

1-1-2016

An Examination of the Influence of Selected Modern Innovations on Evangelical Ecclesiology and Soteriology

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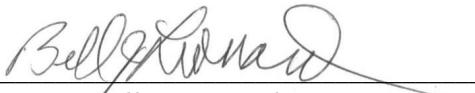
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and submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

has been accepted by the Faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary
upon the recommendation of the undersigned reader:


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Date Received: January 28, 2016

AN EXAMINATION OF THE INFLUENCE OF
SELECTED MODERN INNOVATIONS ON EVANGELICAL
ECCLESIOLOGY AND SOTERIOLOGY

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED
TO THE FACULTY OF THE
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
FULLER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
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DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

CHRISTOPHER EDMOND LAWSON
JANUARY 2016

ABSTRACT

An Examination of the Influence of Selected Modern Innovations on Evangelical Ecclesiology and Soteriology

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2016

The modern innovations that make possible the virtual pastoral presence of the multisite church movement reflect contemporary illustrations of a consistent pattern found within the history of American Evangelicalism. Such innovations were evident in the modernity of eighteenth century missionary efforts in India, to the nineteenth and twentieth century tools of revivalism found in the ministries of Charles Finney, D.L. Moody, Billy Sunday and Billy Graham, as well as the innovation at the heart of certain technologies that undergird the ecclesiology and soteriology of 21st century Evangelical churches.

This dissertation explores those innovative dynamics. It will be organized around five chapters along with an introduction and conclusion. It begins by outlining a series of significant examples through which innovation expanded the scope and activities of the modern missions movement. These technologies include modes of global travel, the translation of the biblical texts into the vernacular, and the globalization of gospel work in new native lands, each providing resources for shaping theology and praxis in American Evangelicalism. As the Puritans settled in the New World, they benefited from their new religious and geographic environment to create a unique identity that fostered an expectation that modern innovation would be leveraged to help sinners experience the Divine and unite with local congregations.

This revivalism, marked with the basic American principle that all social organizations are based on voluntary choices and relationships, fostered denominational competition that forced many church leaders to leverage modern innovation in an effort to attract new believers. This change of method also changed the Evangelical message; in particular, conversion became normative and new methods became the tool for bringing about this increased local church engagement. As contemporary Evangelical communities embraced these new tools, it did so in ways that had dramatic impact on the nature of Evangelicalism in America.

Content Reader: Bill J. Leonard, PhD

Word Count: 299

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INTRODUCTION

Evangelicalism, as a subculture of American Protestantism, has prospered and been a majority voice of New World Christianity almost since its inception; but, as we are now deep into to the twenty-first century, Evangelicalism finds itself in crisis. According to recent research by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life entitled, “Nones on the Rise,” nearly 20% of all Americans claim no religious identity.¹ This nearly 46 million people included 13 million who are self-described atheist or agnostics (6%) and 33 million who claim no particular religious affiliation (14%). In comparison, both the National Association of Evangelicals and a similar study by the Pew Forum claim approximately 26% of Americans self-describe as Evangelical,² meaning there are nearly as many unaffiliated Americans as there are Evangelicals.

In his focused examination of the Pew study, James Emery White puts this rise in perspective: “Consider that the number of *nones* in the 1930s and ‘40s hovered around 5 percent. By 1990 that number had only risen to 8 percent.”³ Many would argue that this is no big deal. It would certainly be true that religious affiliation ebbs and flows in American life. Drops in church attendance and disillusionment with faith are often revitalized by periods of awakening or renewal. In fact, a central theme of the narrative of American history is the religious movements. Yet, there are many who are concerned by

¹ Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, “Nones on the Rise,” www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise (March 28, 2014).

² Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, “Religious Landscape Survey,” <http://religions.pewforum.org/affiliations> (March 28, 2014).

³ James Emery White, *Rise of the Nones, The: Understanding and Reaching the Religiously Unaffiliated* (Ada, MI: Baker Book, 2014), 16.

these trends. Commenting on this trend over the last decade, Christian Smith, Director of the Center for the Study of Religion and Society at the University of Notre Dame, remarked that, while it is not a “sea change,” it is a “long term distancing of some from an association with religious faith and practice, which is significant.”⁴

The truth is that many churches are seeing it as a monumental shift in the way Americans regard the Church and its role in the public square. In response, churches are changing their methodology through a series of new innovative practices in an effort to reach the *nones*. But these new methodological approaches are not actually new. From the trading company clipper ships that carried eighteenth century missionaries to foreign fields, to the high definition projectors that launched the contemporary multisite church movements, modern innovation has directly and indirectly impacted the ecclesiology and soteriology of Evangelical churches, creating opportunity and distraction for their identity and ministry.

The modern innovations that make possible the virtual pastoral presence of the multisite church movement reflect contemporary illustrations of a consistent pattern found within the history of American Evangelicalism. Such innovations were evident in the modernity of eighteenth century missionary efforts in India, the nineteenth and twentieth century tools of revivalism found in the ministries of Charles Finney, D.L. Moody, Billy Sunday, and Billy Graham, and the technologies that undergird the ecclesiology and soteriology of twenty-first century Evangelical churches. For the purposes of this work, the use of the term *innovation* denotes unique technological and

⁴ Christian Smith, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 145.

cultural developments that have shaped how the faithful encounter social, theological, and interpersonal norms.

This project provides one of the first explorations of a series of historic tributaries, which serve as a precursor for the use of modern innovation. The use of these modern innovations has directly and indirectly impacted the ecclesiology and soteriology of Evangelical churches, creating opportunity and distraction for their identity and ministry. On any given Sunday upwards of 25 million Americans worship in Evangelical, Protestant churches in the United States.⁵ Historically the Evangelical movement is one of the most powerful political, religious, and social constituencies in American society. This work assesses the use of innovation as a tool for developing a unique Evangelical ecclesiology and soteriology.

Throughout American history, the unique nature of these characteristics has not gone unnoticed. In *Democracy in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville noted, “Upon my arrival in the United States, the religious aspect of the country was the first thing that struck my attention.”⁶ De Tocqueville, a French thinker and historian, was particularly intrigued by the principles of religious liberty in America and its impact on the diversity of sects. In fact, with the adoption of the Constitution and the subsequent Bill of Rights, religious liberty became the standard in the American Republic. These new laws opened the door to greater religious pluralism and made the New World fertile ground for the utilization of modern innovation as a method for local church development. In many

⁵ Estimated by the Nation Association of Evangelicals, www.nae.net, accessed March 15, 2015.

⁶ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, translated by Gerald E. Bevan; with an introduction and notes by Isaac Kramnick (1835; repr., London: Penguin, 2003), 295.

ways, America's principles of religious freedom fostered a newly found individualism in religious faith and practice.

This individualism was enabled by denominationalism, which quickly became the principle means of Protestant religious organization in America following the Revolution. Sidney Mead, in "Denominationalism: The Shape of Protestantism," defines a denomination as "a voluntary association of like-hearted and like-minded individuals, who are united on the basis of common beliefs for the purpose of accomplishing tangible and defined objectives."⁷ Voluntary association forced Evangelical denominations to develop new methods aimed at persuading new converts to join its member congregations. The utilization of new innovations in the post-Revolutionary era forced some denominations to realign their thinking concerning ecclesial practices and conversion because, for example, the revivals themselves "demonstrated the possibilities of persuasion."⁸ In addition, these new methods created a "massive and stubborn stability,"⁹ which provided longevity to these newly formed groups.

There are countless works that consider Evangelical development as a sociological or historical phenomenon, each providing an ample supply of historical facts and religious commentary – this dissertation will not repeat these works. In addition, this is not a study of church-growth methods or a theological critique of revivalism. It will not speculate about which model is most advantageous. What this work does provide is a

⁷ Sidney Mead, "Denominationalism: The Shape of Protestantism," in Russell E. Richey, *Denominationalism* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1977), 104.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

historical examination of a series of historic tributaries, which inform a deeper look at modern innovation in American Evangelicalism – a cultural system with a set of meanings, symbols and ultimately universal goals. Specifically, it is concerned with Evangelicalism’s use of the modern innovation as the primary method for reaching the “unchurched.” Evangelicalism has a varied history of ministers who ignored the held liturgical and theological practices in an effort to spread the gospel. This dissertation is focused on an exploration of how modern innovation, as utilized by Evangelicals through American history, remains a driving force in shaping the American religious identity.

This dissertation is organized around six chapters along with an introduction and conclusion. Chapter 1 outlines a series of significant historical tributaries through which innovation expanded the scope and activities of the modern missions movement. The use of innovation to extend the aims of gospel missions is a practice with deep historical roots. These technologies include modes of global travel, the translation of the biblical texts into the vernacular, and the globalization of gospel work in new native lands, each providing resources for shaping theology and praxis in American Evangelicalism. The chapter gives special attention to providing a clear understanding of what is meant by modern innovation, give categorical definitions for the types of innovation this study will explore, and restrict the scope of that exploration to a particular group within American Christianity.

Chapter 2 builds on those early assumptions to examine the impact of other innovations on the development of American Evangelicalism, with particular attention given to the nature of voluntary church associations, as these became a fertile ground for the use of modern innovation. In particular, because early Protestantism went nearly

without challenge in American culture during the seventeenth century, it was able to grow without limits and foster uniquely American characteristics and theological convictions. As the Puritans settled in the New World, they benefited from their new religious and geographic environment to create a unique identity that fostered an expectation that modern innovation would be leveraged to help sinners experience the Divine and unite with local congregations. To understand the power and privilege of early Evangelicalism, this chapter will define the power of voluntary church association, religious freedom, and population mobility, including how each of these shaped the foundational beliefs about soteriology and ecclesiology. This work will then turn its attention to look more specifically at the many ways in which the usage of modern innovation has shaped Evangelical ecclesiology and soteriology.

Chapter 3 argues that, just as ecclesial practices have shifted because of the influence of modern innovation, so have the Evangelical Church's notions of conversion and voluntary church association. Or said more succinctly: a change in method changed the message. As Puritanism created a fertile landscape where the principles of a believer's church took shape, the democratic idealism of America gave rise to a unique form of revivalism. This revivalism, marked with the basic American principle that all social organizations are based on voluntary choices and relationships, fostered denominational competition that forced many church leaders to leverage modern innovation in an effort to attract new believers. Through an exploration of the morphology of conversion, best seen in a series of Awakenings which made conversion normative, it will be argued that the leveraging of these new methods became the primary tool by which leaders increased faith engagement as the principles of revivalism became

institutionalized. In addition, as the purveyors of these modern innovations quickly learned, this shift in soteriology changed the relationship between personal piety and engagement in a believer's church.

This will be followed by Chapter 4, which deeply explores the information introduced in previous chapters and examine how the utilization of the described innovations has been leveraged, including how this has shaped denominational identity. This change of method also changed the Evangelical message; in particular, conversion became normative through the Awakenings and new methods became the primary tool for bringing about this increased local church engagement. The uniquely Evangelical practice of revivalism will be explored for the ways in which it leveraged innovation and changed the nature of Church in America. This examination presents the dramatic shift in what might be considered traditional ecclesial practices, with precise attention given to a group of unique examples where these ecclesial shifts can best be seen and studied.

Chapter 5 focuses attention on ways in which the utilization of modern innovation has shaped Evangelical faith communities in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Special attention will be given to the arguments previously made in Chapters 3 and 4 that the utilization of modern innovation has changed the very nature of Evangelical ecclesiology and soteriology. As a result, this chapter examines contemporary examples of how these shifts have manifested in a variety of Evangelical contexts. As contemporary Evangelical communities embraced these new tools, they did so in ways that had dramatic impact on the nature of Evangelicalism in America. Attention will also be given to the Jesus Movement and the leaders it produced, the continually changing nature of denominational identities, the rise of an influential form of Calvinism, and the

entrepreneurial efforts of many pastors that has give rise to new networks and affiliations. Consequently, although the defining theological characteristics have remained constant and unique to the Evangelical Church, practice has changed over the last century. These specific examples give illustration to the ways that innovation has shaped the very nature of gospel missions and ecclesial formation in America.

Finally, this work concludes by providing a summary of various innovative opportunities and, based on the current research, examines the valuable benefits along with potential dangers of these methods as future church leaders consider the issues and impact of modern innovation. This work acknowledges that innovation and its utilization have implications and this chapter will show how, after the successful utilization of modern innovation as first seen in earlier Evangelical movements, Evangelicals have experienced a decline in their social influence and the battle over modernity has heated up in the last several decades. While some Evangelical s have resigned themselves to fighting a battle that has no apparent end, others have modified their methodology to the changing social environment by adapting the principles learned and practiced by other American Evangelicals.

CHAPTER 1

INNOVATION AS METHOD

The proposition that innovation has been a major catalyst for the missiological advancement of the gospel throughout its Christian history, particularly in American Evangelicalism, begins with an examination of the deep historical roots that made these aims possible and the implications of such moves. This work argues that no significant movement of the mission of God into the world has happened without the fuel of innovation. To that end, this chapter surveys a broad approach to innovation as a method for implementing the Church's mission in the modern world. Innovation throughout this work will denote a broad effort to define contextually appropriate and available tools that change the nature of interpersonal communication, global travel, or the delivery of knowledge and information.

It is almost impossible to overstate the role of innovation in the development of all Christian missions. New World manifestations are not unique. With that in mind, this chapter will consider a series of unique historic tributaries that have contributed to the missiological move of God in the world, including the missions work of William Carey,

the creation of the printing press, and the development of global travel – each providing resources for shaping theology and praxis prior to the rise of American Evangelicalism.

Although innovation contributed to the advancement of Christian missions, it also affected, perhaps even changed, the way conversion was understood and applied. This morphology of conversion can best be seen in the uniquely American expressions of revivalism, whose use of religious populism made conversion experiences normative. This move toward normative markers of conversion has also been informed by a mobility that has forced Evangelicals to ask difficult questions about evangelism and ecclesial models. Finally, after defining innovation as a tool of missions, it will give categorical definitions for the types of innovation this study will explore, and restrict the scope of that exploration to a particular group within American Christianity – Evangelicals.

Historic Tributaries of Innovation

Innovation is the fuel that moves our world forward. From the long-awaited release of a new iPhone to the way digital media is now available to all consumers with one click on a multitude of devices, innovation is at the heart of culture. It fuels how we communicate, define relationships, receive the news, consume our entertainment, and pay our bills. Quite simply, innovation is the common theme of our cultural identity. This has not been lost on the Church.

As the twenty-first century extends into its second decade, Christians around the world are leveraging innovation for the advancement of faith in unprecedented ways. Douglas McConnell remarks, “Technological tools are as normal for a missionary as they are for a business executive. As rapidly as new technology appears, it is incorporated into

the vocabulary and practice of missionaries around the world.”¹ In the broadest sense, the term *missionary* can denote anyone who seeks to share the message of God’s work in the world with the world. Throughout Christian history, purveyors of the Christian gospel, whether in the pulpits of esteemed chapels or the prairies of tribal Africa, have used the tools of innovation to spread the good news.

While there are countless works that consider Christian missions and its role in the development of the world, this section seeks to provide a series of historic tributaries that wed missions with the use of innovation. While not exhaustive in their scope, these examples give some perspective on the use of innovation throughout Christian history as a foundation for examining its contemporary use and implications. That said, this is not a study in effective church-growth methods or a critique of the theological premises behind particular motivations. In addition, it does not suggest which church design is most advantageous. What follows is a consideration of innovation, traced through the following tributaries, which gives examples of mission expansion that set the tone for American Evangelicalism and its use of the same tools.

William Carey and Missionary Travel

For nearly two centuries New World Missions efforts were primarily focused on the native population and converting the unconverted among the native people. During the early part of the eighteenth century both John Wesley and his colleague, George Whitefield, both visited the United States where they participated in field preaching on

¹ Pocock, Michael, Gailyn Van Rheenen, and Douglas McConnell, *The Changing Face of World Missions: Engaging Contemporary Issues and Trends* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academics, 2005), 299.

the frontier. Wesley began actively evaluating men for the pastorate who were not ordained by the Anglican Church. In doing so, Wesley expanded the work of lay preachers, planted the seeds of Methodism, and created an expectation that extended travel would be a part of the Christian mission. As Mark Noll argues, following the death of John Wesley, Evangelical missions went through a distinct season of diversification. He contends, “Evangelicalism began as an effort to revive religious practice in the state churches of the British Empire. But. . .the pursuit of true religion carried Evangelicals beyond traditional patterns centered on inherited ecclesiastical forms and, in fact, was beginning to push them into unEvangelicalized areas of the globe where first-time proclamation rather than revival was the central concern.”² At no single location was this growing concern to evangelize the world better manifest than in the community of the Northamptonshire Baptists.

Northamptonshire is a county in the East Midlands region of England that became a hotbed for the development of Baptist identity and foreign missions following the Reformation. In 1748, non-conformist Philip Doddridge wrote *An Abridgement of Mr. David Brainerd’s Journal Among the Indians*, wherein he remarked that the life of Brainerd should “awaken my Brethern [sic] in the ministry to bear their Testimony with greater zeal and Affection.”³ In addition, Doddridge called for regular prayer meetings focused on foreign missions.

In 1784, the Baptist minister John Ryland offered an invitation to an ecumenical

² Mark Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield and the Wesleys* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), 192.

³ Philip Doddridge, *An Abridgement of Mr. David Brainerd’s Journal Among the Indians* (London: John Oswald, 1748), 3.

group of religious societies aimed at joining together for prayer around foreign missions. In a circular letter he penned entitled “The Nature, Evidences, and Advantages, of Humility,” he called the Northhamptonshire Association to “spread . . . the gospel to the most distant parts of the habitable globe.”⁴

That same year Ryland’s friend, Andrew Fuller, preached a sermon entitled “The Nature and Importance of Walking by Faith,” with an appendix, “A Few Persuasives to a General Union in Prayer for the Revival of Religion,” which became the catalyst for the formation of the Baptist Missionary Society. Yet, there remained a debate among Particular Baptists about the role of human free will and the necessity of foreign missions. Fuller fervently defended the position of Jonathan Edwards, the Calvinist preacher, concerning evangelism and the sovereignty of God, but repeatedly refused to become mired in the debate between Calvinists and Arminians. Rather he insisted that evangelism through missions should be the motive of both. He proclaimed,

I believe it is the duty of every minister of Christ plainly and faithfully to preach the gospel to all who will hear it; and, as I believe the inability of men to [do] spiritual things to be wholly of the moral, and therefore of the criminal kind—and that it is their duty to love the Lord Jesus Christ, and trust in him for salvation, though they do not; I therefore believe free and solemn addresses, invitations, calls, and warnings to them, to be not only consistent, but directly adapted as means, in the hand of the Spirit of God, to bring them to Christ. I consider it as part of my duty that I could not omit without being guilty of the blood of souls.⁵

Fuller insisted that it was the duty of every believer to go and share the good news with the world. While heated theological disagreement surrounded him, Fuller contended that all Christians had but one enemy: global disbelief.

