowledge weaknesses within evangelicalism, particularly evangelical attempts to transform society. In *American Evangelicalism*, Smith attributes these problems not to external forces, such as modernity, but to internal deficiencies. It may be the case, however, that these internal deficiencies are partially a result of the fairly supportive milieu marking much of evangelicalism's history. With the arrival of institutions and systems challenging traditional Protestant thinking, evangelicals found themselves ill-equipped to combat and, consequently, slipped into the personal influence strategy that is deeply entrenched in evangelical individualism. Moreover, in Smith's later works he seems more willing to attribute evangelicalism's weaknesses to forces outside of evangelicalism.

That both Hunter and Smith can have such opposing views and yet are not mutually exclusive underscores the complex nature of both religion and modernity.

---

[99] Christian Smith with Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford: OUP, 2005), 163. It should be added that conservative Protestant teens did not embrace Moralistic Therapeutic Deism as uniformly as Catholic or mainline Protestant teens.

[100] Christian Smith, "Theological Assumptions of American Teenagers," interview by Ken Myers, *Mars Hill Audio Journal* 75 (July/August 2005).

To say that modernity only harms religious vitality underestimates religion. Alternatively, to say that modernity only strengthens religion underestimates modernity. Instead, modernity wields forces toward religion that both strengthen and weaken religion simultaneously. In the next chapter, this complex interplay between religion and culture will be further explored by looking at two increasingly prominent aspects of contemporary life: technology and consumption. The chapter will conclude by considering the directions religion has migrated as a result of its encounter with contemporary society.

2

BEYOND SECULARIZATION: DEVELOPING A MORE COMPLEX THEORETICAL LENS

Chapter one described the long-reigning secularization thesis, emphasizing the place of work in this understanding of modernity and religion. The chapter argued that, although theoretically sophisticated, the secularization thesis failed to properly account for the relationship between modernity and religion. In short, the secularization thesis did not account for the complex and organic relationship existing between the two. Such complexity was suggested by the works of James Davison Hunter and Christian Smith on American evangelicals. These two scholars, while coming to very different conclusions regarding evangelicalism and modernity, both capture important aspects of this tricky relationship. Hunter appears correct to say that contemporary culture poses problems for modernity and, at the same time, Smith seems right to say that the pluralism marking contemporary life actually invigorates evangelicalism. This complex relationship between evangelicalism and contemporary culture will be developed in this chapter by looking at two pervasive aspects of life today: technology and consumption.[1] Both technology and consumption are connected to contemporary work. It is technology that animates the workplace.[2] These technologies, as discussed above, not only shape work but they shape the way the worker conceives reality, including one's religiosity.

---

[1] Admittedly, there is overlap in these two categories. While I have distinguished consumerism from technology, the two are not so neatly distinct. As Christian Smith has observed, mass-consumer capitalism has a way of driving the expansion of technological change and in some ways encapsulates technologies, like television. In other words, it is capitalism that fuels much of television (a technology). Nonetheless, each impart unique habits and assumptions upon individuals and will be treated as distinct phenomenon in an effort to bring clarity to these powerful social forces. See Smith, *Soul Searching*, 177-78.

[2] One would be hard-pressed to find a workplace that did not function without the use of technology, broadly defined.

Technology, then, represents the *means* by which work is accomplished. Consumption is often considered by the worker as the *end* for which work is completed. One works to make money so that one can purchase necessities and wants. Moreover, the largely inescapable culture of consumption leaks into attitudes about work and religion. Technology and consumption have been selected because they formidably shape contemporary life and both are intimately connected to the workplace. Finally, this chapter will track where the sacred has migrated under contemporary conditions. The goal of this chapter is to provide a theoretical template for interpreting the empirical data.

Technology's Re-enchantment of the World

For Max Weber, the rationality endemic to the modern world wields a heavy influence over its inhabitants, exerting itself most forcefully through the technology that has given rise to machine production.[3] This technology-driven state of affairs, Weber believed, would eventually lead to the "disenchantment of the world." More recently, Graham Ward has challenged Weber, arguing that technology has played a key part in the "return to mythological modes of thinking and imagining."[4] Ward calls this return "technomysticism," claiming it pervades "cinema, pop videos, computer games, and interactive cyber sites."[5] Writing in the Catholic periodical *First Things*, Ross Douthat is somewhat encouraged by this return. Douthat acknowledges that at one time religion was a key contender in the battle to keep the airwaves and television free of bawdiness.[6] That battle, Douthat admits, has been lost largely because of changes in technology which have proliferated mediums and outlets making it more difficult to regulate the content of programs. Yet Douthat encourages any that are battle-weary because "there are opportunities in defeat as well as victory, and places where new life can spring up amidst the ruins."[7] Citing

---

[3] Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*, 181-83.
[4] Ward, "The Future of Religion," 182.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ross Douthat, "Lost and Saved on Television," *First Things*, no. 173 (May 2007): 22.
[7] Ibid., 23.

the spiritual and moral overtones of American shows like *Battlestar Galactica*, *Lost*, and *The Sopranos*, Douthat sees it as advantageous for Christians to engage in this "riotous marketplace."[8]

Douthat's attitude towards television suggests that Ward is correct: television and other technologies and mediums are producing programs fostering imaginative thinking about the supernatural. If this is the case, then once again it appears that modernity and religion are showing far more flexibility than many secularization proponents speculated because technology, rather than disenchanting, seems to be re-enchanting the world. Returning to Berger's dialectic of externalization, objectivation, and internalization, perhaps too much credit was given to internalization. For example, the notion that the proliferation of a variety of techniques—giving ever more control to individuals—would squelch interest in the sacred does not seem to account for the evidence because, as Ward argues, these techniques, although laden with religion-squelching logic, have not disenchanted the world but have churned out products (i.e. films, music videos, games, etc.) laced with transcendence and mystery. This means that human interest in the sacred pierces through the logic of this technology to affect the ongoing output of human production (i.e. externalization).

This section considers the ways technology can both expand and constrain religion by focusing on the Internet. The Web is important because it embodies so many different technologies and mediums.[9] From television to radio to global communication, the Internet serves as the space in which all of these activities can be enjoyed. Reflecting upon the work of Annette N. Markham, Christopher Helland reminds that not only does the Internet fuse a variety of mediums together, but it is also considered "a tool, a place, and a state of being."[10] Helland states that "for many

---

[8] Ibid., 26.

[9] See Erik Borgman and Stephen Van Erp, "Which Message is the Medium? Concluding Remarks on Internet, Religion and the Ethics of Mediated Connectivity," in *Concilum, Cyberspace—Cyberethics—Cybertheology* (London: SCM, 2005), 110.

[10] Christopher Helland, "Popular Religion and the World Wide Web: A Match Made in (Cyber) Heaven," in *Religion Online: Finding Faith on the Internet*, ed. Lorne E. Dawson and Douglas E. Cowan (London: Routledge, 2004), 30.

people cyberspace is a real space," providing a legitimate venue for religious activity.[11]

To be sure, the union of religion and the Web has been an important development. Utilizing the Pew Internet and American Life Project, Elena Larsen observes that "28 million Americans have used the Internet to get religious and spiritual information and connect with others on their faith journeys."[12] According to the same study, "More than 3 million people a day get religious or spiritual material" from the Internet.[13] Larsen also notes that "more people have gotten religious or spiritual information online than have gambled online, used Web auction sites, traded stocks online, placed phone calls on the Internet, done online banking, or used Internet-based dating services."[14] Given the widespread interest in religion online, it is no surprise that churches feel the need to carve out a space in cyberspace in order to remain in touch with their congregants.[15]

While it is clear that religious bodies must have a presence online, determining the best way to construct such a presence can become a bit hazy. Reverend David Jenkins is the pastor of what is purportedly the world's first virtual church, the Church of Fools. This virtual venture is a "serious religious exercise, despite its name" that offers members the opportunity to do things one can do in any real church service.[16] After selecting a character, individuals can click their way through the hallowed halls of the cyber church, sit where they choose, and offer an affirming "Amen!" to the pastor's sermon. The Church of Fools experiment offers a glimpse into the difficulties that come with doing church online. The church, like most churches, was open to anyone interested in attending, including those seeking to disrupt the services. During the worship time these unwanted visitors would shout profanity and make coarse gestures, distracting the more serious worshipers.

---

[11] Ibid., 31.

[12] Elena Larsen, "Cyberfaith: How Americans Pursue Religion Online," in *Religion Online: Finding Faith on the Internet*, ed. Lorne E. Dawson and Douglas E. Cowan (London: Routledge, 2004), 17.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

[15] See Helland, "Popular Religion and the World Wide Web."

[16] *Times* (London), 24 July 2004.

Wardens were in place to press their "smite buttons" which would oust any causing disruption to the services.[17] Eventually, though, the visitors were too elusive to wrangle and after just a week the church had to close its doors.[18]

The ruckus behavior of a few of the visitors to the Church of Fools raises some issues that religion faces online. The anonymity of cyber-identity lends itself to this sort of activity, activity far less common in physical churches. Of course, this anonymousness affects more serious attendees as well. Springing forth from anonymity is the issue of accountability. Divorced from physical reality and the network of relations physicality entails, individuals attending church online lack the formative influences a physical community provides.[19] The problem of accountability is also grounded in the ease with which one attends these churches. If, as one member of another online congregation has proclaimed, church is "just a mouse click away,"[20] then the opposite is true: turning church off is just a mouse click away.

Citing Jean-Francis Lyotard and Jean Baudrillard, David Lyon contends that new technologies and communications, epitomized by the Internet, blur the line between reality and simulation.[21] This is because technologies, especially the Internet, says Lyon, "bend and melt rather than…structure and solidify reality."[22] Lyon also points out that the Internet is an "open medium" where just about "anything goes."[23] Such openness coupled with the lack of accountability that the Internet engenders is a combination that could encourage online explorations of which one's religious community would disapprove. In this sense, the privacy and anonymity of the Internet could incite deviant behavior too risky for the embodied

---

[17] *Times* (London), 19 May 2004.

[18] Ibid.

[19] The importance of a physical community for discipleship is deeply woven into the Christian understanding of sanctification. Consider, for example, St. Benedict's admonition that it is striving for the good of the community which "prompt[s] us to a little strictness in order to amend faults and to safeguard love." Timothy Fry, ed., *The Rule of St. Benedict* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1982), prologue 47.

[20] Kirsten McIntyre, "Church reaches out to web users," *The Daily Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City, Oklahoma), 27 May 2006.

[21] David Lyon, *Jesus in Disneyland: Religion in Postmodern Times* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), 67.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid.

physicality of the real world. This could include temptations that may entice religious individuals online, such as the prevalence of pornography. Or, perhaps it is behaviour akin to the obnoxiousness of the hecklers at the Church of Fools. Finally, the privacy and openness of the Web might lead to more insidious problems. This could include repeated encounters with ideologies and worldviews at variance with one's own.

According to Lyon, the Internet's openness and fluidity also erodes authority structures because "it knows no priorities, respects no precedents, promotes no principles."[24] Such erosion of authority was evident in the warden's impotency in banishing the less-than-sincere Church of Fools attendees. The problem of authority that the Web's flexibility creates can also be seen by looking outside Christianity. Describing Neopaganism, Lorne L. Dawson and Douglas E. Cowan observe that cybercovens engender an elasticity uncommon to physical covens where the leadership, number of members, and the frequency of interaction among members are more defined.[25] Such elasticity poses problems of authority "because," say Dawson and Cowan, "there is no mechanism by which information posted to or claims made on the Internet may be vetted beforehand, the World Wide Web produces what some have either lauded or deplored as the phenomenon of 'instant experts.'"[26] Lagging close behind the problem of accountability is authenticity. If, for example, a Neopagan coven can exist online that lacks a leader with experience and includes whoever clicks their way to membership, then the authenticity of such a group may be questioned. Dawson and Cowan pose the question this way: "If a coven can mean anything its online users want it to mean, has it not ceased to mean anything at all?"[27]

---

[24] Ibid.

[25] Lorne L. Dawson and Douglas E. Cowan, eds., *Religion Online: Finding Faith on the Internet* (London: Routledge, 2004), 2.

[26] Ibid. Dawson and Cowan demonstrate this problem by pointing out the credentials that a High Priestess of one coven had garnered: She was fifteen years old with two years of pagan experience (2).

[27] Ibid. This question raised by Dawson and Cowan neglects that the leadership of this coven still has structure, that is, it is still organized by a logic and is not random. Meaning, then, does remain in some sense.

Even more subtle, though, is the way a legion of authorities (whether credible or not) vying for attention can undermine the legitimacy of any one authority. Such decay of authority certainly seems possible but it could be that for those that are intentional cyberspace might actually promote authority by providing more opportunity to access it. An extensive chain of evangelical websites, online sermons, online resources, and blogs might anchor the evangelical more deeply in evangelicalism. Islamic groups have used the Internet to make accessible a wide range of Islamic materials. The Web, for example, provides the opportunity for Muslims to recite the Qu'ran with those in Mecca, an especially important opportunity during the month of Ramadan.[28] Not surprisingly, a sense of *ummah*, that is, the global Islamic community, increases thanks to the connectedness of the Internet.[29] For these Muslims, it would seem, the Internet does not cripple authority but bolsters it by providing more opportunity to access it as well as access the broader Islamic community.

Notwithstanding the example of Islam, the question lingers: does the Internet rupture or reinforce religious authority structures? Perhaps this question is a variation of the perennial sociological question regarding the effect of pluralism on religious belief. For Berger, pluralism hinders the plausibility of belief and religious authority by offering a multiplicity of other options. The Web is an intense plurality of mediums (e.g. visual, audio, and texts) and ideas. For those living in more homogenous locales, the cyberworld would be a whirlwind introduction to cultural pluralism. Drawing upon the work of Tom Beaudoin, Dawson and Cowan agree with Berger, stating that "The obviously constructed and pluralistic character of religious expressions online tends to have a relativizing effect on the truth claims of any one religion or its authorities."[30] If pluralism has fostered a religion marked more by seeking and dabbling than residing and committing, then the Web is a religious environment extremely conducive to the contemporary religious climate. Christopher Helland agrees, stating that "the Internet caters to people who wish to

---

[28] Gary R. Bunt, "Negotiating Islam and Muslims in Cyberspace," in *Concilium* 41, no. 1 (London: SCM, 2005): 71.

[29] Ibid., 70.

[30] Dawson and Cowan, *Religion Online*, 3.

be religious and spiritual on their own terms."[31] As such, it "will likely accelerate the processes of religious change already happening in the West."[32] This, of course, presents challenges to evangelicals who maintain exclusive religious claims unfit for the plurality of the Web.

But what if Christian Smith is correct that pluralism can actually reinforce religious convictions? If so, then the Internet would accentuate evangelicals' sense of embattlement, leading to a more fervent evangelicalism. Yet there is a twist, once again the anonymity, privacy, and ease of the Internet brings an important dynamic that the physical world lacks: without the accountability of one's religious community and the curious stares coming from those not sharing one's religion (that incite ostensible conformity to one's convictions), religious individuals have free rein to explore an ever-expanding myriad of diversions that all catechize in a way that might not be conducive to one's religion. Also, there is the problem mentioned above of authenticity which is sometimes bound up with the anonymity, privacy, and ease of the Web. When Lyon speaks of the Internet as being open, these are the challenges in mind.

Not only does the Internet blur reality and act as an open medium, it also disrupts identity. Individuals online can experiment with an assortment of cyber-identities in an array of cyber-settings. There is more than just the Internet at work in the severing of identities, however. Psychologist Kenneth J. Gergen believes that the proliferation of a host of technological accoutrements has led to "the saturated self." Gergen says these varied "relationships pull us in myriad directions, inviting us to play such a variety of roles that the very concept of an 'authentic self' with knowable characteristics recedes from view."[33] Gergen continues by claiming that the "fully saturated self becomes no self at all."[34] It has been over fifteen years since Gergen's book was published and since that time our communication technologies have only proliferated. For example, it is not uncommon for one to be instant

---

[31] Helland, "Popular Religion and the World Wide Web," 34.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Kenneth J. Gergen, *The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life* (New York: Basic Books, 1991), 6.
[34] Ibid., 7.

messaging an old friend while on conference call with co-workers in three different continents and at the same time traversing decades of memories by listening to old favorites on an iPod, and thanks to the iPhone, this range of activities can all be executed with one, hand-held device. This somewhat common experience jostles individuals through a number of worlds, challenging an integrated identity. This is why Lyon uses the term "fluidity" to describe the nature of so many of these technologies.[35]

Yet, as Lyon highlights, there is also a sense in which the self is strengthened thanks to cyberspace and other related technologies. In cyberspace, one finds oneself "choosing, communicating, controlling."[36] Lyon notes that "God-like control is bestowed upon mortals by the power of computers and the grace of VR [virtual reality]."[37] The same year Gergen published *The Saturated Self*, Anthony Giddens published another study on self-identity that came to a very different conclusion. In modernity, says Giddens, "self-identity becomes a reflexively organized endeavor. The reflexive project of the self, which consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives, takes place in the context of multiple choice as filtered through abstract systems."[38] This context gives individuals remarkable autonomy to piece together a narrative for their lives. Such self-constructed narratives provide some fixedness in an otherwise fluid world, for Giddens. This is in contrast to Gergen, for whom the self is far more passive and therefore much less able to forge an identity in the tumult of what Giddens calls "late modernity." It is probably the case that modern technologies hold one's identity in tension, at the same time fracturing and reinforcing individual identities.

What might technology do for evangelicals in the workplace? This, of course, is an enormous question that could be teased out in a number of ways. But to conclude this section I will consider the ways the Internet might foster and challenge faith/work integration. Lyon suggests that many technologies like the Web erode authority structures. Moreover, these technologies "melt" instead of

---

[35] Lyon, *Jesus in Disneyland*, 67.
[36] Ibid., 69.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, 5.

"structur[e]" reality. If this is true, does the message evangelical workers receive from their authorities (i.e. pastor's sermons, Bible, and the broader evangelical culture) have the momentum to carry them through the flux of the modern workplace? Or, might these technologies creating such flux, like the Internet, provide a haven, arming evangelicals with downloadable sermons and access to a network of encouraging church members engaging in the same struggles? This would correspond to Elena Larsen's research which has found that the most common way the Web is utilized among the religious is "as a vast ecclesiastical library," providing spiritual help and information, or as a way to "interact with friends and strangers as they swap advice and prayer support."[39] In any case, the prominence of technology certainly poses a number of intriguing questions probing into the health and promise of evangelicalism. Now it is time to turn to a second major feature of contemporary culture, consumerism.

The Virgin Mary and Playboy Bunnies

Nestled deep within the *Christianity Today* archives is a brief article contemplating the unlikely union of two recognizable symbols, the Virgin Mary and the Playboy bunny. Some forty years ago, theologian Richard J. Mouw saw coupled upon an automobile a plastic Madonna and a sticker of the Playboy bunny. This experience, Mouw admits, threw him into "a frenzied attempt to absorb it into [his] theology."[40] Perhaps the uniting of these symbols was to provide an epiphany, a window into the "Spirit of the Age."[41] Assuming that something was to be gleaned from this odd pairing, Mouw began interpreting. Maybe this was cause to re-think H. Richard Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture* paradigm since here was the "Mother of Christ" and the "Pet of Hefner standing in relatively stable confrontation within a single organism, with neither one being quite dominated, or transformed by, or exalted at the

---

[39] Larsen, "Cyberfaith," 18.

[40] Richard J. Mouw, "The Bunny and the Madonna," *Christianity Today* 14, no. 13 (March 27, 1970): 12.

[41] Ibid.

expense of, the other."[42] Or perhaps this was emblematic of the evolution of the twentieth-century woman, from the servant Mary to the autonomous Playmate. In Hegelian terms, this thesis and antithesis were duelling to beget a synthesis that points "to some middle, even transcendent, way that at once embraces and rises above the conflict."[43] Possibly this was to be interpreted more broadly as a "prophetic-priestly clash," Mother Mary embodying traditional morality and the bunny representing the New Morality.

Having delved into a number of possible meanings, Mouw concludes that this "is a case where the *medium* is the message."[44] These meaning-rich emblems are nullified by their substance, that is, "they are fashioned by…the same plastic-and-cellophane culture, a culture whose very *plasticity* allows for the real possibility that Madonnas and Bunnies are mass-produced in the same factory."[45] Mouw believes that such a culture sucks out the power of the sacred and profane to judge each other. And so it is that images constructed of such material can peacefully reside with one another.[46]

For Mouw, the entry of commercialization into the realm of the sacred (and even profane) was a worrying development. The quality and sheer numbers of mass-produced religious icons undermine their meaning. Since Mouw's perusal, the hills of products dotting the landscape have grown to mountains with peaks too tall for even the wealthiest to summit. These mountains now occupy a more prominent space in the cultural landscape. Consequently, the line between consumerism and religion has grown ambiguous. Religion has responded with ambivalence to this development. For some, the shift indicates a departure from authentic and rich religiosity. For others, tapping into the habits acquired from consumption provides an opportunity for religious growth. This section will consider the way consumption has become an increasingly central dimension of life that affects attitudes toward many aspects of life, including religion. By consumer culture, I am referring to a

---

[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid.

culture in which individuals inhabit a world orbiting around consumption and define themselves largely through the purchasing of products.

Vincent J. Miller is concerned with how Christians are affected by the consumerism that dominates so much of life. Miller recognizes that for many religious people the wedding of consumption and religion is anything but holy, yet religious individuals remain drawn to this fusion of the two. This is in part due to the disarming nature of consumerism. Consumerism caters to desire, and with one hand monitoring the pulse of consumer longing, the other is quickly packaging products accordingly. Miller begins to describe this process by stating that "many members of consumer societies are tired of glitzy gluts of ever more stuff."[47] Surprisingly, marketers do not fret but simply adjust their strategy to this consumer desire, or lack thereof. Miller continues,

> stroll[ing] through the supermarket illustrates this strategy. Foodstuffs and personal care products are packaged as plain, simple, honest. The color schemes of labels as well as the products themselves are muted. Beige, lavender, and pale green provide the palette for iced tea and shampoo, risotto mixes and aroma therapy candles[48]

The simplicity of this strategy is intended to appeal to those who feel as though they are drowning in a sea of ever expanding products.

This shrewd adjustment to meet desire is indicative of how successful marketers are at keeping consumption a permanent fixture in life. Miller's desire is less about eradicating such rampant consumption and more about finding ways to live Christianly in such a culture. One of Miller's central concerns is commodification, that is, the abstraction of products from their original context so that they appear to have fallen from heaven, landing on the appropriate aisle of the grocery store complete with price tags. When one purchases a banana, Miller points out, they are often completely unaware of the environment, the politics, and the very lives that have played a role in getting that banana to the grocery store.

---

[47] Vincent J. Miller, *Consuming Religion: Christian Faith and Practice in a Consumer Culture* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 2.
[48] Ibid.

For Miller, individuals in consumer culture apply the "interpretive habits" they acquire from a culture of consumption to the way they think about other things, such as religious symbols.[49] When this process occurs to religious symbols they tend to become dislodged, floating away from their "coherence with[in] a broader network beliefs."[50] As a result, Miller worries, they are "put to decorative uses far removed from their original references and connections with other beliefs and practices."[51] The habits acquired from consumption may also sever worldviews. For example, according to Miller, consumer thinking sees little wrong with maintaining mutually exclusive beliefs such as a belief in reincarnation and resurrection.[52] And this, Miller believes, is why consumer culture is so dangerous for theology. "When," says Miller, "beliefs are readily embraced in abstraction from their traditional references and contexts, it is less likely that they will impact the concrete practice of life."[53]

Such flexibility of religious symbols is exemplified in the popular Hispanic version of the Madonna, Lady Guadalupe. As a result of the pliability bound up in Lady Guadalupe, Ana C. Castillo notes that any discussion of Guadalupe causes "hesitation" and "nervousness" largely because she is "as private to each person as prayer."[54] Castillo's claim is substantiated by a series of essays she edited describing what the Virgin of Guadalupe means to a number of individuals. For Clarissa Pinkola Estes, Guadalupe brings a sense of obligation to serve the imprisoned. For Sandra Cisneros, Lady Guadalupe is "a sex goddess, a goddess who makes [her] feel good about [her] sexual power."[55] Another contributor, Margaret Randall, employs Guadalupe's flexibility to help Serafina, a woman who grew up with an abusive mother. Having just called Guadalupe "A sister in suffering," Randall, in order to

---

[49] Ibid., 7.

[50] Ibid., 3.

[51] Ibid., 32.

[52] Vincent Miller, "On the Commodification of Everything," interview by Ken Myers, *Mars Hill Audio Journal* 69 (July/August 2004).

[53] Miller, *Consuming Religion*, 32.

[54] Ana C. Castillo, ed., *Goddess of the Americas: Writings on the Virgin of Guadalupe* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1996), xxiii.

[55] Ibid., 49. Perhaps here lies the answer to Mouw's perusal of the Virgin Mary and the Playboy bunny.

conveniently supplement Serafina's abusive mother, opts to call Guadalupe a "benevolent Mother."[56] These contributors seem to have no problem with the wide range of roles ascribed to Guadalupe. Accordingly, Guadalupe legitimately takes on a variety of roles for a variety of people.[57]

Does such flux hinder Guadalupe's ability to affect the "concrete practice of life," as Miller would argue? The brief uses of Guadalupe just mentioned certainly affect "concrete" aspects of life: service, sex, and counsel. But problems arise when Guadalupe is rooted in a specifically defined set of doctrine and tradition in conflict with the way she is appropriated by individuals. To liken the Virgin Guadalupe to a sex goddess violates at least one aspect of Guadalupe's contextual backdrop, the Christian tradition.[58] While the Christian tradition is not shy about sex, it nonetheless places boundaries and limits upon the kind of sexual exploration embarked upon by Cisneros who finds inspiration for such exploration in Guadalupe. After all, Mouw's reflection upon the union of the Madonna and bunny strikes readers as odd, and for good reason: Lady Madonna and the Playboy bunny each embody worldviews in sharp conflict with one another. This highly subjective appropriation of religious symbols and images is intensified thanks to the habits acquired from consumer culture. Consequently, religion faces new challenges presented by the consumption that typifies contemporary American life.

Whereas Mouw and Miller are concerned about the way consumption alters the nature of belief, the concern of Jeremy Carrette and Richard King is how major corporations have appropriated religion to promote a culture of consumption and disseminate capitalist principles. For Carrette and King, religion has been hijacked by corporate bodies and has been renamed the more innocuous term "spirituality." Not only does this form of spirituality reinforce neoliberalism rather than challenging it, it also creates notions of spirituality encouraging social, economic,

---

[56] Ibid., 113.

[57] Although one can bend and mold Guadalupe in a number of ways, there is a breaking point for Guadalupe's identity. Many of the essayists were consistent to call *la Guadaupe* a helper for the lowly. Also, she is rigorously described and depicted as a *mestizo*, that is, a mix of Spanish and Native American descent. All contributors ascribed sacredness to Guadalupe.

[58] There are also Native American religious elements woven into the meaning of Guadalupe.

and political accommodation to the status quo.[59] This dynamic operates both within and without corporate bodies. On the inside, corporations encourage faith in the workplace but a faith that never challenges their corporate business practices. Externally, marketers package products that encourage consumption and the privatization of religion, a direct contradiction to the teachings of many of the religions being appropriated. This is especially true of the many Eastern religions being appropriated for mass consumption.[60]

If Carrette and King have been troubled by the business world's appropriation of spirituality, evangelical theologian David F. Wells is concerned about the church's appropriation of business to advance evangelical causes. The American church, Wells points out, has extended its services to include selling life insurance, providing hair salon services, and mediating vacation packages.[61] Wells believes this to be problematic for the church because it assumes that the eternal message of the cross can be likened to the ephemeral products mass produced for quick and easy consumption. It is the success of rampant consumption that has attracted evangelical leaders to the ways of the marketers. Consider, for example, the success of the shopping mall. Wells has likened shopping malls to the cathedrals of medieval Europe. Malls are the places one goes to re-make oneself. One is not just buying new trousers or shoes, but seeking a new image, a new self. The lighting, the trees, the fountains, the tantalizing displays all work in tandem to create the most optimal life—not just shopping—experience. Wells concludes, the products we buy "are the sacraments that are passed out in these, our secular cathedrals, sacraments that both point to and mediate the salvation for which the empty have come."[62]

---

[59] Jeremy Carrette and Richard King, *Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion* (London: Routledge, 2005), 4-5. For Carrette and King, neoliberalism is a version of recent capitalism that is, thanks to globalization, being presented "as the only way forward." This neoliberalism, worries Carrette and King, is invading many facets of life, religion included (ix).

[60] Ibid., 87-122.

[61] David F. Wells, *Above All Earthly Pow'rs: Christ in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 283.

[62] David F. Wells, *Losing Our Virtue: Why the Church Must Recover Its Moral Vision* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 90. For a more extensive unpacking of the shopping mall as worship site, see James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2009), 19-22.

If the shopping mall is nudging the church to the periphery as a place of worship, then it should come as no surprise that the churches gaining significant attention are those that have made themselves most reminiscent of the mall. This is what Kimon Howland Sargeant has argued, claiming that among seeker churches shopping malls are the model used for reaching the unchurched.[63] Sargeant perceptively notes that in the same way small town stores have been replaced by massive shopping centers, so have small churches been replaced by the mega-church.[64] What these larger churches seek to do is replicate at church what one experiences in everyday life.[65] For this reason, only a highly controlled, clean and efficient way of doing church will do. As such, it is best that one with good administrative skills lead the church, one more like a C.E.O. than a theologian. This is why pastor conferences associated with these churches offer a heavy dose of marketing and management strategies taken from the business world and pastors are preferred to have a strong business pedigree.[66] Sargeant believes a major flaw with this approach is that it assumes these business tactics are value-neutral when they are actually fraught with assumptions that might challenge the conservative Christianity that most of these churches espouse.[67]

Another evangelical, Sam Van Eman, is troubled by consumption's powerful voice, advertising. Van Eman believes that advertising's success is due to the way it penetrates deep into the human soul, reaching the same deep, existential needs that the Christian gospel addresses. Van Eman recalls the Garden where humanity experienced relational harmony with God, neighbor, and creation. Since humanity fell from this universal flourishing, the memory of the Garden remains, and humans have repeatedly tried to satisfy their physical, emotional, spiritual, and psychological angst with fleeting delights.[68] This pursuit has reached new heights

---

[63] Kimon Howland Sargeant, *Seeker Churches: Promoting Traditional Religion in a Nontraditional Way* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University, 2000), 106.

[64] Ibid., 107.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Ibid., 126.

[67] Ibid., 130-2.

[68] Sam Van Eman, *On Earth As It Is in Advertising: Moving from Commercial Hype to Gospel Hope* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2005), 20-21.

and bold hopes with the intense, omnipresent advertising that exists in America. Ads, therefore, not only promise products but what Van Eman calls the SimGospel. The ads appeal to the same needs the gospel addresses, but in a quick, have-it-now way. Take the human longing for intimacy. Citing Jean Kilbourne, Van Eman reminds readers of a perfume add where two gorgeous lovers are kissing. The viewer sees intimacy on display. The answer to the ad's question, "What attracts?" is the product, "Jovan musk." Yet if the product was so powerful the partners could also be ugly. Moreover, "Intellect, care, sincerity, humor, and honesty are not part of this equation," says Van Eman. "Intimacy is only simulated."[69] And this is how it is with all ads, believes Van Eman. They offer only a shadow of the gospel, a SimGospel.

The prophets of consumption, advertisements, distract individuals from the promises offered by religion. Related to Christianity, advertisements encourage a highly autonomous mode of salvation that, taken together, appeal to the whole gamut of human longing. Under the intense proliferation of ads, humans tend to become their own saviors and their jobs become the climb to Calvary where they will accomplish the great work (monetary retribution) that enables them to patch together their own redemption through the purchasing of products.

In a word, what all of these theologians and sociologists have suggested is that the union of consumption and religion births *superficiality*. Secularization proponents agree, claiming that the explosion of spiritualities running on the fuel of savvy marketing and fancy packaging are simply a depthless version of religion that confirms the viability of secularization. But, as Lyon has observed, if our society becomes increasingly consumption-oriented, then a more consumer-oriented model of religion is where opportunity for religion resides.[70] Miller suggests that consumers are "tired of glitzy gluts of ever more stuff," saying that marketers adjust by packaging items more simply, in ways that seem hassle-free.[71] But are consumers this naïve? Perhaps the "glitzy glut" prods individuals not toward "ever more stuff"

---

[69] Ibid., 22.
[70] Lyon, *Jesus in Disneyland*, 32.
[71] Miller, *Consuming Religion*, 2.

but to religion, which offers reprieve from the triviality of consumption.[72] Moreover, since consumer culture does not fully equip one for grappling with existential quandaries, perhaps individuals are even more drawn to the sacred because here they find what consumption lacks.[73]

Or, to take a different angle, consumption has increasingly become the means by which individuals forge their identity. This autonomous mode of identity formation can have a degree of seriousness because it is such a weighty pursuit; *who* individuals are is wrapped up in it. The sense of autonomy and choice that rampant consumption has cultivated spills over into attitudes toward religion. Duty-bound to construct one's own religious worldview, it could be argued that religion takes on a new importance that it lacked when simply passed down from generation.[74] If a culture of consumption has multiplied religious choice, might consumption be somewhat culpable for stirring up the commitment of those embracing religions making exclusive claims? For Christian Smith, pluralism and other forces that embattle evangelicals actually make evangelicalism stronger. If this is the case, then the argument could be made that consumption has played a part in evangelicalism's success over the last fifty years.

Consumption becoming an increasingly important aspect of contemporary society and religion has several implications for understanding evangelicals at work. If Carrette and King are correct that religion is being re-appropriated by the marketplace, rather than transforming it, to what extent is this true of evangelicals in the workplace? Also, is there a poignant sense among evangelicals that the accumulation of stuff does not satisfy, but instead exacerbates existential inquiries? This might create a sense of distance from the workplace among evangelicals that even sparks radical thinking in how they might challenge capitalism through their work and spending practices. Regarding evangelical purchasing habits, might a culture of consumption provide another way for evangelicals to distance themselves

---

[72] See Lyon, *Jesus in Disneyland*, 40.

[73] Ibid.

[74] When secularization theory reigned among sociologists, Andrew M. Greeley was arguing that the individualism and choice exercised in constructing a religious identity was not indicative of a secularized religiosity but actually suggested that religion was more important. See Greeley, *Unsecular Man: The Persistence of Religion* (New York: Delta, 1972), 15.

from the world? Or, have evangelicals hitched consumption to the gospel, utilizing it for church growth and interpreting the materialistic life as blessings from God? I will return to these questions in chapter seven. For now, these questions demonstrate just how complex the relationship between consumption and religion is. Consumption is probably best understood as the root of both helpful and harmful influences toward religion. The next section seeks to trace the path of the sacred under contemporary conditions.

Locating the Sacred

The picture on the cover of Steve Bruce's *God is Dead* is of a church turned carpet store. For many, the emptying of churches across Europe and other Western nations has signaled the demise of religion. Yet it would be too easy to assume that because churches have been turned into carpet stores that religion must be dying. The Church of Fools, for example, underscores the surprising directions in which religion has migrated. The focus of this section is locating some of the directions the sacred has shifted.

For Grace Davie religion has persisted but has undergone significant changes during the last sixty years. She contends that a religiosity associated with "feelings, experiences and the more numinous aspects of religious belief" has persisted but a religiosity associated with "religious orthodoxy, ritual participation and institutional attachment" has waned.[75] Davie has pithily couched these religious proclivities as "believing without belonging."[76] Belief has endured but connection to religious institutions has loosened. This mode of belief is certainly privatized in the sense that one's beliefs are largely concocted from within rather than being imparted from without. However, Davie avoids speaking of a privatized faith because it suggests that such faith is formed on one's own, unfettered by one's context.[77] For this

---

[75] Davie, *Religion in Britain Since 1945*, 4.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid., 76.

reason, Davie uses "common religion" to describe the type of spirituality so prevalent in postwar Britain.

Looking at American religion during the second half of the twentieth century, Robert Wuthnow has come to similar conclusions. For Wuthnow, the shift has been from traditional religion to a new spirituality marked, not by locating oneself in a permanent sacred space, but by constant movement. Those that are spiritual are seekers rather than dwellers, more akin to tourists than pilgrims because they engage in more "dabbling" than "depth."[78] Wuthnow emphasizes the social conditions prompting such a shift. Consider, for example, where one typically resides; increasingly, individuals are not residents of "communities" but "commuters."[79]

Another social condition influential in the direction religion has moved is the marketing of religion. Innovative religious leaders, Wuthnow says, have successfully drawn upon marketing to attract the attention of the masses.[80] And, as mentioned above, corporations outside religion have realized this renewed interest in spirituality to be a lucrative avenue for selling products. This places strain on local churches to be relevant and purport themselves as purveyors of the sacred. After all, grainy and bland church bulletins are hardly a match for the piles of glossy, well-packaged spiritual products offering means to spiritual growth found in local bookstores. This is why, says Wuthnow, a "majority of the public has retained some loyalty to their churches and synagogues, yet their practice of spirituality from Monday to Friday often bears little resemblance to the preachments of religious leaders."[81]

A third social condition Wuthnow presents is a change in the economy. The workforce relies less on "producing durable goods" and more on "produc[ing] services and information."[82] Likewise, "In their faith, they once relied heavily on bricks and mortar, on altars, and on gods who were likened to physical beings and

---

[78] Wuthnow, *After Heaven*, 3, 168.
[79] Ibid., 7.
[80] Ibid., 11-12.
[81] Ibid., 13.
[82] Ibid., 7.

who called them to dwell eternally in sacred places."[83] More recently, however, the shift has been to "information flows—ideas that may help with the particular needs they have at the moment but that do not require permanent investments of resources."[84] For others, the move is from "spiritual production to spiritual consumption," so that those once coming to serve now come to be served by the "professional experts."[85] These social conditions have largely contributed to the shift in spirituality since the Second World War. The new spirituality is ephemeral, providing, says Wuthnow, "fleeting encounters with the sacred—like a sustaining force behind an individual, felt momentarily as he or she teeters on a slippery rock in the river."[86]

Wade Clark Roof makes a distinction similar to those made by Davie and Wuthnow. Roof's look at the spirituality of baby boomers in America distinguishes spirit from institution, calling spirit "the inner, experiential aspect of religion." By contrast, "*institution* is the outer, established form of religion." The boomer generation tends to stress the spirit over institution. This is consistent with a subjective turn that characterizes the boomer generation's approach to religion.[87] The boomers, Roof contends, have a robust belief in themselves.[88] There was another trend that Roof found emerging from this subjective turn. Emboldened with confidence in themselves, boomers tended to see God or the sacred in unconventional places. For example, Barry, a committed Baptist from North Carolina, does not need to attend church in order to encounter God because he regularly finds God "in nature, in jogging, [and] in people."[89] That these characteristics exist among the baby boom generation is important given their size and influence upon American culture at large. This suggests a broadening regarding where the divine is accessed. Not purely relegated to the church, Bible, and church

---

[83] Ibid.

[84] Ibid.

[85] Ibid.

[86] Ibid., 8.

[87] Wade Clark Roof, *A Generation of Seekers: The Spiritual Journeys of the Baby Boom Generation* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), 30.

[88] Ibid., 46.

[89] Ibid., 13.

family, Barry is able to find the sacred, namely, God, in all sorts of places and experiences.

Steven M. Tipton provides a philosophical account of these assumptions by describing the counterculture of the 1960s. For Tipton, the assumptions driving this counterculture were divergent with two worldviews that have shaped American thought: biblical religion and utilitarian individualism. Whereas biblical religion and utilitarian individualism understand the individual to be distinct and set apart, the counterculture understood individuals to be connected to a larger whole. It was monistic in its understanding of reality, taking an "all is one" view.[90] Such a monistic outlook, Tipton writes, "makes one's innermost feelings ultimately integral with those of others and with the transpersonal nature of the universe." Continuing, Tipton notes that "There is also the related idea that each individual possesses...a 'true inner self' of impulse, feeling, and experience in need of intimate expression to others."[91] In contrast to the biblical worldview, this view operates from an anthropology that sees the individual as basically good, says Tipton. Tipton's work is helpful in understanding some of the philosophical underpinnings and anchors supporting these shifting assumptions about where the sacred exists.

Investigating a much younger generation than Tipton, Christian Smith's studies looking at the spiritual and religious lives of American teens and emerging adults provides nuance to this "spiritual but not religious" trend. Smith estimates that no more than 2 to 3 percent of American teenagers are "spiritual seekers."[92] Only a "modest" increase in spiritual seekers occurs as this cohort enters emerging adulthood.[93] Smith's impressive bevy of both quantitative and qualitative data would seem to challenge the "spiritual but not religious" proclivity. Notwithstanding the statistical shortage of young adults and teens that are actually spiritual seekers,

---

[90] Steven M. Tipton, *Getting Saved from the Sixties: Moral Meaning in Conversion and Cultural Change* (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1982), 14.

[91] Ibid., 16.

[92] Smith, *Soul Searching*, 79.

[93] Christian Smith with Patricia Snell, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (Oxford: OUP, 2009), 136.

Smith still recognizes certain social and cultural frameworks in place that make plausible such a turn inward, one that places authority in the individual.[94]

The findings of Davie, Wuthnow, and Roof provide clues that religion and the sacred have been re-located during the second half of twentieth century. In many cases, the re-location of the sacred has been from something external, like a church or synagogue, to what is internal, something residing deep within the individual. Even those instances where individuals look externally for spiritual help still demonstrate more individual autonomy than in the past because there is a large measure of choice being exercised in who or what to consult. If it is correct to say that the sacred has migrated from institutions to individuals, the question arises as to why this is the case. Peter Berger has argued that the turn inward is the result of growing skepticism toward one's institutions. Consider the difference between traditional and modern societies. Fewer institutions typical of traditional societies enjoy more certitude but as institutions multiply their very numbers erode the institutional certainty that was enjoyed before.[95] Disillusioned and skeptical of externalities, religious individuals have been far more willing to *believe* without necessarily *belonging*, or to *seek* instead of *dwell*. If large numbers of institutions—typical of modern societies—fail to provide individuals with the hardware to build plausible meaning systems, then a turn inward occurs.[96]

Like Berger, Wuthnow says the turn inward has been a consequence of the disillusionment over the likelihood and trustworthiness of an objective reality.[97] In America, the Vietnam War, the Nixon debacle, child molestations within the Catholic Church, major televangelists squandering money, and more recently the War on Terror and economic woes have cast doubt over the trustworthiness of major institutions. As Wuthnow contends, when one's outside reality appears to be crumbling, the sturdiness of the self becomes in doubt as well.[98] But since the self

---

[94] Smith, *Soul Searching*, 177. Smith also suggests that this attitude toward the self is alive and well among emerging adults. See Smith, *Souls in Transition*, 156.

[95] Peter L. Berger, *The Heretical Imperative: Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation* (London: Collins, 1980), 13.

[96] Ibid., 21.

[97] Wuthnow, *After Heaven*, 149.

[98] Ibid.

has a way of absorbing the existential questions that this precarious environment engenders, the self becomes central. Wuthnow continues, "all that exists is what one is able to experience" and so it is that "the height of spiritual existence becomes the process of journeying, seeking, perceiving, and experiencing."[99]

Having been shaped by social conditions that encourage psychological homelessness, one must be self-reliant in finding and forging a connection with the sacred—a weighty task for the self alone. In order to bear the brunt of this task and do so with a sense of correctness, Wuthnow says, "The self must be refashioned in a way that gives it the authority to make these decisions."[100] As a result, the self is often infused with the divine so that its hefty pursuits can be legitimated.

There is historical precedent for this according to evangelical theologian David Wells. Considering Gnosticism, Wells notes that its emergence came at a time when the Roman world might have seemed precarious. Although the final blow to the empire came in AD 410, concerns about the stability of Rome were voiced much earlier from writers like Tacitus and Seneca. The instability and concerns raised by these writers, claims Wells, are similar to the Western world today. Both worlds share "fallen cognitive ceilings,…loss of truth and moral fabric,…hedonism, and…self-abandonment."[101] When the structures and systems of the Roman world appeared suspect, a turn inward occurred. Gnosticism, although varied, shared the notion that the soul was "not divine creation but a shard which had fallen away from the All or Absolute and was now found in a human body."[102] The search for the divine turned in on itself, becoming a pursuit of hacking through the physical with all its weaknesses and locating the shard tucked deeply within the self.

Linda Woodhead and Paul Heelas have argued that the institutional uncertainty that Berger spoke of has been amended by mediating institutions that have resolved the deficiencies of the primary institutions by giving homes to

---

[99] Ibid.
[100] Ibid., 147.
[101] Wells, *Above all Earthly Pow'rs,* 137-8.
[102] Ibid., 138.

otherwise homeless selves.[103] These institutions offer a "'middle way'…between the homelessness of countercultural tendencies and the homelessness experienced in relation to the primary mainstream."[104] Woodhead and Heelas describe these new institutions as less traditional, authoritative, and regulated as primary institutions making them more "*life-affirming*" and "*life-expanding.*" Consider the world of work: a cold, hard profit-mongering capitalism has been replaced by a more worker-friendly "soft capitalism" that has expanded its "bottom line" to include personal development of its employees.[105]

The institutions that Woodhead and Heelas have described operate with a notion of the self more akin to the type of self I have been describing. The self should not be *denied* but *affirmed* and *expanded*, and in the process one's full potential is realized. This emerges from a view of the self that is more consistent with the idea that the self is infused with the divine or somehow encapsulates the sacred. These mediating institutions, then, are the ones that better account for more recent understandings of the self. Even traditional churches have made steps more conducive to these newer understandings of self. The popularity of home groups suggests that church-goers delight in the coziness of a home, preferring a sofa to a folding chair. In these friendlier environments, it is often the case that instead of an instructor there is a facilitator who directs the conversation but allows for and encourages the free-expression of attendees.

On the surface, it may seem that the persistence of evangelicalism during the last sixty years indicates that many, rather than seeing the sacred within, believe that what resides within them is a sin so powerful that only the atoning work of the risen Jesus can amend it. Yet as James Davison Hunter has recognized, this traditional evangelical understanding of the gospel has been subtly revised. As early as 1983, Hunter observed the "deemphasis" of certain evangelical staples like "notions of inherent evil" and "sinful conduct and lifestyles."[106] Such a de-emphasis

---

[103] Linda Woodhead, Paul Heelas, and David Martin, *Peter Berger and the Study of Religion* (London: Routledge, 2001), 44.

[104] Ibid., 53.

[105] Ibid., 54-9.

[106] Hunter, *American Evangelicalism*, 87.

of sin might be understood as a move among evangelicals to have an anthropology that corresponds to the new understanding of the self discussed above. While traditional religion has maintained its presence amidst these new understandings of the self, a higher view of the self—at least among evangelicalism—has accompanied the sacralization of the self seen in culture at large.[107]

What might these shifts mean for evangelicals at work? If Wuthnow is correct that while many remain attached to synagogues and churches, their practice during the week is different, then one wonders how evangelical faith morphs when it encounters the public square during the workweek. If evangelicals talk of Jesus, the faith, and holy living at church, then at work might they employ the more neutral terms: God, spirituality, and values? Does this new anthropology reconfigure the scope of Jesus' redemptive work? How might this new anthropology affect evangelism at work? The old paradigm that assumed individuals to be separated from God by an impenetrable wall does not work in an age when individuals assume that they have all the faculties necessary to directly access the divine. Might a heightened confidence in the self defer the perceived need for consulting pastors and church leaders regarding issues one faces in the workplace? In other words, what does a sense of unmediated access to God mean for mediators (pastors, publications, theologians, etc.) within evangelicalism? These are questions that will be addressed in the coming chapters.

Summary

The social conditions comprising contemporary American culture are ones that affect religion in complex ways. These social conditions do not necessarily squelch religion but nudge and prod the sacred in surprising and peculiar directions. Yet religion is not purely passive and mechanical in its encounter with modernity, rather it has shown reactive and organic qualities that demonstrate religion's

---

[107] This preoccupation with the self, Hunter argues, has even birthed a "new evangelical theodicy," a theodicy attentive to more psychological and emotional concerns. James Davison Hunter, "Subjectivation and the New Evangelical Theodicy," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 20, no. 1 (1982): 39-47.

resilience to survive, albeit in an evolving fashion. Consider the Internet's affect on religion. Although presenting issues related to accountability, authority, pluralism and psychological disorientation, religion has not melted away under the Internet's pervasive glow. On the contrary, religion has found modes of survival and even flourishing in this new frontier. Or, consider evangelicalism's encounter with consumption. This encounter has, according to Wells, given evangelicalism a uniquely consumerist look, from church structures, to polity, to programs. Yet there is the possibility that evangelicalism might react against consumer culture, thereby producing a more countercultural posture to this pervasive aspect of contemporary life. This overview has provided a general orientation for thinking about American evangelicals, contemporary culture, and the relationship between the two. It has laid the theoretical groundwork for a multifaceted, complex, even surprising relationship between evangelicalism and culture. But a closer look at American evangelicalism is needed. The next chapter will seek to provide this by looking at American evangelicalism's history.

3

A HISTORICAL EXAMINATION OF AMERICAN EVANGELICALISM

With towering figures like the Wesleys, Whitefield, and Edwards at the helm, evangelicalism burgeoned during the eighteenth century as a transatlantic movement. Understanding exactly what it means to be an evangelical has been a difficult task and some have even advocated exterminating the term altogether. D. G. Hart, for example, has suggested that the label "evangelical" as it is now understood is a late twentieth century construct that has led to an ill-defined study of religion over the last thirty years.[1] Notwithstanding Hart, this study is convinced that the category "evangelical" should be maintained as it refers to a large constituency of Christianity worldwide that adhere to certain common characteristics. Following David Bebbington's lead, those commonalities include an emphasis on a conversion experience, often called a born-again experience, incessant activism, strict adherence to the Bible, and the centrality of the atoning death of Jesus on the cross.[2] This chapter seeks to understand American evangelicalism and, in an effort to gain a fuller understanding of the American variety, will gaze across the Atlantic to understand what has been happening among British evangelicals. This historical survey will underscore the complex interplay between evangelicalism and culture

---

[1] D. G. Hart, *Deconstructing Evangelicalism: Conservative Protestantism in the Age of Billy Graham* (Grand Rapids: MI, Baker, 2004).

[2] Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 3. Employing similar theological characteristics James Davison Hunter calls for biblical inerrancy, Jesus' divinity, and the way of salvation, namely, through the gospel of Jesus, as characteristics essential to evangelicalism. In a response, Nancy T. Ammerman gets even closer to Bebbington by replacing biblical inerrancy with the importance of "inspiration" and "authority" to the evangelical view of the Bible. See James Davison Hunter, "Operationalizing Evangelicalism: A Review, Critique and Proposal," *Sociological Analysis*, vol. 42, no. 4, (Winter 1981): 368; Nancy T. Ammerman, "Operationalizing Evangelicalism: An Amendment," *Sociological Analysis*, vol. 43, no. 2, (Summer 1982): 170.

that was discussed in the previous chapters. Finally, this historical section will consider views of work spanning the four centuries that evangelicalism has persisted.

The story of American evangelicalism should begin with a look at the New England Puritans. For these religious pilgrims, the New England wilderness was the space where God's society would be carved out. In 1630, John Winthrop reminded his congregants that they were forging a "city on a hill." In the words of William Bradford, the New England Puritans who fled religious enslavement and successfully traversed a volatile sea were "the Lord's free people."[3] Establishing a city on a hill would be no easy task; it was fraught with the perils of the wilderness, surrounding pagans, and the proclivity to declension from within. Yet, it was believed, by overcoming the obstacles these faithful Christians would shine forth as a model to both wayward Christians back home and the reprobate still groping in the shadows.

Enslavement; deliverance; sea; wilderness; pagan neighbors; it would be hard to overlook the parallels these New Englanders made to the Exodus experience of the Hebrew people, an experience providing the motif to which Puritans could turn in order to make sense of their circumstances. In addition to the Hebrew experience, Puritans loaded a plethora of other ideas, convictions, and sensibilities along with their food and supplies. David D. Hall selects the Protestant Reformation and a dissolving traditional society as the two most influential sensibilities boarding ships bound for the New World during the seventeenth-century.[4] These sensibilities, therefore, were European imports, most formidably British. In fact, George M. Marsden believes that well into the eighteenth century New England was more British than American.[5] And the European influence upon American life would remain intact for some time. As Mark A. Noll contends, the shift from a distinctively

---

[3] David D. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgement: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1989), 239.