⁴ John Ryland, *The Nature, Evidences, and Advantages, of Humility* (1783 repr.; Gale ECCO, 2010), 17.

⁵ Peter Morden, *Offering Christ to the World* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2003), 106.

This would explain Fuller's affection for Jonathan Edwards.⁶ He frequently referenced and preached from *The Freedom of the Will*. This became his primary text to combat a particularly nasty form of hyper-Calvinism that was popular in both Europe and the New World. Peter Morden comments, "The prevalence of high [hyper] Calvinism had led not only to a refusal to 'offer Christ' but also to a general suspicion of all human 'means', such as ministerial training and associating."⁷ For Fuller, Edwards' theological insights became the foundation by which he softened this position and challenged all to evangelize the globe. In fact, Fuller's affection for Edwards lasted his entire life. Mere days before his death in 1815 he wrote the following: "We have heard some, who have been giving out of late that 'if Sutcliff and some others had preached more of Christ and less of Jonathan Edwards, they would have been more useful.' If those who talk thus, preached Christ half as much as Jonathan Edwards did, and were half as useful as he was, their usefulness would be double what it is."⁸

Into this diverse theological and mission-hungry context stepped a simple shoemaker, William Carey. Carey is widely held as the father of modern missions, but his beginnings were humble. He was born in 1761, and after only finishing the fifth grade he became a poor shoe cobbler in the rural English village of Paulerspury. Although lacking in formal education, Carey had a particular affinity for languages and he taught himself Latin, Hebrew, Italian, and Greek. He was raised in the Church of England, but while

⁶ Edwards's influence and use of innovation as a tool of American Evangelicalism will be more fully explored in Chapter 3.

⁷ Morden, *Offering Christ*, 45.

⁸ Andrew Fuller, *Works of Andrew Fuller* (Sand Springs, OK: Banner of Truth Trust, 2007), 101

being apprenticed in his trade he met the Decenter John Warr. Carey would eventually sympathize with the Decenter's position and help to form a small congregational church in Hackleton.

Soon after the planting of the church, Carey began to sense the call into gospel ministry, but initially refused because of his difficulty with public speaking. Eventually he submitted, and in 1786 he became he became a pastor to a small congregation in Moulton during which time his passion for world missions developed. However, there was little interest in missions within the church at large. During one particular meeting he proclaimed: "Whether the command given to the apostles to teach all nations was not obligatory on all succeeding ministers to the end of the world, seeing that the accompanying promise was of equal extent."⁹ In response, his friend John Ryland is said to have exclaimed, "Young man, sit down: when God pleases to convert the heathen, He will do it without your aid or mine."¹⁰ Meaning, it was important that the Northamptonshire leadership join in the efforts of global missions because it was clear God was moving that direction.¹¹

In 1792, this discontent shared by Carey, with the assistance of Fuller and Ryland, they established the Baptist Missionary Society and Carey wrote his most influential work, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen*. The eighty-seven page manuscript, with five sections, was widely distributed and became a rallying point for the mission minded in England. It included a

⁹ Fred Barlow, *Profiles in Evangelism* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1976), 19.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹¹ Bill J. Leonard, *Baptist Ways: A History* (Judson Press: Valley Forge, PA, 2003), 102.

section on the theological appropriateness of missions, a history of missions that included David Brainerd and John Wesley, a list of unreached people groups, and a call for the formation of a missions society. The central theme of Carey's writing is found here:

Our Lord Jesus Christ, a little before his departure, commissioned his apostles to Go, and teach all nations; or, as another evangelist expresses it, Go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. This commission was as extensive as possible, and laid them under obligation to disperse themselves into every country of the habitable globe, and preach to all the inhabitants, without exception, or limitation. They accordingly went forth in obedience to the command, and the power of God evidently wrought with them.

Historian George Smith argues that Carey's commitment to missions developed in him a very unique worldview that included a stark rebuke of the English economic system. For example, Carey contended this about the importance of a call to missions: "This seems to imply that in the time of the glorious increase of the church, in the latter days, commerce shall subserve the spread of the gospel."¹² This goes far to explain Carey's motives and leadership style; meaning, all things exist to extend and establish God's work in the world.

The turning point for Carey's mission work came when it was made known that John Thomas was in need of an assistant for the first Baptist mission trip to Bengal. It was Carey who stepped forward and volunteered. After traveling with his family to the Isle of Wright, Thomas's inability to pay his creditors combined with France's declaration of war on England forced them to return. Later that same year Carey took his first trip, aboard the *Kron Princessa Maria*, to India. The voyage took nearly five months and on November 11, 1793, he stepped onto the shores of Calcutta. His family settled in

¹² George Smith, *The Life of William Carey* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 35.

the jungle of Sundarbans. Although the circumstances were harsh and Carey nearly lost one of his children to dysentery, in 1794 Carey moved his family east to Mudnabatti and began preaching and leading Bible studies in Bengal. Life continued to be difficult. His family was afflicted and Carey himself suffered from malaria. Yet, as Timothy George notes, “The writings of Jonathan Edwards were the mainstay of Carey’s spiritual reading during those early days, next to the Bible, of course, and Brainerd’s diary, which Edwards had edited.”

Carey, inspired by the work of Wycliffe, continued his translation work in Bengal and learned the Sanskrit language so as to be able to translate the New Testament for the native people. In 1799, Carey moved his family to Kidderpore where, in 1800, he baptized his first Indian convert, Krishna Pal. In 1801 the Bengal New Testament was published and he was appointed teacher at a school in Calcutta for British civil servants, which provided much needed access to printing. Following this new post, Carey launched what would be the first of nineteen mission stations. Before his death, he proposed the first world missions conference in South Africa (now the World Missionary Conference of Edinburgh) and founded Serampore College (the first Christian College in Asia). By 1821, the Serampore mission had over seven hundred converts. The lasting contribution of Williams Carey cannot be overstated.

When considering the scope and contributions of William Carey’s mission efforts, the way he leveraged modern innovation may not be unique, but innovation certainly made Carey’s work possible. Innovations in transportation are a good example. Since the moment Marco Polo returned with his embellished tales of Eastern riches and friendship with Kublai Khan, European travelers had longed to claim Chinese and Indian treasures

as their own. Land-based travel was nearly impossible because of the treacherous terrain and angry natives. In addition, travel along the coast of Africa was fraught with pirates and unjustifiable tariffs along the Ivory Coast. The Portuguese caravel, first widely used by the fifteenth century Spanish monarch and made famous by Christopher Columbus, was a ship of unique shape and ability, which made longer nautical travel possible. It was this sort of ship that made the work of Carey and Thomas possible as it allowed these first missionaries to avoid the hazards that dominated previous efforts. Additionally, the innovative printing press, which this chapter will explore next, made way for the advancement of many native translations of the New Testament.

Stephen Neill remarks, “The cool and rational eighteenth century [which ended with William Carey’s departure for India] was hardly a promising seedbed for Christian growth; but out of it came a greater outburst of Christian missionary enterprise than had been seen in all the centuries before.”¹³ William Carey, and his effective use of modern innovation as seen in these two examples, provides a modern example of mission expansion. Carey’s work set the tone for all missions work that followed. His lasting epitaph echoes through the history of missions: “Expect great things from God. Attempt great things for God.”¹⁴

Printing and Scripture Translation

A few centuries prior to the missionary efforts of William Carey, John Wycliffe planted the seed of widespread lay literacy. Wycliffe was born in 1320 and was an early

¹³ Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions* (New York: Penguin Books, 1964), 571.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

English Dissenter against the Roman Catholic papacy. He and his followers, the Lollards, advocated for a series of biblically centered reforms and criticized the influence of the papacy over civil authorities. In many ways, Wycliffe was the forerunner of the Protestant Reformation. His most enduring contribution to Christian missions, though, was his advocacy for translating the Bible into the vernacular.

In 1382, he completed his first translation of the Vulgate into English – known as Wycliffe’s Bible. He contended, "It helpeth Christian men to study the Gospel in that tongue in which they know best Christ’s sentence."¹⁵ Wycliffe’s advocacy for the Bible in common language, and its widespread acceptance and influence, was a foretaste of what was to come with Johannes Gutenberg’s invention of the movable type printing press.

In 1997, *Time Magazine* named Johannes Gutenberg’s printing press the most important innovation of the second millennium. In fact, it may be the most important innovation in the history of man. The printing press’s contribution to nearly every area of history cannot be underestimated. From science to math, from literature to the arts, almost no area of human development was untouched by the printing press.

The innovation of the printing press was especially well utilized and leveraged to bring about change during the Reformation. As Martin Luther said, “The printing press is God’s highest and ultimate gift of grace by which He would have His Gospel carried forward.”¹⁶ In fact, it may be Luther’s *95 Theses*, written in 1517, which served as an

¹⁵ Henry Wheeler Robinson, *The Bible in its Ancient and English Versions* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1970), 145.

¹⁶ Lewis William Spitz, *The Protestant Reformation (1517-1559)* (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2003), 89.

excellent example of the press's power. Luther posted his letter, written in Latin, on the door of the church in Wittenberg, which was the usual place of public debate. He did not intend for his letter to be widely distributed, but rather as a scholarly response to papal indulgences. It was actually Luther's friend, Christoph von Scheurl, who translated the letter into German and had it widely distributed. It became the kindling that fanned the flame of the Reformation. The use of the press to distribute Luther's protests marked a shift from the final authority being the church to the authority of Scripture among the people. The printing press provided the innovation necessary for a centralized message of reform among churches and people who were longing for change.

The connection between the innovation of the printing press and the Reformation is primarily about supply and demand. Thanks to the printing press, literate preachers were now able to more easily access the talking points of the Reformation and share these central tenets with their local cities and congregations. The press also allowed broadsheets or Reformation propaganda to be freely distributed to the illiterate. What Wycliffe and others started, the Reformation leaders perfected. A. G. Dickens makes the distinction, "Unlike the Wycliffites . . . Lutheranism was from the first the child of the printed book."¹⁷ The Reformation succeeded because the press allowed its leaders to communicate to the masses, leveraging immeasurable influence over the religious, intellectual, and cultural spheres of European life. Similar efforts in the past, such as the Councils of Lyon and Basel, had been extinguished primarily due to a lack of ability to communicate widely.

¹⁷ A. G. Dickens, *Reformation and Society in Sixteenth-Century Europe* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1968), 51.

A Global Gospel and Theological Modification

William Carey shifted the conversation concerning modern missions. What followed his work in India was one of the most dynamic and influential periods of missions the world has ever seen. In 1865, following Carey's example, Hudson Taylor founded the China Inland Missions, and by the modern era nearly all of the inland waterways, canals, backwaters and creek had been reached with the gospel. This was followed by the work of Cameron Townsend and the Wycliffe Bible Translators which focused, like Wycliffe and Carey before, on unreached people groups who did not have the Bible in their own vernacular. These few examples illustrate a larger trend in mission innovation – globalization.

Innovation's most significant contribution to the development of Christian missions may be that it has provided a means by which globalization might occur. Globalization, for the purposes of this discussion, will be defined as a collapse of technological and social obstructions on a global scale creating a comprehensive network of interconnectedness with shared experiences and communication. Philip Jenkins, in his work *The Next Christendom*, remarks on this trend: "According to a report by the U.S. intelligence community, in the coming decades, 'governments will have less and less control over flows of information, technology, diseases, migrants, arms, and financial transactions, whether legal or illegal, across their borders....The very concept of 'belonging' to a particular state will probably erode.'"¹⁸

¹⁸ Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming Global Christianity* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2003), 11.

This shift toward globalization has had consequences within Christianity as adherents are compelled to deal faithfully with the paradox of claiming a specific, narrow tribal identity as the culture continues to homogenize. Globalization forces all people of faith to ask and answer difficult questions about how they approach the “other.” Consequently, Evangelicals find themselves in a state of crisis as “Christianity became more diverse in terms of geographical distribution, cultural orientation, and theological emphasis than it had been in any previous era since of the origins of the Evangelical movement.”¹⁹ As we approach a time when the church no longer has a privileged voice in our culture, the modern Evangelical Church must face its fear of secularization. Despite their public fight, it seems to be futile as this fear is quickly being realized.

This cultural secularization occurred in Europe as well, but took nearly two-hundred years, compared to the United States where it has happened, with a few isolated exceptions, in just over fifty years. Innovation is at the heart of this rapid progression. Post-World War II, the innovations developed by the American government to protect the world from global takeover were shared with the free market. Most significant of these innovations was global access to intercontinental travel aboard jetliners, specifically the Boeing 707, introduced in 1958. Brian Stanley comments, “Rapid air travel enabled the two-way transatlantic links that had been integral to Evangelicalism since its eighteenth century origins to be immeasurably strengthened. North American evangelists, Christian music, and literature could now travel to Europe and beyond with greater facility and frequency.” He continues, “Short-term mission teams from North American or Europe,

¹⁹ Brian Stanley, *The Global Diffusion of Evangelicalism: The Age of Billy Graham and John Stott* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Press, 2013), 11.

mainly comprising of students and young people with only a few weeks or months to spare, have also become a pronounced feature of the contemporary mission scene in a way that was unthinkable in the days when missionaries sailed rather than flew.”²⁰ Air travel also promoted the globalization of the English language, which quickly became the language of technology and education.

As innovation forces globalization upon Evangelicals, it becomes more important than every that they decide how to respond to the rapidly changing context so the modern movement does not become a footnote in history. Globalization forces Evangelicals, who have often operated as ecclesiastical imperialists resisting the adaption of their message in light of globalization, preferring instead to make the “other” like us. This reconsideration requires a recognition of the tension between biblical truth and cultural transition. Yet simply changing the method for confronting culture is not without significant theological implication. Meaning, changing the method implicating changes the message proclaimed in local churches. Although not implicitly a violation of deeply held theological positions, it must be acknowledged and a way forward proposed.

Scott Moreau argues that the most appropriate term for this inevitable implication is *contextualization*. This means a way “to express the tension between two realities: (1) the Bible expresses universal truths, and (2) we live in a world of diverse and ever changing cultures.”²¹ Evangelicalism, by its very nature, has an assumed cultural imperialism that stands in contrast to the globalization and its implications. Moreau

²⁰ Stanley, *The Global Diffusion of Evangelicalism*, 13.

²¹ Pocock, *Changing Face*, 321.

remarks, “All religious systems of the world symbolically capture values and themes.”²²

Consequently, globalization and the implicit absorption of local values and themes is a modification of message as method adapts to context. The Evangelical church’s failure to acknowledge that missions, particular because of globalization, is not work done from thirty-thousand feet or done by making the “other” the “same.” These misguided efforts lack the humility of the incarnate Jesus. David Fitch comments,

This social presence however is never colonial imperialist in posture. For in these very practices the social body takes on the very humility of Christ, always renouncing worldly power so as to live under her Lord as servant to the world. Whenever the church does not exhibit itself as humble and incarnational servant, it has disqualified itself as Christ’s body and it loses any power via its unfaithfulness.²³

The church, by acknowledging the theological modifications implicit in the nature of contemporary innovation, can embrace a global gospel that takes seriously both method and message.

Changing the Morphology of Conversion

Innovation as a method for mission has a direct impact on theology and the message of the church, and perhaps there is no better illustration of that impact than in the morphology, or process, of Evangelical conversion. At the heart of the Evangelical message is soteriology – “What is salvation” and “How might I be saved?” These questions are central to understanding Christian missions and innovation.

²² Ibid., 348.

²³ David Fitch, “The Trinitarian Foundation for Mission Amidst Empire: or, Why Political Formation and Mission are not Mutually Exclusive,” (paper presented at Fuller Theological Seminary, 2010) 18.

Bill Leonard, in his work, “The Christ of Many Experiences,” contends, “In its most basic sense, Evangelical conversion involves a turning from one way of life to another, specifically from non-Christian to Christian life. Theologically, the process of conversion is the way to justification by faith in Christ. This idea is endemic to Evangelicalism.”²⁴ He continues,

Evangelicals speak and write extensively and provocatively of the need for redemption in Christ. Across the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, however, discovering the means to that salvation has become something of a dilemma. The question remains, how does one secure such a spiritual benefit? How does the objective idea of an encounter with Christ translate into a subjective experience with God? Indeed, while acknowledging that an experience with Christ is essential for salvation, American Evangelicals have never fully agreed on the process whereby such salvation was secured. . . . That pluralism is particularly evident in the diversity of conversion morphologies present within the American Evangelical community.²⁵

This section explores these changing morphologies and the historic efforts of Evangelicalism to define conversion as normative for the Christian experience. Through a consideration of revivalism, religious populism, and contemporary innovation, and by evaluating their effect on a changing morphology of conversion, the following illustrates categorical boundaries that will be utilized in the remainder of this study.

Revivalism, Populism, and Normative Conversion

Following the approval of the Constitution and Bill of Rights, America’s development as a nation was marked by the basic principle that all social organizations are based on voluntary choices and relationships. With religious liberty and the abolition of state-privileged churches in certain of the colonies, the basis of American religious

²⁴ Bill J. Leonard, "Dull Habit or Acute Fever? William James and the Protestant Conversion Crisis," *Harvard Divinity School Bulletin*, Summer/Autumn 2015, 48ff.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 298.

order involved the principles of voluntary association related to communities of faith. The voluntary nature of the church has profound effects on the cultural and intellectual dynamics of American life. The Reformation-based notion of *sola Scriptura* allowed a theological justification for religious innovations initiated by charismatic leaders, whose objective was to get the Scriptures into the hands of the laity. In the American context, the usage of *sola Scriptura* not only meant “no creed but the Bible,” but, as Noll notes, it “was given an especially democratic emphasis.”²⁶ This distinction came to reflect the post-Constitutional era’s move away from establishment-oriented religious organization. In turn, many Evangelical leaders experimented with “unorthodox” ways of proclaiming the gospel. Nathan Hatch calls this unorthodoxy “religious populism” and contends it “remains among the oldest and deepest impulses in American life.”²⁷

One trait of early American religious populism was the development of practical and democratic examples of religious organization within the Evangelical community. These particular Evangelicals were those who gave attention to biblical authority, individual conversion, and the need to propagate the faith to the unconverted. A willingness to take their message “to the people” meant that Evangelicals prospered in the early decades of this country. Noll credits this early achievements with “successfully adapting their Christian convictions to American ideals” by using “remarkable savvy, remarkable displays of what might be called practical intelligence.”²⁸ The democratic

²⁶ Noll, *A History of Christianity*, 152.

²⁷ Nathan Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 5.

²⁸ Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 67.

ideals of America shaped this religious pragmatism by allowing Evangelicals to make a strong commitment to new methods for the purposes of conversion and a desire to make the gospel available to the masses. This pragmatic approach to spreading the gospel is most noticeably evident in the Evangelical inventions of camp meetings and revivals. The ideals of voluntarism allowed the theologically conservative leaders to employ these new forms of Christian outreach.