[4] Ibid., 10.

[5] George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale, 2003), 2.

European religion to a distinctively American religion occurred over a period spanning from the 1730s to the 1860s.[6]

This older theology of European vintage included a robustly theocentric way of viewing the world.[7] An acute theocentricity coupled with a keen sense of one's wretchedness were foundational to understanding the Puritan psyche of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. To be sure, the harsh realities of early New England colonial life gave punch to the plausibility of a wicked human heart. Marsden's landmark study of Jonathan Edwards promptly discusses the difficulty of New England life in an effort to understand Edwards' thinking. Unlike the quaint and peaceful images of New England towns portrayed on postcards, Marsden says that eighteenth century New England towns were more akin to war zones.[8] In place of white picket fences were rugged and robust palisades.

The captivity narrative of Mary Rowlandson provides a window into the way this interrelated sense of human frailty and wickedness and divine sovereignty and goodness mingled. It was during Metacom's War (1675-76)—a bloody conflict between the English colonists and Indians—that Mary Rowlandson was abducted and held captive for three months by the Nipmucs, Narragansetts, and Wampanoags Indians. The tale of her captivity, *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God*, was published in 1682. For Rowlandson, sin had a mighty hold on the human heart and it was while in captivity that she had the opportunity to reflect on this grasp. Rowlandson mulled over her fruitless use of God's time, especially the Sabbath, and the evil deeds that she had committed.[9] Following this reflection, Rowlandson was thankful because now she understood more poignantly the mercy of God, and, says Rowlandson, "Life mercies, are heart-affecting mercies."[10] This rhythm of loathing one's sin, followed by relief and revel in God's mercy was typical of the Puritan. It was often complacency—spawned by a forgetful and too easily satisfied heart—that

---

[6] Mark A. Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (Oxford: OUP, 2002).

[7] Ibid., 19, 29.

[8] Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 11.

[9] Mary Rowlandson, *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God*, ed. Neal Salisbury (Boston, MA: Bedford, 1997), 74.

[10] Ibid., 66.

disrupted this cycle. Rowlandson suggests this when her home and family were attacked just prior to her capture: "the little that we think of such dreadfull sights" when we are in "prosperity."[11] This is why Rowlandson in some sense welcomed her capture, saying that she "was ready sometimes to wish for it [affliction]."[12] Rowlandson believed this experience "scourge[d]" and "chasten[ed]" her, not "by drops," but "like a sweeping rain that leaveth no food."[13] Reinforcing Rowlandson's narrative is both a high sense of the divine and a strong grasp of human weakness. The human predicament, it was believed, ran so deep that nothing less than complete self-annihilation would do. Only then would a re-creative work of God be possible. Consequently, Rowlandson could interpret this frightening experience positively: seeing it not as an opportunity for self-realization or a test to dig deep into Rowlandson's resilience but as an opportunity for self-destruction, a God-ordained incident that might kill Rowlandson's heart of stone, replacing it with a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 11:19).

The fervor the New England Puritans had for establishing a city on a hill has persisted throughout America's history. Much of the evangelical missionary zeal for the conversion of America was rooted in rhetoric appealing to anxiety concerning the fate of the nation. This nervousness seen in the language of Christian leaders can be detected from missionaries and pastors since the advent of America all the way down to the Religious Right. Soothing their concerns has been the quintessentially evangelical born-again experience, an experience providing tangibility to an otherwise murky process of sifting the wheat from the chaff. Moreover, since its beginning the born-again experience has been the balm aiding the anxiety of the individual Christian. The Puritan paradigm—seen in Rowlandson—that emphasized the *process* of salvation marked by onerous mental reflection concerning one's destiny was becoming distressed. Bebbington underscores the differences between the Puritan model and the evangelical model of salvation by saying that "Whereas the Puritans had held that assurance is rare, late and in the fruit of struggle in the

---

[11] Ibid., 70.
[12] Ibid., 112.
[13] Ibid.

experience of believers, the Evangelicals believed it to be general, normally given at conversion and the result of simple acceptance of the gift of God."[14] Individuals wanted certitude regarding their eternal state before God and the offer to be born again seemed to deliver definiteness. Underpinning the born-again experience was the human depravity articulated so well by American Puritans. According to these Puritans, sin had such a tight hold on the human heart that it had ceased to beat; humans were spiritually dead. Yet there was an omnibenevolent God that was in the business of resuscitating the spiritually dead. Here were the perfect ingredients for developing the emphasis upon the born-again experience.

A look at Jonathan Edwards provides a helpful segue to the dawn of evangelicalism as he is often considered one of its formidable leaders. As mentioned above, Edwards was in no way immune to the harsh realities of New England life. His own family had a horrific lineage of violence: "his grandmother was an incorrigible profligate, his great-aunt committed infanticide, and his great uncle was an ax-murderer."[15] Such precarious and violent circumstances perhaps nudged Edwards' faith to heightened levels of fervency. As early as age ten Edwards made a point to pray five times a day, spoke religion with his friends, and built a prayer house in the woods for him and his friends.[16] Edwards' profundity was strengthened by the serious, almost obsessive, way in which he honed his mind. As Marsden says, "He had no middle gears."[17] This full throttle approach to life thrust Edwards into becoming arguably the greatest American theologian. It is Edwards' understanding of time that will shed light on Puritan notions of work.

---

[14] Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 43. This point has recently been tempered by Michael A. G. Haykin. Haykin argues, by looking at the evolution of Edwards' thought on assurance, that there is more continuity between the Puritan and evangelical salvation paradigms than Bebbington allows. Similarly, in the same volume, Garry J. Williams claims that the evangelical leaders of the eighteenth century (specifically, John Wesley, Jonathan Edwards, and John Newton) were not unlike their Puritan predecessors on the notion of assurance. Haykin and Williams, while challenging the abruptness and timing of these changes, do not challenge that changes did take place with regard to assurance in salvation. Michael A. G. Haykin and Kenneth J. Stewart, eds., *The Advent of Evangelicalism: Exploring Historical Continuities* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2008).

[15] Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 22.

[16] Ibid., 25-6.

[17] Ibid., 39.

"The Preciousness of Time"

The uncertainty of seventeenth and eighteenth century life along with constant perusal of one's shortcomings before a holy God fostered an anxious urgency to life. In *The Preciousness of Time*, Edwards grappled with these anxieties and urgencies and concluded that time is indeed precious. In the process, Edwards provides a glimpse into the New England Puritan attitude toward work and leisure.

For Edwards, time is precious because "our state in eternity depends upon it."[18] It is within time that humans have the "opportunity of escaping everlasting misery, and of obtaining everlasting blessedness and glory."[19] Undergirding this was an anthropology and theology consistent with that found in Mary Rowlandson's captivity narrative: a horrifyingly wretched humanity dwarfed by an unimaginably benevolent God. Time was also precious because there was little of it, a fact compounded amidst the hardship of early New England colonial life. Edwards would add that limits on human apprehension exacerbate the preciousness of time; not only is time short, but one does not even know how short it is. Edwards says:

> This is the case with multitudes now in the world, who at present enjoy health, and see no signs of approaching death: many such, no doubt, are to die the next month, many the next week, yea, many probably tomorrow, and some this night; yet these same persons know nothing of it, and perhaps think nothing of it, and neither they nor their neighbours can say that they are more likely soon to be taken out of the world than others.[20]

Life's fleeting nature was reiterated repeatedly among Puritans. As Marsden observes, even "The *New England Primer* illustrated the letter 'T' with 'Time cuts down all, both great and small' and a woodcut of the grim reaper."[21] An appeal to the fleeting and uncertain nature of human life no doubt gave clout to Edwards' claims.

---

[18] Jonathan Edwards, *The Preciousness of Time and The Importance of Redeeming It* (Goodyear, AZ: Diggory, 2007), 8.

[19] Ibid., 9.

[20] Ibid., 11-12.

[21] Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 27.

Finally, Edwards called time precious because it cannot be regained. Edwards said that "when the time of life is gone, it is impossible that we should ever obtain another such time. All opportunity of obtaining eternal welfare is utterly and everlastingly gone."[22] In this way, time was illusory; unlike a lost object which may be found again, a lost day was forever gone.

Edwards expressed two types of time: ordinary and holy (i.e. "sabbath-days").[23] For Edwards, holy time was "more precious than common [or ordinary] time," and, accordingly, the improvement of "sabbaths…[was] the most precious part."[24] It was with ordinary time that many found themselves beset by idleness. Edwards cited excerpts from Proverbs to warn of idleness: "An idle soul shall suffer hunger"; "Drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags"; "In all labour there is profit; but the talk of lips tendeth only to poverty."[25] The implication here was clear: one reaps what they sow. As such, it would seem that there existed little patience toward the poor since they were simply sleeping in the bed they had made. Others struggle not with idleness but "spend their time only in *worldly* pursuits, neglecting their souls."[26] Worldly activity, Edwards clarifies, was activity that benefits this-world only.

There is a dualism simmering beneath the surface of Edwards' thought. First, Edwards' hierarchy between ordinary and holy time elbowed human labor outside the bounds of being a holy activity. Such a view of time was reminiscent of Middle Age attitudes toward time. In addition to time, Edwards' attitude to work itself has a dualistic hue. Granted, Edwards' concern is less about the work done and more about the sanctification of the worker. Even so, Edwards hints at the dualism that *some* contemporary evangelicals seek to avert.[27] The subtext was that human labor benefits the here and now only. To be sure, human work had its sanctifying purpose

---

[22] Edwards, *The Preciousness of Time*, 14.
[23] Ibid., 18.
[24] Ibid., 38.
[25] Ibid., 21.
[26] Ibid., 25.
[27] By "some," I mean those evangelicals that are "looking upward" (see chapter four).

and, in this regard, its effects carryover into eternity.[28] Nonetheless, the intrinsic value of the work itself is absent from Edwards discussion. This was consistent with much of Puritan thought which often centered on a rigorous grappling of one's heart. While this fostered a mature and sophisticated investigation into the condition of the human heart, it often had a debilitating effect on issues extending beyond personal salvation. Consequently, work was construed as a mere means to sanctifying the needy soul. Its affects beyond the scope of individual sanctification appear to have been largely slighted.[29] What was clear was Edwards' insistence that *all* of life, as bound by time, was of the utmost importance to one's eternal destiny. Such a view demanded that the Christian live Christianly with every second of their life, especially the extensive amount of time spent doing work. Edwards' appeal is nuanced, carefully reasoned, and thoughtfully applied, characteristics suggesting a thoroughly planned treatise. This type of preaching was beginning to wane in popularity, becoming eclipsed by a more sensational, extemporaneous mode of preaching. This newer preaching style was indicative of an important shift taking place in American religion that would have pivotal implications for evangelicalism. This homiletical shift can be seen in the preaching of one of Edwards' friends, George Whitefield, a figure playing a major role in the crystallization of modern evangelicalism.

Evangelicalism Arises

Whitefield's ministry and its soaring success in America highlight both key features of evangelicalism and the transatlantic nature of the movement. Harry S. Stout observes that following graduation from Oxford, Whitefield, an Englishman from Bristol, quickly realized "the power he possessed in the pulpit, in contrast to the

---

[28] In this regard, Edwards is consistent with Weber's portrayal of Protestants discussed in chapter one.

[29] The Puritan turn to a more individualistic understanding of calling has been observed by William C. Placher. See William C. Placher, ed., *Callings: Twenty Centuries of Christian Wisdom on Vocation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 210.

powerlessness and inferiority he often experienced in society."[30] Measuring his success were the legions of people assembling to hear the captivating preacher. By the time Whitefield decided to venture to the American colonies his renown as a stunning preacher had been solidified. A second trip to America provided Whitefield the opportunity to take advantage of a new venue for preaching: the field. What began as a necessity, since many English churches ostracized Whitefield, turned out to be a fruitful new setting for a burgeoning egalitarian impulse, particularly in America. As Stout notes, field preaching—available on a first come, first served basis—"both expressed and encompassed social reality for Americans in a more comprehensive way than it ever could have in the more stratified, hierarchical environs of England."[31]

In addition to the field setting, Whitefield brought a new preaching style. In contrast to the well-rehearsed, well-reasoned, and logically sound sermon typical of Edwards and other Puritan preaching, Whitefield delivered a winsome, charismatic, and extemporaneous sermon that left his hearers spellbound. The appeal was less cerebral, more emotional. Stout instructs one to view him as an "actor-preacher" and not a "scholar-preacher."[32] His success was due, not to his birth, education, or any inherited status, but to his ability as a performer. With Whitefield, Stout reminds, the sermon became "a dramatic event capable of competing for public attention outside the arena of the churches–in fact, in the marketplace."[33] Whitefield was thus an apt person for ministering to the increasingly consumption-oriented society that was beginning to burgeon during the late eighteenth century. As for Whitefield's message, the thrust of his sermons was the offer to be born again. Stout likens Whitefield's message to what Locke was formulating in academia: both were reducing reality to sensation experience and, for Whitefield, it was the born-again experience. This "new product," the new birth, was something that transcended creeds, hierarchy, denominations, communal covenants, family allegiances, and

---

[30] Harry S. Stout, *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 33.
[31] Ibid., 91.
[32] Ibid., xix.
[33] Ibid., xvi.

church authority; it came down to individual experience. From 1745 onward, Whitefield was an American icon.[34]

Stout believes that Whitefield's ministry was indicative of a new, more democratic direction which American religion was moving. Individual autonomy was felt in a more poignant way at Whitefield's preaching venues. One could choose for themselves where to sit for Whitefield's sermon, given they arrive in time for the best spot. Church and denominational affiliation also waned in importance since the field made it largely irrelevant, a trend consistent with the trans-denominational nature of evangelicalism. Moreover, one's spiritual destiny hinged not on catechisms, church discipline, nor any other externality, but on one's *own* response to the offer to be born again. It was this offer that provided the rock-solid assurance connected to evangelical soteriology today. In fact, Bebbington suggests that the evangelical movement itself was only possible because of this shift in salvation models that emphasized assurance.[35] Finally, the sermon's emotional appeal was more accessible and attuned to human fancy. Perhaps subtly this type of sermon fostered the expectation that the listeners' wishes to be dazzled deserved to be gratified. Lagging closely behind a sense of entitlement, came a sense of empowerment or autonomy.

After the nation's founding, the evolution of American religion moved at a quicker pace. What was a relatively stagnant period for British evangelicalism was a period of rapid growth and transformation for American evangelicalism.[36] Nathan O. Hatch claims that "the transitional period between 1780 and 1830 left as indelible an imprint upon the structures of American Christianity as it did upon those of American political life."[37] One feature of this transition was a decidedly anti-authority impulse. Traditional authority structures, says Hatch, were supplanted by

---

[34] Ibid., 252.

[35] Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 43. Again, the abruptness and timing of this evangelical stress upon assurance might be overstated. See Haykin and Stewart, *The Advent of Evangelicalism*.

[36] Ibid., 75-77.

[37] Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale, 1989), 6.

"youth, free expression, and religious ecstasy."[38] If authority was waning, the rise of individual empowerment that had begun with Whitefield was waxing. For example, the response of the *individual* at these religious settings—most notably revivals—carried increasing clout. Religious authenticity was hinging more heavily upon subjective experience. The testimonies, singing, clapping, convulsions, and bellowing of the participants provided tangibility to God's work amongst the people; it was something individuals could taste and feel and perhaps even be swept uncontrollably into. The camp meetings where this behavior was so prevalent were welcomed by many preachers because, says Hatch, "they were a phenomenally successful instrument for popular recruitment."[39] It should be noted that these camp meetings were not purely American, but, according to Leigh Eric Schmidt, had Scottish antecedents. They were a variation of the Scottish "Holy Fair," a "sacramental occasion" and festival, "an engaging combination of holy day and holiday."[40] Once again, this points to continuity between America and European religion. What is important, however, is that America seemed to provide a more fertile context for this ilk of religion to flourish.

In time these populist movements either withered or sought respectability. Most sought respectability. Perhaps the transition from a marginalized, ecstatic, and democratic Christianity to a more respectable, more polished Christian faith is best seen by looking at American Methodism. From the late eighteenth to mid nineteenth century the Methodist church underwent massive transformation. Beginning in the late eighteenth century, Methodism tapped into the throngs of people heading westward to the Ohio valley region. The mobile and restless itinerant preacher bore the brunt of this mission to reach pioneer families. John Wigger notes that these circuit riders "were accustomed to frequent relocations and understood the sense of rootlessness engendered by the unprecedented geographic expansion of the early American republic."[41] As for their circuits, they were astounding, covering anywhere

---

[38] Ibid., 35.
[39] Ibid., 55.
[40] Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Holy Fairs: Scotland and the Making of American Revivalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 3.
[41] Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm*, 52.

from three hundred to five hundred miles in a four-week period that included thirty to sixty preaching engagements.[42] With a vast, expanding country to harness for the glory of Christ an education was seen as superfluous to more urgent matters like evangelism. Moreover, too much education, it was felt, might distance one from the simple, frontier ilk and squelch the "holy, 'knock-'em-down' power" that extemporaneous preaching fostered.[43]

With the passage of time these characteristics of Methodist clergy evolved. For starters, by 1860 Methodist ministers were no longer homeless migrants, instead, they "could claim nearly 20,000 buildings, almost 38 percent of all the churches in the United States."[44] Also, Methodists strayed from their ascholastic approach, creating "more than 200 schools and colleges."[45] This sparked interest among pastors to become part of the "educational elite."[46] Methodist preachers increasingly relied on prepared and polished sermons, something the older brood of Methodist leaders would deplore. Charles Giles, while observing this turn in homiletics lamented that "reading sermons will never convert sinners—will not produce reformations, nor aid the work of religious revivals."[47] Methodists faced the choice of being "respectable" or "countercultural," says Wigger.[48] The former proved too alluring and Methodism marched from the margins to prominence. Similarly, other denominations were sliding into a more refined groove. They were "undergoing a metamorphosis from alienation to influence," says Hatch.[49] The excitement and frenzy sparked by the Revolution was beginning to settle and these upstart movements took a more respectable form.

One can detect several characteristics emerging in this rapid growth of evangelical Christianity. Thanks to Whitefield's preaching the formation of a born-again soteriology assuaged the anxiety concerning salvation palpable among New

---

[42] Ibid., 58-9.
[43] Ibid., 79.
[44] Ibid., 175.
[45] Ibid., 176.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid., 182.
[48] Ibid., 188.
[49] Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, 193.

England Puritans. Second, the Puritan impetus to establish God's city drove relentless efforts of preachers and evangelists in the early republic. In their urgency to save the nation they often underestimated the value of rigorous scholarship. Nonetheless, they managed to resonate with a large portion of Americans. Part of this was due to the style of preaching employed, a style exemplified in Whitefield. This more democratic form of Christianity gained respectability by becoming more institutionalized, that is, churches, schools, and organizations sprouted up lending themselves to a calmer, more subdued faith. Yet the factors leading to evangelicalism's success have left an indelible mark on the character of evangelicalism.

Conservative Protestant Christianity in America enjoyed influence and prestige during the nineteenth century. Noll says that through the Civil War America's "ethos was predominantly evangelical" and a distinctly Protestant "tone" occupied public discourse.[50] The same was true of British evangelicalism during this era. In part, this unity was due to anti-Catholic sentiment exacerbated by waves of immigration from Catholic countries in both Britain and America.[51] The evangelical minister shared in this prominence and influence in American life. Perhaps no minister captured this renown more than Henry Ward Beecher whom Debby Applegate calls "the most famous man in America."[52] Beecher was the son of the famous pastor, Lyman Beecher, and younger brother of Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. It was Beecher's Lectures that catapulted his fame from the Indiana frontier eastward.[53] These Lectures were delivered early in his ministry and reflect an earlier theological persuasion. During this time Beecher aligned himself with evangelicalism, saying that he sought "never to become a disputant or

---

[50] Mark A. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 222.

[51] Ian Randall and David Hilborn, *One Body in Christ: The History and Significance of the Evangelical Alliance* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2001), 7; See also Mark A. Noll, David W. Bebbington, and George A. Rawlyk, eds. *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, The British Isles, and Beyond, 1700-1990* (Oxford: OUP, 1994), 179-97.

[52] Debby Applegate, *The Most Famous Man in America: The Biography of Henry Ward Beecher* (New York: Doubleday, 2006).

[53] Ibid., 193.

champion on any of those points which *divide truly evangelical Christians.*"[54] Not only did Beecher strive to maintain evangelical unity, he also took a number of cues from the evangelical playbook: trimming down sermons, preaching extemporaneously and on circuits throughout the Indiana backcountry, and partaking in revivalism.[55] It may be the case that Beecher's theology was beginning to wander beyond the evangelical fold. Confiding in his sister, Harriet, Beecher said that while out West (i.e. Indiana) his "mind was *intensely* unsettled theologically." Continuing, Beecher confessed, "I had dropped so many technical views, through a preference for those more in accordance with my own philosophy, as to produce the vague impression that in time I should serve the remaining views in the same manner."[56] Beecher would become more open about his turn to a more liberal theology following the Civil War.[57] Nonetheless, the Lectures were crafted to resonate with the evangelical ethos that dominated the day.

"Lectures to Young Men"

Beecher's Lectures provide insight into his understanding of work. In these Lectures Beecher spoke of a world both deteriorating and dire. Yet Beecher's words swell with optimism that a harmonious, peaceful and blissful world could exist, and it was this prospect which is in the hands of "young men." Young men, Beecher maintains, are capable of forging a better world largely through the "self." Their efforts, Beecher predicts, will be fraught with temptations. First, attention will be given to Beecher's view of the world and second, the self, the locus for his strategy for dealing with the world will be considered. What will become clear is the centrality Beecher gives to work as the means by which human flourishing is accomplished.

Looking around Beecher saw a world unraveling. This was not an irreversible tide, however. Instead, the world's improvement was possible because its character was largely contingent upon the *work* of humans. Whereas Rowlandson

---

[54] Ibid., 165.
[55] Ibid, 169-70, 174-5.
[56] Ibid., 208.
[57] Ibid., 355.

understood the world as something that made her, Beecher's emphasis is that the world is something humans shape and mold through their labor. Beecher says that "God has stored the world with an endless variety of riches for man's wants." These "riches" do not fall onto lazy laps rather they "must be secured by diligence." Not only are these resources available through labor but they also have a "susceptibility of improvement." Beecher summarizes the availability of these resources and their potential: "The world is full of germs which man is set to develop; and there is scarcely an assignable limit to which the hands of skill and labor may not bear the powers of nature."[58] There is a keen sense of *control* over nature in stark contrast with the *vulnerability* of humans under nature that was suggested by Edwards and Rowlandson. Edwards in particular focused his discussion on what a fruitful use of time could do for the next life. Beecher, however, was more grounded in the opportunities latent in the present.

If the world has so much to offer hard workers, it is no surprise that Beecher has little sympathy for those tragically affected by an economic "earthquake."[59] For Rowlandson tragedy and affliction were signs that God was purging a lowly sinner, however, Beecher sees those afflicted by economic disaster as reaping what they have hastily sown. For example, Beecher says that in times of economic crisis "the suddenly rich [are] made more suddenly poor." This is natural because they "flung together the imaginary millions of commercial speculations, built upon sand" rather than slowly accumulating gains from hard labor.[60] Therefore, humans have the responsibility to improve the world's riches through diligent work otherwise they will suffer the consequences of hasty work, namely, an "economic earthquake." The assumption is that God is over a world in which there are very clear, perceptible cause-effect relationships. In the words of a contemporary, James Parton, Beecher "preaches pure cause and effect."[61] Edwards shared Beecher's tough stance toward the poor as seen in *The Preciousness of Time*. Also, a similar view occupied

---

[58] Henry Ward Beecher, *Lectures to Young Men on Various Important Subjects* (New York: M. H. Newman & Co., 1851), 26.

[59] Ibid., 27.

[60] Ibid., 27-28.

[61] Appelgate, *The Most Famous Man in America*, 354.

evangelicalism in Britain. According to Boyd Hilton, the laissez faire economy of the early nineteenth century Britain was heavily influenced by evangelical eschatology which gave comfort and purpose to the tumult of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The thinking of these British evangelicals, which was a fusion of Enlightenment thought and Christian theology, was that government should step aside from God's providence, which was directing all things to His redemptive purposes (hence *The Age of Atonement*). It was the state churches (in Scotland and England), holding a postmillennial eschatology, that shared this optimistic attitude toward a laissez faire economy.[62]

If the world's estate is inextricably bound to human action, then one wonders what the habits of humanity were during Beecher's day. An understanding of this illuminates Beecher's perception of the world. For Beecher, the world is laced with dishonesty. He says that the "seeds of dishonesty have been sown broadcast" and, *consequently*, the world is "filled with lamentation, and its inhabitants wandering like bereaved citizens among the ruins of an earthquake, mourning for children, for houses crushed, and property buried forever."[63] When one finds "an unnumbered host of dishonest men," one can look to laziness, or a "sullen lethargy," as its source.[64] Dishonesty fuels laziness. Furthermore, Beecher warns that even the most assiduous have streaks of laziness: the "veins of [idleness] run through the most industrious life."[65]

Laziness and dishonesty, therefore, pervade Beecher's world, and when full-blown these habits produce a sad and desperate world. In illustrative Beecher fashion, a description of the town of lazy-men underscores the situation. It is a place marked by disaster and pity; not only is there no order in this town, but cows are starving, officers "wink" at "tumults," the summers "swarm with vermin in hot

---

[62] Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1795-1865* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).

[63] Beecher, *Lectures to Young Men*, 49, 52.

[64] Ibid., 50-51.

[65] Ibid., 16.

weather," winters see "starveling pigs in cold," and "the jail [is] full" and "the church silent."[66]

Lurking beneath the surface of Beecher's proclamation is anxiety concerning the city. Thanks to the industrial revolution, which was hitting full stride during Beecher's day, and a new wave of immigration, the city was becoming a new environment with which to reckon. Beecher calls this locale a "wilderness" and "desert," and unlike the "ravenous Beasts" (i.e. Indians) that Rowlandson feared in her wilderness, Beecher's concern is the greedy.[67] While different from Rowlandson's wilderness, Beecher's jungle is not any milder; he describes greedy men so prevalent in his day as pouncing upon a man in debt "like wolves upon a wounded deer, dragging him down, ripping him open, breast and flank, plunging deep into their bloody muzzles to reach the heart and taste blood at the very fountain."[68] That this imagery, oozing with primeval barbarity, is applied to the city is telling. This was a time when the idioms dominating place were being inverted. The city became a wilderness. The wilderness became a haven. The palisades that once protected the polis were broken down and reversed, becoming a defense to a new idyllic wilderness. Romanticism provided the philosophical underpinnings supporting this shift, a movement with which Beecher resonated.

The city was also viewed as a hurdle to good work. First, there was the litany of distractions available in the city. Consider the active "idler" who watches "shooting matches," fights, talks with strangers at the tavern, and finds all kinds of other things to do except their own work.[69] Presumably, these lures would not be so prevalent outside the hustle and bustle of the city. Not only was the city full of diversions, it was also the space where a new type of work was taking place, a type of work anchored in industrialization. Sprinkled throughout Beecher's message is nostalgia for an older, gritty work. Beecher says regretfully that "men are so sharp now-a-days, that they can compass by their shrewd heads, what their fathers used

---

[66] Ibid., 40.
[67] Ibid., 57-58, 86.
[68] Ibid., 61.
[69] Ibid., 18-19.

to do with their heads and hands."[70] According to Beecher, just one generation ago there was a very different lifestyle, one requiring both "heads and hands." Now, however, one's shrewd business prowess is enough to create a "successful" living. Beecher laments this turn in the nature of work because it fosters contempt "to do one's own errands" and "to wheel one's own barrow."[71]

In order to resolve this crisis of work Beecher appeals to the self, urging young men toward industriousness. To reach this end Beecher appeals to masculinity, individual sovereignty over one's destiny, and the importance of the individual for community. As for masculinity, Beecher claims that "usefulness" provides "manly joy" and refers to honesty as "manly."[72] Further, Beecher calls industry (or work) "plain, rugged, brown-faced, homely clad" and "old fashioned" and reminds young men that it has a "firmer muscle" than "Genius."[73] Beecher warns of the temptation to seek "Pleasure," which has "the face of an angel, a paradise of smiles, a home of love" when first glanced upon. "Industry," however, is far less enticing; Beecher describes it as "embrowned by toil" and "dull and repulsive."[74] Yet the fruit of pleasure and industry are far different than what a cursory glance might suggest: while industry "rest[s] in the palace which her own hands have built,—Pleasure, blotched and diseased with indulgence, shall lie down and die upon the dung hill."[75] Bound up within the contrast between the illusion and reality of pleasure and industry is the suggestion that a wise *man* will not be duped by the enticement of pleasure, rather putting aside his emotion he will press forward by hammering out the fruits of industry.

The second appeal is to the control individuals have over their destiny. Beecher contrasts those who always "suppose Providence to have an implacable

---

[70] Ibid., 29.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Ibid., 24, 62.

[73] Ibid., 28, 33.

[74] Ibid., 44.

[75] Ibid. Curiously, a later speech given by Beecher suggested that amusements were a good and holy gift, in fact, Beecher claimed "man was made for enjoyment." As Applegate argues, this claim was indicative of a radical shift in anthropology. Now, desire for amusement was interpreted as a legitimate one, something constituted in the way God made humans. This radical claim regarding the goodness of amusements was a later development, however. See Applegate, *The Most Famous Man in America*, 217.

spite against them" with those that never complain of bad luck. All of those who have received bad luck from providence did so from their own error. On the other hand, those that never complain of bad luck are "early rising, hard working," "prudent," and "honest." In other words, "good character, good habits, and iron industry are impregnable to the assaults of all the ill luck that fools ever dreamed of."[76] Industriousness, therefore, is the antidote to bad luck. Put differently, hard work empowers individuals to chart the course of providence.

There is a keen sense of empowerment seen in Beecher's view of community as well. For Beecher, individuals are the building blocks of a community. That is why Beecher dreads the widespread "dishonesty and crime, which, sweeping over the whole land, has spared our wealth and taken our virtue." This problem is more tragic than if the Atlantic Ocean roared across to the Pacific "sweeping every vestige of cultivation, and burying our wealth."[77] Yet if individuals resolve to do good, hard, honest work corporate flourishing will follow. For Beecher, this world is marked by cleanliness, good behavior, worship, and financial stability, complete with music from the "blacksmith's anvil,…the carpenter's hammer, and girls cheerfully singing at their work."[78] And so it was with great hope, Beecher said, that "we turn to you, YOUNG MEN!...turn to watch your advance upon the stage, and to implore you to be worthy of yourselves, and of your revered ancestry."[79]

A Rift in the Evangelical Consensus

It was said that Beecher's theology leaned in a more liberal direction toward the end of his ministry. In this way, his own theological journey is a window into the challenges confronting Protestant Christians during the second half of the nineteenth century. These challenges would explode into a war as the nineteenth century gave way to the twentieth, a war that would not subside until 1925 when a beleaguered band of fundamentalists would retreat following the embarrassment of

---

[76] Ibid., 30-31.
[77] Ibid., 78.
[78] Ibid., 39.
[79] Ibid., 78-79.

the Scopes Trial. American Christianity had long been influenced by Common Sense philosophy and empiricism, seeing the two as confirming an orderly creation, governed by a rational Creator. Not only that, principles gained from these two disciplines informed the evangelical hermeneutic for understanding the Bible. Being fully orbed in the sciences, many evangelicals were faced with a dilemma when these sciences began to challenge their straightforward understanding of creation and the Bible.[80] The twin forces wreaking havoc on the evangelical worldview were biblical criticism, a practice questioning the reliability of the Old and New Testament documents, and Darwinian evolution. By the time evangelicals were confronted with these two challenges they had become oblivious to their intimacy with sciences. They were, then, faced with one of two extremes, says Marsden. They could remain aligned with Common Sense philosophy and Baconian science, calling, for instance, Darwin's conclusions "speculative and hypothetical rather than truly scientific."[81] Or, they could reduce religion to issues of the heart, not reason. As such, religion escaped the clutches of scientific scrutiny as it dealt not with the physical but spiritual.[82] Beecher opted for the latter and, according to Marsden, "discovered a formula that would for many years allay the fears of respectable evangelical Americans concerning the new science and learning." Beecher said, "While we are taught by the scientists in truths that belong to the sensual nature, while we are taught by the economists of things that belong to the social nature, we need the Christian ministry to teach us those things which are invisible."[83] This had the effect of compartmentalizing Christianity in an effort to elude the intellectual challenges it faced.

Early twentieth century Protestantism was occupied with this conflict as it continued to escalate into heightened levels of mudslinging and name-calling.

---

[80] It needs to be said that not all evangelicals were rattled by these new sciences. As David N. Livingstone has argued, many nineteenth century evangelicals were surprisingly warm to Darwin's science. B. B. Warfield, for example, saw "no *necessary* antagonism" between Christianity and evolution. See David N. Livingstone, *Darwin's Forgotten Defenders: The Encounter Between Evangelical Theology and Evolutionary Thought* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 115-19.

[81] George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth Century Evangelicalism 1870-1925* (Oxford: OUP, 1980), 20.

[82] Ibid.

[83] Ibid., 21

During this time theological boundaries were proclaimed with resounding clarity. William T. Ellis, a compiler of Billy Sunday's sermons, could boast that while Sunday's methods were "Modern to the last minute[,]…his message is unmistakably the 'old-time religion'." Continuing, Ellis affirmed that Sunday "believes his beliefs without a question. There is no twilight zone in his intellectual processes; no mental reservation in his preaching. He is sure that man is lost without Christ, and that only by the acceptance of the Saviour can fallen humanity find salvation. He is as sure of hell as of heaven, and for all modernized varieties of religion he has only vials of scorn."[84] In other words, amidst the uncertainty of modernity, Sunday, along with other fundamentalists, adduced a robust certitude as solid as that old, rugged cross. Marsden spoke of two options facing Protestant Christianity: deny the sciences or relegate Christianity to experience. It is probably the case that fundamentalists opted, like Beecher, for a heart religion of their own. Again, Ellis said regarding Sunday, "'Modernists' sputter and fume and rail at Sunday and his work: but they cannot deny that he leads men and women into new lives of holiness, happiness and helpfulness. Churches are enlarged and righteousness promoted, all by the old, blood-stained way of the Cross."[85] The effectiveness of Sunday's ministry was weighed, not by its correspondence to orthodoxy, but its tangible results as seen in the *experience* of individuals. Such a sensibility fit well with the revivalism that had so profoundly shaped the American evangelical ethos. While some in the fundamentalist ranks would question Sunday's allegiances, these comments from Ellis nonetheless underscore some of the sentiment swelling within conservative Protestantism.

The fundamentalist/modernist confrontation climaxed with the famous Scopes Trial, a trial dealing with the teaching of evolution in public schools. The trial pitted an aging William Jennings Bryan against Clarence Darrow. While Bryan and the creationist constituency prevailed, it was Darrow and the Darwinian supporters that arose victorious in the opinion of the nation. The trial, according to Marsden,

---

[84] William T. Ellis, *Billy Sunday: The Man and His Message With His Own Words Which Have Won Thousands For Christ* (Philadelphia, PA: John C. Winston Company, 1914), 146.
[85] Ibid.

"brought…an outpouring of derision upon fundamentalists" and, thanks to the media's wide circulation of the event, it "would have far more impact on the popular interpretation of fundamentalism than all the arguments of preachers and theologians."[86] In the end, it seemed that fundamentalists were nothing more than rural, poorly educated, country bumpkins, a stereotype that would pervade the American conscience. Though not fully accurate, the stereotype managed to persist and, oddly enough, it seemed that fundamentalism was actually morphing into this popular perception.[87]

After 1925, then, a demoralized cluster of fundamentalists scattered into enclaves far removed from American society. It was not long, however, before a new attempt to reengage with American society would be sought. This new group of fundamentalists strove for a complete overhaul of conservative Christianity. First, there was a name change; no longer would they accept the worn and opprobrious name fundamentalist, preferring instead new evangelical or neo-evangelical. Also, their strategy would be different, focusing less on political reform and more on intellectual reform.[88] As such, their efforts centered on academic institutions and publications, the two most important being Fuller Seminary and *Christianity Today* magazine.

In order to muster a new engagement with society it was important that these new evangelicals create a training ground for their future leaders. Accordingly, Fuller Seminary was spawned. Their hope was that Fuller be a bastion of evangelical scholarship that would capture all the glory of Princeton Seminary prior to its undoing by modernists.[89] In developing Fuller's curriculum, leaders were quick to include a healthy dose of apologetics. Evangelical Harold Ockenga, Marsden says, "viewed apologetics based on impeccable scholarship as essential backing for effective evangelism."[90] That these evangelicals felt apologetics to be a key piece is

---

[86] Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 184-5.
[87] Ibid., 185.
[88] George M. Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and The New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 8.
[89] Ibid., 24.
[90] Ibid., 56.

of the curriculum is telling, for it suggests that they were deliberate to grapple with ideas opposed to the Christian faith.

In addition to Fuller Seminary, the publication of *Christianity Today* magazine was indicative of a renewed confidence among evangelicals.[91] Within the very first issue one finds a corrective to fundamentalism's aloof posture toward society. In it Addison H. Leitch regretfully noted that evangelicals "commonly draw back" from social involvement.[92] Instead, Leitch urged his evangelical cohorts to repent and roll up their sleeves for an aggressive engagement with culture, for a transformed culture has always been a fruit of Christian action.[93] Such engagement with society, according to the title of Leitch's article, is "the primary task of the church."[94] *Christianity Today* sought to "showcase evangelical thought" by being an intellectually robust publication of evangelical thought.[95] It was hoped to be for conservative Christians what *The Christian Century* was for liberal Christians.

To the surprise of many, including perhaps evangelicals themselves, evangelicalism in America began to enjoy some prominence and visibility during the latter half of the twentieth century. While the trends, given their nearness to the present, during these last decades of the twentieth century are more difficult to identify, there is a developing narrative for these years. In part, evangelicalism's success during this time has been related to two events, says Noll. First, the successes of the civil rights movement during the 1950s and 60s helped make a southern and evangelical form of Christianity more palatable for the rest of the nation, which paved the way for many southern evangelical leaders, including Billy

---

[91] It should be pointed out that *Christianity Today* has evolved since its beginnings. According to David Wells, the periodical went from being a theologically-minded publication, printed on "cheap, pulpy paper," to being a "poor cousin of *Time*" printed on "bright, colorful coated' paper." The articles, Wells observes, have shifted from theology and doctrine to personal interest stories and news. David F. Wells, *No Place For Truth: or, Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 207-10; Similarly, Mark A. Noll has suggested that *Christianity Today* has had to dumb-down its content just to stay in business, a move underscoring the anti-intellectual impulse of American evangelicalism. Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 15.

[92] Addison H. Leitch, "The Primary Task of the Church," *Christianity Today* (15 October 1956): 13.

[93] Ibid., 18.

[94] Ibid., 13.

[95] Beth Spring, "Carl F. Henry dies at 90," *Christianity Today* (February 2004): 20.

Graham, Jerry Falwell, D. James Kennedy and others, to "export" Southern Christianity into more influential sectors of American life.[96] And, second, evangelical forms of Christianity were entering from more than just the South as there was an influx of Christians arriving on the U.S.'s eastern and western seaboards from countries such as South Korea, Nigeria, China, Eastern Europe, Philippines, Ghana, and Brazil.[97] This influx was due to the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 which loosened restrictions upon immigrants entering the country.

As Noll observes, one of the "spinoffs" of the government-assisted success of the civil rights movement was evangelical skepticism over government regulation and intervention.[98] Wed the civil rights movement's success to other successes aided by government in spheres including sexuality (especially the *Roe v. Wade* decision that legalized abortion), family, and public schools, and the conditions were in place for the rise of the Christian Right. Frustrated with what was believed to be the overextension of government, evangelicals rallied a significant constituency that focused upon issues related to the family and education. This group of politically conservative Christians experienced a boon with the election of Ronald Reagan, a president they believed was very much in tune with their political vision.[99]

Evangelicalism also experienced impressive numerical growth during the last decades of the twentieth century thanks, in part, to their embrace of methodologies that set well with a burgeoning suburban culture.[100] These "seeker churches," which include Bill Hybels' Willow Creek Community Church and Rick Warren's Sabbleback Church, captured the attention of thousands every Sunday due to their weekly worship service, which was, Kimon Sargeant says, "a polished, one-hour, professionally produced show designed for those who are *not* members of the church or even professing Christians."[101] If the calculated, highly controlled, market-driven methods of seeker churches were a concession to the modern ethos, then

---

[96] Mark A. Noll, "Where We Are and How We Got Here," *Christianity Today* 50, no. 10 (October 2006): 46.

[97] Ibid., 45.

[98] Ibid.

[99] Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*, 445.

[100] Sargeant, *Seeker Churches*, 51.

[101] Ibid., 15.

their successors, the emergents, were conceding to the postmodern ethos, argues David Wells.[102] While anything but monolithic, in general, these emergents are bothered by the ministry model (in many cases, theology) that they believe is more modern than Christian. In particular, these emergent churches have reacted against the seeker churches. If the seeker model stressed performance, production, the individual's tastes and an inward focus, then the emergents were looking to minister based on "dialogue," "authenticity," "community," and "an outward focus."[103] The common thread in these trends within evangelicalism during the last fifty years has been the evangelical's posture toward the surrounding culture. Noll says that during "the mid-20th century, evangelicals once again began to run on the two tracks of tradition and innovation."[104] The question would become which track the evangelical train would lean on: innovation or tradition?

A similar twentieth century trajectory took place in Britain, although British Christians dealt with modernization in a much kinder way. The Evangelical Alliance's (EA) grappling with some of the issues is instructive. Toward the end of the nineteenth century some EA members accepted evolution. James McCosh, for example, a member of the Alliance embraced evolution and was praised by the EA. Such a response suggests that the EA was willing to positively engage with the latest science. This trend has persisted to the present where, according to a 1998 survey of EA church members, 37 percent considered themselves young earth creationists, while a majority of 58 percent embraced theistic evolution.[105] Regarding higher criticism, the EA initially took a very defensive posture toward it, yet while conservative Christianity grew more rigid in America, the EA grew more moderate as time passed, distancing themselves from fundamentalism. As the mid-twentieth century approached, the EA further defined its position by rejecting the New

---

[102] David F. Wells, *The Courage to Be Protestant: Truth-lovers, Marketers, and Emergents in the Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 13-16.

[103] Jim Belcher, *Deep Church: A Third Way Beyond Emerging and Traditional* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2009), 24. Belcher, who is dissatisfied with the direction of the emerging movement, was nonetheless a part of the movement from its early days during the late 1990s. His book offers "a third way" between the theological haze of the emergents, on the one hand, and the problems that reside in what he calls the "traditional" branch of evangelicalism.

[104] Noll, "Where We Are and How We Got Here," 49.

[105] Randall and Hilborn, *One Body in* Christ, 103-11.

Theology (a liberal evangelical movement), Anglo-Catholic leanings, and fundamentalism. Some in the EA also embraced the neo-orthodoxy of Barth; again, suggesting a more moderate position than their brethren on the other side of the Atlantic.[106] There were other groups taking stances more akin to American fundamentalism, however, their efforts never grew as volatile as the American variety.[107]

There was a sense, however, in which British evangelicalism reached an intellectual nadir under the weight of twentieth century life. Akin to American evangelicalism, British evangelicals witnessed a renaissance following World War II. There was renewed vitality toward social transformation. Indicative of the changes in attitude was what took place at the National Evangelical Anglican Congress in 1967, assembling at the University of Keele under the leadership of John Stott. This meeting emphasized the comprehensiveness of the gospel and its demand on *all* of life, including those things early twentieth century evangelicalism overlooked.[108] Much of the emphasis of Keele was the social implications of the gospel, something neglected by fundamentalists due to their desire to distance themselves from liberal Social Gospel advocates. The call to social action was a controversial one among British Christians during the 1960s and 70s. Consider, for example, Oliver Barclay's *Whose World?*, a book published under the pseudonym A. N. Triton. Barclay, who at the time was head of IVF, published the book under the pseudonym to avoid causing undo ruckus at IVF.[109] Barclay's simple suggestion was that the Christian God is the creator of all things, therefore God's revealed Word is accurate and sufficient in its view of things created (i.e. material world, culture, politics, technology, and society).[110] It may seem odd that a book like this would be accompanied with so much apprehension for what British evangelicals might think but, says David F.

---

[106] Ibid., 183-207

[107] George M. Marsden, "Fundamentalism as an American Phenomenon: A Comparison with English Evangelicalism," *Church History* 46 (1977): 215-232.

[108] Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 249-50. For its significance in reviving social awareness, see Timothy Chester, *Awakening to a World of Need: The Recovery of Evangelical Social Concern* (Leicester: IVP, 1993), 22-23.

[109] Chester, *Awakening to a World of Need*, 56.

[110] A. N. Triton, *Whose World?* (London: IVP, 1970), 12-14.

Wright, the sensibilities of evangelicals during this time was one of "instinctive caution." Wright asks his evangelical readers in the introduction to *Essays in Evangelical Social Ethics*: "Have we not tended almost unthinkingly to appreciate peace and order in preference to the disturbance that alone may bring forth justice?"[111] Like America, British evangelicalism honed their strategy of social engagement around intellectual reform. Efforts indicative of this intellectual reform include the formation of the IVF, London Bible College (now London School of Theology), Tyndale House, and Banner of Truth Publishing.[112] A somewhat embarrassed conservative Christianity gained a newfound confidence and revitalization from the respectability that the more conservative neo-orthodoxy was gaining in academia following the War.[113]

By lowering the staunch defenses put in place by fundamentalism, some evangelicals have been concerned as to whether evangelicalism has become too friendly with the way of the world. For example, over the last thirty years or so evangelicals, using the innovation that has marked so much of their history, have adopted strategies of the marketplace for both recruitment and maintenance of its members. This strategy, epitomized in the seeker churches that entered the scene during the 1980s and 90s, was effective at garnering numerical growth.

Not only methodology, but the way evangelicals are perceived has affected their relationship with the world. Now that evangelicals occupy a more prominent space in America's religious and social landscape it could be the case that they have become distracted by their newfound respectability. Awestruck, evangelicals may have shifted their goals to attaining more prominence in politics or even making a name in a thriving Christian subculture. Exiting the palisades carefully put in place by an embittered fundamentalist constituency and boldly hacking their way into the world, it could be the case that evangelicals have become entangled. While no longer cantankerous, perhaps evangelicals, having embraced a softer stance toward the

---

[111] David F. Wright, *Essays in Evangelical Social Ethics* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1978), 15.
[112] Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 260-61.
[113] Ibid., 254.

world, have become remarkably similar to the modernists their predecessors, the fundamentalists, vehemently opposed.[114]

Concluding Remarks on American Evangelicalism's History

American evangelicalism has navigated its way through over two centuries of rugged terrain. To be sure, it has been weathered by the journey. Yet much of evangelicalism's features remain intact, particularly those highlighted by Bebbington: a definite conversion moment, activism, submission to the authority of the Bible, and an emphasis upon the cross' redemptive work. Not only have these characteristics remained intact, but they have also been solidified by this journey. During the first Great Awakening, the more dramatic and exciting born-again experience began to burn away the fogginess of uncertainty surrounding the salvation paradigm of just a generation before. Moreover, revivals, the nursery for the new birth, addressed new concerns sparked by the less accessible, more transcendent Deist deity.[115] As for activism, the astonishing efforts of itinerant preachers assisted in the conversion of the nation. The anxiety these pastors felt for building a city on a hill translated into incessant activity to make known the offer to be born-again to those traversing the frontier. Their efforts blossomed during the mid to late nineteenth century as the discourse of the nation drew largely upon evangelical idioms. This language that connected with the masses drew much of its punch from the Bible, the authority for evangelical faith and practice. This authority, however, was beginning to be questioned as one moved from the nineteenth to the twentieth century. This battle over the Bible exploded into an all-out war during the early twentieth century. The fighting subsided when a demoralized band of fundamentalist retreated following the Scopes Trial. Following the Second World War, a new engagement with the world was being mustered. This time a more nuanced position toward the world would be sought. According to some, this more

---

[114] See David F. Wells, *God in the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 26; Wells, *No Place For Truth*, 129-30; Noll, "Where We Are and How We Got Here," 49.

[115] Noll *et al.* eds., *Evangelicalism*, 20-25.

nuanced position quickly lost its sharpness, becoming blurred as evangelicals compromisingly flirted with the world.

British evangelicalism has followed a similar path. There are many that have suggested sharp differences between American and British evangelicalism. American scholars have often doted over the uniqueness of American religion in general and evangelicalism in particular. Bebbington has warned against this trend, pointing to a British root behind nearly every corner of American evangelicalism. Names like Baxter, Doddridge, Wesley, Whitefield, Carey, Wilberforce, and Darby loom behind so much of American evangelicalism, says Bebbington. More recently, Bebbington adds, the neo-evangelical movement has drawn heavily upon the work of British theologians such as F. F. Bruce, J. I. Packer, and John Stott.[116] As for John Stott, a recent op-ed piece in the *New York Times* lamented that the media turns to "bozos" like Jerry Falwell and Al Sharpton rather than John Stott who better represents evangelicalism.[117] That an American Jew, David Brooks, is appealing to John Stott as a window into understanding American evangelicalism underscores Bebbington's point. Yet such comments should be tempered with America's influence upon British evangelicalism. John Stott, for example, acknowledges the influence of the American Carl F. H. Henry in amending conservative Christianity's aloof posture to the world. Referring to Stott's early ministry, Stott says that "we read Carl Henry's *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*" and notes that Henry was "very much ahead of his time."[118] It is probably the case that the relationship between American and British evangelicalism is one of *exchange*. Notwithstanding Bebbington's claim that American evangelicalism is "not so exceptional," there are ways in which American evangelicalism is unique. Most glaringly, evangelicalism in America occupies a much larger portion of the population in America than it does in Britain. This has several implications. For one, evangelicals have the numbers to successfully sustain a thriving evangelical subculture. This creates both a buffer and channel through which evangelicals can

---

[116] David Bebbington, "Not So Exceptional after All: American Evangelicals Reassessed," *Books and Culture: A Christian Review* (May/June 2007): 17.

[117] *The New York Times* (New York), 30 November 2004.

[118] John Stott, interview by author, audio recording, London, England, 26 April 2007.

do just about anything in the confines of like-minded Christians. In addition to numbers, America's size and youth provide important differences to British evangelicalism. As mentioned already, this space and youth sparked a nervousness that incited activity to "save" the American project by building a city on a hill, an endeavor seen all the way down to the Religious Right.

This survey has reinforced the previous chapter by underscoring the organic and complex nature of religion as seen in evangelicalism. Far from passively acquiescing to culture, evangelicalism has demonstrated remarkable flex. Consider the role of experience among evangelicals. As already discussed, the appeal to experience increased during the eighteenth century as vexed Christians were beginning to exhaust a distressed soteriological paradigm emphasizing *process*. Concurrently, there was heightened dissatisfaction toward external authority which made the turn inward more appealing. Experience-oriented leanings solidified as the intellectual climate shifted to one seemingly more hostile to conservative Protestantism during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For example, Billy Sunday legitimated his ministry by appealing to the experience of his listeners. Such a move, kept conservative Christian claims less vulnerable to scientific scrutiny. Conveniently, evangelicalism had an escape route: continue to emphasize an already well-accepted experience as a way to insulate the faith from these challenges. What began as the result of an internal deficiency in conservative Christian circles was reinforced and even strengthened by external challenges, namely, twin forces of modernity: higher criticism and Darwinian evolution. Muddling matters even more, the original turn to experience during the eighteenth century also gained momentum from spreading Enlightenment values which claimed human propensity to reach cognitive certitude. In other words, the important part experienced played in evangelical circles demonstrates profound complexity between culture and religion. Evangelicalism and its cultural context relate in surprising ways, agreeing, resisting and transforming one another all at the same time.

As for work, evangelical attitudes as demonstrated by Jonathan Edwards and Henry Ward Beecher have evolved as well. Edwards' discussion of time suggested

that work's value lay in its sanctifying affect upon the worker. Also, Edwards'
hierarchy between ordinary and holy time implicitly nudged work into a lesser
category. In sum, Edwards emphasized work's *spiritual* importance, and this
emphasis coincides with Weber's assessment of Protestant attitudes toward work.
Henry Ward Beecher, by contrast, emphasized work's potential in creating a utopian
society. In other words, whereas Edwards and Weber's Protestants stressed the
eternal consequences of work, Beecher focused on more temporal consequences.
Beecher's treatise was more physical, less spiritual. It was a treatise exuding with
optimism typical of modernity and the leaps and bounds a young America was
making. Both Edwards and Beecher seemed to have little patience with the poor,
assuming that both were reaping the fruits they had hastily and sloppily sown. Both
showed little regard for idleness, insisting that Christ called his people to
industriousness. The next chapter looks at contemporary evangelical views of work.
Along with work, the gospel's place within the biblical narrative will be explained.

4

A THEOLOGICAL EXAMINATION OF AMERICAN EVANGELICALISM

This chapter considers contemporary evangelical views of work. It is "contemporary" because it draws upon works by theologians still living. The views are "evangelical" because they are works either written by evangelicals or taken seriously by evangelicals. The various views will be organized under the rubric *looking backward*, *looking forward*, and *looking upward*. For those views looking backward, there is an emphasis upon creation. For others that look forward, the coming kingdom that Christ has initiated and will consummate at his return is underscored. Still, others look upward, emphasizing the doctrine of God as a starting point for thinking about work. As with any paradigm, these categories are far from airtight. Those looking back certainly do not neglect Jesus' redemptive project and the coming eschaton. Alternatively, it is hard to anticipate the nature and scope of redemption that will be consummated with the eschaton without considering redemption's referent, namely, all of *creation*. All Christian views, of course, remain cognizant of God and, therefore, look upward. These categories simply provide a way to organize points of emphasis in the various Christian views of work. After a look at these various views of work, this chapter concludes by providing a description of the biblical narrative. This narrative, it will be argued, is centered upon salvation and climaxes with the gospel of Jesus Christ. In all, this chapter offers a theological template for understanding the interviewees.

Evangelical Views of Work

Looking Backward

For some theologians, a theology of work gushes forth from the doctrine of creation. For Luther and Calvin, for example, all work was good because it was a *good* part of God's creation. From here, these Reformers launched a proposal for work that challenged the dualism which informed so much previous Christian theology on work. Lee Hardy and Gene Edward Veith adduce a view of work based on the one emerging from the Protestant reformation.

The hammering of Luther's Ninety-Five Theses on the church door at Wittenberg reverberated throughout the Western world, shaking all aspects of life, including work. Underpinning Luther's theology of work was grace which leveled the dualism that plagued medieval Christendom. Luther made the distinction between two kingdoms, the kingdom of God and the kingdom of earth. As Hardy observes, humanity's relationship with God is central to God's kingdom and humanity's relationship with their neighbors is central to the earth's kingdom.[1] Everyone occupies certain stations in this earthly kingdom requiring them to love others. These stations are many; one might be son, father, brother, uncle, tenant, carpenter, citizen, and soldier all in the same life. Rather than these stations being hindrances to holiness, as many medieval thinkers suggested, Luther saw them as central to a Christian's cooperation with God and sanctification toward God-likeness. Hardy says that Luther's reason for this "is as astounding as it is humbling":

> the order of stations in the earthly kingdom has been instituted by
> God himself as his way of seeing that the needs of humanity are met
> on a day-to-day basis. Through the human pursuit of vocations across
> the array of earthly stations the hungry are fed, the naked are clothed,
> the sick are healed, the ignorant are enlightened, and the weak are

---

[1] Lee Hardy, *The Fabric of This World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 46.

protected. That is, by working we actually participate in God's ongoing providence for the human race.[2]

In other words, human work is the means by which creation is sustained. Just as God created, humans co-create with God through their jobs and this activity is the mechanism built into *creation* by which people survive and thrive. Luther pointed this out when he noted that as the Christian prays for their daily bread there is a busy baker baking it and a farmer harvesting the wheat.[3] Applying this thought to contemporary life, Gene Edward Veith adds "the truck drivers who hauled the produce, the factory workers in the food processing plant, the warehouse men, the wholesale distributors, the stock boys, the lady at the checkout counter."[4] Continuing, Veith applies the principle to family, saying children emerge, not from the dust as the first humans did, but out of the covenantal relationship of marriage, and they grow thanks to the vocation of parenthood.[5] Similarly, most are not miraculously healed but seek the doctor's help, the vocation provided for healing.[6] Certainly, bread could spontaneously appear in the pantry, children could spring forth from dust, and the sick could be healed in an instant, but, instead, God uses vocations as the providential means by which these things occur.[7]

Work, for Luther, is viewed neither as a necessary evil nor an opportunity for control, rather it is a participation with God as his stewards in shedding his love and grace toward other humans. As Veith notes, humans were created as social beings and work is a means by which their social nature is realized. Quite pointedly, Veith states that the "purpose of vocation is to love and serve one's neighbor."[8] This is why, as Luther saw it, monasticism was too self-centered, for it concerned itself with

---

[2] Ibid., 47. See also Gustaf Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, trans. Carl C. Rasmussen (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2004).

[3] Gene Edward Veith, Jr., *God at Work: Your Christian Vocation in All of Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002), 13.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid., 14.

[6] Ibid.

[7] That is why Luther called various vocations the "masks" behind which God hides. See Veith, *God at Work*, 24.

[8] Ibid., 39-40.

personal holiness rather than seeking another's good.[9] Luther's view of vocation, then, infused meaning in all work, for work was a central locale for Christian sanctification.

Calvin concurred, but added his own contributions to develop the Protestant view of work. One of the windows into Calvin's view of work, believes Hardy, is his commentary on the episode of busy Martha and worshipful Mary. In this story Jesus enters the home of sisters, Mary and Martha, and while Mary sits at Jesus' feet, Martha busily plays host by making the appropriate preparations. Jesus corrects Martha by telling her to stop her activity and consider Mary's choice to listen. This story was critical to medieval Christianity and monasticism because it provided the starting point of a two-tiered system that distinguished between those that chose the contemplative life like Mary and those that chose the active life like Martha. According to this view, the contemplative life was most honoring to God. Calvin challenges this far-reaching interpretation by refuting its universal application. Hardy says:

> In commending Mary over Martha Jesus was not commending a whole way of life over another—for certainly at times Mary also worked just as Martha also listened. Rather, he was addressing himself to the relative merits of their responses to his presence and message at that particular time.[10]

Like Luther, Calvin's understanding of work maintains a robust view of community that refutes any notion of individual autonomy. Hardy describes Calvin's launching point this way: "This understanding [i.e. work as bound up in creation] begins from the fact that God did not create us as individuals sufficient unto ourselves. We cannot by ourselves meet all of our needs, even our basic bodily needs, through our own efforts."[11] Unlike Luther, who emphasized "stations," Calvin placed emphasis on one's gifts or abilities. These gifts are to be used for others and not oneself. Emphasizing gifts over stations gave Calvin more flexibility in critiquing

---

[9] Hardy, *The Fabric of This World*, 50.

[10] Ibid., 55. See John Calvin, *A Commentary on the Harmony of the Evangelists*, vol. 2, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1949).

[11] Ibid., 60.

certain stations or jobs that were deemed unbiblical. For example, Hardy points out that Calvin's works contain a critique of slavery.[12] For this reason, Hardy believes that Calvin's theology contains a more developed understanding of the sinfulness within structures and systems.[13]

Both Hardy and Veith have a preference for looking back. They are looking back by anchoring their view in creation. God's world has been created in such a way that it is sustained through human work. Put differently, human work is the normative means by which God's providence is realized. Consequently, the global economic system becomes the mechanism through which humans and creation are provided for, and, seen this way, an individual's work should be directed away from the self and toward others. This is not to say that personal satisfaction is not a consideration; it is simply not the primary one.

Looking Forward

Rather than looking to creation, Jürgen Moltmann, Miroslav Volf, and Darrell Cosden emphasize the awaiting *new* creation for understanding work. Viewing work with a future orientation requires a certain amount of *continuity* between the old order and the new one that is at the center of God's redemptive project.[14] For those arguing for discontinuity between the present and the coming kingdom, work has little intrinsic

---

[12] Ibid., 66.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Richard Langer has challenged Volf's and Cosden's future orientation in understanding the meaning of work, and Langer's challenge starts with this purported continuity between the two orders. Langer argues that the relationship between this age and one to come is described biblically as both continuous and discontinuous. Put differently, there will be both annihilation and transformation upon the arrival of the eschaton. As a result, the sharp distinction that Volf and Cosden make between those that, on the one hand, see discontinuity between this age and the one to come and those that, on the other hand, see continuity between the two ages is overstated. Moving closer to the subject at hand, Langer says that the claims of Volf and Cosden regarding the eschatological significance of work stand upon thin exegetical ice. This does not mean that work has no eschatological significance. Drawing upon J. R. R. Tolkein's *Niggle's Leaf* and the film *Mr. Holland's Opus*, Langer argues that work may indeed have an eschatological significance but its protological (or present) significance is the primary concern for the Christian. He concludes, "Faithfulness to protological duties is significant and meaningful merely by the benefits accrued in the present world, though the seeds of our duties may also flower in the next" (117). Richard Langer, "Niggle's Leaf and Holland's Opus: Reflections on the Theological Significance of Work," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 33, no. 2 (2009).

value because work, like the rest of creation, will undergo an annihilation followed by re-creation. Put simply, God will be starting more or less from scratch. With work annihilated, its importance lay not in the work itself but in how efficacious work is at taming wicked hearts. With this model, sanctification and evangelism rank highest on the Christian agenda for work. Such a view flows smoothly from the dispensational premillennialism widespread among American evangelicals. In contrast, Volf is arguing for continuity between the present order and the one to come, anticipating not "apocalyptic destruction" but "eschatological transformation."[15]

Like Volf, Cosden also recognizes continuity between the present reality and the one to come. Cosden looks to Jesus' resurrection to make this point, stating that Jesus rose from the dead embodied, complete with the scars and wounds suffered on the cross. What's more, the glorified Christ is said to have the marks of the "Lamb slain" when he returns. An immensely significant point for Cosden:

> We [i.e. humanity] have made an imprint on Jesus' (God's)
> eternal physical body. And since this body, still containing
> those scars, is now ascended back into the Godhead, the results
> of at least this particular "human work" are guaranteed to
> carry over into God's as well as our own future and eternal
> reality.[16]

Here, Christ, an exemplar and firstfruits for Christians, reveals continuity between his earthly life and resurrected life.

There is also the eschatological hope that all of creation will be redeemed and made right for the Kingdom of God.[17] This is significant because both Cosden and Volf maintain that human work has been fused into creation and is now actually a part of it.[18] Moreover, Christians anticipate not a return to the Garden but a city which represents the cumulative effect of human labor. Finally, there is the enigmatic hint that the glory of the kings of earth will be ushered into heaven

---

[15] Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work* (Oxford: OUP, 1991), 91.

[16] Darrell Cosden, *The Heavenly Good of Earthly Work* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006), 59.

[17] Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 95-6; Also see Cosden, *The Heavenly Good of Earthly Work*, 71.

[18] Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 118; Cosden, *The Heavenly Good of Earthly Work*, 71.

(Revelation 21:24-26). Both Volf and Cosden understand this to be what human cultures have created, that is, the fruits of work, albeit transformed and fit for glory.[19] For these reasons, the work done by humanity on earth will persist in heaven in a glorified way.

While these theologians are oriented to a coming kingdom, they still recognize creation's importance. This is because eschatology is grounded in redemption, and redemption's subject is *creation*. Humans have been made in the *imago dei* and, as such, have been created to work as God works, caring for and developing creation to make it more suitable for life.[20] Lest one think this line of reasoning is prone to lead to abuse of the environment, Cosden profoundly states that humans are in a sense working on themselves, after all, "Adam…[is] made from the stuff he is commissioned to be working on."[21] Similarly, Volf urges Christians to remain cognizant that they "are not set against the rest of creation but are embedded in it."[22]

While looking to creation is important for grappling with a Christian conception of work, elevating creation above eschatological consummation can become dangerous. Volf says that views of work too enveloped in creation "tend to justify the *status quo* and hinder needed change in both microeconomic and macroeconomic structures by appealing to divine preservation of the world: as God the Creator preserves the world he has created, so also human beings in their work should strive to preserve the established order."[23] In contrast, an eschatologically-oriented position is unrelenting in its insistence upon change and transformation because the coming Kingdom promises to be radically different than the present order. What a view of work in orbit around the new creation gives Christians is a foundation for critiquing current work structures and systems.

That human work will make it into an eternal and perfect kingdom is a provocative claim indeed, a claim certainly requiring imaginative thinking. Cosden

---

[19] Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 118; Cosden, *The Heavenly Good of Earthly Work*, 75.
[20] Cosden, *The Heavenly Good of Earthly Work,* 89.
[21] Ibid., 91.
[22] Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 143.
[23] Ibid., 102.

addresses this by arguing that Christians are equipped with "sanctified imaginations" to help them envision this new order.[24] Volf, on the other hand, provides more practical explanation of how work might persist into eternity. He reminds that work should be understood as more than the "work of isolated individuals...but also the cumulative work of the whole human race."[25] There is, in other words, a strong dependence present achievements and works have with the past and although those past achievements may have become obsolete they are nonetheless inextricably bound to the present reality. Furthermore, while work may seem ephemeral, its mark on "natural and social environments" is indelible.[26] Finally, work, says Volf, leaves a mark not only on natural and social environments, but also on human identities and personalities. To illustrate the point, Volf suggests considering how those "who have benefited from Gutenberg's discovery would in their glorified state be the same without his discovery."[27] This third point Volf believes is different from viewing work as a mere means for sanctification. Viewed this way, work done by Christians and non-Christians alike has eternal value because both will be transformed.[28]

If the coming Kingdom is what gives work its intrinsic and enduring value, it is the Spirit that seals work for the eschaton. Hence Volf's title "Work in the Spirit." As mentioned above, Volf calls the Vocational or Protestant model of Christian work insufficient because it tends to be complacent toward present structures, economies, and jobs.[29] By calling all jobs a means through which to serve God and neighbor, the dominant model often is too rigid or static, failing to adjust to the fluidity that marks contemporary work conditions. In addition to being insufficient for the contemporary setting, this model is also exegetically weak. Volf claims that Luther's understanding of *calling* in which different Christians are called to a variety of stations is inaccurate; instead, calling "refers to the quality of life that should

---

[24] Cosden, *The Heavenly Good of Earthly Work*, 9.
[25] Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 97.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid., 118-19.
[29] Ibid., 107-8.

characterize *all Christians as Christians.*"[30] Rather than drawing upon calling, Volf

prescribes the *charisms* (gifts) as the key to unlocking a Christian view of work.[31]

Volf seeks to unite calling and gifting:

> the general calling to enter the kingdom of God and to live in
> accordance with this kingdom that comes to a person through the
> preaching of the gospel becomes for the believer a call to bear the
> fruit of the Spirit, which should characterize all Christians, and, as
> they are placed in various situations, the calling to live in accordance
> with the kingdom branches out in the multiple gifts of the Spirit to
> each individual.[32]

In other words, the calling is general; the gifting is particular. For Volf, the Spirit is

operative behind all the work Christians do.

Furthermore, housed under the rubric of new creation, a view that holds the

Spirit central to work (i.e. a pneumatological view of work) is essential because it is

the third person of the Trinity—the Holy Spirit—which re-creates.[33] Traditionally,

the Spirit was understood *only* as the agent through whom salvation was obtained, a

salvation primarily for the human soul.[34] For Volf, the Spirit's work extends beyond

this limited sense to encompass the "whole of reality."[35] As Volf describes, the

miracles of Jesus, primarily the healings, "are not merely symbols of God's future

rule, but are anticipatory realizations of God's present rule."[36] The Spirit continues

this re-creative work that extends to all creation. In part, this re-creative work

occurs by the Spirit's gifting of individual Christians and manifests itself in both the

ecstatic and normal.[37] If the fruit of the Spirit "designates the general character of

Christian existence," then "The gifts of the Spirit are related to the specific tasks or

functions to which God calls and fits each Christian," says Volf.[38] Also, argues Volf,

---

[30] Ibid., 110.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid., 113.
[33] Ibid., 102.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid., 103.
[36] Ibid., 104.
[37] Ibid., 112.
[38] Ibid., 111.

these gifts are not only for the edification of the Christian community but for the whole world, and to say otherwise would undermine the viability of a gift like evangelism.[39]

Volf's view of work is a lofty one indeed, and, in an effort to avoid seeming naively optimistic about work, Volf stresses the fallenness of work. This aspect of work will be under God's judgement. After all, Christians are anticipating a new creation, new because of the problems with the present order. Work is no exception. Seen this way, Volf, like Hardy, believes the biblical view of work strikes the balance between seeking to avoid work (as the Greeks did) or understanding work as the loftiest of activities (as moderns often see it).[40] Such a mediating position is found in the first three chapters of the Bible where work is introduced as a fundamental and satisfying aspect of human life. Yet due to the Fall work can often be onerous, frustrating, and dehumanizing.

Volf addresses some problems with contemporary work. Regarding the radical individualism of work today, Volf offers an interesting critique. He challenges any self-absorbed way of working that denies obligations to others, but maintains that personal development is still important in work, albeit a personal development that is grounded outside oneself. Contrary to the notions of an unencumbered self, humans are embedded in social and ecological contexts. Neglecting this is the key problem with radical, individual autonomy. In striving to improve these social and ecological structures—in other words, in looking beyond oneself—one's actually assisting in their own development, for, says Volf, "to look at work from the perspective of social and ecological practice and to look at it from the perspective of a worker's self development are not mutually incompatible alternatives."[41]

Humanity's embeddedness in social, chronological, and ecological contexts is often overlooked due to contemporary conditions. The highly differentiated modern workplace, often situated amidst asphalt streets, concrete walls, and carpeted cubicle partitions is severed from nature. Moreover, the illusion of humanity's

---

[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid., 126-7.
[41] Ibid., 131.

independence from nature is reinforced by the ease with which its fruit is partaken: often conveniently packaged and readily available from a grocery store. Instead, "Human work is and always will remain essentially related to nature, because human beings are essentially 'natural beings' who can live only in constant interchange with their natural environment."[42] In addition to being fundamental to our humanness, a concern for the environment should be maintained because Christians are often pegged as propounding a "dominion" (i.e. control) over the environment.[43] Volf attributes the Christian tendency to interpret dominion as control to a dualism between spirit and matter.[44] Instead, Christians must remain cognizant that they "are not set against the rest of creation but are embedded in it."[45] Also, implicitly the Spirit is understood to be present in creation, says Volf.[46] The Christian's task, then, is to relate to nature in both a productive (because one cannot live apart from this) and protective (because as global warming concerns indicate, one cannot live any other way) manner.[47]

Finally, Volf addresses the pervasive issue of alienation at work. For Volf, alienation is objective not merely subjective. This means that work could be judged alienating even if it is enjoyed by the worker because Volf contends, "Work is alienating when it does not correspond to God's intent for human nature."[48] Put differently, says Volf, "To the extent that work negates human nature, it is alienating; and to the extent that work corresponds to human nature, it is humane."[49] Tackling subjects like personal development and technology, Volf argues that humanized work should recognize the giftedness of others and allow those gifts to be expressed appropriately, things that technology and modern management tend to stifle. Finally, Volf suggests that work be understood as an end, not just a

---

[42] Ibid., 142.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid., 143.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid., 144.
[47] Ibid., 145.
[48] Ibid., 160.
[49] Ibid., 168.

means.[50] It is an end because it is a fundamental activity for which humans were created.

Volf admits his study is far from complete. Nonetheless, he hopes that he has proffered a view of work that orbits around a new center, namely, the gifting of the Spirit for the purpose of preparing the new creation. In contrast, the traditional Protestant view (the view of Hardy and Veith) focused on God's call upon the worker with the purpose of preparing the worker him/herself for the new creation. The problem, Volf contends, with this model is that it is often too static, encouraging a contentment toward jobs that might not allow the free-flow of one's gifts.[51] Both Cosden and Volf have been influenced by Moltmann's emphasis on eschatology. For Moltmann, there are twin benefits to work: producing and presenting. Moltmann says, "When people through their work earn their livelihood and *produce* their life, when they glorify God and partake of his rest on the Sabbath, then they also *present* themselves before God" (my emphasis).[52] These two benefits infuse both utilitarian-value and existential-value into work, and they often spill over into one another. Yet there is more to human work. To be sure, God's work was seen in creation but, for Moltmann, even more profound is God's work to redeem, a work carried out with much suffering. As Christ's co-workers and representatives, Christians are called to take up this same work in the world. Christians, in other words, are called to imitate Christ. And, says Moltmann, "If work can be used in following the self-renouncing Christ, then it also promises participation in the resurrection and in his kingdom." Continuing, Moltmann says, "earthly work receives the stimulus of a hope that moves people constantly to invest more and give more of themselves than is necessary and therefore also to expect from work more than the earthly results justify."[53] Like Cosden and Volf, Moltmann's view of work finds its crescendo in the

---

[50] Ibid., 195.
[51] Ibid., 199.
[52] Jürgen Moltmann, *On Human Dignity: Political Theology and Ethics*, trans. by M. Douglas Meeks (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1984), 41.
[53] Ibid., 44.

anticipation of the consummation of Christ's kingdom; it is, in other words, a view looking forward.[54]

Looking Upward

For R. Paul Stevens a Christian understanding of work begins by looking up to the Trinitarian God. Before looking at work, Stevens seeks to dismantle the clergy/laity divide that is deeply entrenched in Christian circles. He approaches this task by focusing on three areas. First, by looking at the Greek derivatives of "laity" and "clergy" Stevens concludes that the New Testament use of the terms refer to the whole people of God, not two distinct people.[55] Clergy, then, come forth from within the *laos*, that is, the whole people of God. Stevens puts it this way: "there were clergy under the Old Covenant but, under the New, these functions are abolished, or rather universalized in the *laos* of God. The reason has to do with the lordship and mediatorship of Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit."[56] As for clergy, or the Greek *kleros*, what is being referred to, says Stevens, is "the dignity, calling and privilege of every member of the family of God."[57]

If the laity/clergy dichotomy must be eradicated then it follows that theology should be for the *whole* people of God, not merely a small band of pastors and theologians. This is Stevens' second point: to make all theology *practical*, something having "the continuous and dynamic task of translating the word of God into the

---

[54] Evangelical theologian John Jefferson Davis also looks forward in thinking about work. Davis wonders whether *new* work will be present in the new creation. In other words, whereas Volf and Cosden stress the persistence of human work from the old order to the new order, Davis' question centers around whether there will be *new* work and labor in the new order. For Davis, the answer is yes. Davis' orientation to the eschaton is what he calls "theocentric maximalism," a view that sees three mandates upon humanity persevering into the new creation: 1) love of God, 2) love of neighbor, and 3) the Cultural Mandate. Having established his theological posture to the new age, Davis begins his case that human work will continue by looking to God. Davis believes that God's work, at least God's work of creation and providence, will continue into the new age. Humanity, by virtue of being created in the image of God, will likewise continue working in the new creation. John Jefferson Davis, "Will There Be *New* Work in the New Creation?" *Evangelical Review of Theology* 31, no. 3 (2007).

[55] R. Paul Stevens, *The Other Six Days: Vocation, Work, and Ministry in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 5-6, 29.

[56] Ibid., 30.

[57] Ibid., 38.

situations where people live and work."[58] For Stevens, theology was derailed from its application-focus with the infiltration of Aristotelian philosophy into theological circles during the late Middle Ages. This framework for interpreting reality, compounded by the rise of the university, shrank theology down to "logical, rational formulae."[59] While this trend toward a more abstracted, cerebral theology experienced slight interruption during the Reformation,[60] it nonetheless tumbled along steadily into our present age where "practical theology" remains a subset of theology, a discipline often struggling to overcome feelings of disrepute among faculty in the department.[61] Third, Stevens propounds a democratization of theological inquiry. He says, "In contrast to the dichotomizing of theology and practice in the theological academy today, the New Testament presupposes a community in which every person is a theologian of application, trying to make sense out of his or her life in order to live for the praise of God's glory: theology of, for and by the whole people of God."[62]

The justification for squelching the clergy/laity divide is the Trinitarian God. Just as the Trinity is at once unity and diversity, so the church becomes "a rich social unity" through "a diversity of functions" executed by each member.[63] As such, any hierarchy that develops within the church, particularly one between clergy and laity is unfounded. Stevens is careful to maintain the mystery surrounding the diversity of the Trinity:

> The Father creates, providentially sustains, and forms a covenantal framework for all existence. The Son incarnates, mediates, transfigures and redeems. The Spirit empowers and fills with God's own presence. But each shares in the others—coinheres, interpenetrates, co-operates—so that it is theologically inappropriate to stereotype the ministry of any one.[64]

---

[58] Ibid., 9.

[59] Ibid., 13.

[60] Not mincing words, Luther asserted that "True theology is practical...speculative theology belongs to the devil in hell." Ibid., 14.

[61] Ibid., 9n.

[62] Ibid., 21.

[63] Ibid., 53.

[64] Ibid., 57.

Yet Christians often pigeon-hole the works of the Trinity and churches often lock in on certain persons of the Trinity with "Father-denominations" stressing "reverant worship and stewardship," "Son-denominations" underscoring "discipleship and evangelism," and "Spirit-denominations" highlighting "gifts and graces."[65] What is needed is an understanding that keeps the diversity and unity balanced and avoids a "merging" of roles. Applied to the church, this means individual Christians do not get absorbed by community and at the same time cannot be fully human without community. Such is the tension that must be maintained between individuality and corporality.[66] It is out of the enigmatic notion of the Trinity that Stevens' ecclesiology emerges. For Stevens, putting an end to the stubborn clergy/laity dichotomy is foundational to a theology of work because such dualistic thinking encourages a hierarchy of callings and livelihoods.

Rather than seeing a tiered system of callings, Stevens argues for a more leveled view of calling. His analysis of calling gives careful attention to the New Testament. Stevens conclusion is that in "the entire New Testament witness, 'call' is used for the invitation to salvation through discipleship to Christ, the summons to a holy corporate and personal living, and the call to serve. All are called. All are called together. All are called for the totality of everyday life."[67] Often churches turn to one of two callings or mandates: the Cultural Mandate (Being fruitful, filling, subduing and having dominion over the earth) or the Great Commission (making disciples). Evangelicals prefer the Great Commission and it is often mainline denominations as well as European churches that emphasize the Cultural Mandate.[68] Rather than separating them, Stevens asserts that they must be fused together so that vocation is conceptualized as "a covenant encompassing creation, redemption and final consummation."[69] In other words, Stevens believes that Christians should simultaneously *look back* to creation and *look forward* to kingdom consummation:

---

[65] Ibid., 58.
[66] Ibid., 61-2.
[67] Ibid., 88.
[68] Ibid., 89.
[69] Ibid., 90.

"The first two chapters of Genesis are foundational for our understanding of the human vocation, as are the last few chapters of Revelation."[70]

The fusion of the Cultural Mandate and Great Commission is what Stevens calls the Covenant Mandate. This Covenant Mandate is the umbrella under which human vocation can be understood in its fullness. Stevens divides this umbrella for understanding vocation in all its magnitude into three areas: communion with God, community building, and co-creativity. As for communion with God, Stevens urges Christians to grasp the "fact that God has made us for himself, to enjoy the loving communion of the triune God."[71] This foundational point is often overlooked by those content to simply look back to the Cultural Mandate.[72] Similarly, the call to community building has often been slighted among Christians, argues Stevens.[73] Yet this vocational call is very much bound up in what it means to be human. Finally, co-creativity is a crucial aspect of our vocation, and the one most often talked about in discussions of vocation. Such co-creativity finds its imperative in the "subdue" and have "dominion" language of the Cultural Mandate.

Since this mandate of dominating and subduing the earth causes chagrin to those sensitive to the damage done by a control-minded Modern project, it is not surprising that evangelicals employ fancy footwork in averting the pitfalls of past generations that have interpreted this text in a way that justifies a damaging of creation. Both Volf and Cosden averted the danger by emphasizing humanity's dependency upon creation. For those looking back the service and communal side of work was emphasized. As such, one might surmise that care for creation is the Christian's responsibility to their neighbor and future neighbors, that is, future generations that must endure the consequences of our treatment toward creation.

Stevens' solution to this dilemma is to cast his gaze to the incarnation. Citing Loren Wilkinson, Stevens reminds that the incarnational God is not aloof manipulator but immanent burden-bearer, and, says Stevens, "Like God, like

---

[70] Ibid., 91.
[71] Ibid. 92.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid., 94.

people."[74] In other words, Christians are to follow God's lead—as God's image-bearers—by being an "involved and relational participating steward."[75] And work, while fraught with fallenness, will be restored by the redemptive work of Jesus.[76] Stevens says, "The drama, music, beauty, movement, orderliness, sounds and sights of the New Jerusalem are powerful hints that heaven will mean not only a restored creation, *but restored creativity*" (my emphasis).[77] Looking backward. Looking forward. Clearly there are continuities here with the other authors. What makes Stevens unique is his habit of *looking upward*; in other words, his insistence that all of this is held together by the Trinitarian God.

M. Douglas Meeks, who also propounds a Trinitarian view of work, describes four implications of such a view. First, all persons of the Trinity have a distinctive work: Father creates, Son redeems, and Spirit re-creates.[78] Likewise, humans should cultivate an economy that provides distinctive work for all humans and does not exclude any. Also, there is cooperation among the Trinity's work.[79] It is a cooperation demonstrating both dependency and reciprocity. Meeks writes, "What of themselves they give up in work they find again in the fullness of the community for whose life they work."[80] Accordingly, human work should be cognizant of its dependency and contribution to the larger community. Third, the work of each member of the Trinity is equally valuable and likewise human work should avoid any "relationships of domination."[81] Finally, the work of the Trinity is "self-giving."[82] Not self-preservation but self-abandonment for the other is the *modus operandi*. In contrast to contemporary assumptions about work, human work should seek to serve neighbor, not self.

---

[74] Ibid., 99.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid., 100.
[78] Douglas M. Meeks, *God the Economist: The Doctrine of God and Political Economy* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1998), 132.
[79] Ibid., 133.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid., 134.
[82] Ibid.

For Stevens and Meeks, the Christian calling is for all of life and looks back to creation, forward to kingdom consummation, and, most importantly, upward toward the Trinitarian God. Stevens claims that "Every legitimate human occupation (paid or unpaid) is some dimension of God's own work: making, designing, doing chores, beautifying, organizing, helping, bringing dignity, and leading."[83] As for the persons of the Trinity, Father-work is to care and nurture creation, Son-work extends the gospel, and the Spirit empowers the worker.[84] Altogether, the worker is ushered into "communion with God in God's work."[85] Of course, this work is fraught with challenges, rooted in both human fallenness and spiritual forces, but nonetheless the ills of the world (both seen and unseen) find their solution in a wooden cross.[86] In this way, those looking upward remain anchored in the gospel of Jesus. Stevens' argument for the importance of work is built upon the levelling effect of the gospel. It is the gospel of Jesus that births the people (*laos*) of God. The gospel levels social roles because of the unsurpassed role taken on by Jesus upon the cross.

Indeed, all the views of work discussed operate with a gospel backdrop. Those looking backward need the gospel to substantiate their gaze to creation. Without the gospel, the standard exhibited in creation is merely an unreachable nostalgia. The apostle Paul contends that if Jesus has not been resurrected, then the Christian's faith is worthless (see 1 Corinthians 15:14). If the dead are not raised, Paul continues, Christians should eat and drink because they only die (see 1 Corinthians 15:32). Paul does not suggest maintaining service to neighbor and creation if there is no risen Jesus but instead service to self. The service-oriented view of work that is grounded in creation needs the gospel of Jesus for validation. Those looking forward do so only because they first gazed at the cross, that is, the gospel of Jesus. The full establishment of God's kingdom that these proponents anticipate is contingent upon the gospel. It is the gospel that has breathed life into these multi-directional views of work. But what is this gospel and what does it mean? The next section seeks to answer these questions.

---

[83] Stevens, *The Other Six Days*, 119.
[84] Ibid., 120-3.
[85] Ibid., 123.
[86] Ibid., 232.

The Good News of Jesus

The term "evangelical" can be a slippery one. Attempting to pin the term down, Steve Bruce argues for the importance of beginning with concepts that are central to the players themselves.[87] Bruce, dealing with evangelicals, begins with a particular understanding of the Bible. In contrast to liberal Protestantism, evangelicals view the Bible as a timeless piece. One way this view manifests itself is the evangelical tendency, Bruce says, to print "the sermons and writings of long-dead divines as if they were written yesterday."[88] Other Christian traditions might rely on various authorities such as culture and reason (liberal Protestantism), the Church (Catholicism), and the Spirit (Pentecostalism).[89] But it is the centrality and authority of the Bible that marks the evangelical.

Similarly, R. Stephen Warner understands evangelicalism to refer to a group of Christians that are biblically-based and stress personal salvation.[90] As Warner observes, a comparable definition has been offered in popular sources such as a *Time* cover story on evangelicals and the Random House Dictionary.[91] Warner, writing during the evangelical revival of the 1970s, recognizes that evangelicalism might provide something cognitively, emotionally, and morally satisfying and should not be readily dismissed as a vestige held only by the marginalized, disenfranchised and those furthest removed from processes of modernization.[92]

James Davison Hunter has also included the Bible as crucial for defining evangelicals, more specifically, a view of the Bible as inerrant. Along with biblical inerrancy, Hunter adds these other characteristics to help define evangelicalism: a tendency toward Protestantism, a belief in the divinity of Christ, and salvation in Christ as the cumulative effect of God's redemptive agenda.[93] Amending Hunter's

---

[87] Steve Bruce, "Identifying Conservative Protestantism," *Sociological Analysis* 44, no. 1 (1983): 65.

[88] Ibid., 66.

[89] Ibid.

[90] R. Stephen Warner, "Theoretical Barriers to the Understanding of Evangelical Christianity," *Sociological Analysis* 40, no. 1 (1979): 2.

[91] Ibid.

[92] Ibid., 8-9.

[93] James Davison Hunter, "Operationalizing Evangelicalism," 371.

proposal, Nancy T. Ammerman suggests that biblical "inerrancy" is too rigid and "inspiration" and "authority" should be put in its place.[94]

Among these efforts to define evangelicalism, these two features gain attention: the importance of the Bible and salvation. As I hope to demonstrate, the Bible and salvation are not disconnected. For evangelicals, the central motif of the Bible is God's sweeping redemptive project that is accomplished through the work of Jesus. In other words, the content of the Bible that evangelicals hold so dear is a story of salvation. Jesus, as this theological survey will indicate, is central to this story. The Bible and salvation in Jesus are inextricable to the evangelical faith, which may be because salvation is primarily what the *whole* Bible is about. Evangelicals, while recognizing the Bible to be authored by many over thousands of years, nonetheless assume continuity with the biblical story because of the belief that God was orchestrating the writing of the various books.

The Bible, then, provides a sweeping narrative that gives the individual meaning,[95] and this is true of other faith traditions. Meredith B. McGuire has said that "Most historical religions are comprehensive meaning systems that locate all experiences of the individual and social group in a single general explanatory arrangement."[96] Put simply, historical religions provide a worldview by which

---

[94] Nancy T. Ammerman, "Operationalizing Evangelicalism: An Amendment," 171.

[95] Ibid., 169.

[96] Meredith G. McGuire, *Religion: The Social Context* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1981), 22. Christian Smith has described the meaning and appeal the Christian belief system could provide for individuals. His description is "an emotions-focused phenomenological account" of why Christianity (not only evangelicalism) has been compelling for many humans for two thousand years. Putting aside external, structural and cultural forces, Smith investigates why Christianity might work based on the content of its message. What Smith ends up describing are features of the evangelical worldview, providing some support for McGuire's claim that many historical religions, in this case, Christianity, offer an enveloping worldview. Smith begins by saying that Christianity maintains a creator, something that is out there. Humanity is not alone. Reality is not the cumulative effect of time of chance but is "living, warm, and personal" in the Christian view of life (168). Christianity believes in a God of boundless, overflowing love that is not based on merit, lest anyone should boast (170-71). The Christian God's love is applied relentlessly to believers. God's love is great, because human sin is great. At a glance, the doctrine of human sin may not seem like an emotionally satisfying aspect of Christianity. Yet the doctrine, in its frankness concerning sin, actually frees the individual from pretense and the need to blame others (173). According to Smith, there are other appealing features that Christianity provides such as the need to worship, a desire for a moral map, and a longing for community. These features of the Christian faith, broadly understood, meet "many basic mental and emotional human needs and desires," says Smith (177). Smith, "Why Christianity Works: An Emotions-Focused Phenomenological Account," *Sociology of Religion* 68, no. 2 (2007): 165-78.

individuals order and understand their experiences. The gospel, in its broadest and most sophisticated sense, is an integral piece of the evangelical's worldview. Moreover, the gospel is connected to other, integral doctrines of the evangelical worldview. This gospel cannot be understood apart from the Bible. Like the fundamentalists that Ammerman observed, it is the Bible that provides the material used in constructing and maintaining the evangelical's world. Yet world construction and maintenance occur in conjunction with forces outside of the Bible. As Kathleen C. Boone has noted, fundamentalists (and her study of fundamentalism would apply to evangelicals as well) agree upon the authority of the Bible. Yet that authority emerges, Boone writes, "in the 'reciprocal relations' of text, preachers, commentators, and ordinary readers."[97] In other words, the authority of Scripture is connected to a constellation of factors that affect the reading of that Scripture. The theological description of the gospel that I am offering is not meant to provide an account of what most evangelicals believe. Rather, it presents a more sophisticated, polished version of the Christian narrative. Substantively, I am drawing from the "elites." Not only is the following account derived from elites but it presents a more conservative perspective. One would be hard-pressed to find an evangelical theological consensus. Rather than being unified theologically, evangelicalism is both contested and diverse, with the contestation being particularly acute in certain theological and philosophical domains, all of which relate to the gospel.

One of those domains is epistemology. Some evangelicals have pinpointed foundationalism as the root of many problems within Christianity. According to Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, foundationalism, with its ties to Enlightenment thought, has contributed to the devastating split between conservative and mainline Christians during the early twentieth century.[98] Grenz and Franke urge Christians to go "beyond foundationalism" when constructing theology, drawing upon a more

---

[97] Kathleen C. Boone, *The Bible Tells Them So: The Discourse of Protestant Fundamentalism* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 1989), 3.

[98] Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 23-24.

postmodern epistemology.[99] Conservative evangelicals have fired back; J. P. Moreland and Garrett DeWeese, while rejecting classic foundationalism, argue for a "modest foundationalism."[100] Another domain of contestation is the area of soteriology. Debates related to the atonement, for example, reached a broad evangelical audience thanks to Mark Dever's *Christianity Today* article. Dever, representing the conservative penal substitution position, is troubled by differing understandings of the death of Christ among some evangelicals, including Scot McKnight, Stephen Finlan, and James Dunn.[101] Also within the domain of soteriology is debate concerning the eternal fate of humanity. Evangelicals John Stott, Clark Pinnock, and, more recently, Rob Bell have challenged traditional conceptions of hell.[102] Conservative evangelicals have responded to the claims of Stott, Pinnock and others on the topic of hell, pushing for a traditional view of hell.[103] Finally, there has been dispute concerning the Bible within evangelicalism. One area of disagreement revolves around the question of inerrancy, that is, whether or not the Bible is free from error. Evangelical Millard Erickson advocates inerrancy arguing that this doctrine is especially crucial for the ordinary Christian in the pew.[104] On the other hand, Stanley Grenz wonders if the term does not neglect the human dimension of the Bible. The inerrantist insistence upon a flawless text grounded in God's authoring the book fails to recognize that God used fallible humans to do the writing.[105]

---

[99] Ibid. For a more popular account challenging foundationalism and modern notions of truth, see Brian D. McLaren, *A New Kind of Christian: A Tale of Two Friends on a Spiritual Journey* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001).

[100] J. P. Moreland and Garrett DeWeese, "The Premature Report of Foundationalism's Demise," in Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times, ed. Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth, and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 81.

[101] Mark Dever, "Nothing But the Blood," *Christianity Today* 50, no. 5 (May 2006): 28-33.

[102] See David L. Edwards and John R. W. Stott, *Evangelical Essentials: A Liberal-Evangelical Dialogue* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1989), 318-20; Clark H. Pinnock, "The Conditional View," in *Four Views on Hell*, ed. William Crockett (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 135-66; Rob Bell, *Love Wins: A Book About Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived* (New York: HarperOne, 2011).

[103] For example, see Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson, eds., *Hell Under Fire* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004).

[104] Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998), 251.

[105] Stanley J. Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the 21st Century* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 110-11.

Perhaps a helpful way to see some of the conflict within evangelicalism, especially as it plays out among evangelical elites, is to consider the debates that have occurred within the Evangelical Theological Society (ETS). In 2001, ETS held a vote on the following statement: "We believe the Bible clearly teaches that God has complete, accurate, and infallible knowledge of all events, past, present, and future including all future decisions and actions of free moral agents." As Rob Warner reports, 253 voted in favor and 66 against the statement.[106] Wayne Grudem, Warner notes, called the vote a rejection of open theism and a hint that open theists within the organization should leave or change their stance on the matter.[107] Members in favor of broader boundaries struck back with "The Word Made Fresh: A Call for a Renewal of the Evangelical Spirit." This prompted further response from conservatives within the organization, including then current president Millard Erickson and former president Darrell Bock, who both declined to sign the "The Word Made Fresh."[108] Warner cites Grudem again as "objecting to slippery language and claiming that some signatories want to 'ask evangelical institutions to include viewpoints that historically have not been included on their faculty… such as a denial of inerrancy, an advocacy of open theism, a denial of substitutionary atonement, a denial of hell [and] eternal punishment of unbelievers.'"[109] The debates within ETS underscore the contested and diverse nature of evangelicalism, particularly among elites.

Given this contention within evangelicalism, there does not exist a single, agreed upon "gospel" within evangelicalism. What I seek to provide in the following is, to put it in Weberian terms, an "Ideal type" that will be used in interpreting the empirical data. The following is not intended to provide the gospel that all evangelicals adhere to but instead offer a reference point for thinking through the comments of the interviewees. Since my description of the gospel is derived from elites rather than ordinary evangelicals it does not mean that the gospel will be

---

[106] Rob Warner, *Reinventing English Evangelicalism, 1966-2001: A Theological and Sociological Study* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007), 9.

[107] Ibid.

[108] Timothy C. Morgan, "Theologians Decry 'Narrow' Boundaries," *Christianity Today* 46, no. 7 (June 10, 2002): 18.

[109] Warner, *Reinventing English Evangelicalism*, 9.

entirely unrecognizable to ordinary evangelicals either. The view presented in the following does reach ordinary evangelicals through various channels such as the sermon. Yet it often reaches them in partial and inchoate ways. The extent to which ordinary evangelicals actually hold the view of the gospel presented here will be explored in the remaining chapters. The reason I have opted for a more conservative vision of the gospel is due to the suggestion that American evangelicals tend to be more theologically conservative than their British sisters and brothers.[110]

This section suggests that the evangelical agreement with *sola scriptura* (Scripture alone) gravitates to an overarching theme of that Scripture, the good news of God's work in the world through God's son, Jesus. Put simply, the lens that filters the evangelical reading of the Bible is the gospel. This gospel has the breadth to inform and orient the evangelical as they interact with the unbelieving world. Whether the gospel actually succeeds in doing so is a different question, one that will be addressed in the coming chapters. In fact, this study will suggest that ordinary evangelicals conceptualize the gospel as less systematic and with more reference to cultural resources than the view of the gospel presented here (a view articulate by evangelical elites). Nonetheless, this study considers it important to provide a more polished theological vision to serve as a reference for thinking through the thoughts of ordinary evangelicals (the interviewees). The section will explain the gospel by drawing upon the works (and even lectures) of evangelical theologians and theologians that find welcome among many evangelicals. James Davison Hunter's attempt to operationalize "evangelicalism" deemed it best to consider first how evangelicals define themselves.[111] This same approach can be applied to the evangelical gospel, and this is why my discussion of the gospel will draw upon evangelicals themselves. More specifically, much of what I learned at the decidedly evangelical seminary, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in South Hamilton, Massachusetts will be used, including books read there. This seminary, in its current form, was forged by neo-evangelical leaders Billy Graham and Harold John Ockenga. It is a seminary that has maintained much of the vision of the leaders

---

[110] See Ibid., 10.
[111] Hunter, "Operationalizing Evangelicalism," 368.

of that movement. It is also an institution that represents some of the diversity of both American and global evangelicalism, drawing future pastors and teachers from more than ninety-six denominations and thirty-eight countries. While I am not suggesting that all evangelicals hold a view of the gospel like the one presented here, it is nonetheless the case that the following account represents the gospel as explicated at an important and influential evangelical seminary. This section seeks to show that the gospel can be mobilized in a way that facilitates an evangelical orientation to the world. The gospel, and its connected assumptions and doctrines, could provide a foundation upon which a worldview can be constructed. The following theological sweep of the biblical story will begin with creation and continue to the life and ministry of Jesus. The examination is based on fairly recent scholarship with no book being published before 1980, which is fitting given that my interest is in *contemporary* evangelicals. The narrative that is described in the following will be used as a template to interpret the empirical data.

The Biblical Narrative and the Good News of Jesus

Evangelicals readily recognize that there exists a host of things that pester, pinch, poke and pound the human. At the more tolerable end of the spectrum, says Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., there is the "first motorist in a green arrow left-turn lane [who] is often some dreamer who lurches forward like a startled hippo just *after* the arrow has come and gone."[112] Moving to the more inflicting side of the human's state, Plantinga notes that "thoughtful human beings suffer pangs from aging. They gain an acute sense of the one-way flow of time that carries with it treasures and opportunities and youthful agilities that seemingly will not come again. Worse, they know perfectly well how human life ends."[113] Whether things minor or grave, the "veins of sin interlace" these ills.[114] For Plantinga, the nasty mess that is sin is

---

[112] Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 1.
[113] Ibid.
[114] Ibid., 3.

framed by *shalom*, that is, universal flourishing.[115] At one end, there is creational shalom and at the other is eschatological shalom flowing forth from the blood-stained cross. The evangelical is sandwiched between these "shaloms," at the same time both lamenting the loss that came about via the Fall and yet longing for restoration that comes through the gospel.

First, creational shalom. In order to diagnose what is wrong with the world, evangelicals gain perspective by looking at life before things went wrong.[116] This requires a return to the Garden. The opening chapters of Genesis present a scene of flourishing, that is, the peaceful, harmonious confluence of all that is seen. All of creation (the weather, animals, plant life, etc.) was in proper relationship because it was held together by the creator-king, God.[117] In fact, the theme of kingship is woven throughout the Genesis creation story. Unlike other Ancient Near Eastern creation accounts, there was no struggle, no duel of the gods; rather, God creates *ex nihilo*.[118] And the work of creation is executed with relative ease; things are simply spoken into existence, a point some have speculated was a polemic against other competing creation accounts.[119] According to some, the very structure of the creation account carries with it the theme of kingship.[120] Days one through three God creates *kingdoms* (Day 1: light; Day 2: water and sky; Day 3: land and vegetation) and days four through six God creates the corresponding *kings* for the

---

[115] Ibid., 10.

[116] A look at creation is repeatedly prescribed by evangelicals as the first step in working through the complex issues that vex contemporary evangelicals. John Stott, for example, calls creation "foundational" to developing a Christian mind (along with "Fall," "Redemption," and the "End"). Stott, *Decisive Issues Facing Christians Today: Your Influence is Vital in Today's Turbulent World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 1984), 34. Similarly, Nancy Pearcey claims that "The Christian message does not begin with 'accept Christ as your Savior'; it begins with 'in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.' The Bible teaches that God is the sole source of the entire created order…Thus His word, or laws, or creation ordinances give the world its order and structure." Creation, believes Pearcey, is an essential tool for thinking Christianly. Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004) 44-45. See also Chuck Colson and Nancy Pearcey, *How Now Shall We Live?* (Nashville, TN: LifeWay, 1999), 17.

[117] Kenneth A. Mathews, *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture NIV Text, Genesis 1-11:26* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1996), 121.

[118] Ibid., 117-19.

[119] William J. Dumbrell, *The Faith of Israel: A Theological Survey of the Old Testament*, 2nd ed (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002), 13.

[120] Gary D. Pratico, "Old Testament Survey," (Lecture, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, S. Hamilton, MA, March 3, 2003).

kingdoms (Day 4: sun, moon, and stars, corresponding to light and day; Day 5: sea creatures and birds, corresponding to water and sky; Day 6: earth creatures, corresponding to land and vegetation). When one reaches Genesis chapter two there is a change in tone. There has been a move from the vast expanse of the universe to the serene and utopian bliss of the Garden. Even the word for God changes from *Elohim* (a term denoting God's transcendence) to *Yahweh* (God's revealed covenantal name, a name denoting nearness and God's relationship with his people).[121] It is in chapter two that Adam is commissioned with the task of working and keeping the Garden. Furthermore, he is called to *name* the living creatures, a duty that implied kingship over the named.[122] That Adam's task was to lord over creation was suggested in the first chapter. There it says that humanity is created in the image (*selem*) of God. What exactly this means has been the topic of much discussion, but perhaps the best option is that humans are in some sense God's idols (the word for image, *selem*, is the same word for idol) on earth, that is, God's representative *kings* over creation.[123] This understanding is bolstered by the following cultural mandate, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on earth" (Genesis 1:28).[124] Universal flourishing exists because God is king and all other representative kings, particularly humans, are in proper relationship to both God and the rest of creation. They are tethered tightly to God's rule and kingship. For evangelicals, when God is king, the world is as it should be. When Adam and Eve ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they subverted this order. The tethers were disconnected from their source and the harmonious relations between all of creation began to fragment and sever.

---

[121] *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), footnote for Genesis 2:4.

[122] The recently released and markedly evangelical *ESV Study Bible's* note on Adam's task of "naming" reads: "By naming the animals, the man demonstrates his authority over all the other creatures." See *ESV Study Bible*, footnote for Genesis 2:20.

[123] Douglas K. Stuart, "Old Testament Survey," (Lecture, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, S. Hamilton, MA, January 29, 2004).

[124] See Mathews, *The New American Commentary*, 168-69. All biblical quotes are taken from the ESV translation unless noted otherwise.

God's kingship was usurped and, as a result, creational shalom (that is, universal peace) was ruptured. For evangelicals, this Fall is the source of the world's maladies.

The early chapters of Genesis document the severity of life beyond the Garden. Notable for this project, human work was explicitly mentioned in the curse as something that would be made difficult (Genesis 3:17-19). But the scope of the human predicament would extend beyond work, creating multilayered and far-reaching devastation. For evangelicals, such a grave existence is due to sin, a problem that in the early chapters of Genesis escalates into God's bringing a flood of judgment which "blotted out every living thing that was on the face of the ground" (Genesis 7:23).[125] Despite God's drastic recourse, sin continues. Noah and his family experience some sort of foul play (Genesis 9:20-27) and the peoples of the earth seek to make a name for themselves by building a tower (Genesis 11:1-9). The grim tune of these chapters is replaced with an overwhelming dulcet hope of "blessing" with the call of Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3). Here God is reestablishing a relationship with his alienated creation. Abraham's call is filled with "blessing." There are three promises given to Abraham: land, multiple seed, and blessing. The patriarchal narrative continues by holding these promises in suspense.[126] In fact, the Abraham narrative seems to be a series of obstacles in the retrieval of God's covenant promises of land and offspring. The most ominous threat to the realization of God's promise is sparked by God himself who asks Abraham to sacrifice his son, Isaac, the one through whom the promises would be realized.[127] And yet the "Lord provides" (Genesis 22:14). God's covenant to Abraham is reiterated to Isaac and Isaac's son, Jacob. It is Jacob's son, Joseph, who lands the Hebrews in Egypt.

The exodus from Egypt is the defining moment in Israelite history. The book of Exodus can be summarized as the move from bad service (enslavement in Egypt) to good service (enslavement to God).[128] The repeated use of the Hebrew *abad* (work, serve) in the first chapter of the book underscores the author's point that

---

[125] Andrew E. Hill and John H. Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 69.
[126] Dumbrell, *The Faith of Israel*, 29-31.
[127] Ibid., 30.
[128] Douglas K. Stuart, *The New American Commentary: Exodus* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 2006), 35.

they were enslaved under the Egyptians (1:13-14). God tells Moses that Israel is leaving so that they might serve (the same root, *abad*) God (Exodus 3:12). This process escalates into the giving of the Law and the building of the tabernacle. The tabernacle is strikingly reminiscent of the Garden.[129] Both the tabernacle and the Garden had entrances on the east. Both were enclosed spaces where God dwelt amidst his people. The veil surrounding the inner sanctum of the tabernacle, the holy of holies, was to be covered with representations of cherubim. It was the cherubim that were set to guard the entrance of the Garden following Adam and Eve's expulsion from it. This suggests that God is providing a way back to the Garden, that is, a way back to fellowship with him.