The drive towards new forms of outreach inevitably moved Evangelicals toward leveraging modern innovation and also called into question many long held assumptions concerning clergy leadership. Many lay leaders demanded that the church be under local control, that the worship be lively, music singable, and doctrine “preachable.” Many local lay leaders even carried democratic idealism directly into church polity by rejecting or minimizing the distinction between laity and clergy, insisting that laity have a greater voice in church affairs. In addition, there developed a culture of normative conversation as to the nature and process of salvation that would come to characterize much Evangelicalism in the Republic—it would come to be known as revivalism.

Revivalism has its historical roots in pietistic Puritan response to tenets of reason and rationalism held by many thinkers during the Enlightenment and the creedal representations of the Reformation that exemplified much of seventeenth century Protestantism.²⁹ As the leaders of the Puritan movement fought against the depersonalization of faith, they revealed a more experiential foundation that elevated the role of personal experience and public commitment as the primary evidence of

²⁹ John B. Boles, *The Great Revivals: 1787-1805* (Lexington, KY: The University of Kentucky Press, 1972), 126. Boles contends that the Puritan-pietistic movement is foundational for the development of early individualism.

regeneration and obedience to Jesus. John Boles contends that revivalism's emphasis on converting individuals "changed the primary role of the minister from that of counseling and performance of ritual to that of evangelization."³⁰ Thus, leaders of these early movements focused on public expression and mission as the primary duties of the church and converted. Consequently, the expansion of the church in the New World was almost solely dependent on the subjective religious experience of the individual, which would bring forth a new crop of critics in the coming decades.

The instigators of early revivalism were located in New England. Solomon Stoddard's sermons in Northampton, Massachusetts led to revivals breaking out as early as 1679. After that, periodic revivals would occur and then die out as the influence of the Enlightenment was still being felt throughout the colonies. With the distribution of Isaac Newton's *Principia Mathematica*, published in 1687, traditional religious ideals came under pressure.³¹ Implicit in the work of Newton and others were the teachings that human beings had the ability to discover absolute truth for themselves. This undermined Calvinism's assertion that there was a considerable gap between God and creation. This declaration of human reason corroded belief that God held humanity's destiny. The result was that religion became less emotional and more rational.

Of the many religious leaders who attacked the growing rationality of the Enlightenment was Jonathan Edwards. Edwards was born in 1703 to Timothy Edwards and Esther Stoddard, the daughter of Solomon Stoddard. Most of Edwards's

³⁰ Ibid., 7-10.

³¹ Edwin Gaustad, *The History of American Religion* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1966), 278.

contemporary fame is because of his sermon, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God”; however, his establishment of a new conversion morphology may be his most influential contribution to American religion.³² After witnessing the revivals of Northampton, Edwards noted a distinct process for conversion in his work, “Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God.” It included, “a deep conviction of sin and helplessness, terror over one’s lost condition, an acceptance of God’s justice in condemning the depraved sinner, a recognition that God was gracious, and, for the elect, a realization that grace had been provided.”³³

Edwards’s understanding of conversion became the norm for revivalists throughout the country. However, as Leonard notes, “Not all Evangelicals agreed with Edwards’ morphology. Some warned of the dangers of religious affections and the “enthusiastical” outbursts which often accompanied revivalistic activities. Others like the infamous James Davenport promote more charismatic expressions often equating genuine conversion with psychological frenzy.³⁴ Although there were detractors, Edwards articulated a theology for conversion that had been practiced but not examined as fully as he proposed. He argued for a new form of Evangelical Calvinism, wherein the elect still experienced an emotional conversion of their own understanding. In essence, this laid the groundwork for a substantial theological shift which included a normative conversion experience.

³² Bill J. Leonard, *A Sense of the Heart: Christian Religious Experience in the United States*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2014), 290-299.

³³ Jonathan Edwards, “A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God,” in Leonard, “Converts, Clones, and Disciples.” 18.

³⁴ Leonard, “Converts, Clones, and Disciples,” 18.

There had been earlier conversionistic experiences and descriptions, specifically among the Wesleyan revivals in eighteenth century England. For instance, by the time George Whitefield began his wide-reaching revivalistic trips in 1738, Edwards had already experienced revival in his own Congregational church of Northampton, Massachusetts. Edwards, unlike many of his Reformed colleagues, acknowledged much of the personal experiences that accompanied conversion and wrote in defense of the proper role of emotion in true religion.

As John Wesley continued to lead the Evangelical revivals in England, his dear friend Whitefield, who had encouraged him to take his message to the masses, raised serious issues with what he called “cheap grace.”³⁵ He attacked established ministers for leading their flocks into Hell by not demanding an experiential salvation, a premise others, such as Presbyterian Gilbert Tennant, would also adopt. This led the established clergy to attack Whitefield and Tennant for the unchecked enthusiasm of the revivals. The prominent voice of this critique was Charles Chauncy, who led the attack from his pulpit in Boston. His sermon, “Enthusiasm Described and Caution’d Against,”³⁶ called for congregants to fight against a religious conversion validated by an emotional experience. He claimed that one good sermon did not make a preacher worthy of God’s calling. Traditional preachers could not contend with these itinerant evangelists, and their charismatic teachings endangered local congregations.

³⁵ Albert D. Belden, *George Whitefield: The Awakener* (Nashville: Cokesbury Press, 1930), 192.

³⁶ Charles Chauncy, “Enthusiasm Described and Caution’d Against,” as quoted in Alan Heimert, *Religion and the American Mind* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2006), 93, 107.

This criticism was not limited to Massachusetts. Throughout the colonies, clergy questioned the driven emotionalism of Evangelicals and accused them of encouraging disorder. They did not appreciate the itinerant preachers who, like Whitefield, journeyed from colony to colony often critiquing the work and efforts of local clergy. They took exception to Evangelical preachers who challenged established social orders which placed both women and African Americans in subordinate status. These preachers reprimanded local clergy for bad teaching and an absence of piety and grace. These divisions created conflicts within denominations over clerical authority as well as conversion. Consequently, the First Great Awakening left many colonials sharply polarized along religious lines. Religious populism, as seen in the innovative methods of revivalism, established a normative method of conversion, but it was a significant shift from that which was previously held dear.

Mobility, Evangelism, and Changing Models

As the Second Great Awakening, a Protestant revival movement in the nineteenth century, arrived on the frontier, church attendance was in drastic decline. The Revolutionary War had disrupted the momentum that many churches had developed and the deist attacks from Tom Paine and others soured the confidence of many new converts.³⁷ Paine is often quoted as saying, “All national institutions of churches, whether Jewish, Christian or Turkish, appear to me no other than human inventions, set up to

³⁷ Tom Paine’s *The Age of Reason* called into question many of the truths upon which new Christian converts had based their conversion. Also, many of the highly esteemed political leaders, such as Thomas Jefferson, subscribed to many of Paine’s deist ideologies.

terrify and enslave mankind, and monopolize power and profit.”³⁸ Christian Smith estimates that less than ten percent of the American populace belonged to a local church body during this Revolutionary period.³⁹

Both the decline and the challenge of religious diversity prompted Evangelical leaders to initiate a new movement of religious piety which manifested itself in what many saw as a new Awakening. This renewed piety had both religious and cultural implications as the leaders sought to conquer the “barbarism” they saw around them, especially on the frontier. This revivalism was driven by a strong democratic spirit which transformed the cultural landscape. De Tocqueville remarked, “The Americans combine the notions of Christianity and of liberty so intimately in their minds that it is impossible to make them conceive the one without the other, and with them this conviction does not spring from that barren traditional faith which seems to vegetate in the soul rather than to live.”⁴⁰ In essence, de Tocqueville observed that Americans placed religion on the side of liberty rather than on the side of oppression. This liberty helped establish revivalism as a continuing feature of Evangelicalism and made possible a theological shift away from strict Calvinism towards modified Calvinism or full-blown Arminianism. The Arminian emphasis on freewill, grace, and general atonement gained extensive influence in America, even among many who continued to use Calvinistic language.⁴¹ By the time

³⁸ Marilyn Butler, ed., *Burke, Paine, Godwin, and the Revolution Controversy* (Oxford: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 124.

³⁹ Christian Smith, *Christian America? What Evangelicals Really Want* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), 101.

⁴⁰ Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 302.

⁴¹ Leonard, *Baptist Ways*, 21.

Methodists were spreading this doctrine on the frontier, it was much less rigid, and offered masses access to God's grace, impacting Baptists, Presbyterians, and the Restorationist movement.⁴²

This theological shift, mixed with a desire to evangelize the frontier natives, contributed to significant changes in models of church organization during this period. In fact, innovation around conversion, accompanied by the Second Great Awakening, contributed to the growth of many denominations such as the Baptists and Methodists. It also created divisions among many staid denominations such as the Presbyterians. Richey attributes this shift to the revivalists who "found traditional church structures largely irrelevant."⁴³ Presbyterians contributed to the early stages of the camp meeting phenomenon, modeling them after the extended outdoor "communion seasons," used by the Presbyterian Church in Scotland. They were particularly intrigued by how these seasons often produced emotional displays of religious conviction.⁴⁴

The mobility of frontier exploration and innovative methods of creative normative conversion experiences continued through the twentieth century. Leonard contends,

By the late twentieth century a sustained interest in spirituality signaled varying experiential possibilities, often drawn from diverse sources of devotional literature, conversion morphologies, and contemplative techniques, practiced inside, outside, or alongside traditional religious settings. These modern and even postmodern approaches represent varying alternatives to spiritual experience from the late nineteenth to the early twenty-first century.⁴⁵

⁴² Heimert, *Religion and the American Mind*, 4-5.

⁴³ Richey, *Denominationalism* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1977), 178.

⁴⁴ Smith, *Christian America*, 141.

⁴⁵ Leonard, "Christ of Many Experiences," 288.

This approach marked a sweeping wave of diversity in Evangelical models of soteriology and ecclesiology. However, the rise of modernity also united Evangelicals in new, inspired ways. John Wolffe comments, “This was a moment that had expanded and matured enormously since the since stirrings of the Second Great Awakening in the 1790s. In their dominance, no less than in the expansion, Evangelicals were to be frustrated by their lack of visible unity, but they maintained an underlying sense of shared spiritual identity.”⁴⁶ As Evangelicalism developed over the span of three centuries, their understanding of conversion changed and the tools of revivalism sustained church growth in way that defined their methodology as it modified ecclesiology.

Contemporary Innovation and Technological Advances

As traced through its history and as seen in a series of tributaries, Evangelicalism has frequently adapted itself because of the influence of contemporary technology and innovation. These influences have been the fuel for many shifts in ecclesial practices, particularly in the changing nature of conversion. Bryan Stone says it best: “Let us confess that we live in a ‘culture of conversion.’ The technologies of transformation assembled within our world to directed toward the endless formation of desire and the only alteration of behavior are unrivaled by any other period in history.”⁴⁷ Moving forward, this “culture of conversion” will define the very nature of Evangelicalism and outline the parameters for evaluating mission expansion in the New World expressions of this movement.

⁴⁶ John Wolffe, *The Expansion of Evangelicalism: The Age of Wilberforce, More, Chalmers, and Finney* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Press, 2007), 246.

⁴⁷ Bryan Stone, *Evangelism After Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2007), 258.

As this chapter concludes, it seems important to restrict the scope and narrow some definitions as this work moves forward. The usage of Evangelicalism and innovation will have particular connotations from this point forward. Evangelicalism will be used to define a particular subgroup within American Protestantism that holds to similar convictions about theological dogma and normative ecclesial practices. Similarly, the use of innovation will be used to denote technological and cultural developments that have shaped how the faithful encounter social, theological, and interpersonal norms. In turn, these two are rarely mutually exclusive because innovation has shaped the very identity of Evangelicalism. The next chapter narrows the discussion around these central terms as it examines the influence of innovation on Evangelicals' soteriology and ecclesiology and propose a way forward.

CHAPTER 2

THE FOUNDATION OF AMERICAN EVANGELICALISM

Evangelical history developed in several distinct phases. The first, as previously illustrated, began with the Protestant Reformation. During this time the focus was primarily on the established religious traditions and the challenges brought forth by a group of religious reformers. The result was a fractured religious culture in Europe that brought forth both conflict and new movements. Among these groups were the Lutheran, Anabaptist, Anglican, and Reformed traditions.

Many early reformers denied they were starting new churches, and, in fact, they may initially have been trying to rediscover “the gospel within the historic Catholic tradition.”¹ Yet, by the mid-seventeenth century, the Reformation’s communions that placed emphasis on the preaching of the gospel and the centrality of Scripture as the foundations of Christian commitment had created a divisive separation between the Catholic Church and Reformation communions. These Evangelical distinctions fed the voluntarism of both the Magisterial and Radical Reformers; however, while the

¹ B. L. Shelley, "Evangelicalism," in *Dictionary of Christianity in America* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1990).

magisterial reformers stayed with the medieval and Catholic model of mandatory church membership for civil participation, the Radical Reformers represented a *voluntaristic* approach to faith – a faith and association uncoerced by the state. This voluntaristic principle allowed these early Reformers to establish a believer’s church based on believer’s baptism – an idea at the heart of voluntaryism.

These Evangelical churches represented a major shift in church method because they placed a high value on personal conscience, personal piety, and the necessity of faith on the part of each individual. This transition in method prepared the foundation for an additional distinct period, identified primarily by the expansion West, which can best be characterized by the numerous “changing patterns” of the New World religious milieu.² This chapter seeks to define the religious convictions of Evangelicalism, explain the uniquely American phenomenon of voluntaryism and its innovative response to faith, then move the discussion toward Evangelical soteriology and ecclesiology, two specific areas where the influence of innovation can best be seen. Finally, this chapter introduces for future examination the contemporary categories of innovation.

The Convictions of American Evangelicalism

In a basic sense, ‘Evangelical’ can be understood to mean a simple belief that Jesus is the Christ of God. The term comes from the Greek word *εὐαγγέλιον*, meaning “gospel” or “good news.” While some might suggest that all Christians are Evangelical, the word is often used to describe a particular type of conservative Protestantism. The term “Evangelical” has its theological roots in the sixteenth century, as evident in the Lutheran

² Shelton H. Smith, Robert T. Handy and Lefferts A. Loetscher, *American Christianity: An Historical Interpretations with Representative Documents, vol. 1* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1960) 187. The phrase “changing patterns,” is unique to this work.

emphasis on the proclamation of the Word. In the years to follow, during the seventeenth century, the Puritan party in the Church of England aimed to reconcile its church with other congregations from the Reformed tradition by first purifying the church from within. These efforts to unify were not without dissention. Those Evangelicals who withdrew from the Church of England came to be known as the “Separatists,” many of whom moved to the New World to seek refuge from religious tyranny. David Bebbington says, “Although ‘evangelical,’ with a lower-case initial, is occasionally used to mean ‘of the gospel’, the term ‘Evangelical,’ with a capital letter, is applied to any aspect of the movement beginning in the 1730s.”³

While there would be much variety found in worship style, local autonomy and polity, and even convictions about preaching style, there is a common set of theological convictions that define the subgroup. Evangelical Mark Noll contends that American Evangelicalism, as best seen in Bebbington’s quadrilateral, is defined by the following characteristics:

Conversionism - Centrality of a personal conversion experience, which Evangelicals call being “born again” or “saved.”

Biblicism - Evangelicals share an affirmation of the Protestant canon as the source of all religious authority necessary for faith and practice.

Activism - Through personal testimony and missionary organizations, Evangelical Christians are challenged to share and spread their faith as commanded in the Great Commission.

Crucicentrism - Evangelicals have shared a belief in the salvific work of Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross as the mode for redemption. In most Evangelical circles, this means a particularly narrow form of penal substitutionary atonement.⁴

³ David W Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London:Routledge, 1993), 18.

⁴ As referenced in Mark Noll, *Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 8. For further study see: John Green and James Guth, et.al., “The American Religious Landscape and Political Attitudes,” *Akron Survey of Religion and Politics in America* (Akron, OH: Roy C. Bliss Institute of Applied Politics at The University of Akron, 2004). Researcher John Green is the director of the

In the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, conservative Christians have often called themselves *Evangelical* in order to distinguish themselves from other Protestants, but it is certainly a more specific subgroup than suggested by that simple title. Although Evangelicalism certainly has its roots in the Reformation, it could be argued that its current form and function is almost purely a result of New World religious idealism. The focus on making conversion experiences normative brought with it a particularly new assurance of salvation. Bebbington comments,

Whereas the Puritans had held that assurance is rare, late and the fruit of struggle in the 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. The consequence of the altered form of the doctrine was a metamorphosis in the nature of popular Protestantism. There was a change in patterns of piety, affecting devotional and practical life in all its departments. The shift, in fact, was responsible for creating in Evangelicalism a new movement and not merely a variation on themes heard since the Reformation.⁵

This religious populism, which Evangelicals connect to the moment of conversion, provided Evangelicalism with a particular niche in the development of the American religious fabric. Randall Balmer comments:

Evangelicalism itself, I believe, is a quintessentially North American phenomenon, deriving as it did from the confluence of Pietism, Presbyterianism, and the vestiges of Puritanism. Evangelicalism picked up the peculiar characteristics from each strain – warmhearted spirituality from the Pietists (for instance), doctrinal precisionism from the Presbyterians, and individualistic introspection from the Puritans – even as the North American context itself has profoundly shaped the various manifestations of Evangelicalism.

Ray C. Bliss Institute of Applied Politics at the University of Akron in Ohio. He created a very informative survey concerning the attitudes and religious practices of many American Religious groups. This report's definition of Evangelicalism continues to inform many religious historians, including Mark Noll.

⁵ Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 43.

In the early eighteenth century, many within the Puritan tradition experienced a deeply spiritual period in American religious history that became known as the First Great Awakening. Yet, there was not universal acceptance of this new methodology, as the “Old Lights” (anti-Revivalists) stood over against the “New Lights” (revivalistic Calvinists). It was led by a diverse group of charismatic leaders and would establish the Evangelical sect as a serious religious movement. Led by preachers such as Jonathan Edwards, Gilbert Tennant, and George Whitefield, the First Great Awakening became the foundation for modern Evangelicalism.

Yet, as the First Awakening waned and religious fervor diminished, expansion to the West was changing the landscape of American religion. Several decades later, it was on the frontier that the use of camp meetings by itinerant preachers rekindled revivalism in America. Under the leadership of James McGready and Charles Finney, the diversity of American religion grew and the Second Great Awakening permanently established revivalism as a unique characteristic of the American religious milieu.⁶

The Second Great Awakening further encouraged many Evangelicals to use the methodology of revivalism as a means for awakening sinners to their need for grace. Revivalism itself “is the Protestant ritual (at first spontaneous, but, since 1830 routinized) in which charismatic evangelists convey ‘the Word’ of God to large masses of people who, under this influence, experience what Protestants call conversion, salvation, regeneration, or spiritual rebirth.”⁷ Revivals created occasions for more conversions, new

⁶ William G. McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), xiii.