And yet once they arrive (through conquest) into the Promised Land, the Hebrews become enslaved to themselves and other gods because of their refusal to *serve* the Lord. It is the prophets that call Israel back to the Lord. The prophets had a keen sense of the multifarious affects of sin and spoke vividly of God's plan to restore the creational shalom that was lost at the Fall. The prophet Isaiah spoke of the promises of God leading to a time when swords would be beat to plowshares and spears into pruning hooks (Isaiah 2:4). In other words, tools of violence would be changed to tools for cultivation. Furthermore, Isaiah understands the shalom of God to spawn peace between the animals—"the wolf shall dwell with the lamb"— and peace between humanity and animals—"The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra" (Isaiah 11:6-9). Finally, inanimate creation will flourish when God's kingdom is restored. The prophet Joel describes the mountains dripping with wine, the hills flowing with milk, and all the streambeds of Judah flowing with water (Joel 3:18).[130] In short, the hope of the prophets is a glorious and universal flourishing. It is through the prophets that the goal of history, namely, eschatological shalom begins to take focus.[131]

---

[129] See Vern S. Poythress, *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1991), 31.

[130] These references from the Prophets are derived from Plantinga, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be*, 9n.

[131] Plantinga explains the work of the prophets this way: "They [the prophets] dreamed of a new age in which human crookedness would be straightened out, rough places made plain. The foolish would be made wise, and the wise, humble. They dreamed of a time when the deserts would

The prophet Micah describes a time when "the sun shall go down on the prophets" (Micah 3:6). Traditionally, Christians have understood this time as the years of silence between the testaments. The first (or Old) testament stressed the kingship of God. Themes of God's sovereignty laced the creation account. Humanity's rebellion was a rebellion from God's sovereign rule over creation. Not only was humanity alienated from God but all of creation felt the impact. The world's woes are due to sin, a reality that has a tight grip upon creation as seen in the early chapters of Genesis. With the call of Abraham God begins to reinstitute his rule over a people. God's people are called upon to serve the Lord in order that they might find freedom. As the prophets anticipate, when the rule of God is fully established all of creation will flourish again.

The Old Testament is a critical foundation for understanding Jesus' mission, which is the focus of the New Testament. The silence that the prophet Micah spoke of was ended on that silent night when Jesus entered the world. *The* prophet had arrived. The thrust of Jesus' message was the nearness of the kingdom of God (or "heaven," as Matthew calls it).[132] It was through Jesus that the kingdom of God, that is, the sovereign reign of God would be established. The New Testament authors are in agreement that Jesus is the one whom the whole of the Old Testament was longingly reaching for. There are multiple ways that the New Testament writers see Jesus fulfilling the promises and satisfying the themes of the Old Testament: whereas Adam and Eve succumbed to Satan's temptation, Jesus triumphed (Matthew 4:1-11); whereas Adam's temptation took place in a garden and led to a wilderness (both figuratively and literally), Jesus' temptation took place in the wilderness and placed him on track to restore a garden-city and acquire access to

---

flower, the mountains would run with wine, weeping would cease, and people could go to sleep without weapons on their laps. People would work in peace and to fruitful effect. Lambs could lie down with lions. All nature would be fruitful, benign, and filled with wonder upon wonder; all humans would be knit together in brotherhood and sisterhood; and all nature and all humans would look to God, walk with God, lean toward God, and delight in God." Plantinga, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be*, 9-10.

[132] C. C. Caragounis, "Kingdom of God/Heaven." In Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall, eds., *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1992), 417.

the tree of life (Revelation 22:2)[133]; whereas Abraham was given a ram, Jesus was the ram[134]; whereas Moses freed the Hebrews from their enslavement under Egypt, Jesus frees the world from its enslavement to sin (Galatians 5:1); whereas Moses delivered the Law upon a mountain (Exodus 19-40), Jesus spoke of fulfilling the Law upon a mountain (Matthew 5:17-19)[135]; whereas God dwelt among Israel via the tabernacle, Jesus "dwelt (literally, "tabernacle") among us" (John 1:14).[136] In short, the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus accomplished what the Bible understands to be God's plan for history: the restoration of God's sovereign rule.[137] This restoration although present, will not be consummated until the return of Jesus. This is what evangelicals anxiously await: the arrival of eschatological shalom.

The gospel is that undeserving sinners are invited into this sweeping plan of restoration. Paul states the gospel succinctly when he says, "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve…" (1 Corinthians 15:3-5). For Paul, this message is "of first importance." Paul describes the gospel as being most simply about Christ, his death, and resurrection which was confirmed by the eyewitness accounts of Cephas, the twelve, and more than five hundred others. While Paul's excerpt focuses the work of Jesus as it relates to sinners, Paul also understands the gospel to be broad in scope, garnering nothing less than all of creation (Romans 8:21; Colossians 1:20). By placing the gospel in the context of the biblical narrative, one is better suited to understand the centrality of the gospel for providing an enveloping system to frame all of one's affairs. This will become evident in the remaining chapters.

---

[133] See *ESV Study Bible*, 2635, note for Genesis 2:9. According to evangelical New Testament scholar, Robert H. Stein, the temptation established the type of messiah Jesus would be and set the tone for his ministry. Robert H. Stein, *Jesus the Messiah: A Survey of the Life of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1996), 110.

[134] *ESV Study Bible*, 2636, note for Genesis 22:8.

[135] Ibid., 2637, note for Exodus 20:13.

[136] Ibid., 2020, footnote for John 1:14.

[137] Ibid., 23.

Summary

Chapters one through four have sought to orient. Chapters one and two oriented the reader by developing a theoretical lens for thinking about American evangelicalism, contemporary culture, and the relationship between the two. The focus of chapters three and four has been to orient the reader to American evangelicalism itself. I have done this by examining American evangelicalism's history, its theology of work (as described by professionals), and the gospel that is central to the evangelical worldview (again, as described by professionals). The next two chapters will delve into the interviews, looking at how and why the interviewees determine their particular career paths, and how evangelical faith shapes the evangelical's engagement at work.

5

CAREER CHOICE

Any consideration of career choice must consider the larger question of decision-making, a vitally important subject. As someone once said, one spends their entire life either making decisions or living out decisions already made. The evangelicals interviewed tended to gravitate to one of two positions on this issue. For some, God has an individual will, a blueprint for life. One carefully must follow this blueprint that God has through a variety of ways: hearing God's word, counsel with godly leaders, and circumstances. Most importantly, this school of thought stresses a dynamic, numinous, ongoing dialogue with God. The way God spoke to Abraham, Moses, and the Apostles is *normative*. For this school, God speaking to his people is often referred to as a prompting of the Holy Spirit, what some refer to as that "still small voice" (1 Kings 19:12; KJV). In order to hear from God, careful attention is given to intuitions, impressions, and signs. I am labeling this view the *dynamic* model.

There is a second view of decision-making that exists within evangelicalism. Those evangelicals adhering to this view believe that God has two types of will, moral and sovereign.[1] God's moral will such as the Ten Commandments is fully revealed in Scripture. God's sovereign will happens regardless of one's actions. The Christian's primary concern is to live obediently to God's moral will, which is found in the Bible. There is no individual will that Christians should be concerned about following. While this school recognizes that God can lead people through strong inner urges, a burning bush, or an angel, they do not see these leadings as

---

[1] These two types of will have also been labeled perceptive (moral) and permissive (sovereign).

normative. I am calling this view the *wisdom* model because it stresses the importance of applying the wisdom gained from the Bible and others in order to reach individual decisions.

Understanding the Dynamic and Wisdom Models

Among many evangelicals, the dynamic model is the preferred approach to decision-making. In fact, Garry Friesen and J. Robin Maxson's (Friesen) *Decision Making and the Will of God* suggests how ensconced the dynamic view is in evangelicalism by calling it the traditional view.[2] The successful *Experiencing God* series by Henry T. Blackaby and Claude V. King is indicative of the dynamic model. This series, the authors claim, has impacted nearly every Christian denomination.[3] Another book representative of this model is John Eldredge's *Walking with God*. This book chronicles a year of Eldredge's walk with God. Eldredge has previously authored successful evangelical books including *The Sacred Romance* (co-authored by Brent Curtis) and *Wild at Heart*. Having been out for less than a year, Eldredge's *Walking with God* enjoyed the number 23 spot on the Evangelical Christian Publishers

---

[2] Garry Friesen and J. Robin Maxson, *Decision Making and the Will of God* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 1980). Other evangelical authors concur with Friesen and Maxson's assessment. For example, Gerald Sittser began his presentation "Knowing the Will of God" by describing what he labeled the conventional approach, an approach to the will of God that assumed one right will or way and the individual's task was to find out that way through signs and prayer. It was, in other words, the dynamic view that he was describing as conventional. Gerald Sittser, "Knowing the Will of God," (Presentation, Gordon-Conwell Seminary, S. Hamilton, MA, March 29, 2003). Also see Kevin DeYoung, *Just Do Something: A Liberating Approach to Finding God's Will* (Chicago: Moody, 2009), 43. Similarly, another evangelical, Greg Koukl, began his argument for the wisdom approach preparing his hearers ears because most of them were operating from the dynamic model. He says, "I think that these next couple of hours are going to make some of you very upset. Some of you are going to be very mad at me after the first hour. You'll think that I am taking something very vital away from you. You're going to question much of what you understand about the leading of the Holy Spirit and that's going to be painful. You're going to yell at me; you're going to challenge my orthodoxy. Some of you are going to be frustrated. You'll accuse me of quenching the Spirit—maybe taking God away from you. Some of you might be depressed." Later, he calls decision-making the issue that is "filled with more confusion, more misinformation, more mistaken prooftexting, and actually, it may seem odd to say this, but I think there is a lot of superstition that involved in the body of Christ on this particular issue." Greg Koukl, *Decision-Making and the Will of God* (Signal Hill, CA: Stand to Reason), Audio-tape.

[3] Henry T. Blackaby and Claude V. King, *Experiencing God: How to Live the Full Adventure of Knowing and Doing the Will of God* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1994), xii.

Association's January 2009 bestseller list.[4] According to the Christian retailer, the CBA, *Walking with God* maintained the number 20 spot during January 2009.[5] And according to the CBA's "Christian Living" category for the same month, *Walking with God* could boast a top ten spot at number 6.[6] *Guard Us, Guide Us*, a book indicative of the wisdom model and one that came out at roughly the same time,[7] could not be found on any of these bestseller lists. Taken together, this suggests that a book propounding the dynamic view has captured the attention of evangelicals more broadly than *Guard Us, Guide Us*, a book representative of the wisdom view.

The dynamic view holds that God invites Christians to regular, daily dialogue through which the Christian is led. Blackaby and King argue that "God's assignments come to you on a daily basis."[8] Following each daily study in the *Experiencing God* workbooks is a question asking how the reader will respond to God's leadership and there is a blank space for the reader to write a response.[9] The assumption is that God speaking to his people is common, happening daily, and such leading is so precise that it can be put into words. This same specificity is seen in Eldredge's book. For Eldredge, being in relationship with God means that one has dialogue with God, the kind of dialogue one would have in any human relationship. Throughout the book there are examples of this sort of dialogue in the life of Eldredge. At one point Eldredge recalls the frustration of trying to find a lost watch. After searching for some time, it "occurs" to Eldredge: "*You* are *writing a book on walking with God. Why don't you ask him where it is?*"[10]

Later in the book, Eldredge seeks God for what should be done on a day when there was little that actually needed to be done. Having an itch to fish, Eldredge

---

[4] Evangelical Christian Publishers Association, http://www.ecpa.org/bestseller/index.php (accessed January 6, 2009).

[5] Association for Christian Retail, http://www.cbaonline.org/nm/documents/BSLs/Top_50.pdf (accessed January 6, 2009).

[6] Association for Christian Retail, http://www.cbaonline.org/nm/documents/BSLs/Christian_Living.pdf (accessed January 6, 2009).

[7] *Guard Us, Guide Us* was published March 1, 2008. *Walking with God* was published April 15, 2008.

[8] Blackaby and King, *How to Live the Full Adventure of Knowing and Doing the Will of God*, 20.

[9] Henry T. Blackaby and Claude V. King, *Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing the Will of God* (Nashville, TN: LifeWay, 1990).

[10] John Eldredge, *Walking with God: Talk to Him. Hear from Him. Really.* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 49.

prays, *"Jesus, is this a good day for fishing, or should I just lay low, hang out here?"*
Eldredge continues, "I pause and listen. I'm really okay with either answer." Time
ensues, but no answer. Eldredge asks, *"What do you think, Lord?"* Eldredge continues
to listen, not hearing anything. He then relays the following testimony:

> For I've also learned this: sometimes God wants to speak to me
> about something entirely different than the question I'm
> asking. If I don't get an answer on the subject I've raised, I may
> need to ask a different question. You'll find this very helpful in
> learning to walk with God. If he doesn't seem to be answering
> the question you're asking, stop, and ask him what he *does*
> want to speak to.

Eldredge repeats the request a third time, "*Jesus, shall we fish? What do you
have for today?*" Luckily for Eldredge, Jesus grants him his request: "I hear,
Fish."[11]

The dynamic model also stresses a highly individualistic study of the Bible,
claiming that God will speak uniquely to individuals in their Bible study. Blackaby
and King say, "The Holy Spirit at work in you will confirm in your own heart the
truth of Scripture."[12] The appeal for authoritative correctness is not a church pastor,
a commentator, or theologian, it is the individual believer. Not only is the individual
imbued with hermeneutical prowess, but the individual is also provided the ability
through Jesus to locate the most suitable passage for the day. Eldredge teaches that
Jesus will regularly lead one to the right passage for one's need. Another testimony
underscores Eldredge's point. Eldredge says, "Just this morning I asked God what to
read. At first I simply heard, *John*." Turning to the Gospel of John, Eldredge asks,
"*Where in John?* and God says, *Ten*. (He's said this several times these past few
mornings.)."[13] This is an approach to the Bible that does not stress the importance of
systematic reading. Rather than reading through a Gospel or epistle systematically,
the dynamic view argues that the individual's reading should be more tailored to the

---

[11] Ibid., 67.

[12] Blackaby and King, *How to Live the Full Adventure of Knowing and Doing the Will of God*, 3.

[13] Eldredge, *Walking with God*, 44.

exigencies of the day. As a result, Eldredge's instruction is that God (or Jesus) will daily direct one to the most pertinent passage for the believer.[14]

The *Experiencing God* studies are laced with Bible references. It is from Scripture that they build their case that God speaks to his people in an ongoing fashion. They say:

> If anything is clear from a reading of the Bible, this fact is clear: God speaks to His people. He spoke to Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden in Genesis. He spoke to Abraham and the other patriarchs. God spoke to the judges, kings, and prophets. God was in Christ speaking to the disciples. God spoke to the early church, and God spoke to John on the Isle of Patmos in Revelation. God does speak to His people, and you can anticipate that he will be speaking to you also.[15]

Here, Blackaby and King make extraordinary events ordinary, which their critics claim is their flaw. Eldredge also recognizes the Bible to be a means through which God speaks to Christians, but emphasizes that it is not the only means. He draws upon biblical characters to suggest that God still speaks to his people.

Failing to obey Jesus when he speaks is to invite peril into one's life. Eldredge opens the book by describing an annual trip his family takes to find their Christmas tree. On this particular trip, the family found themselves in the midst of a violent blizzard. Their vehicle was inflicted with two flat tires and they only had one spare. Eventually the car battery died due to the prolonged use of their hazard lights. Regarding this experience, Eldredge says, "The word that comes to mind is *ordeal*."[16] Why did doom strike the Eldredge family? Eldredge says plainly, "we weren't supposed to go." Explicating, Eldredge continues:

---

[14] This practice, according to Barbara Donagan, was viewed as nothing more than dangerous superstition among the Puritans. She writes, "Opening the Bible at random and taking the text on which one's eye lighted as a divine direction belonged properly with appeals to lots, omens, and the stars. Indeed, by a 'Catch-22' argument, a randomly opened Bible on one occasion forbade the practice itself. Such practices were objectionable because they constituted a challenge to God, requiring an action outside the course of nature, and because they assimilated appeal to Scripture to lottery, the results of which (although foreknown by God) were dependent on chance." Barbara Donagan, "Puritan Decision-Making in Seventeenth Century England," *The Harvard Theological Review* 76, no. 3 (July 1983): 317.

[15] Blackaby and King, *How to Live the Full Adventure of Knowing and Doing the Will of God*, 83.

[16] Ibid., 4.

> We'd prayed about the weekend, asking God when would be a good
> time to head out. This was the day after Thanksgiving (Friday), and
> both Stasi and I sensed God saying we were to go up the following day.
> But it didn't make sense to us. We were tired and the boys wanted to
> see their friends. There were all sorts of "reasons" not to go, but more
> so there was that lingering unbelief that passes for weariness, that
> thing in us that sort of whines, *Really? Do we really have to do this now,*
> *God?* So we ignored the counsel and went the following weekend.
> Now, the weekend God told us to go was a gorgeous weekend—no
> snow, sunny skies, no wind. The whole event would have been
> delightful.
>> But no. We had to do things our way'.[17]

The dynamic view, then, believes that severe consequences will follow those missing God's individual leadership. By contrast, the wisdom model seeks to assuage the anxiety potentially fostered by the dynamic model. Friesen's *Decision Making and the Will of God* begins by highlighting his difficulty with the dynamic model. J. I. Packer and Carolyn Nystrom's (Packer) *Guard Us, Guide Us* likewise seeks to alleviate any fear that the dynamic model of decision-making might spark in the hearts of Christians.

Both these books, which are representative of the wisdom model, stress the importance of the Bible in understanding the will of God. Much of Friesen's lengthy study orbits around the assumption that "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17). If Scripture is adequate for *every good work*, then one need not fret over whether one is hearing from God through an inner voice, a hunch, or signs. Simply following the dictates of Scripture keeps one in God's will. Proponents of the dynamic model, argues Friesen, fail to understand that in addition to God, these feelings could be from "Satan, an angel, a demon, human emotions, hormonal imbalance, insomnia, medication, or an upset stomach."[18] If this numinous approach to understanding God's will was normative, one would expect the Bible to address

---

[17] Ibid., 5.

[18] Friesen and Maxson, *Decision-Making and the Will of God*, 130.

interpreting God's voice from these other voices. Friesen puts it this way, "For nonmoral areas, Scripture gives no guidelines for distinguishing the voice of the Spirit from the voice of the self—or any other potential 'voice.'"[19]

Packer also gives great weight to Scripture for making decisions. As the Bible becomes ingrained in the Christian's mind, they will begin to have the wisdom to make sound, God-honoring decisions. Packer says,

> Many Christians are still haunted by the fancy that real guidance from God for the making of each day's decisions is a direct ministry of the Holy Spirit in one's heart that entirely transcends the mental disciplines of analyzing alternatives, applying principles, calculating consequences, weighing priorities, balancing pros and cons, taking and weighing advice, estimating your own capacities and limitations, and engaging in whatever other forms of brainwork prudence in self-commitment is held to require.[20]

Packer agrees that the Holy Spirit leads, but maintains that the Holy Spirit does not circumvent these "laborious intellectual procedures," rather they are the very means by which the Spirit directs.[21] In fact, Packer actually critiques Friesen's approach by claiming that it is "subspiritual" because Friesen seems to limit the work of the Spirit. So while I am lumping Packer's study with Friesen's study, Packer might not be so quick to do so. For Packer, Friesen muffles the work of the Holy Spirit, failing to give "the whole story about guidance."[22] Notwithstanding Packer's critique of Freisen, both books argue against the dynamic view and take a similar line of reasoning in doing so. Friesen differs in that he erects rigid borders around a careful, biblically-guided approach to decision-making. Packer, however, seeks to lower the borders, arguing that the Holy Spirit is more flexible and sometimes might lead by direct communication to the individual. But this extraordinary experience should always be measured by looking externally. Packer says, "while it is always important to check our conclusions as to what God wants us to do by consulting

---

[19] Ibid., 130-31.

[20] J. I. Packer and Carolyn Nystrom, *Guard Us, Guide Us: Divine Leading in Life's Decisions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008), 136.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid, 221.

wise folk in the church, it is supremely important to do this when we believe we have received guidance by unusual means." Continuing, Packer warns, "Sin and Satan operate by deceit and the corrupting of good judgment, which makes lone rangers in this matter of direct guidance more than ordinarily vulnerable." After all, Packer concludes, "If the wise folk agree in giving us reasons to doubt whether our experience really was God revealing his will to us, we should doubt it too."[23] In other words, the more numinous experience that is normative to the dynamic school is not rejected outright by Packer. Instead, it is considered paranormal and is held in check externally, namely, by the consultation with other Christians on the matter. It should be noted that both the dynamic and the wisdom models defer authority to experience. The dynamic model gives authority to immediate experience and frees the individual from answering to very little but one's heart. The dynamic model does appeal to the inspiration of the Bible but the hermeneutic employed is privatized to such a degree that the individual's "heart of hearts" will trump other suggestions on what the text might mean. On the other hand, Packer also appeals to experience when he says that the individual should seek counsel with wiser, more seasoned Christians. Here, though, experience is not immediate but instead the collected wisdom gained by a constituency over time. Moreover, the experience that Packer urges Christians to draw upon is one accessed by looking outside oneself, not primarily inside as the dynamic view would instruct.

The Interviewees on Decision-Making

The Dynamic View

The interviews addressed issues of decision-making primarily as they related to career choice. However, certain language often emerged while speaking of the workplace in general that revealed certain assumptions about decision-making. The assumptions undergirding the decision-making process are connected to other

---

[23] Ibid., 229.

aspects of the interviewees' working lives (this will become clear in future chapters), which is why significant attention is devoted to this subject of decision-making. All the Christians interviewed agreed that God guides his people. There were, however, differences on how that guidance works. Among the interviewees, the dynamic view was widespread, which makes sense given the broad influence of Blackaby and Eldredge within evangelicalism. Of the churches interviewed, one church had used Blackaby's materials and pastors regularly quoted Blackaby and used language suggestive of his approach.

Jennifer[24] was one interviewee demonstrating characteristics of the dynamic view. When I interviewed Jennifer she was entering her final semester of university. With the approach of graduation looming, Jennifer felt the impending weight of life-altering decisions. Adding to the pressure she placed upon herself was the inescapable "what-are-your-plans-after-graduation?" question that bombards college seniors. Shouldering some of the weight of Jennifer's uncertain future was her faith in a God that leads his people; she was, after all, drawing upon divine assistance in these decisions. In order to work through her present decision related to career choice, Jennifer reflected on a previous decision where she had received clear direction from God. This experience, she says gleefully, was "my shining moment when the Lord and I took an adventure together." The way God so clearly led Jennifer to go on a short-term mission trip to the Middle East several years ago served as the paradigm for decision-making that she was working through when I interviewed her. Jennifer learned about this short-term mission trip opportunity only a few weeks before the application was due. This, Jennifer says, meant that she had "little time to pray through and little time to speak with my parents about it." Initially, her parents did not want her to go on the trip.

An important step in the confirmation process of this trip occurred when she was attending an informational meeting about mission trips:

---

[24] Names and identifying details of the interviewees have been changed to insure their anonymity.

> I went to this meeting about mission trips and they were talking about where they had been and their day in and day out tasks. It was not cold in the room; it was not a temperature thing and I just started getting chills, like crazy chills all over my body. And my eyes start welling with tears and I start crying and I am like, "what is wrong with me?!" It was a weird experience. And one of my friends was there and she wondered, "are you okay?" "I'm fine," I said. I am beginning to think I need to pay attention to this, and so I start to pray through it. I was just so excited and giddy about it and I asked, "I really want to do this Lord, is this what you'd have for me?" And he said…I just really felt a peace.

Jennifer begins to experience a physiological reaction in the midst of a relatively normal, even mundane setting. This physiological reaction causes her to wonder if God might be speaking to her so she gathers focus and begins to pray. She asks God if this trip is what she should be doing and God responds. It seems as though Jennifer might voice the very words communicated to her and yet after a brief pause, she simply says, "I just really felt peace." At this meeting the arrival of chills and tears cause this evangelical to ask God what he might be trying to say, more specifically, whether or not she should attend this trip. Jennifer interprets a feeling of peace as the affirmative from God. Yes, she should go.

Yet Jennifer still needed to convince her parents that it was God's plan for her to take this mission trip:

> And so the next step was to get mom and dad on board. They were not on board but my dad during his time with the Lord really heard the Lord say to him: "Sometimes you have do things that you don't want to do, like let your daughter go to the Middle East and trust that I will take care of her."

It was during a devotional time that her father heard God speak to him. While God had told the father that his daughter should go to the Middle East and that she would be taken care of, the mother still needed convincing. It was through a sign that this issue was resolved. Jennifer says:

The other thing was that it was going to cost about 3,900 dollars for the trip and I had one semester of school to raise that. And so my parents were like we cannot afford to pay for that, which I understood. Through a series of events, I did not have enough money raised when I was supposed to leave for training and my mom still had not come to terms with me going and we had gotten into an argument that we talked through. My dad drove me to training and I told him…we need to get the checkbook but we won't probably need it. He said, "why do you think we won't need the checkbook?" I said, "Basically, the sign for you guys that I am supposed to be in the Middle East is that all the money will be provided." I had known that from the beginning—that the Lord would provide the money. And if he doesn't, okay, I was wrong. When we showed up I asked them how much money I owed and they said nothing, it was all there. That was my confirmation and just the peace.

As it turned out, the money was provided anonymously from other donors. This provided resolution to mother's concern. Jennifer boldly declares that if the money was provided, then God was providing a sign to assure them that this was God's leading.

Despite God speaking to Jennifer and providing signs, there was still anxiety over the trip. She says, "there were times when I was like, 'this is the Middle East! Stuff could happen.' And the Lord would just provide numerous biblical examples of people that just faced things and the Lord was there for them and brought them through it." These anxieties were allayed by God's directing her to a variety of passages that provided encouragement.

It was this short-term mission trip that provided the paradigm for decision-making which Jennifer was currently working through as she sought her post-graduation plans. One of the prospects Jennifer was considering was a long-term mission trip. Regarding this long-term mission prospect, she said that initially she had received a clear directive from God, similar to the Middle East trip described above. Yet, Jennifer says, "when I started thinking about actually going and praying through that I never received a clear word from God." Given the severe consequences of missing God's will, Christians operating from the dynamic view do not advance on a major decision unless it is clear that God has told them to do so. By contrast, those operating from the wisdom approach freely make decisions, not

expecting a specific word from God on the matter, although not excluding the possibility of a word from God either. These Christians would regard the indecision that often accompanies the dynamic view as problematic. Kevin DeYoung, an evangelical pastor and proponent of the wisdom model, says this: "Too many of us have passed off our instability, inconsistency, and endless self-exploration as 'looking for God's will,' as if not making up our minds and meandering through life were marks of spiritual sensitivity."[25]

Not only had Jennifer not heard from God but she had also lacked biblical direction. She says, "I had never received scriptural backup for how I needed to do this. Nothing." This suggests that the hermeneutic of the dynamic view is being employed. She does not mean that she could not find biblical support for the Christian to take the gospel abroad to the nations, for the Bible is replete with imperatives to take the gospel to the ends of the earth (see, for example, Matthew 28:19-20). What Jennifer means is that there had not been a sense of God's personal direction through her reading of Scripture.

There was also the lack of signs for this mission trip prospect. Following the announcement of this potential trip, she remembers that "only one person had encouraged me to apply." By contrast, another opportunity arose and in one week, she says, "three people suggested that I consider the new opportunity." Lest one should focus a decision solely through these sorts of signs, she says:

> And so I thought I don't want to just look for signs, I need to hear from the Lord. Yes, he can use signs—like people telling you to do this—but I think he needs to speak also. And so I started to look at my options…I hit a point this week when I said I don't want to go. It was a really rough moment for me and the Lord because I thought maybe he wanted me to go do missions, and I said, "God, I will not go." And so then I had the Jonah complex and so it has been a process of working through that. And God later confirmed that he needed me to be obedient in pursuing the application process and just some personal things in my life have happened which require me to be in the States for two years as opposed to being overseas for two years. And so I finally got my closure [from the Lord] that said, "it's okay, you don't

---

[25] DeYoung, *Just Do Something*, 15.

need to continue pursuing the long-term mission trip." I am not sure why [God told me not to apply for the long-term mission trip], but I know that God will explain someday why, and if not then I'll ask him later (laughing). And so that eliminated long-term missions and I am still working through other options.

When I interviewed Jennifer she was still in the midst of this decision. Her account highlights characteristics of the dynamic model already noted. In these decisions, she describes dialogue with God, feelings of peace, and signs as all working together to reach a decision. Also, there is the presence of a privatized method for interpreting Scripture. The Bible need not simply affirm the rightness of a practice such as going to do missions, instead it must "speak" to the individual; it must strike the reader in a unique way. This reading of a text works off of a more organic reading. Presumably, Jennifer is not systematically reading biblical texts on the importance of missions rather she is looking for such affirmation through the natural flow of her daily reading. Finally, the dynamic view also believes that any misstep in God's path for the individual will result in disaster. Jennifer does not say this explicitly but it is implied in her persistence on waiting for God's directive. For Jennifer, choices are only made on the basis of God's direction. It was not until God told her that she was not supposed to do long-term missions that she marked that prospect off her list, despite having strong reservations. These reservations she calls her "Jonah complex." Jonah was called to preach to Israel's enemies the Assyrians at Nineveh. Rather than heeding God's direction, Jonah boards a ship moving in the furthest direction from Nineveh, Tarshish (most likely Spain). While on board a storm hits and Jonah instructs the crew to throw him overboard so that God's anger toward Jonah would not affect the sailors. Jonah is swallowed by a large fish and eventually the fish vomits Jonah back upon dry land. Jonah, then, reluctantly goes to Nineveh. Jennifer's "Jonah complex" was her unwillingness to do missions. Thankfully, though, God told Jennifer that she should not apply to do long-term missions. If God had not told her this her disobedience would have sparked disastrous consequences. Either Jennifer would have been "out" of God's will for her

life or God would have taken extreme measures—like God did with Jonah—to put her back on track with God's plans for her life.

The drastic consequences that follow when one misses God's will are what incite such energetic searches to hear from God among the interviewees and other evangelicals embracing the dynamic view. One teacher speaks of being sensitive to that "still small voice." The phrase "still small voice" was used frequently by those expressing characteristics of the dynamic model to describe the way God speaks. It is a quote from 1 Kings 19:12 which describes Elijah's theophany on Mount Horeb. Having experienced divine majesty and awe on Mount Carmel when God defeats the Baal and its prophets, Elijah now experiences God subtly upon Mount Horeb. The text describes wind, earthquake and fire as dramatically appearing before Elijah and yet it is in the midst of the "sound of a low whisper" (as the ESV translates it) that God speaks.[26] This Hebrew phrase is an enigmatic one probably suggesting that God was heard in silence; there was nothing heard and yet paradoxically it was through the silence that God was heard.[27] William Dumbrell draws two conclusions from Elijah's theophany on Mount Horeb. First, the piercing silence that Elijah hears is intended to draw Elijah's attention to a previous theophany upon Horeb, the giving of the Law to Moses. What God was communicating to Elijah is that he had already spoken to Moses at Sinai and had nothing to add and he is, therefore, silent. Second, Dumbrell believes that the text insinuates that it would have been better for Elijah to be engaged elsewhere (see 1 Kings 19:15-16).[28] According to Dumbrell the "sound of a low whisper" is not intended to be a characteristic of the way God speaks. Instead, it serves as a reminder that God already has spoken through the Law or, by extension, the whole of the Bible. In evangelical parlance, however, the "still small voice" typically means that God is accessible so long as the Christian is

---

[26] The RSV translates the phrase "a still small voice."

[27] The *New Bible Commentary* says this: "The translations *a gentle whisper* and 'a still small voice' (RSV) do not do full justice to the enigmatic Hebrew expression, which may be better rendered 'a brief sound of silence.' Although the text does not explicitly say so, it implies that God was at last passing by in the silence which followed the storm." See John J. Bimson, "1 and 2 Kings," in *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, ed. D. A. Carson *et al.*, 4th ed. (Leicester, England: IVP, 1994), 1 Kings 18:20.

[28] Dumbrell, *The Faith of Israel*, 98.

able to suppress the clutter and noise that beset individuals in contemporary life. I asked this evangelical teacher what she meant by being sensitive to that "still small voice" and she did not explain the Elijah connection but did say this:

> It means that my life is not my own. That had I continued to say, "okay, I am not going to sacrifice and go back to school and do what I think I have been called to do because I can't make any money at that," then I would be outside of God's will for my life. Way, I mean, going the other direction outside of God's will. I know that he has a plan for me and it is up to me to be listening to find out what that plan is and that is a big question.

For this teacher, being a Christian means one has a new conscience, a Spirit-directed conscience. Like Eldredge, she contends that this Spirit-directed conscience will lead her in the "right way." Divine leadership is not accessible to all but comes to Christians who have the Spirit dwelling within them. Like Jennifer, this teacher believes that grave decision-making mistakes can be made *even* in non-moral decisions. In this instance, the decision was whether to return to university or not. This is a non-moral decision, that is, it is not prescribed in Scripture whether it is morally right to return to school or continue in the job one presently has. Despite the moral neutrality of the decision, this teacher believes that if she had failed to follow God's directive in this decision she would have been outside of God's will, in her words: "going the other direction outside of God's will" (language reminiscent of Jennifer's "Jonah complex"). Given the seriousness of being *in* God's will, one suspects that she would see herself as being susceptible to ill-consequences when *out* of God's will. The wisdom model, on the other hand, would allow more freedom for making non-moral decisions like which university to attend or which house to buy.

In addition to suggesting the importance of following God's lead for decision-making, the words of this teacher also underscore the autonomy of the decision-making process for those adhering to the dynamic view. These comments suggest that this evangelical believes it is up to her, and her alone, to be listening and to decipher what God is telling her. This underscores the robust confidence in the

individual's own resources for navigating their lives. There is little room for any *external* appeals or resources to be utilized, rather the *internal* carries the decision-making load. These comments emanate from an optimistic appraisal of the individual's resources. One might conclude that such optimism leads to a more liberated view of the individual. After all, if the individual's inner self is less encumbered by sin the individual might perceive themselves to be free to act upon what flows from within the self. This is not the case for this Christian; she says simply, "my life is not my own."

It should be noted that while the interviewees and other evangelicals holding the dynamic model often communicate the very words of God when describing God's leadership, this does not mean God's leadership necessarily comes to them audibly. An evangelical in the health field describes it this way:

> God did not speak to me audibly but in my spirit; it was if God said to me "Mattie, I wouldn't allow Satan to enable his kids to do something....[like] publish and present, that I wouldn't enable mine to do. You go to Oklahoma University and trust me, and I will enable you to be able to do what you have to do in Me."

Like Eldredge, these Christians may not hear an audible voice but regularly extrapolate precise words from God based upon impressions. Access to specific direction from God does not rely upon measured, laborious cognitive processes. Rather, access to God's direction is immediate. In the words of this health field worker, access to God's leadership is a fruit of the "God-given gift of intuition," and intuition appears to circumvent deliberation.

Given the specificity of God's direction, which is drawn from intuition, coupled with the seriousness of a misstep in God's plan, one must wonder how to be sure one is hearing from God and not their own wishes, desires, or indigestion. When I asked interviewees how they could be so sure that they were hearing from God, they appealed to experiential, transcendent mystery. They also, like the health field worker that stressed the "God-given gift of intuition," gravitated to a preference of *heart* over *head*, that is, intuition and feelings supplanted reason, deliberation,

and cognition. One doctor believed God had told him to devote a percentage of his earnings to ministry. When God spoke to this doctor the practice was struggling financially. Those keeping a watch on the practice's finances suggested that this move was virtually impossible; answering God's call made little sense. Yet the doctor obeyed this calling and miraculously the $100,000 they needed was in the bank. They did not know where it came from. I asked how he was so confident that this was God speaking, particularly given the difficulty of what he was asked to do. He says, "I just knew. If God tells you to do something, then do it." Here the subjective is what substantiates God's leading. The way God led, though crystal clear to the individual, was difficult for the individual to articulate. God's leading as it leaves the inner recesses of the subjective becomes murky and ill-defined. So much so that he simply declares, "I just knew." For this Christian, there is a degree of theological capital associated with making decisions that run counter to reason. It made no sense for the doctor to devote a significant sum of his earnings to ministry, especially when his practice was having financial difficulty. Yet he did so based on a leading that was inexplicable. The intellect and reason not only could not explain what was taking place but they stood in the way of his coming to this decision. Indescribable feelings, on the other hand, give clout to this Christian's decision. Emotions and feelings residing deep within (heart) are favored over the intellect and reason (head).

The preference of heart over head could be seen in the comments of a mechanic. When asked how one could be sure God was speaking to them, this mechanic gave the example of a hot stove. He said that if he told someone not to touch a hot stove, they could believe that. But something entirely different would happen if they were to touch that hot stove and experience it for themselves. This, he said, "would bring them from the realm of faith, to the realm of experience." So it is with God speaking; it must be experienced in order to be completely understood. Again, the implication is that God's leadership is indescribable. The persuasive punch of God's leading emerges not from explanation but experience; not from what is grasped by the intellect but from what is felt; not from the head but from the heart.

A successful evangelical who brings entertainment to the Midwest spoke of the type of questions that arise when facing a decision. In these moments, this evangelical asks, "Is this what you'd have me do, God?" One difficult decision this person often faces is which shows to bring and which shows to reject. Some shows, for example, contain content that a Christian might have difficulty endorsing. When probed on why the show *Chicago* was brought to the region but not others, this Christian spent some time trying to explain why and finally said, "I felt more peace in doing it." That this unsubstantiated and highly subjective response to a genuine ethical inquiry carries persuasion among evangelicals is significant. The response flows from the heart not the head. Such gravitation to the heart gains saliency from a strand of anti-intellectualism that weaves its way through American evangelicalism (a theme I will revisit). This is not to say that these comments flow from one who is irrational, for given this interviewee's presuppositional foundations, internal feelings and hunches are directives from the divine.

Both the dynamic and wisdom models view their own view as being indicative of Christian maturity. For the dynamic model, Eldredge and Blackaby insist that the ability to carry on dialogue with God is the pinnacle of Christian maturity. Eldredge says, "hearing from God in such a direct manner might be a new experience for you. It certainly wasn't my experience for years. No shame in that. We're all students, and we're all learning."[29]

In contrast, the wisdom model views this type of dialogue as indicative of Christian immaturity. Packer cites Jesus' frustration when individuals obsess over signs (Mark 8:11). Also, Packer points out Dallas Willard's comments about the immaturity of seeking the spectacular. Willard says,

> When the spectacular is *sought*, it is because of childishness in the personality. Children love the spectacular and show themselves children by actively seeking it out, running heedlessly after it. It may sometimes be given by God—it may be necessary—because of our

---

[29] Eldredge, *Walking with God*, 44.

denseness or our hardheartedness. However, it is never to be taken as
a mark of spiritual adulthood or superiority.[30]

Even worse, in a forward to Friesen's book, Haddon Robinson likens the dynamic
view to paganism.[31] It would seem the comments of this evangelical in the
entertainment industry underscore the immaturity of the dynamic model. This
evangelical's basis for bringing *Chicago* to town, while hard to argue against,
demonstrates enfeebled moral reasoning.

What one sees in these interviewees is an internal dialogue with God similar
to what Eldredge demonstrated throughout his book. Maintaining a keen ear to
God's leading is important because of the severe consequences that result from a
decision-making misstep. Yet God's voice is subtle, therefore the Christian must be
alert. Instructing one to decipher God's voice from other competing voices is
difficult. It is something that must be experienced, not explained. Part of this is due
to the highly subjective means employed by the dynamic model.

The Wisdom View

While most of the interviewees operated from the dynamic view of decision-making,
not all of those interviewed could so easily fit into the dynamic paradigm. For
example, a dominant assumption behind the dynamic view is the idea of a blueprint
for one's life. With such a blueprint, there potentially exists anxiety about making
the *right* decision in order to stay in line with one's blueprint. Instead of the *right*
decision, other evangelicals interviewed spoke of the *best* decision. When asked how
the "best" decision was to be determined, some interviewees emphasized giftedness.
A forester when asked how one should determine their vocation said, "They need to
listen with their hearts about what their gifts and talents are." This statement

---

[30] Packer and Nystrom, *Guard Us, Guide Us*, 42. Similarly, Eugene Peterson has talked about
the tendency among Christians to "denigrate ordinariness." He says, "We're incited to lust after
miracle and ecstasy, after flashy displays of the supernatural." See Peterson, *Leap Over a Wall: Earthy
Spirituality for Everyday Christians* (San Francisco: Harper, 1997), 9.

[31] Friesen and Maxson, *Decision-Making and the Will of God*, 13. See also Haddon W.
Robinson, *Decision Making by the Book* (Grand Rapids, MI: Discovery House Publishers, 1998), 36-37.

stresses the turn inward. That is, gifts and talents are determined by listening to one's heart, not by looking outside to counsel, the Bible, one's pastor, or friend. Nevertheless, the turn inward is not infused with the divine in the explicit way it was with those holding the dynamic view. Rather than the turn inward leading to a definite word from God, or tapping into "the God-given gift of intuition" as one evangelical put it, here the turn inward leads to wisdom about one's giftedness. As such, it does not carry the same authority that it did with interviewees holding the dynamic view. Consequently, an orientation to the self is not as robust. One is not bound by this turn inward to pick a particular job over against another. The forester says later, "Just go after it [the job or vocation you seek] and God will take care of it."

There is a trust in the sovereignty of God informing this last comment. The forester emphasized being proactive instead of passively waiting for a word from God because God in his sovereignty will take care of things. Likewise, an architect when contemplating God's role in his life said, "as I look back over my career, I really think that God had his hand on me from day one…and I didn't even realize at times that he was guiding and directing me through some of these paths." God certainly leads for this Christian but it is in a way that often transcends human understanding. This architect confesses, "I'm still not sure exactly what that [God's] purpose is." The self, then, while of great concern to God, is not equipped with the same level of omniscience seen among interviewees holding the dynamic view. To be sure, dynamic view adherents were not claiming omniscience in and of themselves. Instead, they viewed the self's connectedness to the mind and heart of God—via the Holy Spirit—as largely unfettered. While the individual may not know God's plans, the individual can nonetheless rest in the sovereignty of God.

The potential anxiety created by the dynamic view is relieved by the sovereignty of God under the wisdom model. For example, when advising someone on career choice, an evangelical working in finance said, "I would say trust in the sovereignty of God that whatever you do in life will sanctify you and is where you should be working in that moment in the kingdom." The idea of a blueprint or an individual will of God is absent. One should simply trust that in God's sovereignty they are in the right place. Similarly, a pro-golfer said they might advise a fellow

Christian planning out their career choice to remember that "if this God that we have is so great and so sovereign, then as long as you are not picking a field that is sinful, then pick it and go do it." It was said that wisdom model proponents only see two types of wills that God has, moral and sovereign. God's moral and sovereign will exclude the individual will that is so prominent among dynamic view adherents. As this pro-golfer puts it, if one is doing a morally good thing (i.e., following God's moral will) then the Christian has nothing to be concerned about because God's other will, his sovereign will, is inescapable. The concern about finding God's individual will, or the blueprint for one's life, is absent. In other words, non-moral areas do not require one to wait for the Lord's leading; the category is completely absent from this golfer's language on decision-making.

As far as guidance, the interviewees holding the wisdom model believe that God works through fairly normal decision-making processes. A baseball coach says that when one is deciding on what career to choose, one should read Scripture, pray, seek counsel with parents and pastor, and learn their giftedness. Remarkably consistent with Packer who says that the Holy Spirit leads through mundane processes like "balancing pros and cons,"[32] this coach stressed that the Holy Spirit would provide wisdom "to weigh out pros and cons." Finally, true to wisdom model form, this coach said that when one is trying to decide what career to pursue they should remember that they are "not going to screw-up by making one decision versus another," because, after all, "God is sovereign." Notice the sharp contrast between this approach and the dynamic approach that was seen in Eldredge. Eldredge saw doom come upon his family for not obeying the voice of the Lord when they were told to look for a Christmas tree. Other evangelicals believed that to miss God's will in non-moral decisions was to cause one to be, in the words of one interviewee, "way, I mean going the other direction outside of God's will" for one's life. For this evangelical coach, however, making one decision over another will not devastate God's plan for his people. This belief is substantiated by the sovereignty of God.

---

[32] Packer and Nystrom, *Guard Us, Guide Us*, 136.

Whereas interviewees utilizing the dynamic view drew upon primarily *internal* (or subjective) resources, interviewees turning to the wisdom model demonstrated an interesting interplay between *internal* resources and *external* resources. For example, subjective feelings—or what is internal—played an important part in the decision-making process, yet those feelings where either confirmed or rejected on the basis of more external criteria such as conversations with others or Scripture reading. In order to see this interplay at work, here is a lengthy excerpt from an interview with a real estate agent turned worship leader:

How did you end up working in the church and not real estate?

I come out of seminary feeling dejected. I came out of a very militaristic, legalistic, Calvinistic, Baptist church. There was lots of idolatry. It was a bad, Baptist background. This led me to think about church polity, government, and the way theology was put into practice. I met some key men in the PCA[33] and realized, "okay, this is what I actually want to be like." That is how I ended up Presbyterian. So the reason I came out of seminary dejected about ministry was that it was this intense academic environment at Westminster, I came home without any money, burned out, and not in the spiritual place to handle ministry; really unsure about what to do. Maybe I was not cut out for ministry; maybe I can be used as a lay officer in the church, instead. I was good at real estate, had connections, and went down that path and things were going well. Then I met Rob and heard him preaching at an RUF[34] meeting at Tulsa University. I was really encouraged; it was like hearing the gospel afresh, and I told him so. I had done the music that night. So he asked if we wanted to do lunch, so I did. And he said, "Mike, here's the thing: I'm taking you out to lunch because the music at my church sucks. We're a church plant with forty people and the music is awful and I really think the church is doomed if the music doesn't get better." And I said, "Well, you know, worship isn't about the music." And he said, "I completely agree, but this is the way that it is." "People come and the music is the first impression and you can preach the best sermon in the world and people might go away thinking, 'hmm, that just didn't feel right, didn't taste right; I didn't enjoy singing.'" And I said the reason I am not sure on leading worship here is that I am just not in a good place. I am not in a place to lead worship; I just need to be singing these songs! And I

---

[33] PCA stands for Presbyterian Church in America, a more theologically conservative Presbyterian denomination.
[34] RUF (Reformed University Fellowship) is a university ministry of the PCA.

began to confess my sins to him, one after another and he said, "oh, I've heard a lot people confess their sins and say that they are a sinner, but you might be the first person I actually believe." And he said, "Let me confess my sins to you." And he started going. And he said this might be the person God is using here right now. And it was ugly. And that was a great foundation for me. I thought maybe this might work. I started serving there on a voluntary basis and doing more and more as the church continued to grow, things that I was happy to do. But, at the same time, I began to have the gospel preached and started to see my life changed. Laura (his wife) saw it and family saw it. What had wilted was beginning to come back to life through the preaching of the gospel and it was just obvious. And it was unanticipated; just this continual means of grace being poured out on my life. I started to grow again, wanting to do more, having a passion to do more. The church was growing in every way. I was taken on full-time after a while, which was a change because I was used to getting what I needed financially through real estate. It has been good. It is fine.

What forces were at work to lead you to ministry? And in what sense do you feel called to this?

There has been a sense, since I was 20, that my sales work seemed empty. At the same time, I was doing a lot of reading and wrestling with maybe God wants me to do something vocationally ministry wise, and preaching the Word. That was going to require me going to school and seminary, and from that point it has really grown. There have been questions that have surfaced along the way. But being at this church has really helped me to know that I am in the right place. Over the last 8-10 years I have really had the sense that this is who I am wired to be. All the circumstances up until now have been in preparation for this work. And my mom just last week told me—she writes down all her prayers—she told me for the first time that she has been praying since I was three years old that I would pursue the ministry. Without a doubt, I feel a calling, I've had that calling affirmed by my closest friends—in seminary, for example, when I was having those doubts, many friends encouraged me saying, "this is what you are fit for; ministry seems so right."

This detailed account describes a rich web of experiences and relationships all working with or against one another in order to prompt a career choice, in this case the move from real estate to ministry. First, this evangelical draws upon his church experience growing up in a "militaristic," "legalistic," and "Calvinistic" Baptist

church. This experience sparked reflection on church life and nudged him in the direction of the Presbyterian Church. Working in tandem with his internal dialogue regarding church was conversations with men from the Presbyterian denomination. Having concluded that Presbyterianism was more in line with biblical faith, he left for the Presbyterian and Reformed seminary, Westminster. Upon his return from seminary, there were doubts about whether ministry was right for him. He describes another internal dialogue. Once again, the internal dialogue is bolstered by another external dialogue, a conversation with his future pastor, Rob. Doubts about his own sin were assuaged through outside means, namely, hearing "the gospel preached." He says, "What had wilted was beginning to come back to life through the preaching of the gospel." This worship leader recognizes the subjective, or what is on the inside, was providing conflicting feelings. On the one hand, his "sales work seemed empty." Yet there were many "questions that…surfaced along the way" regarding his ministry decision. It seems that the ministry decision was finally confirmed from both fronts. First, internally or subjectively, he feels as though he were "wired" for ministry. This internal feeling was not attributed to a divine voice and consequently did not carry the weight that it might among those holding a dynamic position. It is also worth pointing out that those internal factors did not seem as consistently emotive as they were among those operating from a dynamic view (they were sometimes more reflective instead). Second, those internal feelings and reflections are confirmed by external or objective sources: 1) His mother's prayers for his ministry and 2) his friends from seminary who believed he was well-suited for ministry.

This dialogue draws upon an interesting dialectic between internal struggles and external relationships, conversations, and circumstances that all converge to confirm a calling ("Without a doubt, I feel a calling…"). Perhaps this is the difference between the dynamic and the wisdom model: Whereas the dynamic model gains its saliency from primarily subjective factors, the wisdom model does not neglect subjective factors but views them less authoritatively and, therefore, also seeks affirmation through more objective means. There is a dance, so to speak, taking place between the subjective and objective that leads to a decision. If pressed, those

affirming the dynamic model might recognize similar interplay between internal and external factors. What is significant, though, is when asked their initial description neglected those externals and stressed the internal. This suggests that an important issue of faith, decision-making, is conceived of in highly privatized, individualistic terms for most of the evangelicals interviewed. The next section will seek to account, both historically and sociologically, for the popularity of the dynamic view. In order to do this, I will draw upon what was covered in earlier chapters.