⁷ *Ibid.*

forms of worship, hymnody, and theological controversies. They also became a mechanism for drawing persons to the Christian faith and ecclesiastical communities. In short, for many Evangelicals revivalism became a source for securing spiritual “volunteers.”

Voluntaryism, Innovation, and the Unique American Experience

Innovation, as defined earlier, denotes technological and cultural developments that have shaped how the faithful encounter social, theological, and interpersonal norms. In American Evangelicalism, voluntaryism is one of the most widely applied and adapted innovations. Voluntaryism, as used throughout this work, denotes a distinctive occurrence in religious practices that emerged in American society during the post-constitutional era. Sidney Mead suggests that “voluntaryism is the necessary corollary of religious freedom.”⁸ Voluntaryism in American religion is nothing new, and contemporary applications are simply another form of institutionalized revivalism, as voluntaryism became normative within elements of American Evangelicalism.

A consequence of this new religious freedom was that “churches actually gave up . . . coercive power.”⁹ Thus, the distinguishing characteristics of voluntaryism, as understood within the American ecclesial milieu, included its freedom from religious tests, a constitutionally based prohibition against religious establishments, and a dependence on the voluntary support of members who chose one congregation or group over another. Mead continues, “Conceiving of the church as a volunteer association tends

⁸ Sidney Mead, *The Lively Experiment* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1993), 113.

⁹ Ibid.

to push tangible, practical consideration to the fore by placing primary emphasis on the free uncoerced consent of the individual.”¹⁰ Simply put, to succeed in a pluralistic environment, religious communities must attract volunteers, those who choose to participate in a specific group.

Voluntaryism became a primary motivation for defining and solidifying denominational identity so as to promote the unique qualities of each group. This motivation also convinced denominational leaders to take seriously the methods adapted and successfully employed by the revivalists. As voluntaryism became normative, denominationalism, shaped by English Puritans in the 1600s and transported to colonial America, became the primary construct for organizing religious communities in the post-constitutional era.

On the American frontier, revivalism, evident in the Awakenings and other such religious movements, fostered an Evangelical fervor that encouraged individual conversion and religious conviction. However, with each new revival came the question, “Which church shall the converted join?” With that question, revivalism and denominationalism were wed as means of securing and retaining volunteers. In time, the American churches turned from revivalistic cooperation to denominational competition.¹¹

Voluntaryism remains a powerful influence on religion in twenty-first century America, even as the structure of traditional denominations dissipates under the stress of a changing religious globalization. In its place is an increasing localism evident in various

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ It should be noted that there was also much rivalry among the many start-up denominations and religious leaders during the revival period. Yet, the time period can be loosely defined as hospitable among the many competing groups. This point is made in more detail in Finke, *The Churching of America 1776-1990*, 57-58, 96-104.

organizational emphases, including so called megachurches. These “para-denominations” can be defined as:

congregations of several thousand members, often led by a strong and populist founder-pastor whose sermons attract multitudes to worship and Bible study. Megachurches provide specialized ministries to target groups in the church and community, are particularly concerned to reach “seekers” (persons unaffiliated with any church), and are organized around intentional marketing techniques.¹²

This new formula for church organization includes revival-like methods for securing volunteers. Megachurch methods have introduced a new era of church participation by using a theoretical approach first used during the period of American frontier revivalism. This realization has forced many contemporary American churches into a transition from traditional denominational systems to a non-localized form of voluntaryism that takes seriously “new” methods and styles. This innovation has particular application for this work because voluntaryism stands alone in its ability to shape social, theological, and interpersonal norms which, in turn, shapes and defines current and future Evangelical soteriology and ecclesiology. What follows is a brief discussion of why voluntaryism, as a uniquely American innovation, continues to thrive.

Religious Freedom

Evangelicals remain an important illustration of the effective use of the innovation of voluntaryism by a religious community. Voluntaryism became a reality for church life as the nation itself took shape for several important reasons. First, American voluntaryism quickly became the primary mechanism for preserving one’s identity in a

¹² Bill J. Leonard, *Baptist Ways* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2003), 417.

country largely consisting of new immigrants. Many people not only considered themselves “American,” but more specifically “Irish-Catholic” or “Dutch-Lutheran.” Consequently, American religious freedom allowed new immigrants to assign themselves unique identifiers that were both ethnic and religious in nature.¹³

Wuthnow argues, “The nineteenth century legacy of the word ‘freedom’ in the American context closely associates it with freedom of opportunity and, in even more specific terms, with upward mobility. Freedom meant the absence of caste, aristocracy, or government restrictions which might have prevented the individual from pulling himself up by his own bootstraps.”¹⁴ This individualism was quickly applied to religious freedom. It could no longer be assumed that new adherents, or old for that matter, would keep lasting loyalty. Both religious freedom and voluntaryism were a result of widespread religious diversity and a Constitutional promise of the separation of church and state, which was unique in the history of Christianity.

Mobility and Population Groups

Second, America is a country composed of citizens with immigrant roots, and immigration facilitates a highly mobile population. This high mobility creates an itinerant population which searches for ways to establish social roots in local communities. Until

¹³ Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988) 20-22. Although Wuthnow’s discussion is primarily focused on nineteenth and twentieth century migration and immigration to the New World, the parallel can certainly be drawn to the rapid expansion and ethnic identity of earlier centuries. More details concerning the religious-ethnic identity of new settlers can also be found in Edwin Scott Gaustad, *A Religious History of America* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1966), 202-226.

¹⁴ Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion*, 277.

the last half-century, religious organizations in most American communities offered the best and quickest way to find social assimilation. By the twenty-first century this was no longer true. As Jonathan Last comments, “Of all of the evolutions in twentieth century America, the most consequential might be the exodus of religion from the public square.”¹⁵

Although Last’s study is primarily about population density issues, he remarks in some detail about the danger of the decline in religious affiliation among a more highly mobile, highly educated population. As families representing increasingly diverse population groups move from city to city and shift from homogenous suburbs to diverse urban cities, they encounter a wide range of alternatives for social networking, the church being one of a myriad of available opportunities. This means that the twenty-first century church is not only competing with other churches but with all social organizations for the affection of the masses. For this reason, the principles of voluntaryism continue to thrive as faith leaders continue to seek innovative ways to leverage its benefits.

Separation of Church and State

A final explanation for the success of voluntaryism as an American innovation is that the idealized separation of church and state has prevented many religious institutions from becoming trapped in the scandal of political life. For instance, the Church of England is intrinsically linked to the governmental and political corruption of Great Britain. In contrast, this separation in America has prevented the local church or its clergy

¹⁵ Jonathan Last, *What to Expect When No One's Expecting: America's Coming Demographic Disaster* (Jackson, TN: Encounter Books, 2014), 84.

from receiving governmental subsidies. Thus, the local Church body must “market” its services and demonstrate its relevance to the public market. The church in the United States is fundamentally no different than any other American organization in the social sphere; it competes for membership and charitable dollars.

It is this final unique characteristic that best informs this discussion of voluntarism. The freedom from the boundaries of a religious establishment allowed Evangelicalism to find roots and thrive in the New World. The institutional legacy of American revivalism created the establishment of “religious populism.” Revivalism itself was “a movement that took shape around magnetic leaders who were highly skilled in communication and group mobilization.” The revivalistic leaders of the Evangelical tradition have freely experimented with unconventional, and often democratic, methods of spreading the gospel.

Nathan Hatch states that the unique nature of “religious populism remained among the oldest and deepest impulses in American life.”¹⁶ One of the legacies of this populist tradition is the fostering of efficient ways to organize Evangelical communities. Noll contends that Evangelicals have thrived “because they successfully adapted their Christian convictions to American ideals.”¹⁷ From the Reformation through the many of the movement, Evangelicals, in a broad understanding of this identification, have utilized the ideology of religious populism, as adapted from voluntarism, as a tool for reaching people.

¹⁶ Nathan Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 5.

¹⁷ Mark Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 152.

Unique Identifiers of the Evangelical Experience

The foundation for the argument of this work has now been fully examined, beginning with a series of tributaries that established the historic roots of a particular subgroup within Protestantism, the Evangelicals, and illustrated their use of innovation as method to distribute their message to the masses. These tributaries provided new methods for missions that also changed the way conversion was understood as religion liberty was sought in the New World. As Evangelicalism developed in distinct ways, its theological tenets become more clearly defined as it flourished in America and voluntaryism became a mark of the unique religious experience.

From this point forward, using the provided definitions and by narrowing the scope of the partnership between innovation and voluntaryism found exclusively in the American milieu, this work looks at two theological categories appropriate for a deeper understanding of the changing nature of the Evangelical Church: soteriology and ecclesiology. These are unique identifiers that measure the ways in which innovation continues to shape the church and provides a framework by which contemporary applications can be evaluated and assessed, and guideposts for future innovation can be proposed.

CHAPTER 3

INNOVATION AND THE MORPHOLOGY OF EVANGELICAL SOTERIOLOGY

The previous chapter illustrated in what ways the ecclesial practices of American Evangelicalism has shifted because of the influence of modern innovation. This chapter moves more specifically to examine the Evangelical Church's notions of conversion and voluntary church association. Or said more succinctly: a change in method changed the message. As Puritanism created a fertile landscape where the principles of a believer's church took shape, the democratic idealism of America gave rise to a unique form of revivalism.

This revivalism, marked with the basic American principle that all social organizations are based on voluntary choices and relationships, fostered denominational competition that forced many church leaders to leverage modern innovation in an effort to attract new believers. Through an exploration of the morphology of conversion, best seen in a series of Awakenings which made conversion normative, this work contends that the leveraging of these new methods became the primary tool by which leaders increased faith engagement as the principles of revivalism became institutionalized. In addition, as the purveyors of these modern innovations quickly learned, this shift in

soteriology changed the relationship between personal piety and engagement in a believer's church.

Puritan American and Modified Calvinism

The early roots of the Reformation promoted *sola Scriptura*, *sola fida*, and *sola gratia*, ideas that often unified distinct theological sects against historic religious practices. As illustrated, these reformers can be accurately divided into two theological camps: establishmentarians and the dissenters or radicals. The establishmentarians include the Roman Catholic Church and the magisterial reformers. Although there are major theological distinctions between these two groups, both groups elevated the role of ruling authority, papal and ecclesial, respectively. The magisterial reformers linked baptism and citizenship as essential for maintaining a moral "Christian" society. Thus, sacramental assurances of salvation were tied to church membership.

In contrast, the Radical Reformers drastically changed the way Protestants viewed both the role of the church and the government. The Radicals, primarily led by the Spiritualists, Rationalists, and Anabaptists, were dissenters who believed the church and the state must remain separate, for they feared the state would oppress the freedom of conscience that first enabled the Reformation. This freedom informed political and theological principles, such as believer's baptism, the sole authority of Scripture, uncoerced conversion of adults, and voluntary church affiliation. These Old World demarcations continued in the New World through exploration and early settlements by the Puritans. These formative years laid a fertile foundation for New World religious diversity and the uniquely American phenomenon of voluntarism.

Following the actions of Martin Luther and other Reformers, the European religious establishment was in turmoil. The Tudor Monarchy had created much confusion concerning its religious loyalties. Although some rulers were loyal to Rome, many embraced the Reformation and instilled its influences. Yet, under the reign of Mary I (also known as ‘Bloody Mary’), many Protestants, including leader Thomas Cranmer, were burned at the stake. Many of those who survived simply fled to more friendly lands. Queen Elizabeth I and King James I brought a new uncertainty to the church in England. Although both had no intention of re-Catholicizing England, they also refused to formally endorse purging the English Church of any Catholic remnants.¹ Thus, the Puritans began with certain Reformed Protestants, some of whom sought to cleanse the Church of England from these remnants, and those who urged separation from a false (Anglican) communion.

During early Puritan development a group within the church believed, maybe idealistically, that the Church of England could be cleansed of papal loyalists and remain in England. They were convinced that papal abuses did not justify complete withdrawal. However, another group, the less hopeful Separatists, initially moved to Holland to find religious freedom, but ultimately found the religious tyranny of Europe too oppressive and boarded the Mayflower. This famous ship transported these Separatists to what became the Plymouth Colony, Massachusetts in 1620. Noll remarks about the role of the Puritans in England, prior to their New World arrival:

The Puritans thus arose as the “advanced” or “precise” party among English Protestants. Defined negatively, the Puritans wanted to wipe out the vestiges of

¹ Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*, 32.

Roman Catholic worship and doctrine that survived with the Church of England as governed by Queen Elizabeth I (1558-1603), James I (1603-1625), and their clerical advisors. Defined positively, the Puritans wanted to finish the Reformation and finish it now.²

Following the first generation of Puritans in England, the descendants of the early Separatists brought a similar “cleansing” attitude to the New World.

Noll lists four primary characteristics of the Puritans, including: total dependency on God for salvation, emphasis on the authority of the Bible, a belief that God created society as unified, and a belief that covenants are God’s primary way of working through people.³ The Puritan efforts in America were unique in many ways including, but not limited to, their use of voluntaryism’s principles for religious structure and growth. Perry Miller rightly calls the Puritan “experiment” in the New World an “errand into the wilderness.” Miller suggests that these early settlers “were reluctant voyagers” because the English “authorities made life impossible for Separatists.”⁴ Led by English born William Bradford, among others, these settlers understood the gravity and difficulty of the errand they had assumed. He states, “May not and ought not the children of these fathers rightly say: Our fathers were Englishmen which came over this great ocean, and were ready to perish in this wilderness; but they cried unto the Lord, and he heard their voice, and looked on their adversities . . .”⁵ This journey was both difficult and coerced

² Ibid., 32

³ Ibid., 32-34.

⁴ Jon Butler and Harry S. Stout, ed., *Religion in American History: A Reader*, “Errand Into the Wilderness,” by Perry Miller, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) 30.

⁵ Ibid., 31.

at the same time. The circumstances challenged the faith of these early settlers and allowed a new set of roots to be established for what was an “uprooted” group of people.

Yet, not all the Puritans followed the errand to America. For those who remained in Europe, a dissenter by the name of Thomas Helwys appeared as an outspoken advocate of religious liberty in a time when this type of thinking was considered heretical. In 1612, Helwys addressed King James in an appeal entitled *A Short Declaration on the Mystery of Iniquity*, which contained an extraordinary plea for religious freedom for all groups. In this document Helwys states:

If the King’s people be obedient and true subjects, obeying all humane lawes made by the King, our Lord the King can require no more: for men’s religion to God is betwixt God and themselves; the King shall not answer for it, neither may the King be judge between God and man. f our lord the King by his discerning judgment see that as Queen Mary by her sword of justice had no power over her subjects consciences (for then had she power to make them all Papists, and all that resisted her therein suffered justly as evil doers) neither hath our lord the King by that sword of justice power over his subjects consciences: for all earthly powers are one and the same in their several dominions.⁶I

King James promptly responded by remanding Helwys to London’s Newgate Prison. Nevertheless, such writings left a lasting impact on the Separatist movement by insisting that church and state be kept separate in matters of law to ensure individual freedom of conscience. What the previous pericopes illustrate is some early dissenters’ belief in religious freedom and the liberty of conscience due all people. Helwys’s followers, coupled with those of John Smyth and John Murton, came to be known as the Baptists and established the foundation for a larger group of dissenters in the New World.

⁶ H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage* (B&H Academic: Nashville, TN, 1987), 71.

The focus on free choice and uncoerced church affiliation provided the backbone for a growing voluntarism among Evangelicals in America.

Back in the New World the popular growth of early Protestantism went nearly without challenge during the seventeenth century. The first English settlement in North America was in 1607 at Jamestown, Virginia – settled not by Separatists, but by English entrepreneurs sent by King James I who hoped to capitalize on the unexplored coastal region. Where “Evangelicalism” is concerned, perhaps the first “religious” settlement in America was the Plymouth Plantation of 1620.

What made the Plymouth colony distinct in the New World was its association with a group of citizens fleeing religious tyranny and looking for sacred space where they might worship God according to conscience instead of compulsion. William Bradford’s *Mayflower Compact*, signed in 1620, served as a social contract between the early settlers and their leaders. The settlers consented to follow the government’s regulations in return for protection. The *Mayflower Compact* used religious language to pledge allegiance to the crown, thus inextricably wedding early colonial views of church and state. The *Compact* endured until 1692.

For these early Puritan settlers in Plymouth, the motivation to leave the Old World was an attempt to escape; however, there was another non-Separatist group that settled Massachusetts Bay in 1630. This group was ostensibly loyal to the monarchy. Its leaders hoped that it would set an example for those remaining in England of how the church could be purged of its Catholic residue.

In particular, John Winthrop, a respected religious and political figure, was exceedingly devoted to the Puritan disposition. In a now classic statement on the nature of the Puritan experiment, Winthrop commented,

For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us. So that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken. . . . we shall be made a story and a by-word throughout the world. We shall open the mouths of enemies to speak evil of the ways of God . . . We shall shame the faces of many of God's worthy servants, and cause their prayers to be turned into curses upon us til we be consumed out of the good land whither we are going.⁷

Winthrop made it clear that he desired to create a Christian community that held Puritan beliefs. His efforts to reform society and purge any “un-godly” influences made him very popular among his peers and he quickly took over civic leadership. He was the governor of Massachusetts for nearly two decades. In addition, he supported the Puritan ideals that wedded church membership and civic responsibilities. Meaning, early practitioners of voluntarism understood that the church was not only a religious institution but also a political force. The Puritans widely held that accepting the covenant of grace not only qualified a person for church membership, but also gave the believer a voting role in civic matters. Noll remarks,

Moreover, the church covenant linked converted individuals to the social project without requiring the burden of a church-state machinery such as the one that had persecuted them in England. New England, was, thus, no theocracy, where ministers exercised direct control of public life. It was, however, a place where magistrates frequently called upon the revered father for advice, including how best they might promote the religious life of the colonies.⁸

⁷ John Winthrop, “A Model of Christian Charity,” (1630)
<http://history.hanover.edu/texts/winthmod.html>, accessed on 1 January, 2009.

⁸ Noll, *A History of Christianity*, 42.

The civic participation requirement of church membership encouraged church growth and went nearly unchallenged until the 1640s when the English Puritans and Parliamentarians conflicted with the king and were forced to draft a defining statement.

The statement, *The Cambridge Platform*, written in 1648, provided the details of church government including the autonomy of the local congregation, an ideal central to many Puritan congregations. It noted of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1646), “doe judge it to be very holy, orthodox and judicious in all matters of faith.” Yet, although *The Cambridge Platform* affirmed the prominent Calvinistic theological stance, it differed from the *Westminster Confession* concerning church government. Noll makes this distinction, “The New Englanders agreed that the “Catholick [universal] Church” consisted of all Christians, but it stated that local churches were to be made up only of professed Christians and their children. The Platform dissociated itself from extreme separatism but did proclaim the substantial independence of each local congregation.”⁹

Ultimately, *The Cambridge Platform* was an attempt to define the role of church and state in the early colonies. In many ways, the document was a reactive solution to the problems that had risen in the New World tensions between local congregations. *The Cambridge Platform* became the seventeenth century foundation for New England churches. It established the New England congregational church government and became the definitive statement on what would become known as the “New England Way.” It promoted an establishmentarian view of church and state relations, even as it affirmed congregational, not Presbyterian, polity for Puritan churches, thus, affirming the

⁹ Ibid., 43.

voluntaryism ideal of a believer's church. Local churches had freedom to uniquely identify themselves with the needs and uniqueness of the local community.

Although there were a few noted opponents to the Puritan system, the most significant opponent to this way of life was procreation. During the 1650s a large number of children, whose parents were the earliest settlers, failed to have or articulate a conversion experience, and were thus excluded from full membership in the local church. This problem was perpetuated when these unconverted children married and had children of their own. Although many of these adults had been baptized as infants, few had come forward to make their own confession of faith; however, they still wanted to have their own children baptized. This created a very complex predicament because, although church and civic leaders desired to protect the "believer's church," they also wanted as many as possible under the covering of the church. Thus, in 1662, the Reverend Solomon Stoddard proposed the Half-way Covenant.

This covenant was Stoddard's attempt to protect the religious purposes established by the first generation of Puritan settlers. Under the covenant, baptized but non-believing parents could have their children baptized and be granted halfway membership in the local church. Although the Lord's Supper was reserved for those who could articulate a conversion experience, all other rights of church membership were given to these halfway members. The widespread adoptions of the Half-way Covenant, by most everyone but Roger Williams and other Baptists, allowed a somewhat peaceable existence between the colonies until the eighteenth century.

In a few short years the Puritan expansion to the New World had forever defined the unique history of the western world. In two waves, the Puritan settlers had created a

unique culture that fused, for good or bad, religious identity and civic responsibility. In fact, many of the religious tenets and congregational methods adapted and professed by the Puritans still influence the contemporary American religious milieu. In addition, the religious and social values that these Puritan settlers established in the New World echo the primary definitions of Mark Noll which were stated earlier. Puritanism's lasting doctrinal heritage includes the total dependency on God for salvation, the emphasis on biblical authority, and the power of faith in shaping public values. The emphasis on personal conversion is perhaps the most important aspect of the Puritan impact on voluntaryism. In America, conversionism and voluntaryism are often closely related because, when wed, they result in an uncoerced conversion.

First Awakening and Religious Experience

Many Puritans drew on an Augustinian understanding of original sin, believing that humanity, apart from God, would never seek relationship with the Divine. Humanity is totally depraved and only when God moves on the heart of an individual can one choose salvation. Yet, unlike many of the early Reformers who required a conversion experience while insisting on sacramental assurances, making the sacraments normative for their followers, the Puritans saw conversion as the only necessary assurance of salvation. In fact, early Puritans like the Reverend Thomas Shepard made significant efforts to trace the salvation of the soul from rebellion to obedience. In his writing *The Sincere Convert*, which reads like a catechism, he asked and answered:

Question. How doth Christ redeem men out of this misery?

Answer. By paying a price for them. (1 Cor. 6.ult.) God's mercy will be manifested in saving some, and his justice must be satisfied by having satisfaction or price made and paid for man's sin. Hence Christ satisfieth God's justice.¹⁰

He continued with four specific evidences that one has truly been converted. This illustrates the high value placed on conversion among the Puritans.

Puritans required, or almost required, conversion for all who claimed membership in the church, even as they retained infant baptism. Thus, conversion became the entry point to a believer's church. They understood conversion as the foundation for the covenant with God in Christ and the covenant with the believing community of the church, thus the church would hear a conversion story and vote on its acceptance. Edwin Gaustad notes:

Visible saints, only those consciously redeemed by the saving grace of God, constituted the proper subjects of church membership. In other words, the church covenant presumed a prior contract: the covenant of grace . . . The Puritan church was therefore a withdrawn, restricted, exclusive fellowship. All who sought admission did so voluntarily, but not all who volunteered got in.¹¹

These beliefs are confirmed by *The Cambridge Platform*, which emphasized that conversion must precede church membership. It states, "The doors of the churches of Christ upon earth, do not by God's appointment stand so wide open, that all sorts of people good or bad, may freely enter therein at their pleasure."¹² Thus, Puritans, rooted in Anglican history, proved to be establishmentarians in that they understood visible church membership as the fruit of conversion, essentially eliminating the possibility of

¹⁰ Thomas Shepard, *The Sincere Convert*, (Boston: Doctrinal Tract and Book Society, 1853) 31.

¹¹ Edwin Scott Gaustad, *A Religious History of America*, (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1966) 51.

¹² "Cambridge Platform," (1648), http://www.pragmatism.org/american/cambridge_platform.htm, accessed on January, 2009.

uncoerced church affiliation. For if an individual must be a member of a church body to participate in local civic activities, membership is no longer voluntary.

Other Separatists, successors of the Radical Reformers and Roger Williams, insisted that the invisible church mattered to God, because only God knew the heart of an individual. Subsequently, in contrast to European views of church affiliation, the dissenters claimed that voluntary church membership and the state be kept separate. As will be seen, this distinction became vital as Protestantism took root in the Americas. It was the Puritan's elevation of conversion and the radical's focus on an uncoerced believer's church that ultimately changed the face of American Evangelicalism and defined voluntaryism for the coming centuries.

Normative Conversion and Edwards's View

Puritans were not the only "players" in the shaping of Evangelicalism. Although some of the religious movements in the colonies were "self-conscious protests against the Puritan way of life,"¹³ there were many that were imported from the Continent and England. One of these groups, the Baptists, shaped voluntaryism in a variety of ways.

As noted before, Baptists first found roots in Puritan Separatism, a movement that rejected Anglicanism altogether. In addition, there is little doubt that many of the earliest Baptists were influenced by the Anabaptists. The Dutch Mennonites also shared similarities with General Baptists, including believer's baptism, religious liberty, and Arminian views of salvation, predestination and original sin. Around 1609, in

¹³ Noll, *Christianity in the United States and Canada*, 55.

Amsterdam, John Smyth led the group in embracing "believer's baptism," in what became the defining moment which led to the establishment of this first Baptist church. After Smyth left his leadership role, sometime after 1611, Helwys took over the remaining group and led the church back to England in 1612.

The first Baptist congregation in the New World was founded by Roger Williams by 1639 in Providence, Rhode Island. For a brief time, Williams became the colonial face of the Baptist movement. He soon departed the Baptist fold in quest of new revelations. Among the most lasting influences of Williams's leadership are his advocacy for the Native Americans and the ideals of "soul liberty." Williams contended that the Puritans, in addition to other settlers, had no right to the Native American land, thus their colonial charters were invalid. This influenced his belief in what would come to be known as "soul liberty." Noll notes:

He asserted that individuals who had not confessed Christ could not be held accountable to a social covenant. He also felt it was wrong in principle for magistrates to enforce attendance to church and other spiritual duties, since true Christian action proceeds from the heart. "Christening makes not Christians," he stated, and then went on to argue that attempts to force nonbelievers to act like believers were self-defeating.¹⁴

The principles of soul liberty, illustrated in this statement, quickly became an American norm. In fact, Williams's legacy informs this discussion of voluntaryism because he insisted that personal conversion and soul liberty were essential for the American believer's church. From this point forward, American churches made efforts to attract non-believers to particular congregations.

¹⁴ Ibid., 59.

Although Roger Williams and the Baptists are central to the development of voluntaryism in the United States, there are three other groups with significant influence: Anglicans, Quakers, and Presbyterians. The Anglican Church, or Church of England, was the established church in most of Virginia, North and South Carolina, Georgia and Maryland by the end of the seventeenth century. The Anglicans represented a significant American establishment until the Revolution. The Quakers, under the leadership of George Fox, were in constant, public conflict with the Puritans. In addition to an anti-*establishmentarian* view of religion, the Quakers insisted on freedom of religion and freedom from coerced religious affiliation. Finally, the Presbyterians, primarily immigrants from Scotland, brought with them “communion seasons” – a long gathering, usually multiple days, which included multiple sermons by multiple preachers and celebration of the Lord’s Supper. Noll writes, “When Presbyterians brought these ‘communion seasons’ with them to the New World, they provided an outlet for religious expression that would be especially important on the frontier. The ‘camp meeting’ that developed as the mainstay of American revivalism in the 1790s and following years was in many cases a direct descendant of these early communion seasons.”¹⁵

Although the Baptists played a seminal role in making uncoerced conversion normative in colonial America, it seems appropriate at this point to examine a series of First Awakenings proclaimers who utilized normative conversion as a mainstay of their form of American Evangelicalism and established the normative expectation for those to follow. As example, consider the theological suppositions of Jonathan Edwards. Edwards

¹⁵ Ibid., 69

was born in East Windsor, Connecticut to the daughter of the Reverend Solomon Stoddard. His father, who had worked as a tutor for college students, fostered his son's love for thinking which ultimately manifested in admissions to Yale College at the age of thirteen. While studying the works of John Locke and Isaac Newton, Edwards became convinced that the natural world gave evidence of God's daily involvement in creation's design, and not merely deism as many of his classmates had concluded.

As his passion for more deeply understanding God grew, he accepted a stated supply position at a Reformed church in New York City. After refusing their full-time position, he returned to Yale where he became their primary tutor. It was during this season that he began to find security in his own salvation. He said,

God's absolute sovereignty and justice, with respect to salvation and damnation, is what my mind seems to rest assured of, as much as of any thing that I see with my eyes; at least it is so at times. But I have often, since that first conviction, had quite another kind of sense of God's sovereignty than I had then. I have often since had not only a conviction, but a delightful conviction. The doctrine has very often appeared exceedingly pleasant, bright, and sweet. Absolute sovereignty is what I love to ascribe to God. But my first conviction was not so.¹⁶

Following his conversion experience, Edwards was ordained to the pulpit in Northampton, serving alongside his grandfather. The first public acknowledgement that his views on conversion had morphed was in a sermon entitled, "God Glorified in the Work of Redemption, by the Greatness of Man's Dependence upon Him, in the Whole of It," preached in Boston in 1732. He remarked:

And as we are dependent on the goodness of God for more now than under the first covenant, so we are dependent on a much greater, more free and wonderful goodness. We are now more dependent on God's arbitrary and sovereign good pleasure. We were in our first estate dependent on God for holiness. We had our

¹⁶ Henry Rogers and Edward Hickman, ed. *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (London, England: Ball, Arnold, and Company, 1840) 4.

original righteousness from him; but then holiness was not bestowed in such a way of sovereign good pleasure as it is now. Man was created holy, for it became God to create holy all his reasonable creatures. It would have been a disparagement to the holiness of God's nature, if he had made an intelligent creature unholy. But now when fallen man is made holy, it is from mere and arbitrary grace; God may for ever deny holiness to the fallen creature if he pleases, without any disparagement to any of his perfections.¹⁷

This served as his first sharp critique of Arminianism and illustrated how this particular brand of Calvinistic soteriology was a move away from what New World colonists had heard. As Edwards's convictions became deeper, revival broke out in Northampton and became a laboratory for observing the process and varieties of conversion. During this time of revival he preached what is probably the best single illustration of his own convictions concerning conversion, his sermon "A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God in the Conversion of Many Hundred Souls in Northampton."

This sermon served as powerful account of the word among the people, only two-hundred families, of Northampton and Edward's account of these religious experiences. Edwards noted that "there was scarcely a single person in the town, old or young, left unconcerned about the great things of the eternal world." The diversity of the converted is noteworthy as well; he continues: "The work in this town, and others about us, has been extraordinary on account of the universality of it, affecting all sorts, sober and vicious, high and low, rich and poor, wise and unwise."¹⁸ Edwards estimated that "more than 300 souls were savingly brought home to Christ, in this town, in the space of half a

¹⁷ Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume Two* (Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2010), 17.

¹⁸ Jonathan Edwards, "A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God in the Conversion of Many Hundred Souls in Northampton" (Gale ECCO, Print Editions, August 6, 2010), xii.

year, and about the same number of males as females.”¹⁹ At first he was hesitant to print the account, believing that many would think either he was boasting or that the experiences were fabricated, thus he added a preface concerning his own intentions,

I am very sensible, how apt many would be, if they should see the account I have here given, presently to think with themselves that I am very fond of making a great many converts, and of magnifying the matter; and to think that for want of judgment, I take every religious pang, and enthusiastic conceit, for saving conversion. I do not much wonder if they should be apt to think so; and, for this reason, I have forborne to publish an account of this great work of God, though I have often been solicited.²⁰

Edwards noted that these conversion experiences most frequently produced two effects in the converted: “one was, that they have brought them immediately to quit their sinful practices” and “the other effect was, that it put them on earnest application to the means of salvation, reading, prayer, meditation, the ordinances of God’s house, and private conference.”²¹

The significance of the Spirit’s work in Edwards’s observations about conversion should not be lost. In fact, drawing heavily on an Augustinian view of both sin and new birth he gave us this summary of the Spirit's work: “He has so awakened and convinced persons’ consciences, and made them so sensible of their exceeding great vileness, and given them such a sense of His wrath against sin, as has quickly overcome all their vain self-confidence, and borne them down into the dust before a holy and righteous God.”²² The Spirit’s work in and through a person, in a whole variety of religious experiences,

¹⁹ Ibid., xxi.

²⁰ Ibid., ii.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., xxiv.

was the mark of true conversion. For Edwards, America's Augustine, the experience of conversion was the affirmation that the salvation was real. Throughout Edwards's preaching he gave evidences of the grace received by the new converts, including what he would call "the superlative excellency of divine things," or as he described it:

The way that grace seems sometimes first to appear, after legal humiliation, is in earnest longings of soul after God and Christ: to know God, to love Him, to be humble before Him, to have communion with Christ in His benefits; which longings, as they express them, seem evidently to be of such a nature as can arise from nothing but a sense of the superlative excellency of divine things, with a spiritual taste and relish of them, and an esteem of them as their highest happiness and best portion.²³

Edwards argued that the fear so often connected to conversion under his preaching was a post-conversion awareness of their personal depravity. The changed nature of his understanding of conversion is best exemplified in the morphology of his own preaching. Conversion was not a trivial theological topic for Edwards. The following remarks are significant:

Conversion is a great and glorious work of God's power, at once changing the heart, and infusing life into the dead soul; though the grace then implanted more gradually displays itself in some than in others. In some, converting light is like a glorious brightness suddenly shining upon a person, and all around him: they are in a remarkable manner brought out of darkness into marvellous light. In many others it has been like the dawning of the day, when at first but a little light appears...and gradually increases.²⁴

Revivalism, as a new innovation leveraged during the Great Awakening, represented the possibility that divine grace could and would intersect with the human condition. This intersection would be marked by outward religious experience that served as the first fruit of new birth. For that reason, Edwards became the champion of what was called New

²³ Ibid., xxix.

²⁴ Jonathan Edwards, *A Narrative of Surprising Conversions, from Jonathan Edwards on Revival* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 40, 41.

Light Calvinism. Many New Lights would follow with the desire to duplicate the events of Northampton and the religious experiences that followed.

Whitefield and Religious Affection

A contemporary of Edwards was the evangelist George Whitefield. This preacher to the masses is nearly unparalleled in the history of Evangelical Christianity. Benjamin Franklin, his friend, admirer, and publisher, recalled his unmatched impact on Philadelphia:

In 1739 arrived among us from Ireland the Reverend Mr. Whitefield, who had made himself remarkable there as an itinerant preacher. He was at first permitted to preach in some of our churches; but the clergy, taking a dislike to him, soon refused him their pulpits, and he was obliged to preach in the fields. The multitudes of all sects and denominations that attended his sermons were enormous, and it was matter of speculation to me, who was one of the number, to observe the extraordinary influence of his oratory on his hearers, and how much they admired and respected him, notwithstanding his common abuse of them, by assuring them they were naturally half beast and half devils. It was wonderful to see the change soon made in the manners of our inhabitants. From being thoughtless or indifferent about religion, it seemed as if all the world were growing religious, so that one could not walk thro' the town in an evening without hearing psalms sung in different families of every street.²⁵

Whitefield left an impression on statesmen like Franklin, but also the poor in England and settlers of the colonies. Yet, the 'Grand Itinerate' was born to humble roots in 1714 in Gloucester where his parents owned a local inn. Here he was introduced to a wide spectrum of the local residences, began to develop a sharp tongue, and became skilled at storytelling. Although George was an average student, he was quickly recognized for his oratory skills and took leading roles in many of the school plays. As he grew older, he

²⁵ Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2014), 110.

became more passionate about studying theater and perfected his voice projection and body language. As he turned his attention to scholarship, he gained admissions to Oxford University as a servitor student and met Charles Wesley, who invited him to join his Holy Club – a group of spiritual seekers.

It was during his time with the Holy Club that Whitefield experienced spiritual conversion. Particularly influential was the work of Henry Scougal and his book *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*. Scougal argued, “Some falsely placed religion in going to church, doing hurt to no one, being constant in the duties of the closet, and now and then reaching out their hands to give alms.” Whitefield reflected: “God soon showed me; for in reading a few lines further, ‘that true religion was a union of the soul with God, and Christ formed within us,’ a ray of divine light was instantaneously darted in upon my soul.”²⁶ Whitefield’s conversion forced him to redefine the nature of conversion, which in turn changed his perception of preaching and ministry.

In 1736 his formal education was complete and within eighteen months he was preaching to enormous crowds who were traveling from afar to hear the young preacher proclaim. His physical appearance did not fit the mantel; after all, measles had left him cross-eyed and his love of long meals left him short and thick. Continuing to long for the bigger stage, Whitefield accepted the John Wesleys’ invitation to join them for New World opportunities in Georgia, where he arrived in 1738. Georgia loved the colonist and the affection was reciprocated as he traveled the sea thirteen times to preach, including one occasion where he stayed for eleven months. This season was spent leading an

²⁶ Randy Petersen, *The Printer and the Preacher: Ben Franklin, George Whitefield, and the Surprising Friendship That Invented America* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2015) 102-4.

unprecedented revival where he preached two or three times each day, including a meeting in Boston that drew 20,000, which was 3,000 more than the city's population.

Whitefield did not invent American revivalism, but he certainly perfected it. While the revivals of Edwards in Northampton were primarily regional affairs, Whitefield's meetings were regional gatherings and his notoriety preceded him as he traveled. Wherein Edwards had openly acknowledged that he believed the revivals in the north were a "surprising work of God," Whitefield was not surprised at all. He was certain that there was a proper strategy for inducing revival to breakout. In fact, the lasting impact of New Light Whitefield is most certainly his use of new innovation as a tool for revivalism. These include, but are not limited to, his preaching style, extensive event promotion, and use of printing for widespread dissemination.