Understanding the Popularity of the Dynamic Model

Historian Mark Noll observes that early American theology was built on European theology which was typically "traditional, habitually deferential to inherited authority, and deliberately suspicious of individual self-assertion."[35] These theological characteristics are antithetical to the assumptions undergirding the dynamic view, for the dynamic view operates from assumptions that are not traditional but more modern, do not defer to inherited authority, and are remarkably confident in individual self-assertion. These characteristics marking early American theology that were of European vintage had morphed into something decidedly American and more friendly to the dynamic view by the 1860s. Some marks of this shift included an increasingly privatized spirituality and a robust confidence in human reason. For Noll, the shift from a more European theology to a more American theology occurred through the intermingling of three important threads: evangelical Protestant religion, republican political ideology, and commonsense moral reasoning. These three threads were fused together to create a synthesis that Noll says, provided "an ethical framework, a moral compass, and a vocabulary of suasion for much of the nation's public life."[36]

In order to understand how American theology could experience such a dramatic shift, one must look back to Jonathan Edwards. The dismissal of Edwards

---

[35] Noll, *America's God*, 19.
[36] Ibid., 9.

from his Northampton church in 1750 was a crucial event for the transformation of American religion, says Noll. Edwards' dismissal and what it represents set the stage for the dissolution of the encompassing Puritan canopy. For the Puritans, all of life was subsumed by theology, and it was the covenant that held all the facets of society intact. The New England Puritan project sought to create a city on a hill, that is, an entire society that operated according to Christian norms. Entry into this society—God's society—began at birth with baptism. The sacrament of baptism inaugurated the entry into the covenant. As time passed, the fervency of many of those first pilgrims weakened. Soon New England Puritans had to deal with declension from within their ranks. Many baptized children grew older and did not embrace the faith. These covenant-breakers still desired for their own children to be baptized and gain entrance into the covenant community. This created a vexing dilemma for New England pastors. On the one hand, baptism and entry into the covenant was for *practicing Christians*, and the parents of many of those seeking baptism were not Christians. Granting baptism to the children of non-Christians might diminish both baptism and the legitimacy of the covenant community. Put simply, the purity of the church would be compromised by allowing these children to be baptized. Yet, on the other hand, New England churches had a significant interest in baptizing these children because they would lose influence by excluding them. The solution was to make a Half-Way Covenant, that is, a covenant for the children of those that had not embraced the faith. Through the Half-Way Covenant, professed believers as well as nonbelievers and their children could enjoy cognitive sanctuary under the far-reaching Puritan canopy. For Edwards, the notion of a Half-Way Covenant was sub-biblical, for it denied that the sacrament of baptism was for the children of Christians. Edwards dissolved the Half-Way Covenant which incited his dismissal and would eventually cause multitudes of nominal Christians to seek another "canopy," one outside of the Puritan framework.

Edwards left nothing in the place of the Puritan canopy, thus creating an ideological void waiting to be filled in the minds of many colonists. Noll contends that this void was filled by two intellectual trends: republicanism and common sense philosophy. Common sense philosophy in particular took a vastly more

optimistic appraisal of the human condition. Generally, this new philosophy, says Noll, "promoted 'common sense moral reasoning,' or an approach to ethics self-consciously grounded upon universal human instincts."[37] Under this philosophy, all humans were endowed with the necessary faculties for interpreting the world; knowledge, morality, understanding were understood to be *common* to all. The philosophy, which grew out of Scottish intellectual soil, was a response to the Scottish skeptic, David Hume. The optimism bound in this new anthropology was a distant cry from an earlier, less optimistic anthropology. Consider Samuel Willard's assertion that:

> Philosophy tells us, that life actions require a life in the agent. And spiritual actions must derive from a spiritual life; gracious actions must flow from grace. Call this an habit, or a virtue, or a principle; it must be an ability to do these things, which it had not naturally, but must be given it.[38]

Willard's claim emerges from a worldview that sees individuals in need, not having within themselves all the faculties necessary for properly navigating life. With the intrusion of common sense moral philosophy the theoretical foundation was firmly set in place for a higher estimation of the individual. In order to see how these trends have manifested themselves throughout evangelicalism's history, I will recast a portion of the history discussed in chapter three.

Eighteenth century revivalist, George Whitefield, found great success by preaching, not from the church, but in the open field. This venue found deep resonance with the egalitarian impulse that was beginning to burgeon in America. This egalitarian impulse had the effect of leveling previous hierarchies and authority structures. Not only the venue, but the sermons themselves were indicative of important changes occurring within American Protestantism. Whitefield was insistent in his offer for one to be born again. Such a personal offer tended to trump more external authorities such as creeds, denominations, covenants, familial bonds, and church authority. The ministry of Whitefield, through both venue and message,

---

[37] Ibid., 94.
[38] Cited in Noll, *America's God*, 21.

worked to affirm the more optimistic anthropology that common sense philosophy purported. Under Whitefield's ministry authority was being nudged from external sources to internal ones.

Likewise, the nineteenth century theologian and pastor, Henry Ward Beecher, suggests shifting assumptions in the way individuals understood themselves in *Lectures to Young Men*. Beecher had a strong confidence in humanity's capacity to shape their environment. Rather than *vulnerability* in nature—as stressed in Mary Rowlandson's captivity narrative—*control* was the operative feature. Beecher even suggested that God's providence could be directed via hard work. This is in sharp contrast to the more passive posture of Rowlandson. Beecher's notion that individuals had the resources within themselves to shape and direct their lives as well as the world around them emboldened individual confidence. That Beecher's assessment of the human condition was positive and, moreover, well-received, suggests how receptive nineteenth century Christians were to this optimistic anthropology.

The infiltration of common sense philosophy into American Christianity empowered individuals. The ministries of Whitefield and Beecher suggested that both were appealing to the sensibilities birthed by the more optimistic anthropology of common sense philosophy. This positive understanding of the individual shifted authority, or at least provided the presuppositional basis for the individual to perceive themselves as relatively autonomous. Therefore, it was not as impinging upon individuals to refer to sources of authority outside themselves. This, then, represents a shift inward with regard to things spiritual. Accelerating the shift was the arrival of two threats to American Christianity, Darwinian evolution and higher criticism. These twin threats engendered angst among many Christians during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In order to assuage the angst and avert the challenges posed, many evangelicals opted to create a dichotomy between the physical and spiritual (as described in chapter three). This adaptation was strategic, for if Christianity only dealt with the spiritual, then science with its concern for the physical posed little threat to Christianity. This dichotomy also manifested itself with a heart/head distinction. If matters of faith primarily

concerned the heart, then those aspects of humanity associated with the heart, such as emotions and feelings, would gain greater spiritual clout when compared to aspects of humanity associated with the head such as reason. This adaptation merged smoothly with the revivalist, pietistic impulse already deeply rooted in evangelicalism. So the shift in emphasis from head to heart that was spurred by the arrival of Darwinism and higher criticism was not a difficult one.

The superiority of heart over head can be seen in Eldredge's book. It was said that the dynamic view understands the way God spoke to Moses, Abraham and others in the Bible as normative, not exceptional. Addressing the objection that biblical characters were exceptions, not the norm, Eldredge says simply, "I refuse to believe that. And I doubt that you want to believe it either, in your heart of hearts."[39] This statement reveals how persuasive the heart (i.e. emotions, feelings, intuition) over head (i.e. reason) is in evangelical circles. Moreover, it underscores how ensconced anti-intellectualism is in some evangelical circles.[40] Here, a legitimate critique of Eldredge's model—a critique shared by large number within the Christian community, both past and present—is raised by Eldredge himself and this critique is dismissed with an appeal to what one would like to believe in their "heart of hearts." Underlying this dismissal is perhaps a radical faith in the perceptive powers of the individual. A careful defense of Eldredge's view is unnecessary because such a defense would rely on outside factors: study of what others have said, consultation of commentaries, church history, an array of theological giants, and other fairly inaccessible sources. The heart of hearts, however, is extremely accessible to the individual. This accessibility it seems is a large part of the appeal and the willingness of a large constituency of evangelicals to accept Eldredge's defense without question.

In addition to factors within evangelicalism's history, there are a series of important sociological factors at play in the dynamic view's popularity. In chapter two it was said that the sacred is migrating from the outside (e.g. churches,

---

[39] Eldredge, *Walking with God*, 14.
[40] For a good discussion of the historical antecedents of anti-intellectualism in evangelicalism, see Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*.

synagogues, mosques, Bibles, creeds, and Torahs) to the inside, situated within the individual. This shift is due in part to the tumultuous, fragmented, and largely inhospitable world individuals inhabit. James Davison Hunter argues that the plurality of institutions and ideologies vying for one's existential embrace lead the individual to tap their own resources in an effort to sort through options. Subjectivation refers to this shift inward. Emerging from subjectivation is *subjectivism*, that is, the realignment of the individual around none other than the individual. In other words, subjectivation tends to lead to an absorbing preoccupation with the self, or subjectivism.[41]

Modern technologies also assist in the subjective turn, exacerbating psychological homelessness and assisting in the deification of the self. It was suggested in chapter two that modern technologies fracture and reinforce the self all at the same time. In fact, these contrary affects work dialectically. The more modern technology breaks the self, the more the self seeks to bandage itself, often employing modern technology to do so. The Internet is important because it can appear like an infinite space, formless and void. One is enabled to mold out of that space "MySpace," or similar ventures to create one's identity. With god-like control, the individual tinkers with their past to deliver the most appealing persona; crops pictures (or even uses someone else's picture); polishes their interests. All this identity building gives the individual remarkable control because it is all so self-conscious and intentional. The Internet also dissolves time and space and the individual seemingly transcends these limits.

Consumer culture assists in the deification of the self. Individuals enjoy a relative amount of sovereignty as they reinvent themselves through the purchasing of products. As David Wells suggests, individuals can seemingly save themselves through purchase.[42] In addition to purchasing power, advertisements intensify the

---

[41] Hunter, "Subjectivation and the New Evangelical Theodicy," 40. Also see Berger, *The Homeless Mind*; Wuthnow, *After Heaven*, 149.

[42] Wells, *Losing Our Virtue*, 90. It is more than the shopping mall that assists in the deification of the self. Thomas de Zengotita observes the phenomenon in Barnes & Noble, saying: "The very structure of...Barnes & Noble bookstore, the layout of the sections, in recognition of your tastes, the jackets on display, so lovingly designed to arrest your sovereign gaze, and the names of the famous asking you to trust them, yet again promising to provide you with more of the same thing you liked

self's sense that all is in orbit around them. Moreover, they intend to empower the individual by providing products purporting to solve deep existential longings. Ads offer what Sam Van Eman calls the SimGospel, which places a sense of significant control in the hands of individuals thereby subtly suggesting an amount of religious autonomy.

Contemporary conditions, then, funnel the divine—or at least the means for accessing the divine—from the outside to the inside, and these conditions do this in a number of ways. Other societal conditions, namely, technology and consumption lend plausibility to the migration of the divine to the subjective because they bolster the individual's sense of autonomy. They are conditions that have contributed to the popularity of what Paul Heelas has called "spiritualities of life," that is, "those 'teachings' and practices which locate spirituality within the depths of life."[43] Evangelicalism's dynamic model gains saliency from these conditions. Related to evangelicalism, these changes might mean that the authority of the Bible, pastor, church, and what is *outside* weakens in favor of internal hunches and moods. In effect, the individual is imbued with a powerful sense of unmediated connection to the divine. Couple this cultural climate with evangelicalism's history and it becomes evident how this shift would be a relatively smooth one. The language of the self and unmediated access to things divine is a sweet, nostalgic sound to evangelical ears that have been hearing a similar tune since the eighteenth century.

This is not to say that for many evangelicals all outside authorities have vanished. These authorities remain but are accessed in remarkably privatized ways. For example, as the interviewees and dynamic model literature suggested, the dynamic model gives great credence to the authority of the Bible but the

---

so much the last time. The whole ensemble amounts to this: you are being treated as if you were, or soon will be, Master of your Destiny and Judge of the World, as if The Crisis in the Middle East, The Global Economy, The Starvation of Millions, The Rise of This Huge Thing, The Decline of That Huge Thing, it's all—this is implicit, built into the format—for you, for your attention, for your approval, for your judicious consideration, there to assist you in matters emotional and financial, addressing anything and everything you could possibly be interested in for any reason whatsoever." Thomas de Zengotita, *Mediated: How the Media Shapes Your World and The Way You Live in It* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2005), 260.

[43] Paul Heelas, *Spiritualities of Life: New Age Romanticism and Consumptive Capitalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 25.

hermeneutic employed by the dynamic model deemphasizes other outside authorities in favor of the individual's ability to interpret the Bible, albeit with the help of the Holy Spirit. The stress is that as the Holy Spirit works in the individual, the truth of the Bible will be revealed in the individual's own heart. This highly subjective hermeneutic presupposes a certain aptitude and confidence in the individual Christian that corresponds remarkably to the anthropology present in contemporary spirituality.[44] Not only does the present anthropology make plausible this hermeneutic, but commodification as well impacts the dynamic model's treatment of the Bible. As discussed in the second chapter, commodification, according to Vincent Miller, refers to the abstraction of products from their original context so that the product is severed from the web of relations that produced it. Miller believes that commodification spills over into the way individuals approach religion.[45] Eldredge's suggestion of randomly flipping to the proper Bible passage for the day is highly congruent with the commodifying habits communicated through consumption. It is also a marked departure from the hermeneutic evangelical theologians tend to prescribe. For example, John Stott has put the task of Bible study most simply when he says the interpreter stands between two worlds. First, there is the biblical world which the interpreter must enter in order to gain a proper understanding of what the text is actually saying. This involves diligent work that includes the history and circumstances of the text and a working knowledge of the Greek, Hebrew, or Aramaic. In other words, the interpreter should practice a contextualized study of the text. Second, Stott says, there is the contemporary world. Simply exegeting a passage is not an end in and of itself, instead, the interpreter must also apply the text's meaning to the contemporary world. This requires some knowledge of the contemporary world and a careful bridging of the two worlds, the biblical and the contemporary.[46] The random-flip approach to Bible study that

---

[44] See Neale Donald Walsch, *Conversations with God: An Uncommon Dialogue, book one* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1995), 8.

[45] See Miller, *Consuming Religion*, 7.

[46] John Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982). While Stott's book is for preachers, his purpose applies to any biblical interpreter.

Eldredge suggested greatly diminishes the role of the biblical world in understanding the Bible.

Theologically, these shifting assumptions about divine leadership represent a diminished view of sin. It was the dark, ominous clouds of sin that loomed heavily, preventing the clear perception of God's leadership to Christians of the past. The Puritans, for example, gave careful calculation to the "dictates of a self-indulgent heart."[47] Given human sin, Puritans had a keen sense of their propensity for self-delusion.[48] More recently, Packer makes a similar appeal to the confusion that plagues sinful beings. Giving warnings about the "pitfalls" of "prejudice" and "impressions," he says that our own "confusion" in decision-making is "inseparable from our fallen existence."[49] And elsewhere Packer advises that any Christian who believes to have received guidance by "unusual means" should confirm such guidance by consulting other Christians. This is because both "sin" and "Satan" deceive.[50] In other words, the individual alone does not have the resources to gain directives from God due to sin.

The dynamic view, by contrast, gives little speculation to the possibility that feelings mislead. If there is a problem with understanding God's will, it exists *outside* the individual, not *inside*. This is what one would expect. When what is *inside* becomes good, or divine, the *outside* is what causes internal strife. Eldredge relays the story of writer's block:

> Over the past twenty minutes, I've tried several approaches to dealing with this. I've laid out an outline to help me think clearly. I've gone to a different section of the book to see if I might be more inspired there. I've given in to distraction—checking my e-mail, wandering around the house, hoping that when I return I'll be my old self again. Nothing seems to be working. And now it dawns on me—who would have a vested interest in thwarting the progress of this book? Who would be delighted to distract me for a month, let alone a day? Who would want

---

[47] Donagan, "Godly Choice," 309.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Packer and Nystrom, *Guard Us, Guide Us*, 37.
[50] Ibid., 229.

to distort my thinking just enough to diminish the beauty or helpfulness of what I'm trying to say?[51]

The answer is Satan. The emphasis in Eldredge's book is that problems arise from outside sources, not from internal deficiencies because as Eldredge says, "When God created each of us, he gave us a will, and that beautiful and mysterious inner life we call the soul."[52] Repeatedly, Eldredge suggests that individuals have a remarkable connectedness to their creator, a connectedness *only* hindered by something outside, such as Satan or another evil force, not their own sin. This has the effect of emphasizing and elevating the activity of Satan in human affairs, which is consistent with the overall nearness of the supernatural that marks the dynamic view.

Those embracing the dynamic model gravitate to assumptions about the self more consistent with contemporary spirituality.[53] While the word "sin" may be very much alive in the vocabulary of dynamic view proponents, functionally sin has lost its sharpness. Whereas the Puritans of old would have been quick to state that "the human heart is deceitful above all things" (Jeremiah 17:9), many dynamic view proponents in the evangelical camp would perhaps more readily say, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13), including decipher God's will without mediation. This softening of sin is a theme to which I will return.

For now, certain questions remain, such as: does the dynamic or wisdom model have a stronger degree of sustainability in contemporary culture? Might the popularity of the dynamic model suggest that evangelicalism is on the decline, or becoming more secularized? Mathew Guest's look at the British evangelical congregation, St. Michael-le-Belfrey might shed light on the matter. Guest found that among many of the congregants the sacred was understood as inextricably bound to the individual and the individual's experiences. Moreover, these spiritual

---

[51] Eldredge, *Walking with God*, 51.
[52] Ibid., 64.
[53] See Walsch's *Conversations with God*. This popular book is consistent with the direction contemporary spirituality has taken and is strikingly reminiscent of Eldredge's book. This spirituality, as discussed in chapter one, is built upon assumptions at odds with classic Christianity. See Tipton, *Getting Saved from the Sixties*.

experiences were articulated in consultation with primarily the individual's own faculties. Guest connected this to what he describes as a subjective turn. This subjective turn meant that the congregant's responses to the statement "life is spiritual" were "varied," "inconsistent," and "unorthodox."[54] Through these responses Guest observed that "Conceptions of the 'spiritual' are not necessarily nor predominantly shaped by the external authorities of Scripture, doctrine or church tradition. Rather, they appear to be constructed with more reference to the internal resources of the self, namely memory, introspective reflection, and personal experience." Moreover, "The diversity of the responses," Guest continues, "suggests that individual parishioners are not participating in a single unified tradition, but are drawing from internally felt notions of significance, a pattern that suggests either the absence of a binding authority or its lack of plausibility in the eyes of these parishioners."[55] The subjective is also relied upon heavily in constructing personal narratives which infuse meaning into life, says Guest.[56] He observes that these subjective means, while more akin to "'folk religion' than to church doctrine," nonetheless have an adhesive function within the congregation.[57] Further, the individual's task of ordering all of one's experience in light of the divine has the effect of infusing all of life with the supernatural. As a result, Guest says, "the distinction between the secular and sacred becomes meaningless. The world outside of the church is effectively integrated into a single meaning system, so that competing paradigms lose some of their secularizing force."[58] Evangelical identity, then, is not stymied but broadened.

It was argued in the first three chapters that religion has proven to be more organic than the theoretically robust, but empirically lacking, secularization thesis granted. This broadening of evangelical identity that Guest observed applies to the evangelicals adopting the dynamic view. For these evangelicals, God is not only active through a variety of channels such as Bible-reading, signs, and other means of

---

[54] Guest, *Evangelical Identity and Contemporary Culture*, 107.
[55] Ibid., 108.
[56] Ibid., 115.
[57] Ibid., 119.
[58] Ibid.

leadership, but the individual is endowed with the interpretive means to understand God's guiding in an unmediated way. There is a piercing of the heavenly realm into the earthly that funnels (through various channels) the voice of God to the inner recesses of the individual's heart. These channels, and the Christian's ability to access them, provide the same integrative function between secular and sacred that Guest noted. Rather than the popularity of the dynamic view signaling the dissolution of evangelicalism's vitality, it seems that the dynamic view equips its adherents with a significant degree of sustainability in contemporary culture. First, the dynamic model is empowering. The dynamic model believes that *all* evangelicals have access to divine directives. In fact, it demands this because of the severe consequences that come from missing God's will. Moreover, the task of hearing God is conceived of in such individualistic ways that the Christian finds little outside help. It is imperative that the evangelical muster a certain degree of spiritual maturity in order to stay on track with God's leading. Second, the dynamic view is remarkably consistent with the type of spirituality that contemporary culture engenders, yet it does maintain some distance from that culture. Those evangelicals embracing the dynamic were clear that such guidance is the work of the Holy Spirit and consequently is a benefit for Christians only. This provides a sense of distance from the world, reinforcing the evangelical's distinct identity in the world. Yet the theoretical foundation for the dynamic view garners support from much of contemporary culture.

The wisdom model as well offers a degree of sustainability in contemporary culture. Under this model there was an interplay between subjective and objective means that imbues otherwise mundane experiences with spiritual significance. In other words, God is seen as being at work in the monotony of everyday life. The spiritual does not occur through the ecstatic and inexplicable, as it usually does in the dynamic view, but even in the fabric of ordinary events, relationships, feelings, and circumstances. If pressed, perhaps many that take a more dynamic approach would agree that God works through these everyday occurrences. What is important, however, is how these different evangelicals reconstruct their decision-making processes, for such reconstructions signal profound assumptions about the

spiritual and God's immanence in human affairs. Both views, it would seem, have viability in the present cultural climate. It is now time to see what sort of criteria is employed when the interviewees choose a career.

Work: A Means for Self-Fulfillment

The opportunity to choose a career has not always existed, at least not as it does today. The fluidity of contemporary culture has created unprecedented choice in considering one's career. In addition to career, there is typically a long chain of jobs one has accumulated when they reach the end of their working lives. The focus of this section is the particular criteria employed in choosing a career path and a particular job. In other words, whereas the last section considered the *process* of choosing, this section focuses on *purpose* in choices related to work. Put differently, this section is concerned with the language the interviewees use in order to justify their career choice.

In *Habits of the Heart*, Bellah correctly views the notion of "calling" as connected to larger assumptions about an individual's work and the common good. He says, "The calling is a crucial link between the individual and the public world. Work in the sense of calling can never be merely private."[59] American assumptions about work, Bellah observed more than twenty years ago, had contracted. The characteristics of expressive individualism such as self advancement, fulfillment, and expression were dominating American thoughts on work.[60] And consequently, cognizance of work's larger relationship to the common good was fading. At about the same time, James Davison Hunter noticed a similar trend among evangelicals. Hunter observed that the Protestant notion of calling was virtually extinct among evangelicals. Instead, evangelicals had embraced a view of work not much different than non-evangelicals. Hunter says that among evangelicals "work has lost any

---

[59] Robert N. Bellah *et al.*, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, updated ed. (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1985), 66.
[60] Ibid., 71.

spiritual and eternal significance and that it is important only insofar as it fosters certain qualities of the personality."[61]

What Bellah and Hunter were observing was a shift in the purpose of work. As it relates to Christians, work's purpose of being *eternal* and *communal* was replaced with a view emphasizing the *temporal* and the *individual*. As discussed in chapter two, contemporary conditions play a large role in this privatized understanding of work. The modern world expands and contracts simultaneously. Curiously, in its expansion, it contracts; this is seen in the realm of work: as more jobs proliferate, vision and connectedness is funneled. The effect is that means are divorced from ends. The expanse of the worker's horizon is too broad to connect. Work appears fragmented. Trying to see work's connection to neighbor is like trying to sort a bundle of wiring, and many workers are content to leave the convoluted heap as is. Or, workers do not even realize that it can be sorted. Not only is it difficult for workers to see their work as a service to others, Peter Berger suggests that even workers themselves are tempted to view one another as mere utilities.[62] As such, others tend to be viewed as agents who serve the individual, not people for whom the individual serves.

If there is a strong cultural tide swaying work from its communal and eternal vision, there also exists a contrary evangelical and theological tide that urges evangelicals to maintain a vision of work that keeps work's communal and eternal nature intact. First, Christian work's communal nature: All the evangelical literature in chapter four stressed the decidedly communal nature of Christian work. Gene Edward Veith argued that humans were created as social beings and work was the means by which that social nature was realized.[63] For Miroslav Volf, a Christian is gifted in a particular way in order to serve their neighbor and transform the world. Volf says that to miss work's communal and corporate implications is to miss a fundamental reality of the human situation, that is, humanity's embeddedness. Individuals are embedded in a rich web of social and ecological relations, a reality

---

[61] Hunter, *Evangelicalism*, 56.
[62] Berger, *The Homeless Mind*, 32.
[63] Veith, *God at Work*, 39-40.

often muddled by the highly differentiated working conditions typical of the modern economy. To divorce work from its connectedness to social, chronological, and ecological contexts is to deny the reality of how work functions.[64] R. Paul Stevens also gave great weight to work's decidedly communal nature by seeing it emerge out of the doctrine of the Trinity. Just as the Trinity is involved in a reciprocal relationship of loving service to itself, work is a means by which creation lovingly relates and serves itself.[65]

Lee Hardy gave the greatest discussion on how work's communal nature might affect the way Christians seek vocational choice. Hardy points out that the Christian is first and foremost called to the gospel but in addition to this general call there is a more particular call, one that relates to a specific job or occupation.[66] The privilege of choosing one's job is a recent development, says Hardy. Consequently, a tradition and theology delving into the issue of job choice remains relatively undeveloped. Individuals did, however, enjoy a growing autonomy in job choice during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and, accordingly, the Reformers began to lay the groundwork for selecting a job.[67] Their approach was to consider what work was all about. They called work the means by which the Christian serves God and others, and cares for creation. Furthermore, individual Christians are all gifted in unique ways. Therefore, Christians should first consider the gifts God has given them. This, of course, is no simple task because it requires a keen sense of knowing who one is. Hardy acknowledges that "the road to self-knowledge can be a long one, and often we don't possess a clear idea of exactly what our talents are at the time we must make vocational decisions."[68] Nonetheless, through self-reflection, some trial and error, and perhaps even a gifting or vocational aptitude test Christians can better understand the particular gifts God has given them.[69] Unfortunately, though, clarity is clouded by sin. For some, a particular job might be in sight because of its salary. For others, a prestigious job may be desired. Hardy

---

[64] Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 143-45.
[65] Stevens, *The Other Six Days*.
[66] Hardy, *The Fabric of This World*, 80-1.
[67] Ibid., 84.
[68] Ibid., 85.
[69] Ibid., 85-8.

even considers envy or covetousness as a potential motivating factor for job choice. Perhaps one spends their life jealously following in the footsteps of another in an effort to surpass their achievements.[70] There are many more ways that pride, greed, envy and other sins can stand in the way of a clear, pure decision of what kind of work best suits one. Hardy suggests that the antidote to the human knack for self-deception is wise and mature counsel.[71]

In addition to considering giftedness, Hardy believes one should also reflect on what concerns one has, such as education, health, emotional well-being, or the environment.[72] Or, perhaps one has a "lively interest," says Hardy, in something like music or literature. If so, maybe a job helping others to love the same thing should be sought.[73] In sum, rather than through a mystical epiphany, one can best determine their job through self-reflection and counsel.[74] Hardy does admit that in rare moments God might call a Christian to do things they were not particularly gifted for, but that is not normative.[75]

Once one determines their gifting, Hardy believes it is then necessary to consider where to employ one's gifts. Seeking the place where one can serve others most fruitfully is the objective here. Hardy says:

> In some jobs my neighbor is less well served than others. My neighbor is less well served by the production of diamond studded eyebrow pencils than in the production of prescription eyeglasses; my neighbor is less well served by the production of another TV game show than a drama which locates and explores significant issues in human life; my neighbor is less well served by the publication of the lurid confessions of a rock and roll groupie than a sensitive guide to the choral works of Heinrich Schütz.[76]

In other words, individuals must remain cognizant of the impact their work is having upon society at large. Hardy summarizes: "It would seem that the process

---

[70] Ibid., 88.
[71] Ibid., 89.
[72] Ibid., 91.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid., 93.
[76] Ibid., 95.

of career choice should involve not only a personal inventory of talents and interests together with a moral self-examination of motives and attitudes, but also a serious evaluation of various types of work according to their social value."[77] Hardy argues that the importance of work is its service to God and neighbor. Still, the Christian must learn what their gifts and concerns are. Having determined giftedness, the worker should consider where to employ their gifts in order to employ optimal service.

Not only work's *communal* nature but also its *eternal* nature was underscored in the evangelical literature. Those "looking forward" (see chapter four) believed that in some way work itself is eternal and will persist, albeit transformed, into heaven. Both Darrell Cosden and Miroslav Volf believe that work is now a part of creation and consequently will be redeemed along with it. Volf helps to make sense of this idea by saying that work leaves an indelible print on natural and social environments as well as human identities and personalities. Not all the evangelical theologians argued for this view, but all did suggest that work, given its sanctifying affects, had a mark on eternity. In sum, while cultural conditions tend to push work in an individualistic and temporal direction, evangelicals proffer a resounding call to maintain work's communal and eternal nature.

The Interviewees and Self-Fulfillment

I met Steve at his home. When I arrived the house was undergoing renovation and he led me to an attic turned entertainment room that had just been completed. The hard work put into this renovation revealed careful attention to detail. There was an exquisite pool table with leather pockets, a flat screen television, and décor that would appeal to the avid sport fan. This was a haven, tailor-made for Steve and his friends. This setting for our interview was not disconnected from Steve's comments about the purpose of work.

---

[77] Ibid., 96.

While describing a job change Steve said, "I was ready to experience a larger, growing industry." Further, "there were opportunities for upward mobility in the telecommunications industry." Alas, he said, "it was a new challenge for me." The advice Steve gives to someone trying to decide what career path to pursue is this:

> Find something that you will be content in doing, something that you like to do, something you are interested in, and pursue that. If not, you probably will be miserable in your job and you won't be very successful at it. I would strongly urge them to pursue their interest, their passion. If so, they will enjoy it and they will be successful at it. There is no substitute for doing what you love.

For Steve being a part of something bigger, the potential for upward mobility, and a personal challenge are the reasons he sought a new job. Similarly, he would urge another to consider a related criteria revolving around the self. These comments that are oriented around the self were affirmed by the setting for the interview. Steve's reasons are not wholly inconsistent with what evangelicals prescribe. The Christian is usually gifted and called to something that brings some level of personal satisfaction and fulfillment yet this evangelical's words are not accompanied with the outward call to service that was so pronounced in the evangelical literature on work.

A gregarious music teacher emphasizes being "emotionally fulfilled" as the most important criteria for the type of job one will pursue. When asked what sort of advice she would give a high school student contemplating vocational decisions, this teacher says,

> You got to seek your heart first. You got to know what's going on inside of you. What do you love to do? What do you desire to do above all else? What do you feel called to do? I have a friend I was talking to and she said my child says he wants to help people. And I told her there are so many ways that your child can fulfill that desire to help people. They just need to find what it is that fulfills them. What are they good at?

This music teacher relays the story of a friend whose child sought the kind of work where they could help others. She responded to her friend by saying, "There are so many ways that your child can *fulfill* that desire to help people. They just need to find what it is that *fulfills* them" (my emphasis). Here an outward looking desire is wrangled in and reattached to the self. In other words, the language of self-fulfillment swallows an otherwise magnanimous desire to help people. The music teacher adds,

> And I want to encourage them to set goals. If you set the bar low, there's nothing to excel for, there's nothing to dream for in the future, you know? And, I'm actually just now starting to realize some of my dreams, especially with my community choir. You know, working with adults and being able to lead a choir that is performing successfully and loves to do what they are doing. It's so fulfilling, you know? I just come off excited and "woohoo!" all the time. They just need to find what makes them feel like they are happy to go to work, they are happy to do what they are doing. That it is not about the money.

The language of self-fulfillment is inescapable in this evangelical's ruminations on career choice. Her own work with others in community choir finds its value, not in helping others, but because it is a stepping stone in the path to the realization of her own dreams.

And when speaking of the greatest problem in the workplace, this music teacher thinks that it is the "limits" that are placed on people. She says too often workplaces "limit us and limit our ability to be successful and limit our ability to grow personally and to be who we are." Whereas Christians of the past may have seen limits as providentially given to harness wandering, prideful hearts, this Christian views limits as *the* problem that besets the workplace. Limits do not strip the selfish sinner from themselves and thereby sanctify or free them but instead stand in the way of the individual's pursuit of their dreams. This music teacher's end goal—self-fulfillment and freedom—is not at variance with earlier Christian soteriologies, however, the means by which that end goal is achieved diverges from earlier Christian understandings. Recall, for example, Mary Rowlandson's captivity narrative discussed in chapter three. Rowlandson's captivity limited her, and she

welcomed it because it was a reminder that God was working out his sanctifying purposes upon a heart that needed to be stripped from itself. The music teacher's comments, by contrast, reveal little skepticism toward the individual's heart. There is no instruction for sifting the heart's motivation or impetus but simply in finding its desire. This music teacher's comments flow from an anthropology that takes a more optimistic appraisal of the human condition.

This language of self-fulfillment was widespread among the interviewees. One evangelical would give her son advice similar to the music teacher's advice on career choice. This evangelical mother urged her son to "follow your heart's desire," and thought it best to ask the question, "what do you enjoy doing? Not necessarily what will earn you the most money or bring you the most recognition." She continued, "if you do not love what you do, all the money and recognition do not make it worth it. The best job to have is one that you would do whether you were earning money or not." Again, this is not advice inconsistent with the evangelical literature on the subject, it is only partial because it lacks the notion of service emphasized in the evangelical literature.

As Hardy predicted, self-fulfillment is the usual overarching goal under which work considerations fall. Hardy provides the following corrective to this assumption:

> "job satisfaction" [cannot] serve as an infallible guide to the right occupation. Much is made these days of self-fulfillment. We must to our own selves be true. When it comes to work, we are inclined to think that jobs exist primarily for our sake, to assist us in the realization of our selves. That is what we expect from a good job. If it happens that others are served or edified in the process, then so be it—we will count it as a happy by-product. If, however, we find our work unsatisfying, then even if we are serving others in it, we take ourselves to be entirely justified in quitting.[78]

Rather than job satisfaction, the criteria should be the extent to which the job helps others and allows us to exercise our own gifting. Hardy is sympathetic to the way

---

[78] Ibid., 98.

these words pester one's individualist impulses. He says, "behind these hard words lies the exquisite paradox of the gospel message: those who seek to gain the world will lose themselves in the process, while those who deny themselves for the sake of Christ will gain themselves back again a hundredfold."[79] This message of self-denial was central to the word and work of Jesus himself. Moreover, the Christian calling is to the same kind of service that Jesus modeled. While difficult to execute, one would expect this foundational Christian teaching to at least exist in the language of the interviewees. It did not, however.

Given calling's connectedness to God and neighbor, it should come as little surprise that the notion of calling in these interviews was not strong.[80] When one evangelical was asked whether they believed themselves to be called, he replied with difficulty, "that is a tough one." An evangelical mechanic does not believe he received "the kind of calling that pastors talk about." A weakened understanding of work, or vocation, as calling is significant. Like Bellah stressed, calling implies service or obligation to community. Calling does not begin from within but without and the very idea excludes the kind of choice that is so often prized. It should come as little surprise that as Protestant calling loses its prominence in the evangelical vernacular the notion of work as service weakens as well.

Bound up in the notion of calling is this idea of service. Again, the language of self-fulfillment does not contradict what evangelical theologians prescribed rather it represents a truncated view of what they suggest. The Christian call is the inverse of what one typically thinks of when they think of self-fulfillment. For the Christian, service to others leads to self-fulfillment. Christians have believed that to be last will make one first, and to be humbled will lead to exaltation. This is the paradoxical nature of Christianity and the razor sharp message of Jesus in both word and deed. Yet this view did not present itself as poignantly as one would expect in the language of the interviewees. Instead, many of the evangelicals interviewed

---

[79] Ibid., 99.

[80] Looking at thirty one Catholic and Protestant congregations in America, James C. Davidson and David P. Caddell found that only a few respondents viewed their work as a calling (15%). By contrast, the majority viewed their work as a career (56%) or a job (29%). James C. Davidson and David P. Caddell, "Religion and the Meaning of Work," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 33, no. 2 (1994).

embraced a view remarkably consistent with a dominant assumption today, namely, that service to self leads to fulfillment. It is true that, for many Christian theologians, evangelicals are encouraged to seek work that is in accord with their gifting and therefore in some sense personally satisfying. But more than that, the call is to work that is directed to the service of God and neighbor.

This aspect of work's purpose was not entirely absent. A grocery store worker "loves work" because, he said, "I feel like I was really helping people." Another evangelical was crystal clear that Christians are gifted in order that they can "work together as the body of Christ to best glorify him and to further his kingdom." Moreover, she says, "he [Jesus] wants us to uplift people and to help others." Here, stewardship through work is understood both vertically ("glorify him [Jesus]") and horizontally ("uplift people and help others"). A graphic designer said that Christians are "called to be servants," servants to their boss and company. This, she admits, was a revelation that came to her as she became more "serious" about Christianity by attending more classes at church and doing more reading. Naturally, for this Christian, the biggest problem with work in America is "entitlement and self-service." Rather than seeking to serve, most Americans seek to be served through their work. Work under this view, she says, "is inside-out."

Another evangelical maintained the idea of calling, saying that one should do "whatever one is called to do." Emerging from the idea of calling is the decidedly outward-looking concept, stewardship. This evangelical continues, "be a good steward about your time and your money and your resources." When I asked this Christian what the purpose of work is, he seemed daunted by the enormity of the question. Then, he said as if thinking aloud, "maybe it is to make money and give it to your church and provide for your family." While this Christian's thoughts on the purpose of work remain tentative, he nonetheless theorizes with an outward-looking instinct. In sum, work is an opportunity for stewardship, and work as stewardship is built upon the foundation of work as calling. These comments are strengthened by what this Christian believes to be the biggest problem of the workplace: "selfishness."

Notwithstanding these comments suggesting a more outward-looking purpose in work, most of the interviewees maintained a view of work's purpose that focused on the individual's sense of fulfillment and satisfaction. Work's purpose as communal that was pronounced among the Christian theologians did not share the same prominence among interviewees. Instead, most interviewees did not see work as primarily *communal* but primarily for the *individual*. What was less explicit among the interviews was whether work's purpose was envisioned in *temporal* or *eternal* terms. Consistent with Hunter's analysis from more than twenty years ago, I found that the idea of work as sanctification was largely absent. Work, then, was not a means by which one prepared for eternity but rather the means by which one realized more immediate and personal fulfillment. Moreover, taking a view of work itself as eternal, as Volf and Cosden would argue, was entirely absent. Among those interviewed, work's purpose seemed to be conceived of *temporally* and *individually*, not *eternally* and *communally*.

Perhaps the muffled nature of work's communal and eternal purposes among evangelicals is tethered to the larger issue of Christian spirituality. For Christians, soteriology consists of three basic phases: justification, sanctification, and glorification. Justification occurs when one is "born again." When one is justified, they are saved from the *penalty* of sin. As discussed in chapter three, American evangelical activity has historically honed their efforts on justification particularly through revivalism. But justification is just the beginning. Sanctification covers the remainder of the Christian life and describes the growth one takes into Christ-likeness. Through sanctification, one is saved from the *power* of sin over their lives. Finally, glorification speaks of the post-death event where one enters glory and is saved from the *presence* of sin. Christian theology since the Reformation has recognized that one's work plays a vital role in sanctification. As noted above, Hunter observed among many American evangelicals work's sanctifying affects had practically become extinct and work was understood primarily as means for developing one's personality.[81] Christian theology has long stressed the communal

---

[81] Hunter, *Evangelicalism*, 56.

nature of sanctification. Sanctification happens in relationship.[82] Moreover, sanctification happens in the nitty-gritty of life. In the words of evangelical Eugene Peterson, Christian spirituality and growth is "earthy."[83] Perhaps there is a disconnect lurking in the minds of many evangelicals on this issue and, as a result, work's purpose has a hard time reaching past the individual. Quite possibly, evangelicals have failed to connect sanctification to its communal and earthy nature, opting instead for a highly privatized version of sanctification void of the kind of earthiness Peterson spoke of.

Allow the words of a busy architect to illustrate. This man spoke about the difficulty of juggling all the demands including work and family. Reflecting on the busyness of it all, he was troubled that his spiritual life did not get the attention that it deserved. Regretfully, he says, "I spent very little time on my own needs." The implication is that spiritual life occurs, not in the warp and woof of work life and family life, but alone and away from it all. In other words, here Christian spirituality is divorced from community, in this case, work and family relations. Perhaps this sentiment that sprouted spontaneously in the comments of this architect also exists in the minds of many of the evangelicals interviewed.

Conceptualizing work as temporal and individual might be due to the born-again experience that has profoundly shaped American evangelical identity. This experience assuaged the perceived need to *affirm* one's salvation. Recall from chapter three the marked change from the Puritan salvation paradigm to those salvation paradigms gaining traction during the nineteenth century. The latter presented salvation in more definite and immediate ways by emphasizing a moment when one was "born-again." With this born-again experience operative, work no longer needed to play the affirming role that it did for Weber's Protestants. My interviewees exhibited a marked departure from Weber's analysis. Whereas Hunter understood this departure as a concession to modernity, it seems better to view it as something peculiar to evangelicalism itself. This is not to say that evangelicalism is unaffected by broader cultural assumptions. Rather, factors both within and without

---

[82] This was noted in chapter one by considering *The Rule of St. Benedict*.
[83] Peterson, *Leap Over a Wall*, 4-5.

American evangelicalism contribute to evangelicalism's understanding of the workplace.

To summarize, the outward-looking, service-minded dimension of work among those interviewed seemed like an old, rickety bridge: precarious throughout, adequate in spots, but taken together not reliable. The evangelical interest in self-fulfillment comes from two sources. Externally, the cultural tide drifts one in the direction of self-fulfillment. But internally as well there exists trends within evangelicalism that make work's purpose as self-fulfillment plausible. I discussed in the analysis on decision-making seeds within evangelicalism's history that make a stress on self-fulfillment so persuasive. This chapter has looked at both *process* and *purpose* in issues related to career choice. There is a connection between what the interviews yielded in both these areas. If one were to peel back the layers, one would find that the trends discussed in this chapter are symptomatic of a shifting anthropology within evangelicalism.

The Common Thread: A Diminished Understanding of Personal Sin

This chapter has considered both how (process) and why (purpose) the evangelicals interviewed select their careers or jobs. With regards to the *process* of career choice, the dynamic model is the dominant paradigm used among the evangelicals interviewed. Regarding the *purpose* for which a particular career was selected, self-fulfillment is the most pronounced criteria among the evangelicals interviewed. Could there be a common theological assumption propelling the popularity of these characteristics of career choice? I am suggesting that among the interviewees a diminished view of sin is the cognitive soil out of which the dynamic view and a stress on self-fulfillment grow.

Regarding decision-making, there is a certain optimism about the will, emotions, and the perceptive powers of individuals that energizes the dynamic model. This optimism neglects the muddling tendency of sin as traditionally understood. It was said above that a diminished view of sin is the assumption behind proponents of the dynamic model. Alternatively, it was said that the

skepticism toward features of the dynamic view by Christians of the past (like the Puritans) and wisdom model proponents of the present was rooted in the doctrine of sin. Sin, it was believed, clouds the perception of divine will among God's people. Consequently, any leadership provided by the Spirit should be checked against outside resources such as Scripture or counsel with others. Underlying the dynamic view's optimism concerning the Christian's access to things divine is a weakened view of sin. There is little speculation that feelings could be misleading. If there is a problem with understanding God's will, it exists *outside* the individual, not *inside*.[84] To be sure, these evangelicals believe sin is alive and well, yet its grip on the world remains, for the most part, *outside* the evangelical. Many of the evangelicals represented are victims rather than perpetrators. Their barriers to hearing God are rooted in sin, but not their own. Rather than their own sin clouding the decision-making process, it was the sin of spiritual beings like Satan.

As for the emphasis upon self-fulfillment, it will be helpful to consider Hunter's findings and analysis. As already noted, Hunter's look at evangelicals yielded similar results concerning evangelical attitudes toward work; evangelicals understood work in a way strikingly similar to non-evangelicals. Hunter delves into notions about the self in order to glean insight. For Christians, Hunter observes, the self is "a curious mixture."[85] On the one hand, the self was made in the image of God. Yet, due to the Fall, the self in its entirety is severely entangled in rebellion against God. Traditional theological conceptions of the self, Hunter contends, gravitated to the Fall rather than the *imago dei*. All of one's faculties were marred by sin and the self was naturally hostile to the things of God. This tragic anthropology meant that in order to be spiritually fit one had to pull at the very root all that lay within the self. Practically, says Hunter, "this mean that emotions and affections were to be kept in tight control, expressed only in moderation. It also meant that service to God would subjugate the human will."[86] Hunter believes that a dramatic reappraisal of the self occurred in America beginning in the mid-1960s and evangelicalism had

---

[84] See Eldredge, *Walking with God*, 51.

[85] Hunter, *Evangelicalism*, 64.

[86] Ibid., 65.

absorbed the brighter assessment of the self. Functionally, then, it is creation (or, the *imago dei*), not the Fall, that informs evangelicals thoughts on the purpose of work. The Fall, an evangelical essential for constructing an anthropology, has less grip on evangelical thoughts about the evangelical self. Put differently, sin does not seem to carry the same momentum that it did for Christians of the past.

In sum, the dynamic model of decision-making and self-fulfillment as the operative criteria for career choice among most of the interviewees gains its plausibility and sustainability from a dwindling concept of personal sin among evangelicals. With sin's grip upon the evangelical diminished, evangelicals enjoy unencumbered access to God's voice, as the popularity of the dynamic view suggested. A diminished view of sin within the evangelical's heart also provides sustainable ground for desires to be groomed and fulfilled, not crushed and destroyed. Yet this is not to say that sin has no place in the evangelical consciousness. Indeed, sin is prowling all around, yet it remains largely *outside* the evangelical. As the next chapter will argue, all of the evangelicals interviewed believe their non-Christian co-workers are ensnared in sin and in desperate need of the gospel. In fact, it is the need to share the gospel at work that animates evangelical action in the workplace.

6

THE GOSPEL AT WORK

"Much of evangelism is about how we do our work and less about handing out tracts," said the leader of a class on faith in the workplace. Following this comment was a host of affirming nods from the evangelicals in attendance. This excerpt from "Christianity 9-5," a six-week discipleship course discussing the intersection of faith and work,[1] suggests two important features regarding the way evangelicals engage the workplace. First, the subject of the excerpt is *evangelism*. Indeed, throughout the course there was a perennial return to the importance of evangelism in the workplace. The class operated from the assumption that evangelism, that is, sharing the gospel is the apex of being Christian at work. For these evangelicals, the workplace was conceived as a space where the gospel should be communicated so that it might transform individuals and workplaces. Second, the excerpt reveals *caution*. Evangelism, rather than being a detached distribution of gospel tracts, is more effectively demonstrated through the way one's work is done. This suggests a less explicit and invasive approach to evangelism. These two features, the importance of evangelism and caution regarding the way evangelism is conducted, reverberated throughout the interviews.

---

[1] I attended this class during the fall of 2007.

Evangelism at Work

Its Importance

From my interviews, evangelism, more than anything else, occupies and invigorates evangelicals at work.[2] My interview with Gary highlighted the centrality of evangelism. Gary had the appearance of a vibrant, healthy baby-boomer, the prized look a marketer seeks when trying to reach the baby-boomer audience with a product. He had short gray hair, wore a T-shirt, cargo shorts, and low-top Converse all-stars. He politely walked me to his office which was located in the midst of a newer medical building. Gary's office was cozy, insulated entirely by books, and windowless. Having helped me to a bottle of water and exchanged some small-talk, we began the interview.

Gary had been trained in seminary and spent much of his working life serving in the church. About eight years ago, Gary left the church and began to minister in the workplace. When I interviewed him, he was involved in a workplace ministry seeking to help Christians integrate the faith to their jobs and equip pastors to understand the challenges their congregants face at work. Also, Gary served as a chaplain to both Christian and non-Christian employees throughout the region. This chaplaincy work "exploded" in unexpected ways, Gary observes. He continues, "it has been amazing. I am in the workplace every day. I have opportunity to build relationships with lost people every day—I spent years on church staff and never had that opportunity." Ministry has been in Gary's blood. He proudly spoke of his father—who was on the verge of age 90 when I interviewed him—as one serving a lifelong ministry that was "highly relational." This characterizes Gary's ministry as well who says regarding his own ministry, "I am highly relational." Since Gary left

---

[2] My interview questions did address the role of evangelism at work. Some may correctly wonder whether the centrality of evangelism among evangelicals was forced given that the interviewees were explicitly asked questions regarding it. Even though there was a question intended to address evangelism at work, I often did not need to ask it. Typically, the subject would come up *independently* of any question asked. Also, in casual conversations with evangelicals about this research project the most common reply that I received was something like this: "oh, you are looking at workplace evangelism."

the church and entered the workplace as a minister he says that *all* of his life is understood now as ministry:

> The last eight years the two [working life and church life] have just blended together and it really is a testimony of how ministry is to me today. You can't define when you are doing ministry and when you are not. It is a much more of a lifestyle for me now than it use to me. I use to define God's call as a position and now it is a desire to make a difference in the lives of people.

There is degree of liberation that Gary experienced by leaving church ministry and entering ministry in the secular workplace. Throughout our interview he spoke of this shift from the church to the secular workplace as an important one. Just as the soldier is sharpened in times of war, this evangelical found a new vigor, sense of mission, and opportunity in this new secular venue. Gary's thoughts on the matter are consistent with Christian Smith's findings that a sense of embattlement bolsters evangelical action.[3] There is the sense that Gary's church work insulated him from the world, causing his Christian action to become stagnant. That is not the case anymore precisely because he is now working in a secular setting.

The nature of Gary's activity outside church walls is decidedly evangelistic. What excites him about his new secular venue is the legion of opportunities to form relationships. These relationships are not simply an end in and of themselves. This became clear when I asked Gary how work fit into a Christian understanding of life. He replied by saying that too often Christians view work as a way to make money so that they can support ministry in and through the local church rather than viewing work itself as ministry. With this faulty view, Gary laments, "we are missing the lost people [in our workplaces]. We are missing out on this opportunity to really get into the lives of lost people and build relationships with them and rub up against them with our values so that they can compare their empty set of values to what the Holy Spirit puts in our lives." The correct view, Gary reiterates, is to understand that "our

---

[3] Smith, *American Evangelicalism*.

work is a gift from God that puts us in a position to make a difference in the lives of the people we are working with."

Making a difference in the lives of individuals primarily refers to proclaiming the gospel to them in hopes of saving them. This is the end in sight in Gary's relationship-building endeavors. This stress upon evangelism was apparent among other interviewees as well. When asked where work fits into the Christian worldview an evangelical working at Wal-Mart replied, "I think the workplace is my field of evangelism." An evangelical teacher likewise sees the workplace as a space for missions: "I work in a public school and I consider it a mission field." Similarly, an eye doctor believes that we should all "take what we believe into our workplace, no matter what kind of work it is." Continuing, he says,

> For us work and ministry are the same thing. They are interlaced to the point where they are inseparable. There are times in the workplace that you have incredible opportunities to share or witness to someone and they actually come to Christ and you see a change in their life.

Like Gary, this evangelical believes work is ministry, and ministry is understood primarily as evangelism.

American evangelicals in general seem to focus upon evangelism as well, something readily perceived among non-evangelicals. Often times this perception among non-evangelicals is not a positive one. Responding to a *Boston* magazine article discussing evangelicals and evangelism in the workplace, one reader says, "The movement to bring Jesus into the workplace is appallingly intrusive."[4] Expressing similar nervousness, Sarah Wunsch with the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Massachusetts says regarding evangelicals integrating their faith at work: "I think this stuff is screwy…If you know the boss is a born-again Christian and pushing this stuff and you are a Jew or a Muslim, it would almost be impossible not to have this affect your employment."[5] Another article discussing the rise of

---

[4] "Letters," *Boston*, August 2005, 20.
[5] Blanding, "Jesus at Work," 169.

spirituality in the workplace expressed a similar sentiment. Drawing upon *A Spiritual Audit of Corporate America*[6], the article noted that many Americans agree that the arrival of spirituality in the workplace is a good thing, yet they added this important caveat, "so long as there's no bully-pulpit promotion of traditional religion."[7] Whether explicitly, as in the first two comments, or implicitly embedded in the imagery, these comments suggest a palpable unease among the general U.S. population toward American evangelicals and their evangelistic impulse at work. These articles suggest that there are certain boundaries to the type of faith one is free to express at work. The dogma that dominates workplace spirituality is not typically open to faiths that incite proselytizing. While the spiritualities finding warm welcome in the workplace appear broad and fluid they nonetheless seem to have boundaries that are rigorously patrolled.

Smith's examination of American evangelicals suggests similar distaste among non-evangelicals toward evangelicals and their evangelistic efforts. For all the strengths that Smith's study noted there remained some weaknesses. In fact, Smith argues that it is evangelicalism's strength that contributes to its weakness, namely, its impoverished social agenda. This weakness is due in part to the tendency of evangelicals to be a nuisance to outsiders, or at least to be perceived as such. Moreover, Smith says, "*it was precisely things which evangelicals consider strengths or assets about themselves which bothered these nonevangelicals.*"[8] This, of course, creates barriers against any outsider wishing to embrace the evangelical vision of life. Smith suggests that evangelicals had failed to distinguish their project from fundamentalism. Consequently, "while evangelicals do perform effective in-group identity work that maintains the vitality of their movement, their out-group identity work leaves much to be desired."[9] This is not to say that American

---

[6] This book by business professor Ian I. Mitroff and business consultant Elizabeth A. Denton is an empirical study based upon surveys and interviews with more than two hundred business leaders and executives. Of those polled for the book, 60 % believe that spirituality in the workplace is a beneficial trend. See Mitroff and Denton, *A Spiritual Audit of Corporate America: A Hard Look at Spirituality, Religion, and Values in the Workplace* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1999).