In his nearly thirty-five years of public preaching, Whitefield amassed over eighteen thousand sermons that reflected a newly birthed, newly formed version of modified Calvinism that mixed a high reliance on God's sovereignty for salvation with evangelistic fervor. While openly affirming God's sole choosing in salvation, Whitefield aggressively offered Jesus to the masses, closing his sermons by proclaiming: "Come poor, lost, undone sinner, come just as you are to Christ."²⁷ In addition, Whitefield was known for his dynamic preaching style that often abandoned the pulpit for his preaching in coalmines, wheat fields, and the marketplace. With the abandonment of the cathedral, Whitefield also adapted his message about conversion to make it more persuasive to an audience that was more accustomed to the theater than the steeple. He used the acting

²⁷ Frank Lambert, *Pedlar in Divinity: George Whitefield and the Transatlantic Revivals* (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1994), 19.

skills he polished at Oxford to weep, laugh, and act out the story, which transformed his preaching into a production.

Whitefield's style of branding was both celebrated and panned. Critics called him a "the pedlar of divinity" as he promoted his preaching like a prizefight,²⁸ and no one promoted better than George. He learned how to leverage newspapers and began printing his own *Journals* around the age of twenty-five to promote his events. These writings were filled with egotistical accounts of the masses flocking to his preaching events.²⁹ In 1742, he launched *Christian History*, a monthly magazine spreading the word about the success of his revivals and revivals of others. Printing and preaching weren't cheap, so Whitefield developed an extensive system for turning revival contacts into regular donors.

Although his innovations, which are still widely used today, were controversial, what was probably the most offensive to observers was his flippant disregard for those who exalted reason over emotion. Whitefield, even more so than Edwards, insisted that true conversion was accompanied by an ecstatic religious experience. His hubris warranted criticism, as did his position on American slaves, to whom he preached the Gospel but refused to demand their freedom. At the age of fifty-five, Whitefield died the morning after he preached his final sermon in September, 1770.³⁰ Whitefield is an easy

²⁸ Ibid., 12.

²⁹ Ibid., 37.

³⁰ Harry Stout, *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991) 112.

target for modern historians who consider him a gimmick, but his transatlantic Evangelical network and the continued influence of his innovations are worth noting.³¹

More “New Lights”: Gilbert Tennent and James Davenport

While Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield might be the best examples of New Light Calvinism and innovation’s influence on the morphology of conversion, they certainly were not alone. While the successful revivals of the First Great Awakening solidified the clear division among Calvinists who were already divided about the Adopting Act of 1729 (some believing that subscription violated the freedom of conscience), more aggressive New Light preachers like Gilbert Tennent frequented local communities without the invitation of a local pastor. Tennent’s mentor was the German born Theodorus Jacobus Frelinghuysen who had led successful revivals in the middle colonies and preached a rather aggressive form of Lordship salvation, which argued that supposed converts should examine their lives for evidence of conversion.³²

This need for an external affirmation of an internal transformation took root in Tennent’s preaching. Revivalists like Tennent had an open disregard for existing local churches, but felt justified in doing so because of all the unchurched community members. Local pastors saw the actions of the revivalists as rebuke of their own ministry. In addition to the uninvited nature of Tennent’s work, he was innovative in the way he thought about theological education and ordination.

³¹ Ibid., 163.

³² James Tanis, *Dutch Calvinistic Pietism in the Middle Colonies: A Study in the Life and Theology of Theodorus Jacobus Frelinghuysen* (Martinus Nijhoff, 1967), 83.

He was born in 1703 in Ireland to the minister William Tennent. At the age of fifteen, Gilbert's family moved to Pennsylvania where his father continued educating his son and founded the Log College just north of Philadelphia in 1735. Initially started as a "school of the prophets," it was the predecessor of the American Protestant seminary and quickly became the landing place for the theological education of New Light Calvinists.

This mode of theological education called into question the historically held standard for ordination to the pastoral office. In Tennent's view, it would no longer be sufficient to merely complete your studies, but you must also give evidence of your own conversion experience. For this reason, graduates of Log College were often considered suspect as church leaders assumed that his instructors valued religious experience over academic rigor. This brought back into view the old argument about subscription; wherein Old Light Calvinists believed adherence to the creeds was sufficient testimony to one's pastoral qualification, Tennent's followers were much more interested in testimony of personal salvation.

In 1740, Tennent preached his most noted sermon, "The Danger of an Unconverted Ministry," where he accused those critics of revivalism as being unconverted. He argued, "The ministry of natural men is for the most part unprofitable; which is confirmed by a threefold evidence of Scripture, reason, and experience... And isn't this the reason why a work of conviction and conversion has been so rarely heard of for a long time in the churches till of late—that the bulk of her spiritual guides, were stone-blind and stone-dead?"³³ Tennent was so resolute that he asked his followers who

³³ Gilbert Tennent, "The Danger of an Unconverted Ministry" (Gale ECCO, Print Editions, August 6, 2010), 3.

attended anti-revival churches to leave and find New Light congregations. Although Tennent's defense of revivalism was central to his preaching, his lasting legacy is most certainly the ways in which he wedded revivalism and theological education. This innovation made a way for those who led the Second Great Awakening to be open to conversion experiences while still holding firm to teaching right doctrine.

Following more closely in the footsteps of New Light Whitefield was the more radical James Davenport. He believed in spontaneous conversion that was accompanied by external evidence, and he created new, specific methods for preaching his message and gaining local support. He was also very critical of what he considered to be the dangers of the unconverted ministry, saying it was more dangerous than "swallowing ratsbane or bowls of poison to their bodies."³⁴ Davenport's lasting legacy may be his open anticlericalism, like Tennent; however he not only ignored local clergy, but antagonized them. For instance, to prove their conversion was real, he once led a book burning in the street of all non-Christian literature, which served as a criticism of the "sin-tolerating" pastors of local churches.³⁵ The Old Light / New Light controversy continued to divide local church leaders throughout the Awakenings, but the new innovations employed by the New Light leaders were here to stay.

Second Awakening and the Age of Reason

As the nineteenth century began, the echoes of the innovative methods used by the previous century's leaders were not quickly fading. Many of the ideas that were

³⁴ James Davenport, as quoted in Monroe Stearns, *The Great Awakening, 1720-1760* (New York: Franklin Watts, Inc., 1970), 44

³⁵ David S. Lovejoy, *Religious Enthusiasm and the Great Awakening* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1969), 68

rooted in the American Revolution began to produce fruit during the first decade of the new century. These ideas included religious freedom, uncoerced conversion, heightened religious experience connected to this conversion, and denominational competition for new converts. But for the many who were not caught up in the Awakening fervor, the foundation of the Revolution and the fight for freedom was the Enlightenment.

The Enlightenment was a season in world history where the populace was excited to examine fresh ideas that demanded individual and intellectual freedom. This season began in Europe during the first part of the eighteenth century as the educated classes promoted new ideas around reason, religion, and the human response. These ideas became infectious and spread throughout the world, and in particular to the English colonies in the New World. This was accompanied by a rise in deism and a direct challenge to the belief that God played an active role in the life of humanity. In addition to the challenge to the religious establishment, the teachings of Rousseau and Locke were infectious and established an expectation of a person's inherent rights.

The insistence on individual rights led to a demand for autonomy in the colonies especially around economic and political independence. Alan Taylor remarks about the growing desire among the colonists for self-reliance: "colonial conditions permitted most adult, free men to own sufficient land to employ themselves and their families, in a cherished condition called 'independence.'" These colonies "provided fertile ground for putting the Enlightenment philosophers' words into action." After all, it was the

Enlightenment leader Locke who argued “all people are born with equal rights to life, liberty, and property,” which was the basis for the *Declaration of Independence*.³⁶

Following the victory over the English, the freedoms that many felt were gained in the War for Independence began to erode. With the adoption of the Constitution, much of the power previously held by the common man was passed to the elite ruling class of a centralized government, which fostered the growth of the Federalist Party. This perceived loss of power was solidified with both the Alien and Sedition Acts and, maybe more permanently, the election of Jefferson in 1800. The ideals of the Enlightenment were not reintroduced until the election of Jackson and a return to a government focused on non-elitism. Jackson famously said, “The planter, the farmer, the mechanic, and the laborer . . . form the great body of the people of the United States, they are the bone and sinew of the country men who love liberty and desire nothing but equal rights and equal laws.” He continued, “As long as our government is administered for the good of the people, and is regulated by their will; as long as it secures to us the rights of persons and of property, liberty of conscience and of the press, it will be worth defending.”³⁷ An example of the Enlightenment principles implemented by Jackson, note that he vetoed an effort to charter the Second Bank of the United States – an effort to centralize banking under government authority.

In addition to efforts to decentralize the government, the Enlightenment thinking brought a new wave of immigration and migration as America moved west toward the frontier. The massive land expansion, made possible by new innovations in agriculture

³⁶ Alan Taylor, *American Colonies: The Settling of North America*. Edited by Eric Foner (New York: Penguin, 2001) 37.

³⁷ Andrew Jackson, First Inaugural Address of Andrew Jackson (Given, March 4, 1829).

and travel, made individual landowners the aim and the frontier the best place to seek such fortune. Owning land in the New World, thus being able to provide for your own unique family needs, was the mark of true independence for these settlers. These two factors – a mistrust of the government by the general American public and a new population base looking to make a way in the New World – created a fertile foundation for a new religious movement: the Second Great Awakening.

Onto this fertile ground stepped a general public that was using newly encouraged reason to question the world and all established institutions in light of natural law. More specifically, this called into question religious institutions and the doctrine they espoused. The combustible mixture of fear of loss for the religious majority and challenges to established ways of thinking produced a new religious movement. With the Enlightenment, aims of perfecting the institutions, and the religious expectations from the Great Awakening, America was ripe for a new religious movement.

Less Calvin, More Wesley

While the First Great Awakening had been shaped heavily by the influence of New Light Calvinists, the Second Great Awakening was equally shaped by the innovative and lasting work of John Wesley. Wesley was born in 1703 as one of fifteen children, the most famous of whom being his hymn-writing brother, Charles. His father had been a rector in Epworth and was a graduate of Oxford, where Wesley himself would eventually attend Christ Church in 1720. He was soon ordained and became a fellow and tutor at the university. As noted before, during his time at Oxford, Wesley was a spiritual mentor to many of the New Light Calvinists, most importantly Whitefield, through the

Holy Club. This group developed a methodical approach to studying the Scriptures and was the precursor for what would eventually be called “Methodism.”

Before launching his voyage to the New World colony of Georgia in 1735, Wesley noted that he was feeling spiritually dry and was content believing his new venture would answer these longings. He said, “My chief motive is the hope of saving my own soul. I hope to learn the true sense of the Gospel of Christ by preaching it to the heathen.”³⁸ Wesley was drawn to Georgia because James Oglethorpe, the leader of the settlers, had led his group south in 1733 to establish a slave-free colony. Wesley went to join with that effort and preach to the native tribes of the free land. Wesley’s work in America coincided with similar work being done by his friend Whitefield. Whitefield had come to Georgia to oversee the launch of an orphanage, and expressed his gratitude for Wesley’s work by saying, “The good Mr. John Wesley has done in America is inexpressible. His name is very precious among the people; and he has laid a foundation that I hope neither men nor devils will ever be able to shake.”³⁹

Although Wesley saw his American work as a failure, saying “I went to America to convert the Indians” (he wrote later, “but, O! who shall convert me?”), his ministry would ultimately change the religious fabric of the American frontier. As New Light Calvinists, and especially Whitefield, continued to insist on evidence of new birth, many local church leaders who believed church membership and baptism were enough to prove conversion grew in their affection for Wesley’s brand of revivalism. As Whitefield’s

³⁸ Arthur S. Yates, *The Doctrine of Assurance: With Special Reference to John Wesley* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015), 13.

³⁹ John Wesley, *The Essential Works of John Wesley* (Uhrichsville, OH: Barbour Publishing, 2013), 53.

revival came to a close, he invited Wesley to come and complete the work he started. Wesley preached from Massachusetts to Maine, and then headed back to Georgia. Franklin remarked about the renewed religious intensity: “From being thoughtless or indifferent about religion, it seem'd as if all the world were growing religious, so that one could not walk thro' the town in an evening without hearing psalms sung in different families of every street.”⁴⁰ In fact, response to Wesley’s preaching in 1740 laid the theological foundation that launched frontier revivalism and a new season of growth for denominationalism. As the Anglican Church slowed the funnel of ministers to the New World, Wesley began ordaining and sending his own elders to lead a new Methodist movement in 1784. This new movement exploded across the American frontier and gave Arminianism the American foothold it needed for theological relevancy. Wesley’s brand of revivalism, which juxtaposed Whitefield’s oversized populism, was particularly popular in Kentucky where the uniquely American innovation of “camp meetings” were beginning to develop.

James McGready, Barton Stone, and Camp Meetings

In Kentucky, revivals, which often took the form of camp meetings, were so intense and emotional that many of their original organizers soon renounced them. Many Presbyterians who participated in the early camp meetings quickly vacated their use, while others moved beyond Presbyterianism to a more Arminian or congregational theology. On the other hand, Methodists, rooted in Wesley’s brand of theology, and

⁴⁰ Franklin, *Autobiography*, 171.

Baptists continued to use them and introduced them into the eastern United States, perpetuating the early growth of these newly formed denominations.

Frontier Kentucky became a case study in the rise and influence of camp meetings. In 1792, the population of this newly formed state was 75,000, and by the end of the camp meeting movement (near the beginning of the nineteenth century) it had escalated to 220,000.⁴¹ James McGready, a Presbyterian minister who is recognized by many as the “Father of the Great Revival,” arrived in Kentucky in 1797.⁴² Following a conversion experience while preparing for the ministry, McGready’s preaching changed dramatically, and he became convinced that many people suffered under the delusion that they were truly saved when in fact they had not experienced genuine regeneration.⁴³ McGready’s conviction to “revive” spiritual dormancy set the new stage for revivalism. He believed in the sovereignty of God and covenant theology, insisting that humanity was hopelessly lost because of original sin. Conversion, he believed, was the opportunity for those whom God had chosen to respond to grace. John Scott has noted that “the exciting part of revivalism for a Calvinist like McGready was that he knew God would continue to draw individuals to salvation as long as time continued.”⁴⁴

McGready’s conversion theology was more similar to that of Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield than Barton Stone, one of the early Restorationist leaders and

⁴¹ Boles, *The Great Revivals*, 51-54.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 51.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 37-39.

⁴⁴ Scott, John Thomas, “James McGready: Son of Thunder, Father of the Great Revival,” *American Presbyterians* 72:2 (Summer 1994), 87-95

pastor at the Cane Ridge Church. Yet, Stone found the methods of McGready most influential.⁴⁵ He heard about the camp meetings led by McGready and decided to attend one of them in Logan County, Kentucky in the spring of 1801. During that meeting, he saw religion at a “fever pitch,” and reported the strange emotional events that were similar to the intense manifestations of the earlier colonial revivals.⁴⁶

“The scene to me was new,” Stone remembered in his autobiography, “and passing strange. It baffled description.” He noted the strange occurrences of men falling deathlike, only to arise shouting their love for Jesus Christ. After witnessing such wonders for several days, Stone wrote that his “conviction was complete that it was a good work – the work of God.”⁴⁷ After the close of this camp meeting, Stone returned with high spirits to his congregations in Bourbon County. A huge crowd came, eager to hear his report. Many were extremely moved by his message and the next evening a couple rushed out of the church and began praising God in loud voices. Within a few minutes, many of the congregation had fallen to the ground, pleading for mercy. “The effects of this meeting through the country were like fire in dry stubble driven by a strong wind.”⁴⁸

Stone and other Presbyterian preachers in the region sponsored the meeting but Methodists and Baptists also mounted stumps or climbed into wagon beds to urge sinners

⁴⁵ Ibid., 38-41, 114-115.

⁴⁶ D. Newell Williams, *Barton Stone: A Spiritual Biography* (St. Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 2000), 49-51.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 56.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 61.

to conversion. At its pinnacle, about 20,000 were in attendance. Religious services that involved praying, singing, and preaching were kept up day and night. Physical expressions of the excitement were numerous and sometimes took bizarre forms. “Falling,” “jerking,” “rolling,” and “dancing” movements engaged many of the “seekers” who were present. About 3,000 were said to have been prostrate at some point during the Cane Ridge meeting. Stone noted that a little later in the course of the revival, hundreds displayed convulsive physical contortions which were known as “the jerks.”⁴⁹

This form of religious enthusiasm dominated the religious landscape as revival fervor spread throughout the frontier; however, such enthusiasm posed a new question for American denominationalism: “Which church shall the converted join?” This question and its many responses caused a massive shift in church polity. No longer could one assume church growth would be sustained. The local church was forced to look at populism as a serious force in allocating the new converts.

From Conversion to Membership

These widespread shifts caused by the Second Great Awakening were not unparalleled. Some fifty years earlier, the First Great Awakening sowed the seeds of voluntarism. Noll suggests that this initial movement had two profound effects on Evangelical thinking. First, he contends that the Awakening promoted a more popular style of leadership among the churches. As the fame of these charismatic leaders spread, people congregated to hear them preach and the importance of church hierarchy was

⁴⁹ Ibid., 56-57.

diminished. Second, these new preachers served to undermine the authority of the established church. As a result, the popularity of the Evangelical leaders directed church growth, thus elevating the validity of the Evangelical innovations.⁵⁰

The charismatic leaders surely did not foresee the vast influence they would have both culturally and religiously. In reality, many of these leaders, such as Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield, stayed committed to their denominational ties. Their fiery admonitions to the masses urged them to turn from sin as they waited on conversion and proved their continued commitment to a strict form of Calvinism.⁵¹ Whereas the same fiery admonitions were prominent during the Second Great Awakening, the theology would begin to favor Arminianism as John Wesley developed a following.

These revivalistic campaigns had at least three distinct and lasting consequences: unprecedented growth, a blurring of denominational distinctions, and a development of new evangelistic methods. Camp meetings and frontier churches experienced phenomenal growth as a result of the revivals. Between 1800 and 1803, the Kentucky Baptists gained nearly 10,000 new members while the Methodists reached more than 6,000 in just two years.⁵² New Light Calvinists also had success, although not to the level of the other groups. The revivals continued for some time on the frontier; however, by the War of 1812 they were almost extinguished.⁵³

⁵⁰ Noll, *History of Christianity*, 83, 85-86.

⁵¹ Williams, *Barton Stone*, 55.

⁵² Boles, *The Great Revivals*, 184.

⁵³ Heimert, *Religion and the American Mind*, 412.

Among the consequences of frontier revivalism was that it made denominational boundaries increasingly vague. The frontier's relationship to revivalism changed denominational relationship from that of intense competition to camp meeting cooperation. These camp meetings encouraged benevolence among the various religious groups during the gathering. This benevolence carried over and diminished the necessity of denominational identity.⁵⁴ The third consequence of these revivalistic campaigns was the use of new evangelistic methods, marked by the use of innovation.

Innovation as Tool for Evangelism

Following the rise and decline of the two Awakenings, America entered into a time of transition and turmoil. There are two significant events that represent this period of transition in American religious history: the Civil War and the rise of Enlightenment thought. The War Between the States was not only a monumental moment in the civic history of the United States, but also in the religious history. In many ways, the Civil War can be seen as the "last chapter" in the story of the Second Awakening.

Among the effects of the Civil War on the American religious landscape was the strain placed on many denominations which had grown in strength and number during the last period. The very public debate concerning slavery caused many of the denominations to divide along geographical lines. Among those affected were the Presbyterians, Methodists and Baptists. As it relates to the study of innovation and the Evangelical church, denominational division provided a fertile ground for the rise of civil religion. Because geographical loyalty forced local congregations to align themselves with the

⁵⁴ Mead, *The Lively Experiment*, 107, 129-133.

prevailing civic law, a church's theological stance on the issues of race relations became inextricably tied to state stance on such issues. The principles of civil religion – the folk or popular religious culture of a society – would influence the cultural agenda of the Evangelicals into contemporary society.

In addition, at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, Enlightenment thought, marked by faith in reason and historical-critical biblical interpretation, posed a major threat to Protestantism and provided a demarcation line for Evangelicals. This caused significant divide among the religious community, as Sidney Mead contends:

The two live movements effecting Christianity during the eighteenth century were Rationalism (Deism in religion) and Pietism. During that century the foremost politico-ecclesiastical issue in America was religious freedom. But once religious freedom was accomplished and a popular interpretation of the French Revolution in American brought the theological issue of "Reason" versus Revelation to the fore, pietism rapidly realigned itself with classical right-wing, scholastic orthodoxy in opposition to rationalists and all their works.⁵⁵

As a result of the late-stage Enlightenment thought and the battle against the teachings of the social gospel, liberalism and Darwin, denominational loyalty among many Protestants waned during this transitional period. Consequently, this period of post-denominationalism created a perfect environment for the next development in voluntaryism: the institutionalization of revivalism.

⁵⁵ Mead, Sidney, "Denominationalism: The Shape of Protestantism," in Russell E. Richey, *Denominationalism*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1977) 96.

Charles Finney and New Measures

These revivals forced churches to develop new methods, or innovations, for the mass effort to achieve individual conversion and promoted strategic ways of attracting the new converts to church membership. Churches employed camp meetings and methods associated with them to continue local outreach. Methodists continued to call their annual assemblies “Camp Meetings,” and there were always a few conversions accounted at these meetings. Local congregations also employed revival meetings for social reasons as well as religious outreach. Such meetings provided an excuse for communities to gather and to renew commitments. In addition, this “gathering” method was adapted to local communities and linked with certain stylistic methods as well. The methods were so successful on the frontier that many local churches began to employ these more “relevant” methods in hopes of continuing the high number of new converts.⁵⁶

As frontier towns grew, frontier revivalism seemed to fade. Revivalists such as Charles Finney adapted the techniques of revivalism from rural to urban settings, establishing a variety of “new” methods that turned away from Edwardian reformed theology. Finney’s insistence on the sinner’s free will to choose God’s grace put him in opposition to many of his fellow Presbyterians. In a critique of Calvinism entitled “Lectures on Revivals and Religion,” he described the authority of educated clergy and condemned Calvinist theology as a “promiscuous jumble.”⁵⁷ Although his preaching was filled with controversy and conflict, Finney left an invaluable legacy for American

⁵⁶ Ibid., 57.

⁵⁷ Charles Finney, *Lectures on Revivals and Religion* (Goodyear, Arizona: Diggory Press, 2007), 98.

Evangelicals as he was instrumental in the organization of revivals from rural churches to the new urban setting. Noll contends that Finney “stands by himself as the crucial figure in white American Evangelicalism after Jonathan Edwards.”⁵⁸ According to Finney, a revival “is not a miracle, or dependent on a miracle in any sense. It is a purely philosophical result of the right use of constituted means.”⁵⁹ This meant that human participation was essential in “bringing down” an awakening. For Finney, revivalism was necessary because, “it presupposes that the church is sunk down in a backslidden state, and a revival consists in the return of the church from her backslidings, and in the conversion of sinners.”⁶⁰

The controversy surrounding the ideals and preaching of Charles Finney is not lost on the contemporary church. Candid opposition to Finney’s methods can still be found among elements of Reformed Protestantism. For example, James White argues that the “seeker church” movement is a direct descendent of frontier revivalism, which measured its effectiveness by growth and conversions. White cautions, “adaptability of the frontier traditions risks recasting Christianity in the form of the surrounding culture.”⁶¹ John MacArthur, conservative Evangelical leader, challenges Finney with this critique:

Finney’s real legacy is the disastrous impact he had on American Evangelical theology and evangelistic methodology. The church in our generation is still

⁵⁸ Noll, *A History of Christianity*, 176.

⁵⁹ Finney, *Lectures on Revivals and Religion*, 78.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

⁶¹ Peter Steinfels, “Two Divergent Roads to the Christian Life: Megachurches v. the Liturgical Legacy,” *The New York Times*, 13 May 1995.

seething with the leaven Finney introduced, and modern Evangelical pragmatism is proof of that.⁶²

All the same, Finney should be credited with giving value to revivalism as a form of evangelism and a primary method of religious voluntaryism during this period. Many mainline Protestant leaders have followed in his footsteps making the will freer, the conversion process shorter, and the role of human being more important than Edwards ever dreamed possible.

The religious heritage of the Second Great Awakening, the revivals, and voluntaryism, are joined by an obvious theological shift which continues to affect the church today. In essence, when one changes the method of presenting the “good news,” one also changes the message. As illustrated earlier, democratic idealism and populism shifted theological thinking from a strict form of Calvinism to an Evangelical form of Arminianism. Instead of waiting on the grace of God to be given unto us as one of the elect, Finney and others promised new believers that free grace was readily available to all who sought it. This “new theology” forced local churches to develop strategies for attracting the masses of new converts.

In addition, the intimate connection between American revivalism and the successful growth patterns of Evangelicalism suggest several shared theological premises which continue to affect the contemporary church. Nathan Hatch suggests that there are three common characteristics of American religion that made it unique in the New World. First, the new voluntaryism made religion vital among the middle and lower class people, because it was no longer an elitist institution. Second, American voluntaryism was driven

⁶² John MacArthur, *Ashamed of the Gospel*, (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1993) 235.

not by congregational polity but by charismatic leaders. This led to a decrease in the value given to formal education. Finally, the democratic elements of voluntarism allowed an aggressive component to the new religious milieu, giving charismatic leaders the confidence to be assertive in their pragmatic approaches to conversion.⁶³

Although these characteristics have remained constant and unique to the American church, mainline Protestantism has changed in some dramatic ways over the last century. Following the formation of revivals and camp meetings on the frontier, many Evangelicals have experienced the decline of their social influence as the battle over modernity has heated up in the last several decades. However, while some Evangelicals have resigned themselves to fighting a battle which has no apparent end, others have modified their methodology to the changing social environment by adapting the principles learned and practiced during the Second Great Awakening.

New, New Measures: Aimee McPherson, Father Coughlin, and Charles E. Fuller

Following the success of Finney's "new measures," the role of innovation in the Evangelical church was solidified. Over the next century, the development of radio, television, and new media would allow the message of new revivalist to be spread widely and change forever the prominence innovation in American Christianity. Consider the work of Aimee Semple McPherson. McPherson was a twentieth century evangelist who crisscrossed the United States with her two young children before women's suffrage. She used the principles of innovation to launch an evangelistic ministry and center, which leveraged the newest technology. Her followers credited her with thousands of healings,

⁶³ Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, 211.

and when she opened the doors to her Angelus Temple in California she reportedly fed 1.5 million people during the Great Depression.⁶⁴

From this location she launched what would become known as the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel: Jesus is the Savior, Jesus is the Healer, Jesus is the Baptizer with the Holy Spirit, and Jesus is the Soon-Coming King. McPherson was known for preaching a very conservative gospel with a liberal social ethic. She advocated publically for the passing of the 19th Amendment, owned planes, built radio towers on top of the church sanctuary, bought time on local media outlets, and is widely considered America's "first celebrity preacher."⁶⁵ Carey McWilliams contends she was "more than just a household word: she was a folk hero and a civic institution; an honorary member of the fire and police departments; a patron saint of the service clubs; an official spokesman for the community on problems grave and frivolous."⁶⁶ Her lasting impact must be that she used innovation to reshape Evangelical Christianity and made it relevant to an American audience seeking entertainment but finding faith.

Father Coughlin is another helpful example. It is easy to count the lasting economic legacy of the Great Depression, but the political changes following the economic collapse may be more significant. The faith of the American people was shaken to its core, which allowed a new form of spokesman – the loud voice in the wilderness

⁶⁴ Lately Thomas, *Storming Heaven: The Lives and Turmoils of Minnie Kennedy and Aimee Semple McPherson* (Morrow, New York, 1970), 32.

⁶⁵ Nathan Saunders, "Spectacular Evangelist: Aimee Semple McPherson in the Fox Newsreel." *The Moving Image: The Journal of the Association of Moving Image Archivists* 14, no. 1 (April 1, 2014): 71–90.

⁶⁶ Matthew Sutton, *Aimee Semple McPherson and the Resurrection of Christian America* (London: Harvard University Press, 2007) 7.

who disparaged the nation's predicament and challenged the listeners to turn from their secular ways toward Jesus. Into this space stepped Father Coughlin – the original “shock jock.” Some assert that he may have singlehandedly gotten Franklin Roosevelt elected to office and the New Deal passed before turning on him with a particularly nasty version of anti-Semitism.⁶⁷

Coughlin was born to Irish Catholic parents and educated by a society of priests who ordained him to the priesthood in 1916. Refusing to leave a more monastic life, he left the order and moved to Royal Oak, Michigan, where he served at the Shrine of the Little Flower in a most Protestant area. He was a powerful preacher who soon began to use radio to share his message.⁶⁸ The radio show grew quickly and was receiving nearly 80,000 letters per week from listeners. Sheldon Marcus remarks: “[It] is impossible to determine, but estimates range up to 30 million each week.”⁶⁹ He had become a “radio priest.”⁷⁰ However, once his radio rhetoric turned against Roosevelt's priorities, the president decided that this new innovation was not protected free speech.

When Coughlin found a way around the new restrictions, “the Code Committee of the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) adopted new rules which placed rigid limitations on the sale of radio time to ‘spokesmen of controversial public issues.’”⁷¹

⁶⁷ “Roosevelt or Ruin’, Asserts Radio Priest at Hearing,” *Washington Post* (Jan 17, 1934) 1–2.

⁶⁸ Alan Brinkley, *Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin, & the Great Depression* (New York: Vintage Publishing, 1983) 22.

⁶⁹ Sheldon Marcus, *Father Coughlin: The Tumultuous Life of the Priest of the Little Flower* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co, 1972) 42.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* 172.

When World War II broke out, so did a new American nationalism, which left outspoken critics like Coughlin appearing to sympathize with the enemy. After a few brief battles over congregational oversight of his work, he settled back into his parish in Michigan until his death. Coughlin's lasting legacy is certainly his challenge of political authority, along with his use of radio in new and innovative ways to quickly communicate with the masses and offer conversion on demand.

The next example, Charles Fuller, did similar work without the political tint. Fuller, born in 1886 in Los Angeles, was a successful radio evangelist and the founder of Fuller Evangelical Seminary. Although initially he was in the orange grove business, he experienced conversion in 1916 through the preaching of Paul Rader and quickly enrolled in the Bible Institute of Los Angeles. After taking the pastorate at Calvary Church in Placentia, he launched "The Pilgrim's Hour" across Southern California.⁷² After moderate growth, Fuller changed the name of his broadcast and started "The Old Fashioned Revival Hour" over a large listener supported network. Unlike the work of Coughlin, the listener-supported nature of Fuller's work made it outside the free speech debates that Congress was having with Fuller. By the end of World War II, his program was carried by over 600 stations and Fuller leveraged his popularity to start Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California. The seminary, Fuller's greatest legacy, aimed to train missionaries and evangelists and served as a response mainline liberalism. Fuller, unlike many of his contemporaries, was able to leverage the use of innovation and proclamation of accessible conversion to build a lasting institution.

⁷² Daniel A. Fuller, *Give the Winds a Mighty Voice* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1972) 27.

Television, Faith Healers, and New Methods

Among the many credible contemporary examples of the continuing relationship between Evangelical churches and the changing nature of conversion, two stand as unique and pervasive: televangelism and megachurches. In this discussion of contemporary voluntaryism, televangelism must be noted as a remarkable occurrence following the development of widespread media outlets. The broadcasting networks have been flooded with Bible-based programming so abundantly that now there are entire networks offering a full twenty-four hours full of preaching. The word “televangelist” is used here in a very flexible manner – more a cultural title than a vocational one. The title encompasses a wide variety of preachers and teachers that now use the television as a primary mode of communicating their message. The teachers can be defined as a brand of charismatic Evangelical leaders that use culturally relevant mediums, such as television, radio, arenas, stadiums, and book sales. Though Evangelical Christians are not the only ones who are participating in innovative methods, it should be noted that both megachurches and television evangelism are composed largely of charismatic, Evangelical Christians.

Many of the first purveyors of this form of voluntaryism were what are commonly called “faith healers.” In the first part of the nineteenth century, humanistic thinker Phineas Quimby began popularizing ideas that sickness and death ultimately had their origin in negative thinking.⁷³ These faith healers believed in a theology which held that if

⁷³ Kenneth E. Hagin, *Right and Wrong Thinking* (Tulsa, OK: Kenneth Hagin Ministries, 1978), 19.

one could visualize health and wealth faithfully, then these elusive ideals would become realities. H. Emilie Cady, a humanistic scholar, explained this humanistic approach to Christianity by saying, “our affirming of mind, backed by faith, is the link that connects our conscious human need with His power and supply.”⁷⁴ Cady also claimed, “there is power in our word of faith to bring all good things right into our everyday life.”⁷⁵

These “faith healers” and “humanistic idealists” anticipated what is currently considered televangelism. In many of the same ways that followers found the leadership and personalities of early revival leaders contagious, contemporary culture finds religious experience and expression in these new media personalities. The foundation of the contemporary movement can certainly be traced to the practices and theology of a particular mid-century group of revivalists and faith healers ministering throughout Evangelical and charismatic circles.⁷⁶ In an effort to reclaim the past, televangelists such as Kenneth Copeland and Kenneth Hagin point to their predecessors T. L. Osborn and William Branham as being true men of God who taught them how to preach.⁷⁷ Osborn endorsed many of the teachings of E. W. Kenyon, who denied orthodox beliefs about the Trinity, claiming it was the teaching of Satan.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Mary Baker Eddy, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* (Boston: The First Church of Christ, Scientist), 72.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁷⁶ David Edwin Harrell, Jr., *All Things Are Possible: The Healing and Charismatic Revivals in Modern America* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1975) 10-26.

⁷⁷ Richard M. Riss, "Kenyon, Essek William," *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, ed. Stanley Burges, Gary B. McGee, and Patrick H. Alexander (Grand Rapids: Regency/Zondervan, 1988) 517.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 518.

The well-known televangelist Benny Hinn is also a supporter of these predecessors. However, Hinn's theology and practice is also informed by the infamous revivalist A.A. Allen, who has more readily been considered a charlatan than a minister.⁷⁹ In an effort to raise money, Allen once told his followers that he had the ability to command God to "turn dollar bills into twenties."⁸⁰ He was known to ask his followers to send large sums of money to purchase prayer cloths covered in anointed oils.⁸¹ Allen even hosted an optimistic "raise the dead" program, but it died quickly. Many of the early televangelists, including Allen, have been accused of ministering solely for monetary gain. He was ultimately defrocked by the Assemblies of God.

Popular televangelists such as Robert Tilton and his female cohort, Marilyn Hickey, have also been followers of the Allen method. This is accompanied by their loyalty to Oral Roberts. Roberts may be both the most famous, or for many the most infamous, televangelist of all time. He made national headlines when he claimed that Jesus commanded him to discover the cure for cancer. In an extensive campaign, Roberts declared that God told him, "I would not have had you and your partners build the 20-story research tower unless I was going to give you a plan that will attack cancer." Roberts instructed his listeners, "this is not Oral Roberts asking for the money, but your

⁷⁹ Richard M. Riss, "A.A. Allen," *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, ed. Stanley Burges, Gary B. McGee, and Patrick H. Alexander (Grand Rapids: Regency/Zondervan, 1988) 517.

⁸⁰ Harrell, *All Things Are Possible*, 199.

⁸¹ A. A. Allen, "Miracle Oil Flows at Camp Meeting," *Miracle Magazine*, June 1967, 6-7: 200.

Lord.” Although the campaign goals were met, the center was soon shut down without a cure for cancer.⁸²

Currently, there are numerous charismatic leaders who leverage the principles of voluntaryism and have a wide media presence. Among the most notable is Joel Osteen, the charismatic pastor of America’s largest congregation, Lakewood Church in Houston, Texas. Osteen, marketing director of the church, became Senior Pastor after the death of his father, John Osteen, founder and patriarch of the independent congregation. Under Joel Osteen’s leadership, the church has nearly 40,000 members and its weekly services are seen in over 100 countries.

There are several parallels to be drawn from these contemporary examples to the voluntaryism utilized by the revivalists. First, contemporary televangelists seem to be opposed to rationalism in religion. This was illustrated by prominent televangelist Kenneth Copeland, when he remarked, “Believers are not to be led by logic, we are not even to be led by good sense.”⁸³ Second, like those who preached at town centers and camp meetings, televangelists rely heavily on conversion as validated by religious experience. And finally, these televangelists have adopted revivalism’s commitment to simple doctrine. Copeland can again be noted when saying, “I don’t preach doctrine, I preach faith.”⁸⁴ What is clear is that the tools and methods of the Evangelical church are inextricably tied to the message and actions of contemporary televangelists.

⁸² Clark Morphew, "What's to Become of Oral Roberts' City of Faith?" *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, 27 June 1992; reprinted in *The Christian News*, 20 July 1992, 2.

⁸³ Kenneth Copeland, *The Power of the Tongue* (Fort Worth: KCP Publications, 1980), 4.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

This chapter has illustrated through a series of historic tributaries in what ways innovation has shaped the Evangelical church's notions of conversion and voluntary church association. Through this exploration of the morphology of conversion, wherein the New World leaders made conversion and its experience normative, it has been shown that the use of new, innovative methods became the primary tool by which leaders increased faith engagement as revivalism became institutionalized. In addition, as those who utilized these modern innovations quickly learned, this shift in soteriology morphed the relationship between personal piety and a believer's church.