[7] Michelle Conlin, "Religion in the Workplace," *Business Week*, 1 November 1999, 154.

[8] Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 183.

[9] Ibid., 180.

evangelicals were slighting the important task of evangelism. On the contrary, Smith claims, "For every one (self-identified) evangelical in America, between five and seven nonconservative-Protestants have been proselytized by an evangelical."[10] Yet when evangelicals are proclaiming the gospel, Smith found, "they are generally not leaving particularly good impressions on those they are proselytizing."[11] Smith says,

> One common theme, for example, was that evangelicals are too verbally or publicly expressive about their faith. One Methodist man, for instance, said, "For me, an evangelical is somebody who sings and shouts and is glad to be Christian and wants everybody to know it." This Methodist woman reported, "Well, evangelicals are a lot more active than I am, going around testifying and all, you know, to your face, like doing evangelism. You know, I don't care for that." And this mainline Baptist woman suggested that "An evangelical believes in doing evangelism, in spreading the good news, going out and getting people. Sometimes I don't approve of their methods, button-holing people and being forceful."[12]

Either, Smith surmises, evangelicals have failed to effectively communicate their message or the message itself fosters antagonism.[13] In any case, Smith concludes:

> Clearly, evangelicals have not persuaded one of their major target audiences—Americans who are not conservative Protestants—that they have solutions either to people's personal problems and moral questions or to America's social, economic, and political problems.[14]

Later, Smith wonders if "most nonevangelicals are judging mere misperceptions of evangelicals' views and positions."[15] One university administrator interviewed believed that this uneasiness on the part of non-evangelicals was based on misperception. When told about some of this antagonism on the part of non-evangelicals this university administrator replied, "first of all, it doesn't surprise me.

---

[10] Ibid., 181.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid., 184-85.
[13] Ibid., 181-82.
[14] Ibid., 183.
[15] Ibid., 187.

Second, these people have probably never experienced the very kinds of prejudice that they are claiming happens. It is an alarmist kind of thing."

My interviews concur with this university administrator's hunch. Evangelicals do consider evangelism or sharing the gospel to be a key feature of their faith, particularly at work. But the overwhelming majority of those interviewed are sensitive to those unwritten boundaries that concern non-evangelicals, and do not want to overstep them. In order to avoid the penetration of boundaries, evangelicals employ a variety of strategies to avoid breaking the "rules" of the workplace. This brings us to the second feature of the opening excerpt, *caution*.

Caution in Evangelism

The leader of the "Christianity 9-5" class insisted that evangelism is less about "handing out tracts" and more about the way Christians "do" their work. Supporting this claim, one class participant cited Colossians 3:23: "Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men." Another participant in the class mentioned St. Francis of Assisi's famous words: "Preach the gospel at all times, and if necessary use words." This caution, then, in the way evangelism takes place was widely agreed upon by the class and the support for the less invasive, more cautious approach was grounded in both Scripture (Colossians 3:23) and tradition (St. Francis of Assisi quote). Returning to the question Smith posed as to whether non-evangelicals were judging reality or mere misperceptions, from my interviews, it seems that much of the fear is based on misperception, for many of the evangelicals suggested pause, even reluctance to share their faith in any intrusive way whatsoever. Furthermore, the evangelicals interviewed often times critiqued the swashbuckling, zealot approach to evangelism that many non-evangelicals feared.

One evangelical businessman avoids overt evangelism in favor of evangelism by example or deed: "In business I approach it [evangelism] differently. The business world does not lend itself to preach or share openly what you believe." This evangelical recognizes that there are certain rules or boundaries to the business world and does not seek to subvert those rules or boundaries, but rather

seeks to work within the parameters of his workplace: "I find it is more in doing the right thing. I try to view my work as worship. Am I presenting an acceptable offering to the Lord in my time and effort?" By allowing his work to be a natural byproduct of his Christian faith this worker is confident that "other people will notice." There are opportunities in conversations with co-workers: "when people share with me at work about their struggles then I feel that I can share back with them. I share back with empathy and care, not in an overt Christian manner." In sum, he says, "I don't want my employees to say I am pushing religion on them."

The comments of this businessman demonstrate a broadening of what counts as evangelism to include a pastoral role. This is consistent with Marsha Witten's findings on evangelicals and work. Witten's look at popular evangelical literature on work, money and materialism showed that evangelicals are encouraged "to take action to affirm relationships, share problems, and make themselves freely available to give and receive psychological advice and reassurance."[16] These duties often found their legitimacy by way of their importance in the larger goal of building relationships for evangelism. Our businessman recognizes that a decidedly evangelical response to a worker's problems might create chagrin so he opts for a more broadly acceptable reply (providing "empathy" and "care"). These opportunities for conversation and counsel were regularly slotted under the larger task of evangelism by the interviewees. Moreover, according to Witten, this pastoral approach was also something endorsed by evangelical leaders. This pastoral or counsel approach to evangelism would not be possible unless the definition of evangelism was given added flexibility, which may be what is happening in order to aid the interviewees to better negotiate an often times religiously pluralistic public square. This is legitimated by the widespread claim among my interviewees that evangelism is probably better conducted by one's actions rather than through proclamation.

---

[16] Marsha Witten, "'Where Your Treasure Is': Popular Evangelical Views of Work, Money, and Materialism," in *Rethinking Materialism*, ed. Robert Wuthnow (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 121.

By stressing *deed* over *word*, evangelicals are able to justify the use of *measured restraint* when evangelizing at work. A music teacher described one moment counseling a student struggling with grave problems at home: "I have a young lady who takes private voice from me and she's Mormon and for me that always is kind of out there, you know? And I know it [Mormonism] is and I want so badly to draw her away from that but I can't. She's a student and I can't." In other words, this teacher's desire to share Jesus with this student was restrained. When asked whether she felt held back by the school, the teacher replied:

> No, no, just because she is a student of mine. There's a…, I don't know, I guess I feel to a certain point that if my child was placed in someone else's trust and that someone betrayed that trust. Well, that is what I don't want. I don't want her family to ever feel like I betrayed their trust but I also want them to know that I believe they are lost.

Likewise, a high school baseball coach takes great care to avoid overstepping his boundary in evangelism. He says, "I worry about being the guy that brow beats someone to read the Bible and so forth. It would be easy for me to manipulate my baseball players because they look up to me but I don't want to do that." Both of these evangelicals demonstrate thoughtful restraint when thinking about evangelism at work. Both are *thoughtful* in their empathy. For the music teacher, her concern emerges from her consideration of the student's family. But even before that, this teacher reflects upon her own child being in a vulnerable position where a mentor with a different faith position was in a place of influence. Then she transferred the angst emerging from this scenario to this Mormon student and her family, concluding it best not to "betray their trust." Similarly, this high school baseball coach considers the insecurities and anxieties brimming during adolescence. Furthermore, he recognizes his position of influence over them and, all things considered, avoids exploiting their fragility for the sake of conversion. For both these evangelicals, considerable *thought* leads to measured *restraint*.

These evangelicals perceive certain boundaries for religion at work and do not want to cross them. James Davison Hunter has argued that American

evangelicals have adopted an ethic of civility in order to appropriate their soteriology to contemporary sensibilities. This ethic of civility emerges out of the cultural pluralism that characterizes modern life, an ethic that causes "one to 'play it safe.'"[17] It would seem that these interviewees are indeed playing it safe, trying to appear tolerant, *even tolerable.*

Not only were the evangelicals interviewed restrained in their approach to evangelism but they also seemed hesitant to deck their cubicles, vehicles, or themselves with evangelical accoutrements. One evangelical says,

> I would say that if you walked into my cubicle you would not know
> that I am a Christian because there is nothing there. I have never been
> one for showing my faith. I don't even have jewelry with crosses. I
> focus on the fact that people will see that I will always treat you fairly.
> I talk about my church and the things we do there.

Here is a keen aversion to avoid any hint of hypocrisy that might result from evangelical décor. Instead, the effective means for evangelism comes through behavior and casual talk of church activities. The impression is that ostensible evangelical symbols are counterproductive to evangelism. Another evangelical agrees, questioning the effectiveness of these witnessing tools: "it doesn't make sense to me that people think a little tract or a bumper sticker is really going to convert someone."

An evangelical clothing designer avoids the more explicit, louder approach to evangelism because she thinks it may trigger cynicism or a judgmental attitude toward evangelicals. While speaking of evangelism she had this to say:

> A lot of non-Christians are already set-up to judge. Not all. Just
> because I am a Christian doesn't mean that I am perfect. But when you
> become a Christian, God deposits joy, peace, and love inside of us and
> a lot of the Messiah T-shirts and stuff is cheesy. It matters more where
> your heart is than what you wear on your shirt. And people that have
> been hurt by the Church are going to pick out those things and say,
> "Okay, you wear the Messiah on your shirt, but you said this thing

---

[17] Hunter, *Evangelicalism*, 34-35, 212.

about this guy." We all make mistakes; we are all being continually transformed. I am just not showy in that way.

For this clothing designer there is a subtle juxtaposition between what is on the inside and what is on the outside of the Christian. Evangelism that relies on the external is susceptible to judgment. Why? Because such externally-focused evangelism could conflict with the inside of the Christian, thereby signaling inconsistency to the non-evangelical ("And people that have been hurt by the Church are going to pick out those things and say, 'Okay, you wear the Messiah on your shirt, but you said this thing about this guy'"). Rather than rely on *externals*, this Christian suggests utilizing the "joy," "peace," and "love" that is "deposited" *inside* the Christian. As these traits that are nestled within the Christian begin to seep to the surface, the non-Christian will see behavior that is rooted deep within, rather than a symbol tacked on to otherwise less than Christian behavior. Instead of wearing Jesus on a T-shirt, this evangelical seeks to be "extravagant in loving others."

In these excerpts one's good works are done with the hope that non-evangelicals would be drawn to the faith. In other words, the deeds of these evangelicals are decidedly outward-looking. This is an important contrast to Weber's study of Protestants. For Weber, tireless work and activity secured and affirmed the salvation of the Christian worker. Doing good work did not have any evangelistic intent. By contrast, my interviewees regularly saw the need for doing good work but did not see it as having a sanctifying effect upon the worker. In both cases, Christian work has salvific implications. Among Weber's Protestants, salvation was not to be *acquired* through work but *affirmed* in the mind of the Christian. My interviewees, on the other hand, believe that good work will lead to the salvation of others, or their conversion. This important distinction is probably best explained by looking at the uniqueness of evangelicalism. Drawing upon Bebbington, it was said that Puritans understood assurance in salvation to be unique, not available to every believer, and something acquired through the sanctifying grind of everyday existence. By contrast, evangelicals believed assurance

to be normative and one of the features of the born-again experience.[18] This born-again experience eased the anxiety concerning the individual's salvation and shifted concerns outward, to those that had not been born-again. This demonstrates the power of doctrine to animate engagement in the world.

Whether emphasizing deed over word or avoiding evangelical accoutrements, the overwhelming majority of those interviewed preferred, even insisted on the need for an evangelistic approach that is cautious and energetic to maintain good rapport with co-workers. There were, however, two interviewees that were more aggressive in their evangelism. It is to them that I now turn.

Exceptions to the Cautious Evangelism

My interview with Bruce was particularly enjoyable. We met at his church because, according to Bruce, that is where he could most regularly be found. When I learned that Bruce was a forester I was not surprised, for his appearance fit the mold: bearded, large-framed, plaid shirt, distressed denims, and work boots. Bruce graduated from high school on the "heels of the Vietnam War," and leaving high school he was unsure what to do with his life. He eventually took a job with an oil exploration crew which provided the opportunity to travel throughout the country doing geophysical surveys. It was doing this work that birthed in him a love for the mountains. Bruce explains an especially pivotal moment in his life while mountain climbing:

> One of the guys on my crew was a mountain climber and we climbed a mountain; my first mountain climb ever. It was on the Nevada/Utah border at about a 12,000 foot peak. We got to a point where the trees kind of peter out and the trees were bristle cone pine trees; and they are like the oldest trees on the planet. They are thousands of years old. I realized when I was sitting there amidst those trees that these trees were on the planet when Jesus walked the earth. But for a mistake of geography, they could have witnessed Jesus. At that moment I realized Jesus really walked the earth. He was no longer an

---

[18] Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 43.

abstract, mythological, storybook figure. He was real and a tree witnessed to me better than any person had ever done. That is when I decided I wanted to be a forester. I saved enough money in that year on the survey crew to quit and enrolled at Oklahoma State; I was in, forestry all the way.

Bruce's longing for the mountains was derailed when he met his future spouse. He recalled knowing "the moment [he] saw her" that she would be his wife. She worked in Tulsa and Bruce was able to find work as a forester in Tulsa.

Having spoken of the prominent role of evangelism in the workplace, I asked Bruce how evangelism happens in his work. He replied, "it usually happens under stressful conditions, which are not hard to find in the workplace these days." Bruce added, "it also comes from being bold about not hiding your faith during the calm times." One of Bruce's jobs is to facilitate the cutting down of trees that pose a threat to the community. For example, dead trees that might endanger a power line, a tree hampered by the weight of an ice storm, or any other reason a tree might need to be removed. This task, Bruce admits, often sparks conflict because "people get very emotional about [their] trees." Bruce says that when he is charged to cut down someone's tree "it is a big deal for folks because we were put in the Garden and told to take care of it. People want to take care of their chunk of the Garden." In these moments, Bruce exercises evangelism through prayer and listening. He prays that God would help him in these difficult confrontations. Bruce believes that evangelism might potentially occur in these difficult exchanges.

In addition to opportunities with clients, Bruce has had evangelism opportunities with co-workers. He says:

> I deal with folks that are actually doing the work on the tree crews and they are typically young, poorly educated, have stressful family situations—they trade wives and girlfriends, they have drug and alcohol challenges, and even a few have prison experience. So I deal with those issues and these young people are trying to get away with things; they are tricksters. They work harder at trying to get out of work than they do at doing the work. These people are distracted to the point of being lost and they typically don't have a faith. So I get to

> interact with them and I can pray for them while I'm working with them. I get to witness to them by my actions.

One time Bruce employed more than prayer for his co-workers and simply acting in a manner consistent with the gospel, instead he actually proclaimed the gospel in boldness. He describes the situation:

> We had one of our workers killed in a head-on vehicle collision out in rural Oklahoma and we immediately shut down the entire operation and we brought in all the crews and we told them what happened. We stopped operations because something happened and we wanted to stop and focus on what is the most important thing. I ask them what is the most important thing here and they would reply safety and I told them you would think that but really it is to love the Lord with all your heart and mind and soul and strength and to love each other as you would want to be loved, and that is the most important thing. So here I have 150 tree guys in the gravel parking lot and I am standing in the bed of the pick-up truck. This is family now and you need to love them and you never know when it is the last curve you will go around on the highway. I said we only have two appointments to make in our life and neither one of them we have any control over. One appointment is to be born and the other is to die and we don't know when that is either. We talked about the accident and I said, "okay the meeting is over and if you would like to stay we can say a prayer together" and we said the Lord's Prayer and after that I told them I would be there if any of them wanted to talk. I have never gotten in trouble for doing that. I asked some other believers afterwards, "was that too much, was that over the top?" They said "no, but I don't know how many of them got it" but they felt it was the right thing to do. I only had one guy come up and talk to me afterwards and he offered to pray if we ever had a situation like that again. So I claimed victory on that one.

Grievous circumstances for Bruce sparked bold gospel proclamation. Bruce did admit that this evangelistic opportunity was a rare one. More often Bruce simply prays at mealtime so that, Bruce explains, "they know that I am a man of faith."

A self-described "Christian nurseryman" (which "has to do with plants—not babies," he added) employs an approach slightly more aggressive than the majority of interviewees. This "seller of plants" struggled with "how to be a witness and how

to make Christianity really count" in his workplace. When he created his own business he felt the freedom to place a variety of Christian resources in the store, including "booklets, tracts, and Christian books." This nurseryman, following one of our meals together, placed a gospel tract along with the tip for our waiter. Yet even this man still showed reserve. For example, he started a volunteer Bible study but following consultation with his attorney decided that it was best to end the study because it could cause a disgruntled employee to file a lawsuit due to religious discrimination. This evangelical did not want to risk this possibility.

These two evangelicals both employed bold evangelistic tactics. Bruce's mini-revival service and our nurseryman's gospel tract dissemination, Bible studies, and readily available Christian resources might cause uneasiness on the part of non-Christians. Yet for Bruce this boldness was not the norm, instead he preferred simply giving thanks in front of his co-workers at lunch. And the nurseryman stopped his voluntary Bible studies when he thought there was the potential for a religious discrimination lawsuit. Even though these evangelicals display boldness, such boldness was more exceptional than normative among the interviewees. It might be that the opinions of non-evangelicals are influenced by these "louder" minorities within evangelicalism.

Explaining the Cautious Evangelistic Strategy

(1) All in an Effort to "Build Relationships"

Notwithstanding the two examples above, the overwhelming majority of those interviewed exemplified caution. Among the interviewees, then, there was the suggestion that evangelism be subtle, primarily through deed rather than word and without the use of ostensible evangelical symbols. Such caution echoed in Witten's look at evangelical literature on the topic[19] and Christian Smith's look at American

---

[19] Witten, "Where your Treasure is," 124.

evangelicals.[20] This more subtle approach to evangelism might be understood as an attempt to foster good work relations. Many of the interviewees seemed cognizant of the stereotypical "evangelist" that strikes nervousness in the hearts of non-evangelicals. The evangelical approach to evangelism might be seeking to avoid perpetuating this stereotype. Perhaps this evangelistic strategy is an effort to build and preserve good relationships with co-workers. As suggested by the attitude of non-evangelicals on the matter of evangelism, evangelicals are probably correct to think that evangelizing with wild abandon, donning evangelical décor is probably not going to foster nor preserve healthy work relations. While not always expressed, there seemed to be the sense that to sever workplace relations was to do more harm than good for the gospel. In fact, relationships serve as the crucial inroad to gospel declaration. It seems that most of the interviewees would balk at mounting a soapbox, or truck bed, in order to deliver a riveting evangelistic message complete with an invitation to pray for Christ because they would see this strategy as undermining good workplace relations.

The language of relationship-building was regularly expressed among the interviewees. For example, one evangelical when speaking about evangelism at work said "it's about relationship-building and as you get to know someone you can begin to share your religious beliefs—maybe not at work but as you spend time together outside of work." This emphasis upon relationship-building seemed to be rooted in a desire to avoid the cold, hard evangelism that is often the source of evangelical caricature on the matter. Returning to Gary, his frequent use of the phrase "building relationships" represents an effort to avoid the impression that the lost are simply "projects" for evangelicals. During our interview Gary reflected upon the way evangelism used to be done:

> I grew up in an era when if we were going to reach the lost we were going to knock on the door on Monday night with our assignment in hand, knocking on the door of a total stranger and expect them to invite us in so that we could tell them about Jesus. Today, that seems

---

[20] Smith, *Christian America?*, 88.

to me to be the most bizarre expectation I have ever heard, but I did for years [laughing].

Now, though, Gary employs a different sort of evangelism strategy in his chaplaincy work. His desire is to build trust with the employees with whom he is interacting. He states that "their obvious expectation is that I want to make a difference in their lives spiritually." That much is understood. Gary explained how he lays the initial ground rules with newly met workers:

> I say, "I'm a chaplain so obviously I am interested in your spiritual life, what you believe about God or what you don't believe about God. I am interested in what God you believe in. You will not ever hear me try to cram my beliefs about God down your throat. Now I am a Christian; I operate from a perspective that is defined in the Bible but I won't cram that down your throat."

He explained to me: "now, I can say that Casey because they always bring it up and if they bring it up then you have freedom to talk about it." As if trying to justify this seemingly passive approach to evangelism, Gary says, "I have opportunities to share with lost people about Jesus every day. I would go entire years on church staff and not have an opportunity to share Christ with a lost person."

The reason why an a-relational or anti-relational evangelism potentially undermines the gospel gained its most poignant and theological articulation from the real estate agent turned worship leader. When asked about evangelism in the workplace, he began to ponder, "What is life about? Life is about relationships." Continuing, he says,

> Fundamentally, what it means to be created in the image of God is that we are made like God, and God is fundamentally, at the core, a relational being, the Trinity; [God is] happy, the fullness of love. And so we are wired for these relationships, primarily with God, but also with others…Evangelism is so misunderstood and it pisses me off when I hear so many Christians talk about doing evangelism and they're not [doing evangelism]; they're actually doing anti-evangelism. They're actually, from my perspective—who knows what God is doing—doing harm when they're so awkward and they're like "Let me

tell you about Jesus Christ" [said in an obnoxious, in-your-face manner, while grabbing me!]. That's not evangelism; that's you looking like a freak. That's them going "whoa, you're weirding me out." Why is that approach not effective? Because we are wired for relationships. It's living the gospel. Yes, faith comes through hearing and we need to have those conversations, but if you really think that showing up on the job site day one and handing out tracts is effective evangelism, you need to be fired from the team. Please, stop doing evangelism. Don't. Stop. But the guy who looks for the opportunity to bring the person in the office, who's the most socially awkward person and nobody likes, and he looks for the opportunity to take that guy a cup of coffee, that's evangelism. What is he doing? He's saying, "I recognize you as a fellow image-bearer and I recognize that you are built for relationships, I am sorry that you are lonely; there's an answer for that." He's reading Mark 10 and hearing Jesus say "Even if someone just offers a cup of water to someone in my name, he will not lose his reward."

Many Americans have the nagging thought that community has been crumbling.[21] Evangelicals as well seem to share this concern and appear to be responding. At the academic end, Stanley J. Grenz's *Theology for the Community of God* sought to frame all Christian theology within "community."[22] At the more popular end, the popularity of Rick Warren's *The Purpose-Driven Life*—which according to *Christianity Today* outsold both the *Harry Potter* series and *The Da Vinci Code* combined in 2003[23]—and the Alpha course both suggest a response to the breakdown of community. *The Purpose-Driven Life* was, by intent, the topic of discussion in homes across America as churches sought to welcome the unchurched into a less threatening environment, a church member's home. Not only was the coziness of a home a more suitable venue but it meant that these gatherings were typically lay-led and, therefore, probably more discussion-focused. Similarly, the

---

[21] Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone* provides comprehensive data giving empirical weight to this hunch. See Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000).

[22] Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000). It should be noted that Grenz's relationship to evangelicalism has been questioned by segments within American evangelicalism. See, for example, Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth, and Justin Taylor, eds., *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004).

[23] "Forget Your Bliss," *Christianity Today* 48, no. 3 (March , 2004): 29.

Alpha course is structured in a way satisfying to the community-parched palate, including small groups, a meal and less lecturing and more discussion.[24]

Like these savvy adjustments on the part of evangelicals, the comments of this evangelical represent a strategic appropriation of Christian theology in a way that rings melodically to the community-starved: because God is a relational being, those bearing his image, humans, are also relational beings. Evangelism, therefore, must maintain this intrinsic relational quality. If evangelism does not, then the evangelizer is a "freak" and should be "fired from the team," according to this evangelical. Why is this evangelical so harsh? Because for him evangelism divorced from relationship is "anti-evangelism," that is, it is stifling and hurting the gospel message, rather than spreading it. Perhaps underlying this Christian's concern is a particular view of the gospel. For this evangelical, it would seem, the gospel is fundamentally a message about relationships. Most prominently, the gospel is the good news that humanity's relationship with God has been restored and, flowing forth from that, humanity's relationship with each other has been restored (see Ephesians 2:11-3:1-6). What is more, humanity's relationship with all of creation is being re-worked around Christ (see Colossians 1:15-23; Romans 8:20-25). If the gospel is fundamentally relational, so the thinking goes, then a gospel messenger proclaiming the gospel in a decidedly a-relational way would undermine the gospel message. This could be what is behind the evangelical wariness toward obnoxious, in-your-face tactics.

(2) "Fundagelicals"

A second reason why the evangelicals interviewed seemed tired of more flamboyant approaches to evangelism could stem from a desire among evangelicals to disassociate with the more eccentric brand of evangelicalism. One interviewee expressed this sentiment forcefully. When asked what he thought of the term "evangelical," he replied, "when you think of evangelicals, people are going to think

---

[24] See Stephen Hunt, *The Alpha Enterprise: Evangelism in a Post-Christian Era* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004).

of Jerry Falwell or Pat Robertson or Joel Osteen or James Dobson. I can't think of anyone else that I have more disdain for than those guys, so if evangelical means that, it would be weird for me call myself an evangelical." Rather than evangelical, this Christian calls the Falwells, Robertsons, Osteens, and Dobsons "fundagelicals." Now, if evangelical refers to one holding a view of the "inerrancy of Scripture," "divinity and humanity of Christ," "scriptural authority," and the necessity of being "born again," this interviewee is fine with the term.[25] But, then again, he says, "things happen every day that make it harder and harder for me to go up and say I am a Christian because of all the crap and crud you have to fight through and try to explain to get to some real conversation about Christ." Wavering, he says, "no, I don't consider myself an evangelical." Substantiating this claim, he says,

> Look at the Ted Haggard guy. This is the chairman of the American Association of Evangelicals [he is referring to the National Association of Evangelicals], the pastor of the third largest church in the country and for years he spoke hateful talk about homosexuals and gay marriage and then you find out that he has had a gay affair for two years.

Exasperated, he concludes, "we [Christians] are just so disconnected from the real world and the gospel and the politics of Jesus, the things he cared about." This evangelical's concern for the label "evangelical" is clear.[26] While he is willing to embrace a distilled definition of evangelical, the characteristics that have collected around the term are cause for concern. The specific names mentioned are the evangelicals that garner the most attention from the media, which begs the question as to how accurate the media's portrayal of evangelicalism is.

My interviewee is not alone. The evangelicals that bother this interviewee (with the exception of Joel Osteen) are associated with the Christian Right in

---

[25] Note the similarity of this evangelical's criteria to Bebbington's criteria (discussed in chapter three) which included an adherence to the Bible, the importance of a born-again experience, and the centrality of the atoning death of Jesus on the cross.

[26] Though he expressed frustration and ambivalence over the label, he does attend an explicitly evangelical church.

America. Smith's study of American evangelicals found similar frustrations with these evangelicals. Consider two excerpts from his study:

> I kind of get sick of hearing about the Moral Majority and Christian Coalition. I just tune it out when I hear it on television...

> I get very angry at some of the uncompromising Christian leaders who speak out politically. I get angry because they present a picture that this is the way all Christians are, and I don't like to be stereotyped by them. Once I got mail from the Moral Majority and I refused it. I didn't want the mailman to think I subscribe to their beliefs...[27]

This chagrin toward the more bold and eccentric version of evangelicalism could be at play in the interviewees pause over employing more extravagant and colorful evangelistic strategies.

(3) "The Time Bind"

Arlie Russell Hochschild's research might account for the caution that exists among the interviewees. Hochschild considers what she calls "the time bind," that is, the increasing strain that work seems to place upon one's time in the private sphere. Not only do longer work hours diminish home life but the infiltration of work into the private sphere through technological changes (email and faxes, for example). The company, "Amerco," that Hochschild investigated provided ample opportunity to spend more time at home yet Hochschild found that many workers did not take advantage of these opportunities, explaining that there was too much to be done at work. Why, Hochschild wonders, would workers not seek to alleviate the time bind? Did they not want to reduce their pay? Were they afraid of being laid off because of their opting for less work? Were they unaware of the opportunities? Having perused several possibilities Hochschild concludes that for many workers work has become

---

[27] Smith, *Christian America?*, 122-23.

"home" and home has become "work": "The worlds of home and work have not begun to blur, as the conventional wisdom goes, but to reverse places."[28]

Hochschild bases this conclusion upon shifting workplace conditions. More recently, workplaces have grown to be "a more appreciative, personal sort of social world."[29] At the same time, home life has grown more trying:

> at home the divorce rate has risen, and the emotional demands have become more baffling and complex. In addition to teething, tantrums and the normal developments of growing children, the needs of elderly parents are creating more tasks for the modern family—as are the blending, unblending, reblending or new stepparents, stepchildren, exes and former in-laws.[30]

Contrast the state of flux and upheaval that marks many contemporary families with the evolution of workplaces. Hochschild points out that "Many employees have been working for Amerco for 20 years but are on their second or third marriages or relationships."[31] She continues, "The shifting balance between these two 'divorce rates' may be the most powerful reason why parents flee a world of unresolved quarrels and unwashed laundry for the orderliness, harmony and managed cheer of work."[32] In addition to seeming more tidy and permanent for many Amerco workers, the workplace also seemed more domestic. As part of the new management techniques, Amerco has adapted the adage, "The Customer Is Always Right" to one's co-worker, "Value the Internal Customer," that is, one's co-worker.[33] Given the calm and friendliness that marks Amerco, it should come as little surprise that many workers feel they perform better at work than they do at home.[34] Ironically, as workplaces strive to foster a familial atmosphere, they might be, Hochschild believes, usurping one's own family as the preferred place of residence.

Given Hochschild's findings, it could be that the caution in evangelism is related to the desire to maintain good rapport with one's work "family." For

---

[28] Hochschild, "The Time Bind," 264.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid., 267.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid., 266-67.
[34] Ibid., 266.

evangelicals, crossing any boundary that would violate this rapport would be resisted so that the tranquility of the workplace could be maintained. Rather than engage in explicit gospel declaration, the more worker-friendly route is to engage in activity less conspicuous and more conducive to the civility of the workplace. Evangelicals then label such activity "evangelism" and supply reasons to justify such a move such as the St. Francis of Assisi quote and Scripture (Colossians 3:23 being the regularly cited verse).

(4) Broken Vessels

Jim Belcher's recent book, *Deep Church*, a book that has garnered significant attention from a range of evangelicals, devotes a chapter to evangelism. In this chapter Belcher recalls the story of Jason, a non-Christian curious about Christianity. Jason was drawn to the faith because of the brokenness of the Christian community. Jason says,

> As I got to know them…I realized that some of them were just as messed up as me. But I found a difference. I realized that these people understood the human condition, their struggle with sin and unbelief, and were open about their suffering. They were not trying to cover things up or put a nice wrapper on the ugliness. They were refreshingly authentic.[35]

Belcher recognizes that "This drew him in."[36] And Jason realized that, although struggling, this community was corporately being nourished by Jesus. Through their brokenness this community pointed Jason to Jesus.

Some interviewees also indicated a desire to make known their own brokenness as a means of evangelism. A pro-golfer that was interviewed had this to say:

> I think when people see you working hard and showing grace to other

---

[35] Belcher, *Deep Church*, 93.
[36] Ibid.

people then you can live your life in a way that will allude to the gospel. Whether we like it or not, everyone who shares the gospel is a hypocrite, because of our actions. One of the best things we can do as a Christian is to apologize and ask for forgiveness when we mess up. Because we are going to do it (mess up) and people are going to see us do it. We need to look someone in the eyes and say, "I'm sorry, this doesn't really fit with my faith." I think that is a great ministry tool. I'm not saying go screw-up just so you can confess, but odds are you are going to mess up. You are going to do something that is unChristian and you have to apologize for it.

Once again, evangelism is tied to how the Christian lives their life. Yet what is interesting is that for this evangelical a prominent way of sharing the faith is through failure and confession or apology. Perhaps for this evangelical failure can be a fruitful means of witness because it dispels self-righteousness and instead such a gesture would point to Christ-righteousness, that is, one's righteousness is not their own but imputed to them by Jesus' sacrifice. This golfer realizes that highlighting one's faults can be difficult, particularly in the sports world:

No one really wants to own up to their mistakes. In the sports world we are guided by our sponsors and endorsement deals and they don't want to be a part of someone that has messed up, so they try and just "save face." At some point you have to admit what you have done and be honest and apologize. Just come out and acknowledge it; confess it. It is hard to do.[37]

While acknowledging the difficulty of demonstrating one's failures, this evangelical relayed the following example:

Recently I was playing with someone and I was doing terrible and I was visibly upset, hitting my club on the ground, using bad language,

---

[37] And according to noted evangelical pastor, C. J. Mahaney, it was too hard for Major League Baseball pitcher and Christian, Andy Pettitte, to do. Mahaney blogged about what he believed to be Pettitte's lackluster confession in response to Pettitte's use of banned performance enhancing substances. What troubles Mahaney is that Pettitte had an opportunity to exemplify a decidedly Christian response to sin and instead Pettitte employed equivocal and self-preserving language. C. J. Mahaney, "Andy Pettitte and My Confession of Sin," sovereigngraceministries.org, http://www.sovereigngrac eministries.org/Blog/post/Andy-Pettitte-and-My-Confession-of-Sin.aspx (accessed September 10, 2009).

> it was terrible and I didn't know what to do. I talked to a buddy of mine and told him I had used the F-word like three times and very loud and he was appalled, like most people would be. I said, "I wonder if it hurt my witness?" I think the kingdom of heaven is bigger than foul language, but I came to the conclusion that I had to write the guy a letter. I wrote him an e-mail and he wrote back and said he didn't think it [his behavior] was that bad. That was a great opportunity to minister to the gospel. That is a prime example. The statement "I'm holier than you because I don't do…," that is bull. That is not going to benefit the gospel. That is going to tell people that you think your actions are better. I've read some atheists and their writings deal with moralism. If that is all Christians deal with, then we are no better.

There is the sense that brokenness is a evangelical distinctive, distinguishing evangelicalism from "moralism." The extent to which evangelicals fail to communicate brokenness is the extent to which they misrepresent the gospel. Christians, according to this line of thought, are not morally superior but morally inferior—or at least more cognizant of their moral inferiority—when compared to their non-Christian neighbor.

In a similar vein, another evangelical says:

> I am more concerned with "is everything I do with that person showing them that my life, my hope, exemplifies that Jesus is loving and redeeming?" I will screw up around this person. I can't think that I have to have a perfect slate to show this person that Jesus makes you perfect, because that would just be lies. So even in my faults, am I showing that person that redemption is available? I hope I show good character around my co-workers but that is just not going to happen all the time. You hope it does, but even today I have probably already sinned more than 100 times. I am still a work in progress. Why should I sell a book of lies to my co-workers that I am perfect? What I need to show them is: "Do you see me? God can restore me and if He can do that for me, what can He do for you?" So when I think of evangelism it is not gospel presentations around the water cooler, but it is if my life is showing that I am living for the Kingdom of God. I am living for something higher and more worthy than I am. Am I honest about my own failings and my need for something higher to redeem me.

The evangelical aversion to using lavish and loud methods of evangelism may be rooted in the desire to show themselves as broken vessels. Whatever the reason, according to those interviewed, non-evangelicals have little to worry about, for the

overwhelming majority of those interviewed not only take a more covert approach to evangelism—preaching the gospel regularly, only using words when necessary, to return to St. Francis of Assisi's phrase—but they also routinely condemn more exuberant evangelism strategies, which makes sense. The evangelical tradition gives reason for evangelicals to not force the faith upon others, a belief etched deep into the evangelical consciousness.[38] While most interviewed take a quieter approach to evangelism, all the interviewees consider evangelism to be a critical part of being Christian at work. This should come as no surprise, for the hallmark of evangelicalism has been its tireless desire to proclaim the gospel to an ailing world. With such a strong insistence upon evangelism, does work itself have any value for evangelicals? It is to this question that I now turn.

Work, a Mere Platform for Evangelism?

The 1999 film, *The Big Kahuna*, illustrates how a Christian's evangelistic impulse might nullify the importance of work itself. In the film, three industrial salesmen are seeking to acquire what would be a lucrative account. In order to do so they must pitch their product to the company's president ("The Big Kahuna"), Richard Fuller. The salesmen deem it best to send their young, fledgling salesman, Bob, who also happens to be a devout Christian. As the other salesmen fret over the future of the company that seems to hang on gaining this account, Bob is meeting with Fuller. Upon his return, Bob's sales partners learn that Bob spent the entire conversation, not selling industrial lubricants, but sharing Jesus. Learning this, Larry, another industrial salesman, asks in an exasperated tone, "did you talk about what kind of industrial lubricants Jesus would use?" Flabbergasted, Bob's sales partners wonder why Jesus was the focus of the meeting and not lubricants. Bob responds to the inquiry by saying, "because I think it's [evangelism] more important."

 The Big Kahuna's portrayal of the Christian at work may lead one to think that evangelism nudges work to a second tier. Perhaps one might conclude that a

---

[38] See Smith, *Christian America?*.

lingering dualism resides in the evangelical view of the workplace. One dualistic philosophy, Gnosticism, had a contentious role in the early church. Derived from Plato's understanding the Forms, Gnostic philosophy separated the spiritual from the physical spheres, deeming the physical inferior, even evil. One of the foremost of these threats came from the 2nd century church leader, Marcion.[39] Marcion claimed that the god of the Old Testament was different than the loving, surpreme God of the New Testament. This god of the Old Testament was an inferior and angry god.[40] He was also the Creator god, and this is why the material world (that is, the stuff of *creation*) was inferior to the spiritual. This dualism had a host of implications for material existence. Sex, for example, was often deemed as a bruised and spoiled fruit of the Creator god.

Such dualistic tendencies have woven their way throughout the course of the church history, and it may be that Bob's attitude toward work is suggestive of a lingering Gnostic impulse. After all, for Bob, work in its *physicality* has little value compared to the more *spiritual* task of evangelism. Work's purpose, then, might be important only because it brings monetary support to the worker and serves as a platform for evangelism. But for the evangelical it might seem as though work itself has no intrinsic value. This attitude did exist in a few of the interviewees. Gary, for example, relentlessly maintained evangelism as the central purpose of work. The irresistible evangelistic pull in this evangelical's thinking about work revealed itself when I tried to divert him from evangelism to questions of meaning in one's work. Chapter four argued that for many evangelical theologians work is a fundamentally good aspect of creation, a source for personal fulfillment, but, even more profoundly, a way of serving God and neighbor and playing a part in the maintenance of all creation. It would seem that this message would have an important part to play in the monotony and isolation engendered by contemporary work conditions. In this

---

[39] There is some debate as to whether Marcion was a Gnostic. Nonetheless, Marcion undoubtedly employs Gnostic elements into his understanding of the Christian faith. See Justo L. González, *A History of Christian Thought*, vol. 1 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1970), 140-41.

[40] Although later Marcion would revise this contention, claiming that the distinction was one of a loving God and a just God. See González, 141-42.

effort to tap into the meaning of work under the Christian worldview and veer the conversation away from evangelism, I asked Gary:

> *How would you encourage a worker that is struggling to find meaning in their work? What sort of meaning in work does the Christian worldview provide?*
>
> We must see value, not in our work so much, but in the opportunity that is in the lives of the people we work with. And if you dig ditches and you don't see any value in that then you have to say, "okay, who am I in that ditch with? Why has God put me in that ditch with that person?" Then you think beyond that and say, "Here is my paycheck. This is a gift from God, his provision to enable me to minister wherever I go, not just on my job. My job is a ministry but it is also the means that he gives to the end, and that is to make a difference in the lives of everybody, whether we work with them or not."

My effort to re-direct the conversation from evangelism proved futile. Here work finds its value as a space for pursuing evangelism ("We must see value, not in our work so much, but in the opportunity that is in the lives of the people we work with"), not in anything intrinsic to the work itself. Even the worker doing a seemingly meaningless task (e.g. a ditch digger) is not urged to ask how digging a ditch contributes to the overall economy but whether they can build a relationship with their digging partner in hopes of evangelizing that person. While not providing much significance to work itself, this relentless stress upon evangelism does infuse workplace activity with great importance. Moreover, it serves to invigorate evangelical identity. With this view, ultimate meaning in work is only available to the evangelical because it is only found in evangelism not work itself. In the monotony of work, filled with its seemingly *temporal* and *insignificant* tasks, the evangelical heralds both the *eternal* and cosmically *significant* message of God's redeeming work in the world through the gospel.

Notwithstanding Gary, many evangelicals when asked about work's place in the Christian worldview were quick to point to the centrality of work in God's good creation, thereby suggesting that work itself has importance and is not merely a platform for evangelism. One evangelical observes that work "was originally given

as your passion, something you enjoyed doing; it was a good thing to work. It was a way to praise God and give God glory, and I think it still is." "But," she adds, "because of the Fall work is hard and skewed and it is cumbersome and it is not enjoyable but we still need to do it to glorify God." This evangelical understands that work occupies a good place in God's creation. Work's purpose is twofold: first, it satisfies the worker and, second, it is a way to worship and honor God. She notes that work has been devastated by the Fall and, consequently, any satisfaction for the worker is difficult to attain. Nonetheless, work is still a means by which God can be honored. Unlike the character Bob, this evangelical sees work itself as a way to glorify God and not merely a space for evangelism. An evangelical mechanic notes work's place in God's good creation: "even in the Garden, Adam had to go pick his bananas…Not working is not what God desires; Adam and Eve had work to do." This evangelical also recognizes that because of the Fall, work can become a problem: "For some people work can become an idol in their life. Work can be a focal point of their existence." All in all, however, this evangelical believes that "work is a basic part of the set-up that God has for humanity."

The intrinsic value of work flowing forth from creation, gained a poignant articulation from a university administrator. He says:

> When reading through the whole of Scripture I begin to realize, "wow, what a view of work that is presented." In Genesis, the command to tend the Garden, to have dominion preceded the Fall. So I came to the same conclusion that Martin Luther and so many of the Reformers came to: work, in and of itself is special and God calls us all to vocation. I don't see that there is a dividing line between laity and clergy that says "well, clergy is a higher calling than other callings." So my concept of work as holy and noble and good in and of itself is there because it was designed prior to the Fall[.] [This] became a shaping influence on my view of work.

This evangelical realized work's place within the context of Scripture, most notably its place in creation. Since work was rooted in creation, this interviewee can view work as a good activity. "And," he concludes:

if you approach work that way, it is not just a place to fish [i.e. evangelism]. It is a place to serve God, whether it's pushing a broom, or writing papers, teaching, practicing law, medicine. Work is good in and of itself. Work is not the curse; the curse was that work was going to be tough, through the sweat of your brow.

And, finally, an evangelical coach takes work back to the beginning by saying, "work is essential because we are made in the image of God and we were created to work. God gave us the earth and told us to work it. That hasn't changed. That is part of our meaning here on earth." This interviewee imparts intrinsic value to work by appealing to the *imago dei*. Since God is a working God, humans, being made in God's image, are to work. In fact, the individual's purpose on earth is bound up in work. This is why this person confesses to have "struggled spiritually and mentally" when he was without a job. Similarly, a commercial lender ponders, "why is it that one of the most catastrophic things that can happen to a man is to lose his job?" To answer the question he returns to creation: "I think you can take it back to Genesis; work is our identity." John Stott agrees, calling "the trauma of unemployment" an indication of the centrality of work for humanity.[41] For these evangelicals, the centrality of work to both human life and creation is underscored by the sense of psychological inertia that ensues when one does not have a job.

These evangelicals, by returning to the place of work in creation, are instilling work with intrinsic meaning. Work's embeddedness in the fabric of a good creation provides it with importance. Had work been the result of the Fall it would not carry such favorable appraisal among evangelicals. Work along with the rest of the effects of the Fall would be disposed of through the judgment of Christ. Yet this is not the case because of work's rootedness in creation. With work properly anchored in creation, Bob's neglect of his job in witnessing to a potential client would be seen as a failure because he was neglecting work's goodness in and of itself. Although calling work a fundamental aspect of God's good creation, many evangelicals struggled to draw much out of the fact that God created work as good. The notion of *service*, for example, was absent when evangelicals spoke of work's

---

[41] Stott, *Decisive Issues Facing Christians Today*, 173-75.

place in creation.[42] As discussed in chapter four, Luther, Calvin, and those *looking back* to creation for understanding work reasoned that work was a way to serve one's neighbor. Providentially, humans through their work actually sustain creation.[43] Moreover, it is believed that because humans are created in the image of the Trinitarian God it means, in part, that they are social beings and humanity's social nature is realized partially through work as one relates to and serves one's neighbor. Finally, individual sanctification occurs through this service to neighbor. For the Reformers and evangelicals adhering to their view of work, this extensive web of service finds its source in creation.

The interviewees who mentioned work's prominence in creation did not push its implication very far. Work as service, for example, was in no way connected to its place in creation. One evangelical, for example, said that work's central role in creation meant that work was a means of personal satisfaction as well as a way to glorify God. Service to one's neighbor was conspicuously absent. This is consistent with what James Davison Hunter's study of evangelicals found regarding work. As already noted, Hunter observed that among evangelicals work's eternal purposes (i.e. sanctification and service) were trumped by work's ability to sharpen the individual's personality.[44] Work, in other words, had turned from being eternal to temporal and the scope of work's purpose had narrowed to the individual's personal needs. In addition to yielding few implications regarding work's purpose, work's rootedness in creation also was regularly usurped by the evangelical's relentless evangelistic efforts. An evangelical nursing assistant returns to creation

---

[42] While it was noted in chapter three that some of those interviewed saw service as an important aspect of work's purpose, they did not root this service in creation.

[43] To reiterate what was described in chapter four, the logic went something like this: While the individual is thanking God for food, asking for good health, and safety from the severe weather that looms, there are other people that have devoted their working lives to making those things happen. The food on the table arrives through a series of vocations, including farmers, delivery people, and grocers—all vocations drawing upon other work as well. Good health typically arrives through the work of a variety of doctors. These doctors, of course, received training from those that have devoted themselves to research and higher education. Not only does good health need doctors but good health must be anticipated with diet and exercise, both issues relying on a number of vocations. Finally, safety from severe weather might come from a well-built home—the work of a number of vocations—and the warnings from the meteorologist. Certainly God could drop bread from heaven, miraculously heal the sick, and turn the storm to solace but this is not the way he has *created* the world, many of the Reformers and their followers believed.

[44] Hunter, *Evangelicalism*, 56.

when thinking about work: "God ordains work. He calls us to work. Adam worked in the Garden of Eden. He was called to cultivate and to work in the Garden." She proceeded to say:

> I take opportunities to speak of Jesus when I can in my job. I have co-workers that ask me to pray for them. I talk about my Christian life and involvement outside of the workplace and so they know where I stand. Also important is how you work: working to the best of your ability and being the best you can be. Being on time, not gossiping, your attitude, your actions at work all factor in to sharing your faith.

For this nursing assistant, thoughts about the significance of work begin by looking at its prominence in creation but shortly after when she shifted to *how* the evangelical should engage the workplace she turns to the topic of evangelism. She does not neglect the importance of being a good worker. Returning to the character Bob, she would most likely critique Bob's sharing Jesus instead of industrial lubricants with a potential buyer. Yet the *purpose* of being a good worker, she believes, is still sharing one's faith, or evangelism. Functionally, then, it is the Fall, not creation, that seems to animate the workplace for evangelicals. Unlike Bob, most evangelicals had a high view of work rooted in creation, yet the implications of such a view of work were not teased out.

Perhaps more pressing than the *prevalence* and *mode* of gospel proclamation among evangelicals are questions related to the *content* of this gospel. Among those interviewed, there were variations in the interviewees' understanding of the gospel. Furthermore, the way evangelicals engage the workplace and understood its ills actually seemed to be a corollary of their understanding of the gospel. This will be investigated in the following section.

Evangelicalism's Enfeebled Social Transformation Program

It was noted that Smith saw American evangelicalism's social agenda as enfeebled due to poor public relations, largely through their evangelistic strategy. But even deeper than poor public relations, American evangelicals, Smith argues, conceive of

social ills as largely individualistic, failing to recognize structural problems, and this has led to a weak social strategy. As touched upon in chapter one, Smith defines this faulty strategy as the personal influence strategy (PIS). According to this view, "American evangelicals are resolutely committed to a social-change strategy which maintains that the only truly effective way to change the world is one-individual-at-a-time through the influence of interpersonal relationships."[45] There are a variety of factors that influence this strategy. For example, PIS joins in harmony with evangelicalism's unrelenting stress on having a "personal relationship with God."[46] Also, PIS is a means of creating distance from other groups, thereby reinforcing the self-identity of American evangelicalism. For example, according to evangelicals, fundamentalists fail to foster transforming relationships because they are too defensive and hostile in their posture toward the world. Liberals, on the other hand, are too insistent on social activism that is devoid of the kind of inter-personal relationships that are necessary for conversion. Also, secularists cling too close to education and government programs as the cure for social ills. Finally, PIS is conducive, says Smith, to the individualism running deep in the veins of evangelicalism.[47] This PIS, Smith observes, was "relentlessly evident" in his interviews with evangelicals.

My interviews revealed a similar approach to the public square, particularly the workplace. Yet there remained a departure from the PIS among a small number of evangelicals interviewed. It seemed that any departure from the PIS was rooted in a particular view of the gospel, which makes sense given the centrality of the gospel to evangelicalism. Those with a broader understanding of redemption maintained a workplace agenda with more breadth than the PIS. And one's view of redemption corresponded to one's view of sin. If sin for the evangelical was reduced to individuals then the emphasis upon engaging the workplace focused solely on

---

[45] Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 187. Also see Smith, *Christian America?*, 45. Robert Wuthnow noted this same tendency among a broader sampling of Americans (not only evangelicals). Wuthnow observes that Americans tend to see economic woes such as poverty as steming from individuals, failing to detect the deeper, systemic problems that might be at root. Wuthnow, *God and Mammon in America*, 204-08.

[46] Ibid., 188.

[47] Ibid., 188-89.

individuals. By contrast, if sin was conceived as extending beyond individuals to the structures and systems that comprise the workplace, then the gospel had something to say to those structures and systems. What I seek to demonstrate by highlighting several evangelicals is that those interviewees who spoke of sin and redemption in the broadest terms were most able to burst forth from the limitations of the PIS.

The Interviewees

The gospel heralds Jesus as *Lord* and Savior. Moreover, the thrust of Jesus' teaching was that the kingdom of God had arrived with his arrival. It was this "kingdom" language that was consistent in those having a broader vision of the gospel. For example, a young commercial lender, when asked whether he considered his work a "calling," had this to say:

> Yes, I think so. I am a firm believer in the sovereignty of God. I really think wherever I have been in my life has been a calling. I went to college with people that thought to be the best, effective Christian you could be, you had to be in the ministry; that is the only way you could have a kingdom perspective of life; that is the only way you could live for God. I believe that anything is a part of the kingdom. You can bring the kingdom to bear any where you are.

This evangelical observes that many of his Christian friends in college maintained a stratified system of vocations. There was a partition between ministry and secular work with ministry being the more important pursuit. What dissolves this partition is the kingship of God which may be why he began his comment by stating his belief in the sovereignty of God. A high view of the sovereignty of God translates to a "kingdom perspective" on all of life. If business, banking, health work, and education all fall under the rule of God, then that work has been infused with meaning. The task of the worker is twofold. First, applaud those aspects of the company that are consistent with God's kingdom. Second, transform aspects of the company that are at odds with God's kingdom. Admittedly, this is no easy task:

> Sometimes I do question though when I am in my office from 8-5 working spreadsheets.....what am I doing to spread the kingdom of God? After work I am investing time with my family, in my community, and I do believe anyone can be an effective believer doing anything.

These comments suggest that workplaces, not just co-workers, are ensnared in sin. This is what is implied in spreading the kingdom of God by working with spreadsheets. His work with spreadsheets is an isolated task and therefore something different than personal evangelism is in mind. He is speaking of the transformation of the daily processes that give life to his workplace. Perhaps this is what was missing in Smith's study. The PIS that was so prevalent in Smith's findings was employed because deeper, structural sins were overlooked, or at least not conceptualized as "sin." By contrast, this commercial lender, despite being somewhat vague on how to go about it, still has the ability to look beyond individuals to the insidious underlying problems that might exist at work. He explains why: "because we are sinners everything we touch, every system is by definition broken because of our sin and in desperate need of redemption." Later, he says, "every system in life has as its root brokenness and is hopefully in the process of really being redeemed." While sin is still inextricably connected to individuals ("Because we are sinners everything we touch…"), it is seen as leaking beyond individuals to the things individuals create, organize, and systematize. As the scope of sin broadens one sees how the scope of the gospel broadens as well. If sin reaches to everything "humans touch," which would include the systems and structures that form the very warp and woof of the workplace, then the Christian gospel has something to say on the matter. *Interestingly, those employing the PIS and those engaging the workplace in a more comprehensive way are both combating the same thing at work: sin.* The difference in strategy, however, had to do with one's understanding of sin. A higher—or more comprehensive—view of sin translated to a more

Figure 1: Commercial Lender's Depiction of Gospel

comprehensive understanding of the problems in the workplace. A corollary of one's view of sin is one's understanding of the gospel. According to chapter four, if Jesus had indeed overcome sin and if his kingdom has pierced the present age and is expanding then finding ways to accelerate the kingdom's expansion is a worthy endeavor. This evangelical not only seeks to accelerate the kingdom's growth by transforming individuals but also by seeking to alter deeper structural issues.

If this commercial lender's comments are indicative of a broader vision of the gospel, then it should come as no surprise that for him the biggest problem with work is allowing it to nudge the gospel to the periphery. He begins making this point by claiming that "there are just way too many men who have it [work] as their idol. It is really what they worship, the money, power, prestige, and influence that comes from their job." Following these comments, I asked what viewing work as an idol might be a symptom of and he replied, "I think it all goes back to not believing Jesus is enough to save you." Put differently, treating work as an idol is rooted in a failure to believe the gospel. He then drew a diagram (see Fig. 1), explaining, "your whole life your church has always told you the only thing to bridge the gap between you

and God is the cross." This evangelical affirms the cross as the only bridge large enough to traverse this gulf between humanity and the divine. Unfortunately, though, "the church or your parents or the Christian culture has also told you to work on this ladder that will take you to God even faster or more efficiently or whatever." He describes each rung on the ladder as representing various works: "you read your Bible every day [rung one], have a quiet time [rung two], listen to Christian music [rung three], or read only Christian books [rung four], you are in church every Sunday [rung five], you make sure you witness to two people every week [rung six]." He continues, "you do all these things to build this ladder up." He then begins to draw the first hill: "You are going along really well, then you get a girlfriend and you are making-out too much." When he describes making-out too much with one's girlfriend the hill goes down and consequently the gap between humanity and God grows. "Or," he continues, "you are going on a mission trip and you are all fueled up but then you get into R-rated movies or you are drinking too much." Once again, the hill rises with the mission trip and declines with the R-rated movies and excessive drinking. Viewing one's deeds in this way creates, he says, "a constant up and down." If one views their works as diminishing the chasm between them and God, then the cross shrinks, losing influence on the believer's life (note the increasingly small crosses in Fig. 1). Instead, he explains while drawing a descending line that makes the gap between humanity and God greater, "the Lord has shown us how unworthy we are and how sinful and broken we are and how we need Him more than anything else." In other words, he believes that this gap between people and God is bigger than one might first think. There is good news in this, for when one's own sense of how sinful one is grows, the cross grows as well (note the largest cross that bridges the chasm in Fig. 1). Admittedly, he says, "all these things are good, the rungs on the ladder, but if it is not out of a response of love then it is just toil." In other words, he explains that motivation for one's deeds matters. Good things, like excellence in the workplace, can quickly become the means by which Christians think they are being justified.

The comments of this commercial lender were directed at evangelicals, suggesting that the gospel, while on the one hand fairly simple to understand, needs

repeated reinforcement in order to sustain its transforming power on the evangelical's life. The assumption is that the preaching of the gospel must be directed to Christians as well as non-Christians. This assumption is a departure from the way gospel proclamation was shaped in American evangelicalism's history. As noted in chapter three, in an effort to reach the multitudes the gospel was whittled down to its bare-bones during the early nineteenth century. The difficulty of grasping the gospel was regularly stressed in the church this evangelical attended. On one level, the church would often say, the gospel is easy to understand and yet Christians must spend a lifetime allowing an understanding of the gospel to penetrate and, therefore, animate their hearts. What must anchor the individual's actions, especially their working lives, according to the diagram is the cross. Not only the cross, but the gap must be understood properly as well, for as the diagram illustrates, the larger the gap, the larger the cross becomes. This church began every service by saying two things were true. First, they would say, individuals are far more wicked, broken, and sin has a tighter grip on them than they realize. However, the second point they make is that God's love for individuals is infinitely greater than they realize. These two points are central to the illustration the commercial lender provided.

The centrality of the gospel to this commercial lender's church was woven deep into their collective thinking. At this point it is helpful to tease out the thinking which I regularly encountered at his church and in conversation with its members. As the commercial lender claims, work's greatest problem is that it often replaces the cross as one's source of salvation.[48] To the extent that one believes through their work they are achieving personal fulfillment or salvation that is the extent to which they do not understand their own alienation from God and their own impotence at finding true satisfaction. They have turned a gift from God (like work) into an idol, as the commercial lender says. The individual is trusting in their own performance for personal fulfillment and salvation, not Jesus' work on the cross. Doing this cultivates a roller-coaster of feelings toward oneself, as the hills on the diagram

---

[48] It should be pointed out that the church this evangelical attends is within the Calvinist tradition as they embrace the Westminster Confession.

suggest. But trusting one's works has implications reaching beyond the individual's feelings about themselves. Rooting one's value in their performance—as determined by work—decidedly alters one's posture toward their neighbor. The individual, trusting in themselves, has a tendency to feel superior to others who are not doing as well at work. At the same time, they might have feelings of inferiority toward those that are performing better at work. Anytime feelings of failure at work arise, feelings of inferiority follow. This is because one is seeking to validate themselves according to their own deeds rather than Jesus' work on the cross. Feelings of superiority and inferiority are not going to foster the kind of community that the gospel engenders. In addition to understanding the bridge (the cross), one must also have an adequate grasp of the gap because when one properly understands the gap, they realize that humanity is equally alienated from God which again diminishes feelings of superiority toward others. Yet, lest one feel inferior, God has reached low enough, by means of the cross, to rescue the lowliest. This type of logic, which surfaced at the commercial lender's church, demonstrates how a proper understanding of the gospel might stabilize the individual internally as well as externally, that is, in how they relate to their neighbor. The reason that the biggest threat at work is for work itself to nudge the gospel to the periphery of one's life is that the gospel has a host of implications for the way individuals understand themselves and relate to others. Presumably, a proper understanding of the gospel would better equip one to diagnose and, consequently, work to dissolve structural issues that might undermine community at work, such as inequitable social relations. The individual and social consequence of the gospel that was shared by the commercial lender and the church he attends suggests a developed understanding of the effects of the grace found in the gospel. Here is a nuanced conception of the gospel that translated into a more sophisticated understanding of the worker's psyche, the problems that beset the workplace, and a gospel-focused means of engaging the workplace.

A professional musician had a similar view of the workplace that emerged from the kingship of God. When asked how work fits into a Christian worldview, he replied, "your work is your opportunity to work out the kingdom of God in whatever

sense you can in your field." This musician explicates what the kingdom of God might look like in his field:

> Within a lot of the Christian music or art world—and this criticism is common—there is a lot of stuff that is not created artfully, not necessarily being weird or avant-garde but in simply being thoughtful or original. Instead, the sense is that Christians should create something safe or within some boundaries so that it fits some larger expectation of what Christians seek in Christian music, for example. There is this common thought, "well it doesn't really matter how well we play if our hearts are right." There is a pretty good ground-swelling that says if you consider this to be your calling or craft and you are doing it poorly and not doing the grunt to make yourself the best then you are not honoring God. This is becoming more and more a common idea whereas it use to be the edgy thing to say. So in one sense your work is your opportunity to be excellent and by doing, you're being witness to the creativity of God.

This evangelical laments the poor music standards he sees in the Christian music industry. Earlier the possibility of a lingering Gnosticism was addressed and it was concluded that properly locating work's source in creation would dissolve any Gnostic or dualistic remnants. This musician's comments suggest that a Gnostic or dualistic tendency might reside among some evangelicals. After all, the reigning assumption was that if one's heart is right, then the product would be a success, regardless of the product's quality ("And there is this common thought, 'well it doesn't really matter how well we play if our hearts are right.' And there is a pretty good ground-swelling that says if you consider this to be your calling or craft and you are doing it poorly and not doing the grunt to make yourself the best then you are not honoring God"). In other words, the *spiritual* impetus for creating music usurps the *physical* by-product. Yet according to this evangelical this Gnostic tendency seems to be dismantling within the Christian music industry. This evangelical sees a trend among Christian artists to produce excellence in the actual music itself. Whereas segments of the Christian community may have defined excellence in terms of the piety and faithfulness of the musicians, now it seems that excellence would include both faithfulness and music that is of a high caliber.

Indeed, according to this musician, anything less than excellence in music is a failure to use God's gifts in a way that honors God. Pious hearts alone will not honor God. Instead, such piety must translate to quality music. This evangelical's analysis was anchored in theology, namely, the *imago dei*. By creating good music, the Christian artist is proclaiming the creativity of God.

This musician extends his understanding of the kingdom of God to other spheres, like morality and the environment. When asked what it might look like when the kingdom of God is taken to fields outside of music, he replied:

> In one sense it may be taking what we see of the characteristics of Jesus, humility and kindness and the way you speak, into your workplace. Honesty and straightforwardness and allowing that to break down the cynicism that might dominate a business office. Finding ways to succeed that do not rely on backhandedness. Those are the things that testify to the kingdom of God in a moral sense. You might push or make sure a company is being ethically honest in how it handles its money, the stock market, environment—offsetting carbon stuff—the things that will aid in creating a coherence to everything.

The kingdom of God certainly means doing the things consistent with the PIS, but it extends beyond individuals to the environment and other things that will aid in the cultivation of universal flourishing, or "coherence." This phrase—"coherence to everything"—suggests a notion of kingdom that extends to all creation. While he does not use the word "sin," this musician implies that he is working with a more far-reaching grasp of sin. This is because he see all of creation having problems—more than simply individual morality—and in need of the transforming power of the kingdom of God. The problems, then, are broad, reaching into every facet of creation. This leads to a richer diagnosis of workplace ills. Consider, for example, when this evangelical explained in more detail the problems that beset the Christian music industry,

> There is a Christian music industry that has been built to market things that are palatable toward this Christian demographic and maybe the first thing that would be surprising is that it really is like any other music industry. It is like the mainstream or secular music

industry. It operates by principles of business, that's its bottom line; and we've seen plenty of that. And that is a problem in mainstream music. Just recently we had someone tell us exactly what they wanted us to do so that this song could be used on Christian radio and sold as a single. They have a mold for what will sell and ask artists to fit that rather than allowing a group of artists to create. And it would be for everyone's good, we'd make more money but you feel like it is some kind of betrayal.

And later he says,

I've heard that Christian music is under this process: You go to the rental store to find out what's popular, you rent that. Then you take it to Kinkos to copy. Then you go to the laundry mat to clean it up and you sell it. There is this whole problem where you are trying to create what is safe. Rather than trying to engage the culture at large… And that is the problem with creating a self-inclusive world where you no longer have to deal with those on the outside.

His wish is that the Christian music industry operate differently from its secular counterpart, indeed he expects that it should. Other Christians have felt the same. Over twenty years ago, Kenneth A. Myers lamented the parallel Christian subculture that was growing alongside its secular counterpart. Moreover, Myers saw this Christian subculture as a window into a deficiency within the evangelical ranks, namely, evangelicalism's obliviousness to the danger of cultural forms. American evangelicals, for example, will squirm at violence and sex portrayed on television but typically overlook the problems inherent in television as a medium. Myers explains the logic colloquially:

they're [Christians] listening to the radio like the rest of their friends, and they *really* do like certain performers, but they know their parents would just *really* die if they ever figured out what the lyrics were, so like there's this Christian guy who sounds just like George Michael, only he doesn't say I want your sex, it's I want your soul, and it's really Jesus talking, but it sounds just like George Michael, right? And maybe we can sing it in church.[49]

---

[49] Kenneth A. Myers, *All God's Children and Blue Suede Shoes* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1989), 20.

Evangelical analytical prowess is usually razor sharp when it comes to detecting dangerous *content* but remains dull at diagnosing the dangers of various *forms*. This has led to a curious irony: evangelicals, rather than being "in the world, but not of it" (as Jesus prayed in John 17), are usually, Myers contends, "of the world, but not in the world."[50]

Like Myers, Nancy Pearcey in her widely-acclaimed *Total Truth* notices a similar problem. She notes the ease with which churches implement strategies gained from the business world. For example, Pearcey provides several examples of how ministries have employed ghostwriters to write fundraising letters containing embellished anecdotes all in an effort to bolstered financial support.[51] In other words, the same strategies used in the secular world have been adopted by Christian ministries. Drawing upon Douglas Sloan, Pearcey claims that "we [evangelicals] have resisted modernism in our *theology* but have largely accepted modernism in our *practices*."[52]

As mentioned in chapter two, David Wells is troubled by the infiltration of the world's systems and *modus operandi* into the church. The church has without hesitation embraced many of the world's assumptions and models in order to boost interest. The problem for Wells as well as Myers, Pearcey and the Christian musician, is that evangelicals tend to assume these strategies and techniques are morally neutral. The PIS that pervaded Smith's study is symptomatic of the same tendency. In both cases, non-personal things are deemed neutral and therefore not in need of transformation. Again, the issue for the evangelical seems to be where one detects sin. It seems that for a large number of evangelicals sin is reduced to the individual. On the contrary, what the Christian musician, Myers, Pearcey, and Wells suggest is that sin is sticky. That is, sin tends to leave its messy residue beyond the individual to the things the individual creates. These range from systems and structures that undergird the workplace to tools and techniques that animate the

---

[50] Ibid., this is the title of the first chapter.
[51] Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 366-67.
[52] Ibid., 365.

workplace. This leads to a curious irony: *any evangelical deficiency in integrating faith and work may be suggested by looking not to the outside but inside the evangelical world*. In other words, the best glimpse at evangelical cultural engagement might be gained, not atop a cubicle, but by perching oneself upon a church balcony.

An evangelical engineer had a similar take on the breadth of sin. Prior to our interview I had read an article in the *Tulsa World* newspaper describing how difficult it is to walk in Tulsa and Oklahoma. Out of the 500 most walkable U.S. cities, Tulsa ranked 409 and Oklahoma City rounded out the list at 500. The article mentioned New Urbanism as a possible solution to Tulsa's layout. In our interview we discussed this article and an interesting story ensued. This engineer spoke of the expansion versus renewal debate. Do city planners seek to renew older parts of town or expand on a cheaper fringe of town? She notes that "this expansion versus renewal is an ongoing problem that America has not had to deal with because of our age as a country." By contrast, "Europe, because of its age, has not had the option to expand, so they renew." Returning to Tulsa, she proceeds,

> In Tulsa there is a great growth at highway 75 and 71st St, in Owasso, and in Broken Arrow, but the growth with shopping and restaurants doesn't necessarily enhance people's relationships. Churches need to recognize and counter this growth and to be hospitable to the community to fulfill the Great Commission and share the message of the gospel.

Like the commercial lender and the Christian musician, this evangelical sees problems extending beyond individuals to the way individuals organize and structure space. She even calls for Christians to reverse this trend of expansion. Indeed, families in her own church are intentionally moving into older parts of town in an effort to renew broken communities. She explains, "In our church we have some people that are moving to Brady Heights, just north of downtown, and they are encouraging people to move down there and it is in need of urban renewal. If every church in Tulsa owned that idea the renewal would be amazing." This evangelical has a sophisticated understanding of the problems embedded in the way cities are

developed and has even made significant decisions based on such beliefs. Although she only mentioned friends in the previous excerpt, she too bypassed a newer, safer neighborhood in favor of an older community that was in need of renewal. In her view, the gospel must be shared but she seeks to keep such proclamation tied to relationships or community. She accomplishes this task by perceptively noting ways in which city design might help or hinder community. Because older neighborhoods have parks and amenities bound tightly, they also tend to foster more face to face interaction. This provides opportunity for sharing the gospel but also is more consistent with the type of human flourishing that the gospel seeks to create. This engineer's thoughts were also congruent with the newspaper story which implied that the way cities are designed actually affects human flourishing. Spreading things out, while good for vehicles, stifles communities and strains hearts. By contrast, the article suggested that tighter, walkable cities provide more human interaction, the opportunity for exercise, and tend to be friendlier to the environment. This is consistent with the Christian musician's concern that the Christian music industry is operating according to a model that is not neutral. Similarly, this engineer notes how city development is not morally neutral either.

Gaining Perspective on the Findings of this Chapter

Chapter three highlighted *Christianity Today* as an important publication for the revitalization of American evangelicalism during the mid-twentieth century. In October of 1956, the first issue of this publication was released and with it came a focused and optimistic unveiling of the mood of these neo-evangelicals. It is complete with careful critique of fundamentalist thought and the construction of a culturally engaged, biblically faithful Christianity. Two articles contained in that first issue speak to the themes addressed in this chapter and will provide a helpful vantage point from which to understand the interviewees.

In "Biblical Authority in Evangelism," Billy Graham wonders what kept Jesus' audiences so captivated? Citing Matthew 7:28-29, Graham believes it was his authority. Likewise, prophets of the Old Testament brought a confidence that rested

in the "Divine revelation" of which they were mediators.[53] Learning from Jesus and the prophets is important for contemporaries as well. Graham says, "As the people came to a desert place to hear John the Baptist proclaim, 'Thus saith the Lord,' so modern man in his confusions, frustrations, and bewilderments will come to hear the minister who preaches with authority."[54] What Graham was calling for was a return to Bible-centered preaching, that is, "*a Gospel presentation that says without apology and without ambiguity, 'Thus saith the Lord*'" (my emphasis). Why? Because "The world longs for authority, finality, and conclusiveness. It is weary of theological floundering and uncertainty."[55] Note the contrast between my interviewees: evangelism did not seek to be *authoritative* but *friendly*, not *final* and *conclusive* but *open*. For Graham, such definiteness in evangelism is the only type of evangelism that will work, for it is through the proclamation of God's word that the Spirit breathes life most forcefully into the cold, dead lungs of the unregenerate. Evangelism is quite simply the proclamation of the Word of God, the Bible. This Word is central to evangelism. Granted, Graham's article is directed to preachers and theologians, his conclusions nonetheless affirm the centrality of authoritative, explicit, and biblically-rooted declaration that he believes is needed for evangelism to happen, whether from the pulpit or office. Contra St. Francis of Assisi, Graham urges Christians to preach the gospel with words, specific and authoritative words.[56]

---

[53] Billy Graham, "Biblical Authority in Evangelism," *Christianity Today* (15 October 1956): 5.

[54] Ibid., 6.

[55] Ibid., 6-7.

[56] Notwithstanding Graham's call for biblical, specific and verbal evangelism, there has been an effort to broaden evangelism during the latter half of the twentieth century. As touched upon in chapter three, conservative Protestantism in America reacted strongly against the modernists and their Social Gospel. In their reaction, conservative Protestants tended to neglect social responsibilities. The evangelical renaissance of the mid-twentieth century sought to remedy such neglect by emphasizing the importance of tending to one's physical needs. This renewed interest in social justice sparked questions concerning the relationship between social action and evangelism. One important proposal on the matter came from John Stott in 1975. Stott believes evangelism and social action to be "partners." He says, "As partners the two belong to each other and yet are independent of each other. Each stands on its own feet in its own right alongside each other. Neither is a means to the other, or even a manifestation of the other. For each is an end in itself. Both are expressions of unfeigned love." John Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1975), 27. For a helpful discussion of how this social action and evangelism relationship played out, especially among British evangelicals, see Guest, *Evangelical Identity and Contemporary Culture*, 37-41.

Whereas Graham's article dealt with the *how* of evangelism, Addison H. Leitch addresses the content, or *what* of the gospel that is being declared in an article entitled, "The Primary Task of the Church." For Leitch, the primary task of the Church is quite simple: proclaim and live the gospel. Leitch, as if trying to shake any fundamentalist leftovers, says, "At the time of my theological training there was much talk about the personal gospel as against the social gospel. Now we know what we should have immediately recognized then, that there is only one Gospel, but that it includes both."[57] This is because one's "commitment to Christ immediately and by necessity has social implications. The salvation of the man is the salvation of the whole man, and the whole man is a man engaged in business or trade; he is an employer or an employee; he is an economic man, a political man."[58] The gospel, then, has implications for all of life; those that have been saved "cannot escape the necessity of working redemptively upon society."[59]

If the gospel binds the Christian to cultural engagement, the next question that must be asked is what sins beset contemporary society. For Leitch, writing during the 1950s and McCarthyism, maintaining a capitalist economy was high on the agenda: "Although it is not within the province of the Church to determine what may constitute 'just wages,' it should expect them to be paid."[60] In sum, Leitch maintains that a transformed culture has flowed forth from "essential Christianity," or gospel-driven Christianity.[61] And closing with the enthusiasm that marked the neo-evangelicals of the mid-twentieth century, Leitch concludes, together Christians "form the communities which make constant redemptive impact on the world around them. Thus the things of heaven are brought to bear upon the things of earth and the day is hastened when 'every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess' Christ's Lordship."[62]

An interesting thing is happening in these articles. Graham is *narrowing* the task of evangelism by calling it simply the clear proclamation of God's word. Leitch,

---

[57] Leitch, "The Primary Task of the Church," 13.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid., 18.
[62] Ibid.

on the other hand, is *broadening* the content of that message and he does so by conceptualizing the problems of society as "sin." After all, if the gospel of Jesus fixes sin then that gospel reaches as far as sin's reach (or, "as far as the curse is found," as the hymn says). To reiterate, the transmission of the gospel is *focused* under Graham and the content of the gospel is *extended* under Leitch. The interviewees reveal the inverse. Gospel proclamation, or evangelism, was broadened to include anything from a kind gesture to listening to a co-worker and the content of the gospel was conceptualized in narrow terms, thus accounting for the fairly narrow evangelical social agenda of simply "saving souls." By looking at these *Christianity Today* articles from over fifty years ago, I am not suggesting that this represents massive change within evangelicalism. That an article was written in order to focus evangelism and broaden the content of the gospel suggests that Christians during the 1950s were operating with similar views as those expressed by the interviewees. What this comparison does indicate is that the evangelical renaissance of the mid-twentieth century has probably not had the impact that it had hoped to make. In the next chapter, I will conclude by exploring further the implications of this study.

7

THE SUNDAY/MONDAY RELATIONSHIP

Robert Wuthnow's *God and Mammon in America* investigates the relationship between religion and the economy. Wuthnow's book fills a void in the important and neglected (at least recently) relationship between faith and work. Wuthnow believes that religion still plays an influential role in shaping one's work, yet that role remains "mixed."[1] While religion informs the way religious people work, it does so, Wuthnow states, "in ways that are seldom as powerful as religious leaders would like and that do little to challenge the status quo."[2] Often times, Wuthnow argues, religion plays primarily a therapeutic role. In other words, religion's reach extends only so far as the religious individual is affirmed and feels better toward their working lives. As it is practiced by those in the workforce, religion does not suggest the worker transform their workplaces or challenge broader economic systems and structures. Rather, religion remains present but in decidedly unobtrusive ways. Religion whispers, affirming and encouraging the worker, and usually does not blow the whistle on corporate failures or incite radical changes to the workplace.

This study, which comes more than a decade after Wuthnow's and focuses on evangelicals, has come to the same conclusion. Yes, evangelical faith impacts thinking about the workplace yet it does so in fairly quiet ways. For evangelicals, being faithful at work means, most importantly, witnessing or evangelizing. Yet it is a type of evangelism that is not what the evangelical evangelist, Billy Graham, would

---

[1] Wuthnow, *God and Mammon in America*, 5.
[2] Ibid.

have in mind. It rather refers to behavior that is accepted in most workplaces: hard work and kindness toward co-workers. The caution found in the way the interviewees think about evangelism existed in order to improve (not alienate) the relationship evangelical workers have with their co-workers.

Whereas Wuthnow has investigated a larger and more general group of religious people, this study has focused upon evangelicals. And whereas Wuthnow's study emphasizes *what* is happening between religion and the workplace, this study has sought to go a step further by explaining both *why* evangelicals think the way they do about work and *how* evangelical doctrine might affect such thinking. Or, to pose it as a question: What are the internal mechanisms at play that shape evangelical thinking about work? The answer to this question has implications extending beyond the workplace. Indeed, this study has sought to better understand broader questions connected to evangelicalism's relationship with contemporary American culture. This question concerning what is happening internally among evangelicals directed the study to look more carefully at the evangelical worldview, more precisely, the evangelical gospel. What I have found is a tension within the gospel and other, connected doctrines.

The gospel that evangelicals hold so dear appears to be a culturally-divergent message. It speaks of sin, faith in Christ alone, and an impending judgment for those that do not believe in Jesus. Sin diverges from contemporary anthropologies; faith in Jesus alone and condemnation diverges from contemporary soteriologies. Moreover, the gospel, when embraced, makes one an alien in the world; a child of God, no longer of this world, but remaining in it. Both the message of the gospel and the identity resulting from an embrace of the gospel seem to diverge from contemporary American culture.

At the same time, however, two foundational and inextricable features of this gospel, namely, sin and redemption, are conceptualized in ways revealing cultural nearness or congruence. There has been, then, a degree of accommodation in the way these two central doctrines are understood. While sin and redemption have been affected by contemporary culture, it does not mean that evangelicalism is on

track to fail, at least from a sociological perspective. There is actually a measure of strength or sustainability that emerges from the evangelical view of sin and redemption as represented by the interviewees. Here, then, is the tension: The gospel that in many ways seems aloof from cultural sensibilities also shares a degree of congruence with cultural sensibilities when one looks at two features of that gospel, sin and redemption. Given how central the gospel is to the evangelical worldview (especially evangelical identity and practice), evangelicals are profoundly affected by this tension when relating to contemporary culture. The evangelical worldview, more specifically, the gospel, is conceptualized with significant appropriation of contemporary sensibilities and assumptions by the interviewees. Such appropriations are not wholly foreign to the evangelical tradition but instead accent certain features indigenous to evangelicalism. By putting a more sophisticated and polished salvation story of the biblical narrative (chapter four) in conversation with the gospel and other doctrines as understood and deployed by the interviewees (chapters five and six), a disconnect between evangelical elites and ordinary evangelicals has emerged. The gospel as communicated by theologians, pastors, and other religious professionals was more systematic, oppositional to culture, and integrated. By contrast, the interviewees embraced a less systematic, more fragmented gospel that was in more ways attuned to contemporary sensibilities. More specifically, it was the interrelated doctrines of sin and redemption that seemed most affected. In what follows, I will seek to further explain what is occurring to these two doctrines.

Sorting the Complexity

The importance of the gospel to the evangelical worldview reminds one of how important it is to understand the evolution of that gospel. The gospel (as conceived by the interviewees) represents both resistance and accommodation to culture, producing a complicated picture of how evangelicals relate to the world around them. Before delving deeper into some of the issues and themes raised in the

analysis of chapters five and six, I will briefly recapitulate the arguments of the previous chapters. The evidence of chapters five and six support the complexity of evangelicalism's relationship with its cultural context that was theorized in chapters one and two. Those first two chapters argued that the relationship between evangelicalism and contemporary culture is not the mechanistic one often proffered by secularization proponents, rather the relationship is a complex, even organic, one. Religion (in our case, evangelicalism), it was argued, should be viewed more like a tree sprouting in an environment that might seem challenging to its growth. Although the health and growth of the tree may seem suspect, the tree finds a way to grow. The complexity that was argued for in chapters one and two was further explored in chapter three's historical survey. After developing a theoretical framework for thinking about evangelicals, contemporary culture, and the relationship between the two, chapters five and six delved into the empirical material. Chapter five looked at both the process and purpose that shape evangelical job selection. It found that most of those interviewed operate from what I call the dynamic model of decision-making. Chapter five also argued that most of the interviewees use self-fulfillment as the overarching goal for career choice. This represented a departure from the evangelical literature which stressed not self-fulfillment but service. Chapter five concluded by suggesting that a weakened view of sin is what makes plausible the dynamic model of decision-making and an emphasis upon self-fulfillment as *the* criteria for career choice. Finally, chapter six argued that evangelism was central to evangelical action at work. Moreover, chapter six suggested that the way evangelicals engage the workplace is actually a corollary of their understanding of the gospel. For a strong majority of the evangelicals interviewed, Jesus' redemptive work is conceived of in limited ways, primarily as it relates to individual salvation, and Jesus' redemptive work, of course, is connected to sin. So chapter six, like chapter five, grappled with how evangelicals conceptualize sin. The purpose of this section is to continue the analysis of chapters five and six. Doing this will develop an important aspect of my central thesis, namely, that sin and redemption are undergoing significant change. Accordingly, the

analysis will focus on these two evangelical doctrines which are important for understanding the evangelical posture in the world. Understanding the shape of these doctrines will illuminate further evangelicalism's relationship with culture.

Locating Sin

There were two perplexing and seemingly contradictory statements made in the empirical chapters. In chapter five it was said that many of those interviewed are making decisions in a way that is more informed by *creation* than the *Fall*. In other words, the interviewees in chapter five seemed to discount or suppress their own sin (i.e. the Fall) in the decision-making process. Instead, the majority of interviewees conceptualize their relationship with God as largely unfettered by sin. These interviewees enjoyed a connectedness to God more akin to the connectedness Adam and Eve experienced at creation before the Fall. By contrast, chapter six said that it was the *Fall*, not *creation*, that animates evangelical action in the workplace. Put differently, the reality of sin (i.e. the Fall) fueled evangelical activity at work. Earlier Protestants, such as the Reformers, would have been armed for action because of their view toward creation. God, these Protestants of old would have affirmed, *created* a world that included work as the means by which creation is sustained and cared for. As a result, work was a way of serving creation, including one's neighbor.[3]

To restate, chapter five argued that it was creation, not the Fall, informing evangelical decision-making. Chapter six said the opposite: it was the Fall, not creation, that mobilizes evangelicals at work. *What is one to make of this conundrum?* One way of sorting out the apparent inconsistency is to look at what is happening to sin. Sin, it appears, has migrated. In chapter five, it was argued that *personal* sin did not have a very firm grip on the interviewees. This conclusion was based on two phenomena. First, the popularity of the dynamic model of decision-

---

[3] It is also true that the Reformers would have seen work as an important means of sanctification. Such a view implies the Fall because the individual is being sanctified from sin.

making emboldened the individual's connectedness to God, making communication quick and unmediated. What prevented Christians of the past, such as the Puritans, from enjoying this sort of guidance was sin. It was sin that clouded the individual's perceptive powers, making it difficult to receive God's guidance. Picking up the slack under the Puritan model were a host of outside authorities or resources including family, clergy, and the church. It was argued that the departure from this older decision-making paradigm was rooted in a diminished view of sin.

The second phenomenon in chapter five was the stress upon self-fulfillment (as opposed to service) in the interviews. Such an emphasis suggested a departure from previous Protestant conceptions of work which stressed work as the providential means by which creation is sustained, humanity served, and Christians sanctified. Instead, my interviewees sought fulfillment as the overarching goal of work and in the process suggest a waning sense of *personal* sin. After all, the evangelical did not view desires and dreams as something to be crushed, but as something to be fed. This view is built upon assumptions more consistent with contemporary anthropology rather than a classically evangelical understanding of the individual ensnared in sin. Chapter five, then, made the case that personal sin was on the decline among the interviewees. As pointed out in chapter one, this morphed view of sin may be more than twenty-five years old.[4]

But this does not mean that sin is dead. On the contrary, sin is still alive and well but it exists primarily *outside* the Christian. This was implied in chapter six. While existing outside the evangelical, sin did not exist in every reach of the world. Instead, sin, as the interviews suggest, was located primarily *in the hearts of non-Christians*. It was this reality that spurred the stress on evangelism that was widespread among the interviewees. Sin plagues the non-Christian which is why the non-Christian stands deserving of God's judgment, therefore the non-Christian must be evangelized. Put simply, evangelism stands upon the assumption that sin exists in the hearts of non-Christians. For most of the interviewees, there was no sense in which sin existed in the systems and structures of the workplace.

---

[4] Hunter, *American Evangelicalism*, 87.

A return to chapter two will aid in understanding these issues sociologically. Chapter two suggested that the sacred was being re-located. This re-location of the sacred, as Peter Berger suggests, is due to the increase of institutions which has the effect of chipping away at the trustworthiness of any one institution. If the individual finds little help from institutions, that individual is tempted to turn inward, argues Berger.[5] Similarly, Robert Wuthnow maintains that present social conditions, which have cast a shadow of doubt upon major institutions, tend to shift authority to the self, infusing the individual with an almost divine status.[6] Alluding again to chapter two, with this view of the self, it becomes important to affirm and expand rather than crush and kill the self. This goes some way to explaining the stress on self-fulfillment among the interviewees.

These contemporary views of the self help to explain why the word "sin" seems out of touch and antiquated in contemporary culture. Sin debilitates the self. Sin is not a doctrine that affirms and expands the self but instead undermines the self. For individuals seeking reprieve from external, institutional deficiencies, sin is the great enemy because it undercuts one of the few places individuals can go: within themselves. For these reasons, sin is not a term that has a linguistic home in the American context. Yet it still exists in evangelical parlance and evangelicals are still mobilized for action (namely, evangelism) because of their belief in it. At the same time, however, the concept of sin has morphed in ways that tame it. In this way, the doctrine of sin has evolved in ways that make it more conducive to contemporary sensibilities. And sin's reach (as chapter six argued) is not very far for many of the interviewees, struggling to extend beyond the hearts of non-Christians. Why? Perhaps it is the tendency of contemporary culture to segment and break-up how individuals experience life. Possibly, it is due to evangelicalism's tendency to preach a privatized gospel that focuses on the individual (as discussed in chapter three). This preaching, while providing strength to evangelicalism throughout its history and being conducive to contemporary interests regarding the self, tends to

---

[5] Berger, *The Heretical Imperative*, 21.
[6] Wuthnow, *After Heaven*, 147, 149.

conceive of sin in purely individualistic ways. Connected to this last point, it may be due to the more general privatization of religion that is happening in culture at large. Or, an individualistic way of conceiving of sin could be related to the perennial suspicions that many evangelicals have of left-leaning politics. Left-leaning politics typically emphasize structural problems over against individual problems.

Whatever the reason, the interviews suggest that the doctrine of sin has persisted in the evangelical consciousness yet it has been altered in ways that make it more sustainable in contemporary American life. Recognizing that evangelicals embrace sin is important, but seeing *where* sin has migrated provides nuance. Sin's migration has enabled it to find a better home in the contemporary context. The migration of sin supports the central argument that the relationship between evangelicalism and culture is a complex one. It also underscores the adaptability of evangelicalism in its social context. Far from depicting a mechanistic cause and effect relationship between evangelicalism and its surrounding culture, sin's journey suggests an organic relationship.

At this point I want to take a brief excursus and discuss an implication of sin's migration. Chapter six began by highlighting some of the non-evangelical distaste for evangelicals. Evangelicals, the interviews suggest, are keenly aware of the unease they sometimes create. This non-evangelical distaste for evangelicals might be explained in part by the migration of sin. With this theological framework, evangelicals readily recognize the sins of non-evangelicals, yet lack the conceptual tools to recognize their own sin. These are indeed the ingredients for a potential public relations disaster. This migration of sin may go some way to explaining the public relations problem that Smith observed in *American Evangelicalism*.[7]

The Migration of Sin and the Scope of Redemption

Sin and redemption are connected to one another. Sin is the problem; redemption is the solution. Far-reaching sin means redemption is far-reaching in its scope. A more

---

[7] Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 181, 186.

narrow view of sin (as seen in the interviewees) means a more narrow view of redemption. In this way, the directions sin has migrated can illuminate other aspects of chapter six. For the interviewees, sin was located most heavily in non-Christians. By minimizing sin's grip on the evangelical, the interviewees were allowed to be carried along by the subjective turn taking place in culture at large.[8] I suggested in chapter five that evangelical decision-making was suggestive of this subjective turn. It seems likely that chapter six's findings are indicative of the same turn. If there is this turn inward that marks contemporary spirituality then it would only make sense that evangelicals would conceptualize the gospel in subjective ways. In other words, given this subjective turn, *it is no surprise that the Christian gospel tends to be conceptualized with reference primarily to the self*. This was the case for most of the interviewees: the gospel's work of renewal did not extend beyond the individual.

If this individualized view of the gospel is shaped by culture (which in part it is; there are other antecedents within evangelicalism as well which chapter three pointed out), one may wonder if evangelicalism is weakened by this view of the gospel. In other words, does such a view of the gospel spell failure for evangelicalism? It may be just the opposite. Evangelicalism might actually find a degree of sustainability from this more privatized view of the gospel. After all, evangelicals are not burdened with the overwhelming and dangerous task of transforming largely unshakable modes and systems that shape contemporary work. There is a degree of insulation from society that accompanies this privatized view of the gospel. With such a view, evangelicals maintain a *safe* posture toward the culture because they are not responsible for investigating, diagnosing, and transforming the way their workplaces operate.

This is not to say that evangelicalism has no sense of resistance to culture. Resistance and distance from culture do remain among evangelicals. Evangelicals are still heralding a gospel message that is not aligned with contemporary spiritual

---

[8] Incidentally, this also means that evangelical thoughts about work gravitated to others rather than themselves. Had sin played a more formidable role for evangelicals themselves, one would have expected more talk about work as the means for sanctifying a sinner still entangled in sin, a view embraced by older Protestants.

mores, thereby providing evangelicals a sense of embattlement. Yet the *way* that gospel is heralded is congruent with the present spiritual climate. Often times, it was simply working hard and being nice. This is a sustainable tension. On the one hand, the gospel itself provides a sense of embattlement. On the other, the gospel's implications are not teased out in full because (in part) of the cultural blinders that narrow evangelical vision. By not teasing out these implications evangelicals are able to navigate the workplace in ways akin to their co-workers. Moreover, the way the interviewees communicated the gospel was congruent with contemporary spiritual sensibilities. Tracking sin (as conceptualized by the interviewees) is helpful for understanding the main thesis of this project. It is not that contemporary society is unilaterally destroying evangelicalism. Rather, the relationship between evangelicalism and contemporary society is more complex. American evangelicalism seems to feed off of cultural assumptions, thereby gaining momentum from the collective messages culture communicates. Evangelicalism also resists cultural assumptions, thereby providing a healthy sense of embattlement. This feeding and resisting occur all at the same time.

Toting the Gospel to Work

Chapter six observed that the evangelicals interviewed were cautious in their evangelistic strategy. This finding is strikingly similar to what Christian Smith found in his book *Christian America?*. Smith's study looks at the attitudes of American evangelicals toward public life, specifically their social and political views. Smith dispels the myth that ordinary American evangelicals are poised and ready for an American takeover. The study draws upon a range of data culled over a three year period, including in-depth interviews and telephone surveys.[9] Smith's analysis of this broad empirical data yields insights into American evangelicals that are largely consistent with my findings.

---

[9] Smith, *Christian America?*, 2-3.

Smith found that it is through evangelism that American evangelicals seek to transform America.[10] In other words, communicating a message of redemption is central to the strategy of American evangelicals to transform the country. Yet it is an evangelism that seeks to maintain free choice. In fact, Smith says that his sampling "nearly unanimously repudiated trying to force their beliefs and values on non-Christians."[11] Instead, evangelicals employ an approach that Smith calls "strategic relationalism," that is, the attempt "to build personal relationships with people, impress them with lives that are good examples, and share with them their own beliefs and concerns."[12] Strategic relationalism drove the American evangelical approach to politics, education, and family. One of Smith's interviewees, Karen, provides explanation as to why strategic relationalism is the preferred strategy among American evangelicals. Her thoughts on the matter are strikingly consistent with the evangelicals interviewed for this project. Karen has publicly protested abortion outside of an abortion clinic, yet she was unsure of all the "name-calling" and the "back-and-forth yelling thing" that often accompanies public protest. Instead, she believes that personal evangelism is the far superior approach. She says, "If you can reach one and then they can reach one, you know that's far better than this group stuff where you're so militant and radical. I don't like that kind of thing."[13] So what is the shape of Karen's evangelistic approach? She explains:

> I always want the light of Jesus to shine out of me so that people are attracted to Christ in me. I don't believe in what you call "hard-sell" Christianity. I like to befriend people first and show them kindness and love. I don't believe in preaching at people. I invite them to Christian things, and if the conversation can be such that I can talk to them about Jesus, I do that. I never hit anyone over the head with the Bible—that turns them off quickly.[14]

---

[10] Ibid., 118.
[11] Ibid., 42.
[12] Ibid., 45.
[13] Ibid., 49.
[14] Ibid., 50.

Karen's approach, which is representative of Smith's overall findings, is akin to the approach found among my interviewees. Smith's account of the civility and tolerance marking evangelical engagement in the public sphere is helpful in understanding the dynamics at play within American evangelicalism and, by extension, the same dynamics at play among my interviewees.[15] Smith provides four reasons to account for the civility and tolerance characterizing American evangelical engagement in society. First, Smith believes that the American evangelical embrace of tolerance is due in part to the infiltration of tolerance and civility that is found within American culture at large.[16] This embrace of American sensibilities is not new. As Smith notes—and as touched upon in chapter three of this study—evangelicals have embraced aspects of the Enlightenment for more than two-hundred years. Viewing evangelical civility as a concession to broader American sensibilities is what James Davison Hunter has argued as well.[17]

But to view this civil mood on the part of American evangelicals as nothing more than a concession to modernity is too short-sided, Smith believes. Smith argues that there are other factors at play. For example, the impression that evangelicals are zealously out to win America for Christ and overthrow America's increasingly pagan culture might be less about action and more about identity building. This is Smith's second point. By drawing upon Deborah Tannen, Smith explains, "What many outsiders mistake for evangelical 'report talk' (talk about real intentions, expectations, and actions) is mostly 'rapport talk' (talk about establishing relational connections and meaningful identities)."[18] In practice, however, evangelicals remain civil.

---

[15] Smith found similar civility and tolerance among the "steadfast teen voices of religious particularism." While holding what many would view as intolerant beliefs about religion, Smith recognizes that these teens did "not necessarily" practice "behavioral intolerance, as most of these teens still appear to take civil, accommodating approaches to their interpersonal relationships." Smith, *Soul Searching*, 145-46. Similarly, emerging adults holding exclusive religious claims were "generally not obnoxious or pompous about" such beliefs, says Smith. Smith, *Souls in Transition*, 148.

[16] Smith, *Christian America?*, 56.

[17] This was addressed in the previous chapter. See Hunter, *Evangelicalism*, 34-35, 212.

[18] Smith, *Christian America?*, 56.

Third, Smith roots evangelicals' relative civility and tolerance in the "anti-establishment, decentralized, voluntaristic, fragmented, and individualistic culture" that has long characterized American evangelicalism. These features that have shaped American evangelicalism do not provide the resources or know-how to develop and sustain "centralized, unified, or cooperative action." As a result, "A unified, widespread conservative Christian campaign to 'reclaim the nation for Christ,' therefore, is simply not in evangelicalism's organizational 'cards' or its cultural 'DNA.'"[19] A fourth reason for the civility and tolerance that Smith found is rooted in the Christian tradition.[20] Smith makes his case by citing a host of passages from the Gospels, Paul's letters, and the non-Pauline letters and Revelation. In line with this, a pastor at one of the churches I studied preached a sermon entitled, "Why Obeying the Speed Limit is An Act of Worship," which spoke of the Christian obligation to obey governing authorities.

For Smith, then, the relatively civil and tolerant approach to the public sphere by evangelicals is not simply the result of an "ethic of civility" encroaching upon traditional Christian doctrine. On the contrary, it is the result of forces both within (i.e., evangelicalism's historical alignment with Enlightenment tolerance, its decentralized bent, and the Christian tradition) and without (i.e., ethic of civility that pervades American culture) evangelicalism. Smith's account, then, is more complex than Hunter's which views evangelicalism as simply acquiescing to the civility that modernity engenders. A similar interplay was noted among my interviewees. Often, this more civil approach to evangelism was justified in markedly evangelical ways. For example, repeatedly the evangelical aversion to using words when evangelizing was anchored in St. Francis Assisi's famous phrase, preach the gospel always, and when necessary use words. The importance of being relational (read: not obnoxious or alienating) found a developed theological basis in the doctrine of the Trinity. As God is relational, individuals, God's image-bearers, are relational as well. Since the

[19] Ibid., 57. One might wonder how this explains evangelicalism's civility and tolerance in particular. A group can be "anti-establishment," "decentralized," "voluntaristic," "fragmented," and "individualistic" and remain militant and intolerant.

[20] Ibid.

gospel restores the individual's relationship with God and neighbor, the gospel's proclamation should be relational, not disruptive.

In addition to these evangelical justifications to the mode of evangelism, there perhaps is a more tacit assumption at play. Smith has found that American evangelicals do not want to infringe upon the free choice of the evangelized.[21] Since a *voluntary* (not coerced) embrace of the gospel is necessary, evangelicals may be seeking to insure that they are not infringing upon this free choice by taking a more subtle approach to evangelism.

What appears to be a clear acquiescence to culture in the cautious way in which evangelism is conducted actually finds significant justification from evangelical resources. The mode of evangelism represented among the interviewees points to a creative adaptation on the part of evangelicals: a cultural nudge (like the ethic of civility) finds ready justification in evangelical discourse on evangelism (the regularly repeated St. Francis of Assisi quote as well as a stress upon relationship). Some might wonder whether the evangelical caution in evangelism means that conversion has become secondary to civility. In the consciousness of the interviewees, it does not seem that it has, for conversion is still the final goal and their civility is conducted primarily with the hope of seeing conversion. Yet, functionally, it could be that conversion has been lowered and replaced with the goal of maintaining good rapport with co-workers.

While the cautious evangelism employed by evangelicals seems to be an *accommodation* (albeit an accommodation that finds justification in evangelicalism) to culture, there are ways in which this mode suggests *resistance* to culture. For example, the frustration regarding evangelical symbols, particularly shirts, jewelry, and other accoutrements might be understood as resistance to the consumer culture described in chapter two. As already discussed, David Lyon makes the point that

---

[21] Smith says, "In the evangelical worldview, the only valid way to regenerate that bygone Christian era—for more people to become devoted Christians and practice their beliefs and morals in a way that will revive America—is for more people to decide personally and voluntarily to follow Christ" (28). Indeed, this position is consistent with one of eight rules of engagement that Smith drew out of his extensive empirical data looking at evangelicals. That is, "*Christians should never force Christian beliefs on others*" (42). See Smith, *Christian America?*.

consumer culture might spur individuals to search for more depth. This search could perhaps lead them to religion.[22] It might be that the evangelical pause in using products is rooted in a desire to resist what they believe is the shallowness of consumption, especially the seemingly frivolous products spewing out of the American evangelical subculture.

It was noted that this approach to evangelism may be indicative of the erosion of certain evangelical beliefs, like a belief in sin and hell. While this might be true, it may also be the case that other features of the faith find ready embrace and further articulation under current cultural conditions. For example, brokenness was important in evangelism for some of the interviewees. Brokenness, it was said, underscores Jesus' righteousness and not the evangelizer's. Yet it also is a way to avoid self-righteousness and charges of hypocrisy. To evangelize via one's brokenness finds both theological support and cultural congruence. A second theological theme finding articulation among the interviewees is the theological importance of relationships and community. As highlighted in chapter six, community is something individuals seem to yearn for. Accordingly, the Christian theology of community was spotted in the interviews.

Among the interviewees, the message of redemption was communicated in fairly innocuous ways. It was almost always conducted with caution. If the cautious turn in evangelism gains a nudge from cultural factors, but also finds ample support from within evangelicalism, then one can see that this caution among evangelicals is an important adaptive tool. There is cognitive bargaining taking place. Evangelicals correctly perceive the offensiveness of evangelism and alter evangelism in a way that makes it more sustainable. While cultural factors might nudge evangelism in this direction, this approach to evangelism is a strategic rally point for evangelicals because nearly all of one's interactions with co-workers become "evangelism," an eternal and cosmic endeavor. This approach has the momentum to infuse all of one's actions, particularly those in what is often considered a monotonous workplace, with spiritual significance. The entry of a culture of civility into evangelicalism does

---

[22] Lyon, *Jesus in Disneyland*, 40.

not mean the demise of evangelicalism. Rather, evangelicalism has embraced this civility—a phenomenon that also finds support within evangelicalism—and in doing so has found a way to conceptualize workplace life in deeply spiritual ways. This is indicative of the complex and surprising nature of evangelicalism's relationship with the culture that was underscored in chapter one.

Relating this to the central thesis, the message of redemption, that is, the gospel, is a culturally peculiar belief, yet the way that gospel is communicated by the interviewees was strikingly attuned to contemporary sensibilities. The uniqueness of the gospel message provides identity and a sense of separation from culture, yet the mode in which evangelism is conducted maintains cultural congruence. Here one sees resistance and accommodation. Lest one think that this is pure accommodation to cultural norms, evangelicals have plenty of internal resources to justify such a turn in the way evangelism is done. Is the evangelical's purpose or vitality threatened by this accommodation? No, at least not from a sociological perspective. On the contrary, one could say that evangelicalism is strengthened because of its cautious and culturally friendly approach to evangelism. After all, with such an approach to evangelism *all* of one's interactions take on spiritual significance. The individual is not simply witnessing when a Bible is opened and Jesus being spoken of, instead a handshake, smile, and holding the door open is a religious exercise of cosmic and eternal proportions.

Before pressing forward, it is necessary to consider a question of particular importance to evangelicals: is the evangelical assumption that world transformation occurs one-person-at-a-time via evangelism correct? And even more fundamentally, is it even possible for individuals to transform the world? James Davision Hunter has called Christians to recognize that world transformation does not happen as individual hearts and minds are transformed. The dominant idea within evangelicalism that if enough individuals embrace the right ideas (which often begins with the individual's conversion) then the ingredients are in place for a new culture. This account of cultural change, Hunter states, "is almost wholly

mistaken."[23] On the contrary, cultural change happens at the center of culture (not on the periphery), slowly, and often without even being noticed. It is not something that can be willed, argues Hunter.

Putting the question of world transformation aside, what about the effectiveness of the type of evangelism that evangelicals are employing? Granted, this approach may not make a dent in the overall culture, but can it work toward the conversion of the individual co-worker? Can this subtle and cautious type of evangelism be effective? When one weighs in the observations of Hunter it seems that the answer is no. Hunter has argued that evangelicals (both the Christian Right and Christian Left) are enamored by the potential of politics to solve nearly all problems, and they mobilize their activity accordingly. Evangelicals tend to politicize issues, and this is due in part to a more general trend of politicization that has gripped much of America throughout the twentieth century. According to Hunter, both sides of the evangelical political spectrum employ an angry rhetoric that aggressively seeks domination. Because of this Hunter believes that evangelical witness in the world is a "witness of negation."[24] While the actions of individual evangelicals in the workplace might be courteous and kind, the individual evangelical may have trouble shaking off the characterization induced by evangelicalism's political strivings. This would mean that however pleasant evangelical witness by *individuals* in the workplace is, it is seen as the exception because of the more the powerful, visible and collective political witness of evangelicals (a witness magnified in large part by the media).

"Southern Cross" and the Adaptive Nature of Evangelicalism

Taken together, the way the interviewees think about and even proclaim sin and redemption reveal evangelicalism's ability to adapt. Evangelicalism, by looking at a broad historical trajectory (one reaching back to the Protestant Reformation), is

---

[23] James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (Oxford: OUP, 2010), 17.

[24] Ibid., 175.

anything but static. Instead, evangelicalism has reconfigured itself in ways that bolster its sustainability. These findings are reinforced by Smith's *Christian America?*, a study drawing upon a much broader range of data. These findings, as Christine Leigh Heyrman's *Southern Cross* suggests, also have historical precedent. Heyrman notes similar appropriations of the evangelical faith to American Southern culture during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. She recognizes that the South did not have a strong Christian presence during the eighteenth century, a surprise given that today the South is considered a bastion of evangelicalism. Heyrman observes that there were churches in the South, mostly Anglican, during the eighteenth century, yet these churches were spiritually sluggish and affiliation with them was minimal and often nominal. During the waning years of the eighteenth and into the nineteenth century evangelicals, inhabiting a world enchanted by the supernatural, were perceived as weird, a bit too weird to have any substantial impact upon the South. Evangelicalism needed to shy away from the bizarre behavior that often marked services yet, at the same time, evangelicals needed to keep people cognizant of the impending doom that awaits them. In other words, evangelicals needed to, Heyrman says, "achieve a more delicate economy of terror—enough to frighten people into evangelical churches instead of scaring them away."[25] Evangelicalism had a balance to strike. It was Francis Asbury that would make strides to reconfigure evangelicalism, making it more in tune with Southern culture.

There were other ways that evangelicalism realigned itself. Evangelicalism in the South began as racially integrated to a large degree. As time ensued, segregation became the norm. Other changes that occurred within evangelicalism include the push to have a more seasoned, mature clergy, the advocacy of family values consistent with Southern culture, more aggressive attempts to side with the men of the South, and the appropriation of Southern notions of masculinity with evangelicalism. Taken together, the rise of evangelicalism's dominance in the South

---

[25] Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 1997), 66.

came through change, exchange, and appropriation of Southern culture to the Christian faith. Heyrman captures this process pithily, saying, "Southern whites came to speak the language of Canaan as evangelicals learned to speak with a southern accent."[26] Heyrman portrays a picture of organic and responsive flex akin to what has been demonstrated in my research.

This organic and flexible adaptation seen among the interviewees has affected the way sin is conceptualized, the scope of redemption, and the evangelical approach to evangelism. Each of these three areas have demonstrated an awareness and even appropriation to cultural norms. These features are not without evangelical justification. What this means is that certain cultural prods illuminate and accentuate particular evangelical ideas and doctrines. There are other examples of the way evangelicalism has absorbed cultural trends in a way that accentuates certain evangelical beliefs. Hochschild's *The Time Bind* highlights the importance of work in contemporary American life. The evangelicals interviewed argued for a high view of work similar to the one embraced by American culture at large. The interviewees understood work as crucial to the individual's well-being and identity. They rooted this notion in theological language. This is another example of the way cultural prods illuminate certain theological points. Out of this situation arises a high view of work that is derived from scripture. Given the invasiveness of contemporary work upon the individual, it behooves evangelicals to develop a theological justification supporting its importance, and, according to many of the interviewees in chapter six, it appears they are doing just that.

It has been demonstrated, then, how certain cultural trends can illuminate and spur the development of theological points. But the impact of culture upon evangelicalism remains a mixed bag. Cultural conditions not only enliven certain doctrines and practices but cultural conditions can also undermine them. Consider, for example, the weak view of service among evangelicals. Both chapters five and six observed the absence of a strong view of work as service among many of the interviewees. This is consistent with the cultural climate. It is utterly inconsistent

---

[26] Ibid., 27.

with a large segment of the Christian past, most notable the Reformers. In this regard, cultural assumptions have blinded evangelicals to this role of work. But the impact of culture is not only negative, as has been shown. It is, rather, multifaceted and complex, contributing effects that appear to bolster and stymie American evangelicalism.[27] This chapter will close by addressing sub-themes less central to the thesis.

Sub-Themes

This Study and David Miller's God at Work

In *God at Work*, David W. Miller describes the religiously varied, international movement of workers attempting to integrate their faith with their jobs, what he terms the Faith at Work (FAW) movement. Drawing upon history, theology, and sociology, Miller focuses on the Christian strand of the movement as it plays out in America. Although diverse, the movement's most recent wave (beginning in 1985 and continuing today) shares the desire to integrate. Miller argues that such integration is manifested through the Four E's: *ethics*, *evangelism* (or expression), *experience*, and *enrichment*. Ethics can occur at three levels, the micro (or personal), the mezzo (or corporate), and the macro (or societal).[28] Evangelism refers to expressing one's faith (usually verbally) in the workplace and often with the desire of conversion. While it may seem that this goal would only pertain to some Christians and Muslims in the workplace, Miller urges one to use "expression" interchangeably with evangelism. Expression perhaps captures better the breadth that Miller has in mind for this manifestation of the FAW movement. The third E,

---

[27] Similarly, Smith's *Christian America?* found a bundle of oddities in the way American evangelicals live their public and private lives. This is because, Smith says, evangelicals "negotiate their lives with cultural tool kits containing a mix of tools that do not necessarily all work neatly together." Continuing, Smith says, "Contemporary evangelicals are heirs of diverse historical and theological legacies, the multiple strands of which provide the logics, impulses, and inclinations that often contradict each other" (189). Smith uses the example of husband and wife relations in order to explain these curious relationships. See Smith, *Christian America?*, 189-90.

[28] Miller, *God at Work*, 129.

experience, refers to the effort to understand work by employing theological and spiritual language.[29] It is an attempt to infuse a sense of meaning and purpose in work. The final E, enrichment, stresses the therapeutic benefits of religion in the workplace. Miller recognizes that these four categories tend to be "interrelated" and "overlapping."[30]

By providing these Four E's, Miller is offering a first step in categorizing and defining this loosely organized, varied, and ill-defined movement. Applied to Wuthnow's *God and Mammon in America*, it may seem that the majority of religious people in America gravitate to enrichment and experience. But what about specific religious groups? Might, Miller wonders, "theological orientation" nudge religious people to a particular E?[31] From my research, evangelicals emphasize the second E, evangelism. It is evangelism that serves as the primary and overarching goal for my interviewees at work, at least theoretically, and this is what Miller expects is the case among evangelicals.[32] Ironically, though, while evangelism is the central goal for evangelicals at work, most of the interviewees employ nearly every other E but evangelism. Yet those three other Es serve the ultimate goal, evangelism. Put differently, evangelism is the highest priority for most of the interviewees yet the interviewees habitually defer to the other Es in order to accomplish evangelism. Actually doing verbal and explicit evangelism did not seem that common among the interviewees. For example, many of the interviewees spoke of their work as being done honestly and well (i.e. ethically) as a way to share to the gospel with their non-Christian co-workers. Recall this comment from Gary, the workplace chaplain. When describing the problem of always being in the church away from non-Christians, Gary says, "we are missing out on this opportunity to really get into the lives of lost people and build relationships with them and rub up against them with our values so that they can compare their empty set of values to what the Holy Spirit puts in our lives." For Gary it is the Christian ethical system that potentially has an

---

[29] Ibid., 135.
[30] Ibid., 76.
[31] Ibid., 151.
[32] Ibid., 117.

evangelizing effect. Or, to return to Miller's categorization, it is the first E, ethics, that is employed in order to accomplish the second E, evangelism.

The Professional/Practitioner Divide

One of the important threads weaving its way through this project has been the discrepancy between what evangelical theologians and leaders believe and are prescribing and what ordinary evangelicals believe and how they are practicing their faith. Christian Smith calls it the 'Representative Elite Fallacy.' This error, Smith writes, "presume[s] that evangelical leaders speak as representatives of ordinary evangelicals."[33] This is simply not the case says Smith. Why do observers of evangelicalism assume that what evangelical leaders say is what evangelicals believe? The answer is fairly simple: obtaining the thoughts of evangelical leaders is both methodologically and analytically easier to do.[34] Put simply, it is easier to track down and interpret the published and public works of evangelical leaders as opposed to capturing the thoughts of ordinary evangelicals. This study has affirmed that it is indeed *incorrect* to assume that one can understand ordinary evangelicals by looking to their leaders. Already, this was pointed out in the difference between how the gospel was understood by the two groups. The fallacy was evident in other ways as well.

First, there existed a discrepancy between what evangelical theologians were saying about contemporary views of work and what the interviewees were saying. The evangelical theologians writing about work (covered in chapter two) were regularly critical of modern economic views, specifically Marxism and Adam Smith's capitalism. A version of Marxism or Smith's capitalism can be found throughout the world's economy. In America, Smith has prevailed. One of the evangelical theologians, M. Douglas Meeks, observes that Smith's views have mutated into the

---

[33] Smith, *Christian America?*, 7.

[34] Ibid., 9. There are other reasons such as: leaders tend to be more articulate and are more likely to have a public voice. Leaders are often assumed to be authorities, and therefore they are believed to have a more legitimate voice. Ordinary practitioners also tend to defer to leaders and do not affirm their own voices.

"success ethic," that is, "the individualized theory of progress writ small, in the life of the individual."[35] This ethic has created an obsession with the self in American life, documented poignantly in Robert Bellah's *Habits of the Heart*. Other evangelical theologians, Lee Hardy and Miroslav Volf, are likewise concerned about the individualism that America's economy reinforces. Interestingly, both Hardy's and Volf's studies begin by citing Bellah's *Habits of the Heart* and the individualism he found in American attitudes toward work. While Meeks, Volf, and Hardy are arguing for different understandings of work, like many of the evangelicals that were considered, they agree that the individualism Bellah found is thoroughly insufficient to experience work as it should be. In other words, despite the differences in their theologies, the evangelical theologians agreed that work in America is too centered on the self. Instead, Christians must look outward, being service-minded, in the work they do. Since the service dimension of work existed so consistently among the evangelical theologians, one would expect a similarly unified echo of this same sentiment among the interviewees. It did not exist. Instead, as chapter three argued, self-fulfillment was the reigning purpose for work among the interviewees. Understanding work as service to God and neighbor was not pronounced as it was in the evangelical literature.

The second example was seen in chapter six. The close of that chapter looked at two articles from the first issue of *Christianity Today*. One article by Billy Graham argued for evangelism to be narrowed, claiming that evangelism is the specific and explicit proclamation of God's word. By contrast, the interviewees were suggesting the expansion of evangelism to include hard work and gestures of kindness, things Billy Graham perhaps would have thought were too vague to have much evangelistic impact. The second article by Addison H. Leitch maintained that the gospel be broadened beyond simply saving souls to include its social dimension. The interviewees, on the other hand, did not think of the gospel is such broad terms. While they sought to spread the gospel in broad ways, most of the interviewees appeared to believe in a gospel that was exclusively about soul saving.

---

[35] Meeks, *God the Economist*, 142.

The final example concerns how work is related to the *eschaton*. If one were to read the writings of Volf and Cosden (recall chapter two), one might think that evangelicals believe that their work will somehow persist into eternity. For example, the architect that was interviewed might see his buildings as structures that would make it into eternity, albeit in a transformed way. This was not the case. In fact, not one interviewee even hinted at this idea. Granted, the arguments of Volf and Cosden are unrepresentative. Nonetheless, this example again underscores the discrepancy that exists between evangelical professionals (theologians and pastors) and evangelical practitioners.

When "Relevancy" Becomes Irrelevant

David Wells observes that during the nineteenth century the American pastor went from being a permanent and important fixture in society to holding a less influential and more tenuous role. Coinciding with this shift was the advent of a new concept, career. A career was marked by ascent and mobility, not permanence. "These changes" regarding career, Wells argues, "echoed rather ominously through the ministry." Continuing, Wells says, "For if it is the case that careers can be had in the Church, then it is inevitable that ministers will be judged by the height to which they ascend on the ladder of achievement, and they in turn will judge the Church on the extent to which it facilitates this ascent."[36] This change in work also affected the university and eventually the seminary, making these educational institutions more practical. Also, with pastors bouncing from church to church, the importance of marketing oneself increased. These shifts affecting the pastorate multiplied the roles the pastor was expected to play, and changed the nature of those roles. Wells says, "In this new clerical order, technical and managerial competence in the church have plainly come to dominate the definition of pastoral service…The older role of the pastor as broker of truth has been eclipsed by the newer managerial functions."[37]

---

[36] Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 231.
[37] Ibid., 233.

This professionalization of the ministry has even affected the rubric of ministry degrees. Wells explains that the B.D. became the more impressive M.Div. and seminaries also added the D.Min. which gave "middle-class congregations" a pastor who was "a professional."[38] This professionalization trend even birthed a book by evangelical pastor John Piper entitled, *Brothers, We Are Not Professionals*.

Essentially, Wells believes that in an effort to be relevant the pastor has become more like a CEO than a theologian. It is the desire for relevancy that has propelled these changes. Throughout the interview phase there was a question that lingered: are pastors considered relevant in matters pertaining to the workplace? To answer that question, I asked the interviewees who they turn to in order to find help and counsel for workplace difficulties. The vast majority of interviewees spoke to friends, spouses, and co-workers. Rarely did they mention their pastor as one to whom they would turn for such issues. One interviewee, working in public relations, said that his pastor would not be of much help because of the pastor's unfamiliarity with public relations. The issues in PR, this interviewee believed, are too specialized for a pastor to navigate. While this was the only interviewee who explicitly stated his pastor's inability to grapple with workplace problems, I suspect that many of the interviewees share his concern. Perhaps this is why so few interviewees would even think about consulting their pastor when dealing with issues at work.

There was, however, a small pocket of individuals who indicated that their pastor would be one they would go to for help at work. Interestingly, all of these individuals were from the same church, the Presbyterian church. What would make this pastor particularly relevant regarding struggles at work? The reason, I suspect, for this pastor's relevance in workplace matters is twofold. First, this pastor seemed to be a gifted and persistent counselor. According to several members he spent much time meeting with his congregants. One couple that was experiencing marital problems mentioned that this pastor would sometimes make the forty minute drive to meet with them when they could not make it to their appointment. Second, this

---

[38] Ibid., 235.

Presbyterian pastor was particularly theological in his preaching.[39] More specifically, he stressed lucidly the gospel in all its scope. Having sat under his preaching for more than three months, the sermons had a way of making all activity relevant to the transforming power of the gospel. By connecting all of life to the cross, this pastor was suggesting that life was decidedly theological. Put differently, week after week this pastor extended the cross's horizontal and vertical trajectories so that the cross devoured all of life's experiences. In doing this, the pastor was demonstrating the cross's relevance to all of life. Incidentally, as the scope of the gospel broadened, the relevance of this pastor broadened as well.

Here is the irony: the professionalization of the ministry represents an effort to escape irrelevancy. This trajectory moved pastoral ministry from being more theological to being more managerial and practical. From my research, however, it seemed that the managerial and practical pastoral model seemed less relevant to church members, at least as it relates to workplace issues. Instead, the most theological of the pastors seem to garner the most relevancy. In theory, this would mean that those churches more theological and less absorbed with everyday concerns (divorced from strong theology) actually had the better system for capturing the attention of their congregants. The evidence for this was not overwhelming. But it was a detectable trend.

Addressing Questions Raised in Chapter Two

In chapter two, questions were raised about how dominant trends and features of contemporary American life might impact evangelicals in the workplace. Regarding technology, these questions were posed: What authority issues might technology engender? Could the Internet, for example, be an example of technology providing great help to the evangelical at work, networking one with evangelical friends,

---

[39] It needs to be said that one of the churches underwent a pastoral change in the midst of my interviewing. This new pastor also preached sermons that were decidedly theological. However, most of the interviews at this church had already been completed by the time the new pastor had arrived.

support, sermons and writings? As for the first question, use of modern technology, especially the Internet, may indeed erode authority, as David Lyon predicts.[40] The robust confidence in the self that evangelicals share with their non-evangelical neighbors might be connected to this erosion of authority by the Internet. The Internet, alongside a host of other cultural forms, could be a key player in the subjective turn. This turn garners momentum from the decay of authorities external to the self. No interviewee expressed awareness of this possibility, but the possibility is indeed there as all the interviewees indicated use of the Internet and other communication technologies.

As for the second question, there was indication that evangelicals are benefiting from downloadable sermons and other resources accessed online. Two interviewees mentioned the help that Christian radio programs and sermons accessed online had been for them at work. One interviewee provided me with a downloaded sermon burned onto a CD as a parting gift. This trend, though, was not strong.

The interviewees as a whole expressed ambivalence toward technology. An evangelical educator thinks that "the Internet is…a tool for good or a tool for evil." When asked whether newer technologies had helped or hurt the way an architect's work is done, an evangelical architect had this to say: "it's [technology] a good news/bad news thing. The good news is that there's going to be change. The bad news is that there's going to be change." Other interviewees were more negative toward technology. One evangelical says, "we are too 'wired' into everything." Several lamented the way technology makes work inescapable. One evangelical salesperson says,

> I like to play golf and it [technology's invasiveness] is very frustrating. I want to cut off all the calls when I get away. I don't think companies have done a fair job with the Blackberries. Our mission statement says family is very important but basically it has evolved into a work around the clock culture [because of technology].

---

[40] Lyon, *Jesus in Disneyland*, 67.

The second chapter also posed questions related to a second feature of contemporary life, consumption. If Jeremy Carrette and Richard King are correct, could it be that evangelicalism is being re-appropriated by the marketplace?[41] It was noted in chapter six that the American evangelical subculture and many evangelical churches have adopted marketplace habits and practices. However, unlike Carrette and King suggest, this seems to be a process initiated by evangelicals themselves rather than the marketplace. Chapter six suggested that this trend of shaping evangelicalism like the marketplace is indicative of evangelicalism's inability to diagnose sin in structures and systems. In other words, American evangelicals typically view the marketplace and its constellation of assumptions about life as neutral.[42]

This, however, was not true for one of the interviewees. An evangelical commercial lender was angry at a former company which, in his words, was typical of "die-hard corporate America." He explains that the practices of this workplace severely damaged the relationships of the co-workers: "everyone hated each other there. It was such a competitive atmosphere from the very top all the way down to the bottom, to the tellers. People would stab each other in the back all the time just to move up the ladder a little. It was sucking the life out of me." This evangelical volunteered to leave in the midst of a job cut because he could not handle the practices taking place. One story that got him particularly riled concerned the layoff of his elderly secretary: "they laid my secretary off and she was eighty-five years old and had worked there for fifty years. When you are laid off, you are escorted out by security, like cops. You are not allowed to speak to anyone. They did all this to this eighty-five year old lady. It is so disconnected from humanity." All of these practices, this evangelical relays, were justified to keep the "shareholders and stockholders" happy.

---

[41] See Carrette and King, *Selling Spirituality*.

[42] Which is perhaps why many evangelicals have little problem reproducing its structures in their church life. See Sargeant, *Seeker Churches*.

While this view toward the marketplace was rare among the interviewees, many of the interviewees remained reluctant about engaging consumption with wild abandon. They combated a consumer culture with a private and personal strategy. Regularly, the interviewees expressed the need to live within one's means, exhibiting moderation and patience through their purchasing practices (i.e. not accruing debt). For example, an evangelical coach regularly asks, "do we really need that?" For this evangelical and his wife, asking this question has led to more simplified living that includes a modest wardrobe and no cable television. This evangelical uses his money in ways that "channel it towards the kingdom." Indeed, many of the interviewees spoke of aiding the kingdom through the ten percent tithe which was often spoken of as a minimum expectation for Christians. This is consistent with Wuthnow's research that found that conservative Protestants are more likely to give than their fellow Christians (namely, Catholics and moderate and liberal Protestants).[43] A few of the interviewees expressed selectivity in what brands they purchase, even boycotting certain brands. These evangelicals did admit that this is a difficult task given the complexity of the economy. Two interviewees mentioned that they do not purchase alcohol because of their faith.

The interviewees regularly expressed the need to be stewards of their money, serving others rather than themselves with their monetary blessings. One evangelical said that she spends much of her money on being hospitable to her friends, inviting them over for meals. She even purchased a larger house to meet this goal. The evangelicals interviewed do seem to consult their faith when spending. The purchasing habits of evangelicals appear to provide some sense of separation from a consumer culture. Yet, at the same time, American evangelicalism has been targeted for its uncritical embrace of marketplace practices. This indicates another curious conflict within evangelicalism, again suggesting the complexity that marks evangelicalism posture toward the world.

---

[43] Wuthnow, *God and Mammon in America*, 228. While evangelicals may give more than other groups of Christians in America, Christians as a whole do not give much, struggling to reach their ten percent standard prescribed by the Bible. For more on this, see Christian Smith and Michael O. Emerson with Patricia Snell, *Passing the Plate: Why American Christians Don't Give Away More Money* (Oxford: OUP, 2008).

Conclusion

If two central features of the gospel have been affected by contemporary society, it does not mean doom or failure for evangelicalism. As already seen, a less severe view of personal sin could mean a less fettered relationship with God. And an understanding of redemption that focuses upon the individual could exempt evangelicals from the dangerous task of redeeming systems and structures of the workplace. For evangelicals concerned about maintaining classically evangelical doctrine, this appropriated gospel does raise concerns because it means that forms of Christianity constructed with more reference to contemporary society will not automatically perish. On the contrary, they might even thrive. While these two doctrines, sin and redemption, appear to be shaped to a large degree by the cultural milieu, the news of which they are a part, the gospel, provides a sense of distinction, even embattlement, in the world. In all, this research has suggested a complex relationship between American evangelicalism and contemporary society, or, to put it differently, the Sunday/Monday relationship.

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The following questions guided the interviews. They are divided into three broad areas: career choice, the workplace, and time spent outside of the workplace.

Career Choice

Q1 What do you do?

Q2 Tell me how you entered into this line of work?

Q3 If a high school student approached you seeking counsel on what to do with their life, what advice would you give them?

The Workplace

Q1 What does it mean to be a Christian? How does work fit into the Christian life?

Q2 What place does evangelism have at work?

Q3 What do you think is the biggest problem with work today?

Q4 Where do you find most help in dealing with workplace difficulties?

Time Outside of Workplace

Q1 What is your idea of Sabbath and do you try to keep it?

Q2 What do you like to do when you are not working?

Q3 Do you find that your work crowds in on your time outside the office? Thanks to constant information flow due to cell phones, blackberries, the web, etc., do you feel that you can't ever get away from work?

APPENDIX B: PROFILE OF INTERVIEWEES

Evangelical Leaders

1) **John Stott** (male): Important transatlantic, evangelical leader. Among his many contributions has been the desire to help Christian integrate their faith to all of life, including work.

2) **University Administrator** (male): This administrator of a Christian university expressed a desire to see the Christian faith integrated into all of life. He is a business person by training and has written a book on how Christianity should inform business ethics.

3) **Workplace Chaplain** (male): This former pastor now spends his time in the workplace as a chaplain and feels a new sense of mission in this secular venue.

4) **Business Professor** (male): Works at a Christian college, seeking to help future business people do their work Christianly. This professor has thirty years of business experience.

5) **Business Professor** (male): Works at a Christian college and also aims to help students integrate their faith into their working lives. His specialty is in the area of finance.

6) **Associate Pastor** (male): This pastor of the Baptist church is eager to implement sound teaching throughout the church; the type of robust teaching that would have the momentum to carry the congregant through the course of their workweek. We met several times.

7) **Associate Pastor** (female): This pastor of the Methodist church and I discussed my project at length. She was a critical help as I began the interviews at this church.

8) **Pastor** (male): This Presbyterian pastor stressed the gospel in his preaching. He expressed some frustration regarding the evangelical subculture of Tulsa but nonetheless considered himself evangelical.

9) **Pastor** (male): This pastor of the Charismatic, evangelical church has nearly forty years of ministry experience. He has also published several Christian books and previously taught at a prominent evangelical college.

Evangelical Congregants

10) **Karen, a music teacher** (female): This music teacher attended the Baptist church. She works in a public school setting which (she believes) creates some unique dilemmas when it comes to integrating her faith to her work.
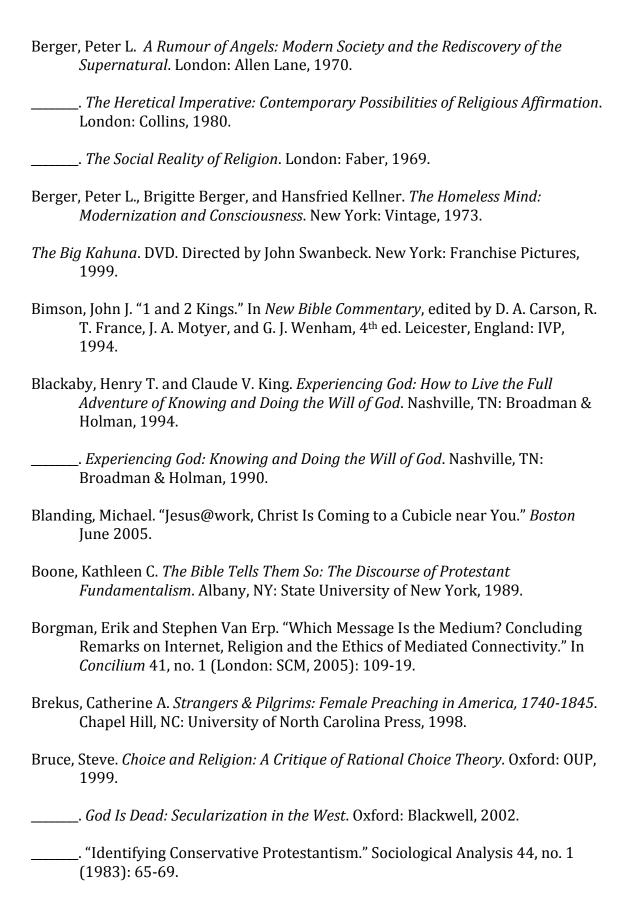
11) **Medical Technician** (female): This Methodist church member was doing what she had wanted to do since a child: working in the medical area. The bulk of her time was spent assisting doctors with surgeries.

12) **Airplane Mechanic** (male): This Baptist had been working as a mechanic for the same airline for twenty years. This worker enjoys his job in part because he can listen to sermons and Christian radio on his iPod.

13) **Dentist** (male): I met this elder in the Charismatic, evangelical church at his home. He was a founding member of the seventeen year old church.

14) **Sales Engineer** (female): This member of the Presbyterian church worked for a major heating and cooling company. She has been working for the company since graduating from college four years ago.

15) **Plant Nursery Owner** (male): This Baptist has inherited his nursery from his parents. He has been in charge of the business for more than thirty years.

16) **Plant Nursery Worker** (female): This wife of the Nursery Owner also attends the Baptist church. She focuses on the bookkeeping side of the business.

17) **Graphic Designer** (female): She attends the Methodist church and has been doing graphic design for the same company for more than twenty years. Her company does a variety of marketing for clients across the country.

18) **Elementary School Teacher** (female): This member of the Presbyterian church knew that she wanted to be a school teacher from age five. She has been teaching in the public schools for more than twenty years, and "loves" her work.

19) **Public Relations Worker** (male): This member of the Charismatic, evangelical church works for a PR firm that has clients throughout the region. He has been serving this company six of his seven years out of college.

20) **Architect** (male): This Methodist owns his company which builds commercial projects throughout the country, including sport stadiums and churches.

21) **Forester** (male): Attends the Methodist church and works for the state's electric company. He manages trees that might interfere with electrical lines.

22) **Manager for Theatrical Company** (male): This Baptist brings in a variety of performances to the Midwest. He has a keen interest to empower those working under him.

23) **Businessperson** (male): Attends the Presbyterian church and enjoys sales and marketing, two areas that his current work gives him opportunity to do.

24) **Jennifer, the College Student** (female): This Charismatic, evangelical worked in the area of counseling and attends a Christian college. When I interviewed her, she was approaching graduation.

25) **Eye Doctor/Surgeon** (male): This Baptist has had his own practice for more than thirty years. He views his work as a mission, regularly taking trips to poorer countries to provide eye care.

26) **Manager for Aerospace Company** (female): Previously a stay-at-home mom, this Presbyterian has been at her current job for over two years. She works in the IT department.

27) **Manager for Engineering Company** (female): Attends the Baptist church and maintains a number of roles in this small company, including PR and management.

28) **Musician** (male): This musician attends the Charismatic, evangelical church. He is a member of a band that tours throughout the country and to the United Kingdom. He is also involved in solo projects.

29) **Photographer** (male): Attends the Baptist church and has worked for a photography company that does school and church photography.

30) **Business Owner** (male): This Presbyterian owns a business that makes materials for the aerospace industry.

31) **Detective** (female): Attends the Charismatic, evangelical church and her interest in criminology spurred her entry into the police force. After years as a police officer, she is now a detective.

32) **High School Coach** (male): This Presbyterian coaches high school baseball. His love for playing baseball made becoming a coach a natural fit.

33) **Grocer** (male): This Baptist works at a grocery store stocking the produce section.

34) **Steve in Telecommunications** (male): This Baptist works in the rapidly evolving telecommunications industry.

35) **School Principal** (male): This Methodist is the founding principal at a private Christian school. Formerly a businessman, he is now applying his administrative skills in a school setting.

36) **Store Owner** (female): This Charismatic, evangelical owns a shop that sells her homemade clothing and other local products.

37) **Commercial Lender** (male): Attends the Presbyterian church and works at a small private bank. He spends most of his time producing loan reports and assisting companies and individuals set up loans.

38) **Golfer** (male): After playing golf in college, this Presbyterian has found success playing professionally.

39) **Sock Designer** (female): Attends the Charismatic, evangelical church and designs children's socks for different companies.

40) **Real Estate Agent** (male): This Presbyterian sells homes in northeast Oklahoma.

41) **Mattie, the Health Field Worker** (female): This Baptist has done work in the area of nursing and teaches nursing at a nearby university.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ammerman, Nancy Tatom. *Bible Believers: Fundamentalists in the Modern World*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University, 1987.

_____. "Operationalizing Evangelicalism: An Amendment." *Sociological Analysis* 43, no. 2 (Summer 1982): 170-72.

Applegate, Debby. *The Most Famous Man in America: The Biography of Henry Ward Beecher*. New York: Three Leaves, 2006.

Ashcroft, John and Michael Schluter, eds. *Jubilee Manifesto: A Framework, Agenda and Strategy for Christian Social Reform*. Leicester: IVP, 2005.

Baker, Douglas E. and Casey Shutt. "Southern Baptists and the evangelical future," *The Baptist Messenger,* 5 November 2009, 1, 6.

Bebbington, D. W. *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s*. London: Routledge, 1989.

Bebbington, David. "Not So Exceptional after All: American Evangelicals Reassessed." *Books and Culture: A Christian Review* (May/June 2007): 16-18.

Becker, Penny Edgell. *Congregations in Conflict: Cultural Models of Local Religious Life.* Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1999.

Beecher, Henry Ward. *Lectures to Young Men on Various Important Subjects*. New York: M. H. Newman & Co., 1851.

Belcher, Jim. *Deep Church: A Third Way Beyond Emerging and Traditional*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2009.

Bell, Rob. *Love Wins: A Book About Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived*. New York: HarperOne, 2011.

Bellah, Robert N., Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton. *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*. Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1985.

Berg, Bruce L. *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*. 5th ed. Boston, MA: Pearson, 2004.

Berger, Peter L. *A Rumour of Angels: Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural*. London: Allen Lane, 1970.

_____. *The Heretical Imperative: Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation*. London: Collins, 1980.

_____. *The Social Reality of Religion*. London: Faber, 1969.

Berger, Peter L., Brigitte Berger, and Hansfried Kellner. *The Homeless Mind: Modernization and Consciousness*. New York: Vintage, 1973.

The Big Kahuna. DVD. Directed by John Swanbeck. New York: Franchise Pictures, 1999.

Bimson, John J. "1 and 2 Kings." In *New Bible Commentary*, edited by D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, and G. J. Wenham, 4th ed. Leicester, England: IVP, 1994.

Blackaby, Henry T. and Claude V. King. *Experiencing God: How to Live the Full Adventure of Knowing and Doing the Will of God*. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1994.

_____. *Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing the Will of God*. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1990.

Blanding, Michael. "Jesus@work, Christ Is Coming to a Cubicle near You." *Boston* June 2005.

Boone, Kathleen C. *The Bible Tells Them So: The Discourse of Protestant Fundamentalism*. Albany, NY: State University of New York, 1989.

Borgman, Erik and Stephen Van Erp. "Which Message Is the Medium? Concluding Remarks on Internet, Religion and the Ethics of Mediated Connectivity." In *Concilium* 41, no. 1 (London: SCM, 2005): 109-19.

Brekus, Catherine A. *Strangers & Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America, 1740-1845*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998.

Bruce, Steve. *Choice and Religion: A Critique of Rational Choice Theory*. Oxford: OUP, 1999.

_____. *God Is Dead: Secularization in the West*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2002.

_____. "Identifying Conservative Protestantism." Sociological Analysis 44, no. 1 (1983): 65-69.

Bunt, Gary R. "Negotiating Islam and Muslims in Cyberspace." In *Concilium* 41, no. 1 (London: SCM, 2005): 68-77.

Calvin, John. *A Commentary on the Harmony of the Evangelists*. Vol. 2. Translated by William Pringle. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1949.

Caragounis, C. C. "Kingdom of God/Heaven." In *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, edited by Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1992.

Carrette, Jeremy R., and Richard King. *Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2005.

Casanova, José. *Public Religions in the Modern World*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.

Castillo, Ana C., ed. *Goddess of the Americas: Writings on the Virgin of Guadalupe*. New York: Riverhead Books, 1996.

Chester, Timothy. *Awakening to a World of Need: The Recovery of Evangelical Social Concern*. Leicester: IVP, 1993.

Colson, Chuck, and Nancy Pearcey. *How Now Shall We Live?* Nahsville, TN: LifeWay, 1999.

Conlin, Michelle. "Religion in the Workplace." *Business Week* 1 November 1999

Cosden, Darrell. *The Heavenly Good of Earthly Work*. Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006.

Davidson, James C. and David P. Caddell. "Religion and the Meaning of Work." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 33, no. 2 (1994): 135-47.

Davie, Grace. *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging* Oxford: Blackwell, 1994.

Davis, John Jefferson. "Will There Be *New* Work in the New Creation?" *Evangelical Review of Theology* 31, no. 3 (2007): 256-73.

Dawson, Lorne L. and Douglas E. Cowan, eds. *Religion Online: Finding Faith on the Internet*. London: Routledge, 2004.

De Zengotita, Thomas. *Mediated: How the Media Shapes Your World and the Way You Live in It*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2005.

Dever, Mark. "Nothing But the Blood." *Christianity Today* 50, no. 5 (May 2006): 28-33.

DeYoung, Kevin. *Just Do Something: A Liberating Approach to Finding God's Will.* Chicago: Moody, 2009.

Donagan, Barbara. "Godly Choice: Puritan Decision-Making in Seventeenth Century England." *The Harvard Theological Review* 76, no. 3 (July 1983): 307-34.

Dooyeweerd, Herman. *In the Twilight of Western Thought.* Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1960.

Dorsett, Lyle W. *Billy Sunday and the Redemption of Urban America* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991.

Douglas, Mary. *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology.* New York: Pantheon, 1970.

Douthat, Ross. "Lost and Saved on Television." *First Things*, no. 173 (2007): 22-26.

Dumbrell, William J. *The Faith of Israel: A Theological Survey of the Old Testament.* 2nd ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002.

Dunn, James. "Church, State, and Soul Competency." *Review and Expositor* 96 (1999): 61-73.

Edwards, David L. and John R. W. Stott. *Evangelical Essentials: A Liberal-Evangelical Dialogue.* Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1989.

Edwards, Jonathan. *The Preciousness of Time and the Importance of Redeeming It.* Goodyear, AZ: Diggory, 2007.

Eldredge, John. *Walking with God: Talk to Him. Hear from Him. Really.* Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2008.

Ellis, William T. *Billy Sunday: The Man and His Message with His Own Words Which Have Won Thousands for Christ.* Philadelphia, PA: John C. Winston Company, 1914.

Erickson, Millard J. *Christian Theology.* 2nd ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998.

ESV Study Bible. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008.

"Forget Your Bliss." *Christianity Today* 48, no. 3 (March 2004).

Friesen, Garry and J. Robin Maxson. *Decision-Making and the Will of God*. Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 1980.

Fry, Timothy, ed. *The Rule of St. Benedict*. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1982.

Gay, Craig M. *The Way of the Modern World*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1998.

Geertz, Clifford. "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture." In *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 3-30. New York: Basic Books, 1973.

Gergen, Kenneth J. *The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life*. New York: Basic Books, 1991.

Giddens, Anthony. *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991.

Gill, Robin. "Sociology Assessing Theology." In *Theology and Sociology: A Reader*, edited by Robin Gill, 2nd ed., 145-64. New York: Cassell, 1996.

González, Justo L. *A History of Christian Thought*. Vol. 1. Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1970.

"Gospel of Inclusion." 5:09. USA: CNN, 2007.

Graham, Billy. "Biblical Authority in Evangelism." *Christianity Today* (15 October 1956): 5-7+.

Graham, Elaine. "Practical Theology as Transforming Practice." In *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology*, edited by James Woodward and Stephen Pattison, 104-17. Oxford: Blackwell, 2000.

Greeley, Andrew M. *Unsecular Man: The Persistence of Religion*, 1974.

Grenz, Stanley J. *Theology for the Community of God*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000.

_____. *Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the 21st Century*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993.

Grenz, Stanley J. and John R. Franke. *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001.

Guest, Mathew. *Evangelical Identity and Contemporary Culture: A Congregational Study in Innovation*. Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007.

Guest, Mathew, Karin Tusting, and Linda Woodhead, eds. *Congregational Studies in the UK: Christianity in a Post-Christian Context*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004.

Guinness, Os. *The Gravedigger File*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1983.

Hall, David D., ed. *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1997.

_____. *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1989.

Hammond, Phillip E., and the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, eds. *The Sacred in a Secular Age: Toward Revision in the Scientific Study of Religion*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985.

Hardy, Lee. *The Fabric of This World*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990.

Harrison, Victoria S. "The Pragmatics of Defining Religion in a Multi-Cultural World." *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* 59, no. 3 (2006): 133-52.

Hart, D. G. *Deconstructing Evangelicalism: Conservative Protestantism in the Age of Billy Graham*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004.

Hatch, Nathan O. *The Democratization of American Christianity*. New Haven: Yale, 1989.

Haykin, Michael A. G. and Kenneth J. Stewart, eds. *The Advent of Evangelicalism: Exploring Historical Continuities*. Nashville, TN: B&H, 2008.

Heelas, Paul. *Spiritualities of Life: New Age Romanticism and Consumptive Capitalism*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2008.

Helland, Christopher. "Popular Religion and the World Wide Web: A Match Made in (Cyber) Heaven." In *Religion Online: Finding Faith on the Internet*, edited by Lorne L. Dawson and Douglas E. Cowan. London: Routledge, 2004.

Heyrman, Christine Leigh. *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 1997.

Hilborn, David, ed. *Movement for Change: Evangelical Perspectives on Social Transformation*. Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2004.

Hill, Andrew E., and John H. Walton. *A Survey of the Old Testament* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000.

Hillman, Os. *The 9 to 5 Window: How Faith Can Transform the Workplace*. Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2005.

Hilton, Boyd. *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1795-1865*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988.

Hochschild, Arlie Russell. "The Time Bind: When Work Becomes Home and Home Becomes Work." In *The Cultural Study of Work*, edited by Douglas Harper and Helen M. Lawson, 261-72. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003.

Hunt, Stephen. *The Alpha Enterprise: Evangelism in a Post-Christian Era*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004.

Hunter, James Davison. *American Evangelicalism: Conservative Religion and the Quandary of Modernity*. New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 1983.

———. "Conservative Protestantism." In *The Sacred in a Secular Age: Toward Revision in the Scientific Study of Religion*, edited by Philip E. Hammond, 150-66*. Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1985.

———. *Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1987.

———. "Operationalizing Evangelicalism: A Review, Critique and Proposal." *Sociological Analysis* 42, no. 4 (Winter 1981): 363-72.

———. "Subjectivation and the New Evangelical Theodicy." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 20, no. 1 (1982): 39-47.

———. *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World*. Oxford: OUP, 2010.

Jacobs, Alan. *Original Sin: A Cultural History*. New York: HarperOne, 2008.

Keller, Tim. *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism*. New York: Dutton, 2008

Kelley, Dean M. *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing*. New York: Harper and Row, 1972.

Koukl, Gregory. "Christian Liberty." str.org, http://www.str.org/site/New s2?page=NewsArticle&id=5 173 (accessed August 12, 2010).

_____. *Decision-Making and the Will of God*. Audio-tape. Signal Hill, CA: Stand to Reason.

Langer, Richard. "Niggle's Leaf and Holland's Opus: Reflections on the Theological Significance of Work." *Evangelical Review of Theology* 33, no. 2 (2009): 100-17.

Larsen, Elena. "Cyberfaith: How Americans Pursue Religion Online." In *Religion Online: Finding Faith on the Internet*, edited by Lorne L. Dawson and Douglas E. Cowan, 17-20. London: Routledge, 2004.

Leach, William. *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1993.

Leitch, Addison H. "The Primary Task of the Church." *Christianity Today* (15 October 1956): 11-13+.

"Letters." *Boston* August 2005.

Lifechurch.tv. http://www.lifechurch.tv/history (accessed September 11, 2009).

Livingstone, David N. *Darwin's Forgotten Defenders: The Encounter Between Evangelical Theology and Evolutionary Thought*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987.

Lyerly, Cynthia Lynn. *Methodism and the Southern Mind, 1770-1810*. New York: OUP, 1998.

Lyon, David. *Jesus in Disneyland: Religion in Postmodern Times*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000.

Mahaney, C. J. "Andy Pettitte and My Confession of Sin." sovereigngraceministries. org. http://www.sovereigngraceministries.org/Blog/post/Andy-Pettitte-and-My-Confession-of-Sin.aspx (accessed September 10, 2009).

Marsden, George M. *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870-1925*. Oxford: OUP, 1980.

_____. "Fundamentalism as an American Phenomenon: A Comparison with English Evangelicalism." *Church History* 46 (1977): 215-32.

_____. *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*. New Haven, CT: Yale, 2003.

_____. *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987.

Marshall, Paul A. *A Kind of Life Imposed on Man: Vocation and Social Order from Tyndale to Locke*. Toronto: University of Toronto, 1996.

Martin, David. "Christian Foundations, Sociological Fundamentals." In *Sociology, Theology and the Curriculum*, edited by Leslie J. Francis, 1-49. New York: Cassell, 1999.

Mathews, Kenneth A. *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture Niv Text, Genesis 1-11:26*. Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1996.

McConkey, Dale. "Whither Hunter's Culture War? Shifts in Evangelical Morality, 1988-1998." *Sociology of Religion* 62, no. 2 (2001): 149-74.

McGuire, Meredith B. *Religion: The Social Context*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1981.

McLaren, Brian D. *A New Kind of Christian: A Tale of Two Friends on a Spiritual Journey*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001.

Meeks, M. Douglas. *God the Economist: The Doctrine of God and Political Economy*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress 1998.

Miller, David W. *God at Work: The History and Promise of the Faith at Work Movement*. Oxford: OUP, 2007.

Miller, Vincent J. *Consuming Religion: Christian Faith and Practice in a Consumer Culture*. New York: Continuum, 2003.

_____. "On the Commodification of Everything." Interview by Ken Myers. *Mars Hill Audio Journal* 69 (July/August 2004).

Mitroff, Ian I. and Elizabeth A. Denton. *A Spiritual Audit of Corporate America: A Hard Look at Spirituality, Religion, and Values in the Workplace*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1999.

Moltmann, Jürgen. *On Human Dignity: Political Theology and Ethics*. Translated by M. Douglas Meeks. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1984.

Moreland, J. P. and Garrett DeWeese. "The Premature Report of Foundationalism's Demise." In *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times*, edited by Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth, and Justin Taylor, 81-107. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004.

Morgan, Christopher W. and Robert A Peterson, ed. *Hell under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents Eternal Punishment*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004.

Morgan, Kenneth O., ed. *The Oxford Illustrated History of Britain*. Oxford: OUP, 1984.

Morgan, Timothy C. "Theologians Decry 'Narrow' Boundaries." *Christianity Today* 46, no. 7 (June 10, 2002): 18.

Mouw, Richard J. "The Bunny and the Madonna." *Christianity Today* 14, no. 13 (March 27, 1970): 12.

Mullins, E. Y. *The Axioms of Religion*. Edited by R. Albert Mohler, Timothy George, and Denise George. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1997.

Myers, Kenneth A. *All God's Children and Blue Suede Shoes*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1989.

Needham, Rodney. *Belief, Language, and Experience*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1972.

Niebuhr, H. Richard. *Christ and Culture*. San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1951.

Noll, Mark A. *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln*. Oxford: OUP, 2005.

_____. *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1992.

_____. *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994.

_____. "Where We Are and How We Got Here." *Christianity Today* 50, no. 10 (October 2006): 42-59.

Noll, Mark A., David W. Bebbington, and George A. Rawlyk, eds. *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, the British Isles, and Beyond, 1700-1990*. Oxford: OUP, 1994.

Orsi, Robert A. "Is the Study of Lived Religion Irrelevant to the World We Live In?" *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 42, no. 2 (2003): 169-74.

_____. *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950*. 2nd ed. New Haven, CT: Yale University, 2002.

Packer, J. I. and Carolyn Nystrom. *Guard Us, Guide Us: Divine Leading in Life's Decisions*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008.

Parsons, Talcott, ed. *Sociological Theory and Modern Society*. New York: Free Press, 1967.

Pearcey, Nancy. *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity*. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2004.

Penning, James M., and Corwin E. Smidt. *Evangelicalism: The Next Generation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002.

Peterson, Eugene H. *Leap over a Wall: Earthy Spirituality for Everyday Christians*. San Francisco: Harper, 1997.

Pinnock, Clark H. "The Conditional View." In *Four Views on Hell*, edited by William Crockett, 135-66. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996.

Pinsky, Mark I. *The Gospel According to the Simpsons: The Spiritual Life of the World's Most Animated Family*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001.

Placher, William C., ed. *Callings: Twenty Centuries of Christian Wisdom on Vocation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005.

Plantinga, Cornelius. *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995.

Poythress, Vern S. *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1991.

Pratico, Gary D. "Old Testament Survey." Lecture, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, S. Hamilton, MA, March 3, 2003.

Purbrick, Rob. "Imagine How We Can Reach the UK." 50 minutes: London Institute for Contemporary Christianity, 2006.

Putnam, Robert. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000.

Randall, Ian M., and Hilborn David. *One Body in Christ: The History and Significance of the Evangelical Alliance*. Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster, 2001.

Ritzer, George. *The Mcdonaldization of Society*. Revised new century edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge, 2004.

Robinson, Haddon W. *Decision Making by the Book*. Grand Rapids, MI: Discovery House Publishers, 1998.

Roof, Wade Clark. *A Generation of Seekers: The Spiritual Journeys of the Baby Boom Generation*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993.

Rowlandson, Mary. *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God*. Edited by Neal Salisbury. Boston, MA: Bedford, 1997.

Sargeant, Kimon Howland. *Seeker Churches: Promoting Traditional Religion in a Nontraditional Way*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University, 2000.

Schmidt, Leigh Eric. *Holy Fairs: Scotland and the Making of American Revivalism*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001.

Shibley, Mark A. *Resurgent Evangelicalism in the United States: Mapping Cultural Change since 1970*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, 1996.

Silverman, David. *Doing Qualitative Research: A Practical Handbook*. 2nd ed. London: Sage, 2005.

Sittser, Gerald L. "Knowing the Will of God." Presentation, Gordon-Conwell Seminary, S. Hamilton, MA, March 29, 2003.

Smith, Christian. *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving*. Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1998.

_____. *Christian America? What Evangelicals Really Want*. Berkeley, CA: University of California, 2000.

_____. "Future Directions in the Sociology of Religion." *Social Forces* 84, no. 4 (2008): 1561-89.

_____. "Theological Assumptions of American Teenagers." Interview by Ken Myers. *Mars Hill Audio Journal* 75 (July/August 2005).

_____. "Why Christianity Works: An Emotions-Focused Phenomenological Account." *Sociology of Religion* 68, no. 2 (2007): 165-78.

Smith, Christian, with Melinda Lundquist Denton. *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*. Oxford: OUP, 2005.

Smith, Christian, and Michael O. Emerson with Patricia Snell. *Passing the Plate: Why American Christians Don't Give Away More Money*. Oxford: OUP, 2008.

Smith, Christian, David Sikkink, and Jason Bailey. "Devotion in Dixie and Beyond: A Test of the 'Shibley Thesis' on the Effects of Regional Origin and Migration on Individual Religiosity." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 37 (1998): 494-506.

Smith, Christian, with Patricia Snell. *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults*. Oxford: OUP, 2009.

Smith, James K. A., *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2009.

Spring, Beth. "Carl Henry Dies at 90." *Christianity Today* (February 2004).

Stark, Rodney and William Sims Bainbridge. *The Future of Religion: Secularization, Revival and Cult Formation*. London: University of California, 1985.

Stark, Rodney and Roger Finke. *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion* Berkeley, CA: University of California, 2000.

_____. *The Churching of America 1776-1990: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University, 1991.

Stein, Robert H. *Jesus the Messiah: A Survey of the Life of Christ*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1996.

Stevens, R. Paul. *The Other Six Days: Vocation, Work, and Ministry in Biblical Perspective*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999.

Storkey, Alan. *A Christian Social Perspective*. Leicester: IVP, 1979.

_____. *Transforming Economics: A Christian Way to Employment*, Third Way Books. London: SPCK, 1986.

Stott, John. *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982.

_____. *Christian Mission in the Modern World*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1975.

_____. *Decisive Issues Facing Christians Today*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Revell, 1984.

Stout, Harry S. *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991.

Stringer, Martin. *Contemporary Western Ethnography and the Definition of Religion*. London: Continuum, 2008.

Stuart, Douglas K. *The New American Commentary: Exodus*. Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 2006.

———. "Old Testament Survey." Lecture, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, S. Hamilton, MA, January 29, 2004.

Szasz, Ferenc Morton. *The Protestant Clergy in the Great Plains and Mountain West, 1865-1915*. Albuqurque, NM: University of New Mexico, 1988.

———. *Religion in the Modern American West*. Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona, 2000.

Taves, Ann. *Fits, Trances, and Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999.

Tipton, Steven M. *Getting Saved from the Sixties: Moral Meaning in Conversion and Cultural Change*. Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1982.

Triton, A. N. *Salt to the World*. Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1978.

———. *Whose World?* London: IVP, 1970.

Van Eman, Sam. *On Earth as It Is in Advertising: Moving from Commercial Hype to Gospel Hope*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2005.

Veith, Gene Edward. *God at Work: Your Christian Vocation in All of Life*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002.

Voas, David, Alasdair Crockett, and Daniel V.A. Olson. "Religious Pluralism and Participation: Why Previous Research is Wrong." *American Sociological Review* 67, no. 2 (2002): 212-30.

Volf, Miroslav. *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work*. Oxford: OUP, 1991.

Walsch, Neale Donald. *Conversations with God: An Uncommon Dialogue, book one*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1995.

Ward, Graham. "The Future of Religion." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 74, no. 1 (2006): 179-86.

Ward, Pete. *Participation and Mediation: A Practical Theology for the Liquid Church*.

London: SCM, 2008.

Warner, R. Stephen. *New Wine in Old Wineskins: Evangelicals and Liberals in a Small-Town Church*. Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1988.

──────. "Theoretical Barriers to the Understanding of Evangelical Christianity." *Sociological Analysis* 40, no. 1 (1979): 1-9.

Warner, Rob. *Reinventing English Evangelicalism, 1966-2001: A Theological and Sociological Study*. Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007.

Warren, Carol A. B. "Qualitative Interviewing." In *Handbook of Interview Research: Context and Method*, edited by Jaber F. Gubrium and James A. Holstein. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2001.

Warren, Rick. *The Purpose Driven Life*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002.

Weber, Max. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Translated by Talcott Parsons. New York: Scribner, 1958.

Wells, David F. *Above All Earthly Pow'rs: Christ in a Postmodern World*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005.

──────. *The Courage to Be Protestant: Truth-lovers, Marketers, and Emergents in the Postmodern World*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008.

──────. *God in the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994.

──────. *Losing Our Virtue: Why the Church Must Recover Its Moral Vision*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998.

──────. *No Place for Truth: Or, Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993.

Wigger, John H. *Taking Heaven by Storm: Methodism and the Rise of Popular Christianity in America*. Oxford: OUP, 1998.

Wilson, Bryan R. *Religion in Sociological Perspective*. Oxford: OUP, 1982.

Wingren, Gustaf. *Luther on Vocation*. Translated by Carl C. Rasmussen. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2004.

Witten, Marsha. "'Where Your Treasure Is': Popular Evangelical Views of Work, Money, and Materialism." In *Rethinking Materialism*, edited by Robert Wuthnow, 117-41. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995.

Wolfe, Alan. *The Transformation of American Religion: How We Actually Live Our Faith*. New York: The Free Press, 2003.

Wolffe, John, ed. *Evangelical Faith and Public Zeal: Evangelicals and Society in Britain 1780-1980*. London: SPCK, 1995.

Woodbridge, John D., Mark A. Noll, and Nathan O. Hatch. *The Gospel in America: Themes in the Story of America's Evangelicals*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1979.

Woodhead, Linda, Paul Heelas, and David Martin. *Peter Berger and the Study of Religion*. London: Routledge, 2001.

Wright, David F. *Essays in Evangelical Social Ethics*. Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1978.

Wuthnow, Robert. *After Heaven: Spirituality in America since the 1950s*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.

_____. *God and Mammon in America*. New York: The Free Press, 1994.

_____. *The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith since World War II*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988.