CHAPTER 4

BELIEVING CHURCH AND ADAPTING ECCLESIOLOGY

This chapter explores more extensively the impact and influence the use of Evangelical innovation has had on the changing nature of local and global ecclesiology. More specifically, this chapter argues that this change of method has, by acts of omission and commission, changed the Evangelical message. As argued previously, as conversion became normative through the Awakenings and new methods became the primary tools for bringing about this increased local church engagement, this shaped the nature of the church on the frontier. The uniquely Evangelical practice of revivalism and the New World context of voluntary church association necessitated a dramatic shift in what might be considered traditional ecclesial practices.

Innovation as Evangelical Fuel

It can be asserted that the primary normative resource for Evangelical ecclesiology is Scripture. And despite admitted differences in the understanding of Scripture's teaching on the church at some points, I believe we have not sufficiently noted numerous areas of agreement that allow us to speak of a distinctly Evangelical ecclesiology. In fact, the following assessment will reflect many of the shared beliefs.

Yet, Scripture is not the only resource we may utilize. As Timothy George has said, "sola Scriptura is not nuda Scriptura."¹ By this, he refers to the view of the Reformers that made critical use of the tradition of the church in an attempt to understand Scripture. Evangelicals have proven that tradition is adaptable, either by intention or by accident, through use of innovation. It can be said that Evangelicals have lacked, and in some cases, not wanted, theological guidance, meaning that most of what can be considered Evangelical ecclesiology has been developed and evaluated by pragmatic criteria alone. Yet, if innovation is the fuel of the Evangelical church, what traditions shape those communities?

Historically, the church has been a leading voice against such social evils as slavery, apartheid, sexism, and oppressive war.² As an example, in *Life Together*, an account of a unique community during the Nazi reign of Germany, Dietrich Bonhoeffer rightly uses the phrase "not an ideal, but divine community" to describe his underground church.³ He continues, "Christian brotherhood is not an ideal which we must realize, it is rather a reality created by Christ in which we may participate."⁴ In many ways, it is the messiness of the church, whose constituents acknowledge their own trials and tribulations

¹ Timothy George, "Toward an Evangelical Ecclesiology," in *Catholics and Evangelicals: Do They Share a Common Future?*, ed. Thomas P. Rausch (Downers Grove, IL:InterVarsity, 2000), 140.

² Although true, it should be noted that at times the church has been implicit, or sadly the leading voice, in these sins. The church has not always spoken out in times of conflict. For instance, there are numerous books available that critique the American Protestant church's response to the Holocaust prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor. It must be said that there is much debate about what motivated the church's lack of response to the Holocaust (e.g., fear, politics, ignorance) – but all can agree it was inadequate.

³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (New York: Harper One, 1954) 26.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.

and face the hard questions together, which places it in best position for influence in the world.

There should be a longing among Evangelical churches to ask and answer hard questions about theology, practice, and the identity of the community. This is echoed in the writing of Tim Chester, who says:

The church is not something additional or optional. It is at the very heart of God's purposes. Jesus came to create a people who would model what it means to live under his rule. It would be a glorious outpost of the kingdom of God, an embassy of heaven. This is where the world can see what it means to be truly human. Our identity as human beings is found in community. Our identity as Christians is found in Christ's new community. And our mission takes place through communities of light.⁵

As Alan Hirsch and other Evangelical leaders argue, the church's existence should provoke questions about practice. Among the practices, Hirsch mentions proclamation and presence.⁶ For the Evangelical church, proclamation is as normative as conversion – and more many leaders proclamation is the fuel behind conversion. But this question arises, “How did the institutionalization of Evangelical innovation, namely gospel proclamation through revivalism, shape ecclesiology in the American church?”

Revivalism Institutionalized

In the late nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries, Dwight Moody, Billy Sunday and Billy Graham all made major strides toward institutionalizing and refining the processes first introduced during the Awakenings. Despite the phenomenal success of the Second Great Awakening, a drastic drop in new conversions in the late nineteenth

⁵ Tim Chester and Steve Timmis, *Total Church: A Radical Reshaping around Gospel and Community* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2008) 50.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 33, 34.

century had many Evangelicals doubting their ability to attain a Christian society. Evangelical Christianity, as a structure for comprehending and evaluating religious experience, became less effective as traditional Evangelicals were challenged by the “modernists.” This group sought to assimilate historical scholarship that illustrated how the biblical text had come together as a canonical collection, gave attention to the global impact of other faiths, and helped people more fully understand the social context of the biblical text. Most importantly, modernists viewed Christianity in light of the developments in science, including Darwinism, geology, and astronomy.⁷ These beliefs cemented a tension between Evangelical leaders and modernity.

Over the period of a couple of years, the Evangelical’s influence waned in some of the more significant divinity schools and turned to Bible institutes to train preachers. During the nineteenth century, these conservative leaders were making aggressive efforts to remove their theological opponents from prominent congregations. This campaign was quite successful, and George Marsden contends that by the 1920s these churches were on the brink of success in their moves to purge several Protestant churches, including the Baptists and Presbyterians, of liberal leadership.⁸

D.L Moody

Dwight Moody was a major player in the revivalistic movement which challenged modernity in the late nineteenth century. He dominated the revival development during

⁷ Marsden, *Defining Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, 119.

⁸ Ibid.

his lifetime and, although the Baptist and Methodist denominations were significant threats, Moody's character was the motivator which persuaded the use of voluntaristic methods within churches. His revivalistic campaigns attracted considerable crowds in both England and America, and he institutionalized revivalism by demanding broad organizational structures and significant budgets. In addition, his use of gospel music, led by the charismatic Ira Sankey, became an indispensable part of the revivalistic groups which developed during this period.

Moody, and then Billy Sunday, won converts by the thousands, all of whom earnestly committed to renounce alcohol, card-playing, and dancing; however, their holy vision of a "converted Nation" disappeared and leaders of the Evangelical movement found themselves at a crossroad. They could continue the battle against sin or they could fight "social" evils like labor abuse. As the American Industrial Revolution swept through America, Evangelicals quickly realized that the Carnegie Steel Corporation would not be soon kneeling at the anxious bench.

Moody never considered giving attention to social justice issues. For all practical purposes, he was completely apolitical. For him, the message was: Sin is sin; and, For every sin, a sinner. The conditions for salvation were just as consistent: Admit, believe, and accept. Moody contended that with conversion came new responsibilities for the converted. New converts were challenged to seek the company of "experienced Christians," and were warned about the "hazards of socializing with the unconverted."

The goal was to “be in the world and not of it.”⁹ Moody believed and taught that the unsaved world would be converted and the Millennium of Christ’s reign would begin.

Moody and Sunday often seemed to suspect formal education. Moody said, “I have one rule about books. I do not read any book, unless it will help me to understand the book.”¹⁰ In essence, he did not want to consider what formal education might mean for the doctrine of biblical inerrancy. Henry Drummond quoted Moody as saying that “higher criticism” was “ruining revival work and emptying the churches.”¹¹

In 1880, Moody provided the gift to launch Northfield Bible Conferences which gathered leading Evangelical preachers for teaching and preaching. The Chicago Evangelization Society was renamed Moody Bible Institute following his death. These institutions were founded in opposition to the modernist’s leadership in many existing Divinity Schools. Timothy Weber, in *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming*, notes Moody’s longing for “men who know the Word,” and who would share the gospel with the “bareheaded infidels and skeptics.” Weber observed, “he desired evangelists, not exegetes.” Moody contended that Divinity Schools taught dangerous new critical methods for reading the Bible, had deserted the principles of inerrancy, and sought to reconcile Christianity and modern science.¹²

⁹ Dwight Moody, *Glad Tidings* (New York: E.B. Treat, 1876), 443.

¹⁰ Gamaliel Bradford, *DL Moody: A Worker of Souls*, (Denver: Bradford Press, 2007) 37.

¹¹ Henry Drummond quoted Moody as saying this in his *Dwight L. Moody: Impressions and Facts* (New York: McClure, Phillips & Company, 1900) 28.

¹² Timothy Weber, in *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979) 198.

Billy Sunday

Sunday replaced Moody as the most popular and significant revivalist and made revivalism and the hatred of modernity synonymous. Sunday spent a substantial portion of his preaching career attacking the modernist's view that the biblical text was not inerrant. He maintained Moody's contention that formal education and revival ministry were incompatible. In fact, the Moody Bible Institute was for those who did not want to "pollute" their faith with reason and knowledge. Sunday insisted: "The way to salvation is not Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Vassar or Wellesley. Environment and culture can't put you into heaven without you accept Jesus Christ."¹³ In another sermon, entitled "Spiritual Food for a Hungry World," he explained:

Some folks do not believe in miracles. I do. A denial of miracles is a denial of the virgin birth of Jesus. The Christian religion stands or falls on the virgin birth of Christ. God created Adam and Eve without human agencies. He could and did create Jesus supernaturally. I place no limit on what God can do. If you begin to limit God, then there is no God.¹⁴

Sunday insisted that without the inerrancy of Scripture "there is no God." Sunday made clear his disdain for educated clergy and his conviction, in Walter Lippmann's words, that "without complete certainty religion does not offer genuine consolation."¹⁵

Sunday preached his fiery messages to the multitudes and each always had the same preamble: "I'm against sin!" He continued,

¹³ Billy Sunday, "Old Time Religion," database online, available from http://www.biblebelievers.com/billy_sunday (accessed 1 May 2006).

¹⁴ Billy Sunday, "Spiritual Food for a Hungry World," database online, available from http://www.biblebelievers.com/billy_sunday (accessed 1 May 2015).

¹⁵ Walter Lippmann, *A Preface to Morals* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1929) 289.

I'll kick it as long as I've got a foot, and I'll fight it as long as I've got a fist. I'll butt it as long as I've got a head. I'll bite it as long as I've got a tooth. And when I'm old and fistless and footless and toothless, I'll gum it till I go home to Glory and it goes home to perdition!¹⁶

Sunday's messages were packed with statistics aimed to unsettle the unconverted. He said, "Seven million prostitutes fallen in a century, three-fourths of them because of dancing." He also noted, "I believe more people in the church backslide because of the dance, card playing and theatre gadding than through the saloons."¹⁷ For both Sunday and Moody, conversion was simply the turning away from sin. They both believed that once enough people were converted, the Rapture would begin. Thus, they were willing to use any means necessary to bring the lost to a point of conversion. If an extreme, unsupported assertion or method brought a sinner to salvation, then they believed they had done their duty.¹⁸ Through the use of revivalistic methods including singable gospel music, a preachable gospel, and lively worship, both Moody and Sunday were able to adapt their methods in order to convert the masses. More importantly, what these two revivalists did was institutionalize the usage of new methods. This paved the way for many twentieth century Evangelicals who also felt called to reach those seeking an alternative to modernity and institutionalized voluntaryism.

¹⁶ Billy Sunday, "Backsliding" found in William Ellis, *"Billy" Sunday: The Man and the Message* (Philadelphia: L. T. Meyers, 1914) 148-49.

¹⁷ Ibid. In addition, Assumption College (Worcester, Massachusetts) has a wonderful collection of resources that combines many of the included quotes as well as a large collection of research material on early revivalist.

¹⁸ Weber, *The Second Coming*, 198-99.

Billy Graham

In the modern period, the use of these new methods may best be illustrated by the launch of Billy Graham's evangelistic efforts. Graham was born in the mountains of North Carolina, attended Bob Jones College, Florida Bible Institute, and Wheaton College, and launched his career in 1957 at the New York City Crusades. His identification as one of the most influential Evangelical leaders since World War II, including his prominent counsel to several Presidents, indicated the potency of revivalism in Christian churches.

Graham's effectiveness in working with both Protestant and Catholic sects reestablished that revivalism was a substantial component of the Christian tradition. Graham emphasized both the methods and theology of historical revivalism. Although he diminished the emotional and psychological facets of revivalism, he retained the direct, simplistic, biblically oriented message, the call for public response, the use of singable music at large gatherings, and a basic approach to "quick" conversion. In fact, Graham quickly reduced the process of conversion down to signing a simple commitment card.

Subsequently, like both Moody and Sunday, Graham's coherence and effectiveness depended upon the historical development of Evangelical revivalism in the United States. That history began with a new American form of religious revival, a highly organized, popular spectacle. Graham used these same methods and organizing principles: advance men, advertising, aggressive publicity campaigns (not unlike Whitefield), and a staff of specialists (prayer leaders, singers, counselors, ushers). He

perfected and popularized Moody's transformation of revivalism into mass, widespread entertainment, superbly executed in the New York City crusade of 1957 at Yankee Stadium and Madison Square Garden.

Graham's revivalistic success denoted a turning point in American Evangelicalism by launching a season of rapid growth and the utilization of a seeker-oriented methodology. In addition, the widespread adoption of voluntaryism's message and methods and the charismatic revivalists' current hold on religious media are additional signs of the contemporary recovery of the tradition. James Davison Hunter illustrates this new Evangelicalism by noting four specific hallmarks of Evangelical religion: conversionism, the belief that lives need to be changed; activism, the expression of the gospel in effort; biblicism, a particular regard for the Bible; and crucicentrism, a stress on the atonement of Christ on the cross.¹⁹

This theological shift reiterates the historical relationship connecting the growth of revivalism and Evangelicalism's tenets as seen in the wide methodological use of voluntaryism. The contemporary Evangelical's adoption of Jesus' commission to his followers serves as a mandate for personal accountability and urgency of conversion. Martin Marty has commented on America's spiritual style, noting:

In search of spiritual expression, people speak in tongues, enter Trappist monasteries, build on Jungian archetypes, go to southern California and join a cult, become involved "where the action is" in East Harlem, perceive "God at work in the world," see Jesus Christ as a man for others, hope for liberation by the new morality, study phenomenology, share the Peace Corps experience, borrow from cosmic syntheses, and go to church.²⁰

¹⁹ Christian Smith, *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998) 83, 172, 222, 282.

²⁰ Martin Marty, "The Spirit's Holy Errand: The Search for a Spiritual Style in Secular America," *Daedalus* 95, no. 1 (Winter 196) 99-115.

With a slight alteration to the emphasis, one can easily apply this statement to the current church culture. In essence, Marty is asserting that the new religious milieu is accentuated by a large group of “seekers.” Thus, it should not be a surprise that many mainline Evangelical churches, building on the success of Moody, Sunday, and Graham, are making deliberate attempts to reach this group, and voluntaryism continues to be the driving force for seeker-oriented churches.

A New Voluntaryism

In the last 30 years, spirituality has become a booming enterprise in the United States, as the spiritual seeker is no longer a rare minority but represents a growing and substantial portion of the American population. In this milieu, many Evangelical churches, much like their predecessors, are finding creative ways to attract the spiritual seeker. In doing so, they have packaged conservative theology in a pioneering, contemporary form. Certainly this attempt to attract “seekers” is not a new phenomenon in America. As illustrated earlier, many revivalistic leaders of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were also willing to adapt methodology to appeal to the broader community. However, what may distinguish the contemporary church from earlier efforts is the elevated American emphasis on consumerism. This church is now forced to adapt its methods in ways that appeal to the individual’s felt needs. By doing so, a distinct sect of Evangelical, mainline churches has developed which can be denoted by the phrase “seeker church.”

Seeker churches are re-forming ecclesiology by incorporating cultural style and pastoral ingenuity into the life of the church. The leaders believe that traditional church services and programs are outdated, and that although they meet the needs of some Christians, the church can only become relevant to a seeker society by abandoning these methods. The local church has always provided the majority of Christians and seekers with their most important encounter with institutionalized religion. Seeker church leaders are determined to make this initial encounter friendly and accessible to the masses. To achieve this goal, seeker church leaders “throw out tradition” which might make the seeker feel alienated from the church community. In essence, the seeker church model resembles the local shopping mall more than the traditional church, because the shopping mall is developed and marketed for mass consumption. Likewise, seeker churches aim to design an appealing environment that will appeal to a broad group of consumers. David Roozen puts it this way:

These and other analysts have found that religion has become one choice among many in the ever-expanding cultural cafeteria of lifestyle options. For example, one study found that contemporary Americans’ relationship to the church is “fundamentally different from that of previous generations.” It is more voluntaristic, consumer-oriented, and captive to the subjective, expressive dimension of cultural individualism.²¹

These changes in church-goers are so significant that they amount to, as Robert Wuthnow contends, a “restructuring of American religion.” Two of the significant changes include weak institutional loyalty and declining denominational identification. In fact, many of the larger seeker churches serve as mini-denominations. According to Wuthnow,

²¹ David Roozen and Kirk Hadaway, “Individuals and the Church Choice,” in *Church and Denominational Growth*, ed. David Roozen and Kirk Hadaway (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993) 243.

religious participation was originally based on denominational affiliation and loyalty; however, there is an increased willingness to change religious loyalties for a group that better meets one's own needs.²²

Another major change which has helped the establishment of the seeker church movement is the suburbanization of American society. In fact, studies show that a large portion of the American populace has migrated to the outer-city. In the 1970s, the suburbs became home to a large group of Americans, with 37 percent making them their home. By 1990, these areas had experienced rapid growth and almost 40 percent now occupied these communities. Wade Clark Roof, in *A Generation of Seekers*, notes that, coupled with the declining loyalty to denominations, the growth of the suburbs is a significant shift in American religion since the 1960s. Across the religious spectrum today is "a popular, do-it-yourself mentality, reflecting a voluntaristic religious climate where people of almost all persuasions increasingly choose their own private forms of religion rather than rely on the authority of tradition."²³ The seeker church movement pragmatically and methodologically responded to this new form of voluntarism.

Therefore, the seeker church movement is an institutional response to the emergence of consumerism in the religious milieu and the wider culture. This form of consumerism and the new voluntarism illustrate the changes in the religious environment and provide an opportunity for innovative churches to offer seekers a religious experience that meets their felt needs. Leaders of the seeker church movement

²² Wuthnow, *Restructuring of American Religion*, 171.

²³ Roof, Wade Clark, *A Generation of Seekers: The Spiritual Journeys of the Baby Boom Generation*, (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1993) 138.

have recognized the changes in the American religious environment. According to its leaders, these changes have created a religious environment drastically different than the traditional model. These church leaders view the situation as a “crisis,” which must be responded to by this new movement.

The Changing Face of Ecclesiology

The seeker church’s determination to meet the felt needs of the “consumer” has allowed these churches to grow at an extraordinary rate, often developing into megachurches. Putting many Christian leaders’ predisposition to judge the megachurch movement aside, it is abundantly clear that it is a movement to be reckoned with in the twenty-first century. One historian put it this way, “The megachurch is to the old-style chapel what the suburban shopping mall is to the small stores of Main Street — a replacement.”²⁴

Megachurch as Normative

The megachurch institutionalized the seeker church movement, and, as with any model which shows itself particularly successful, other groups have duplicated the pattern. As these megachurches established successful seeker churches, other church leaders followed their lead. The seeker model consists of several methodological approaches: a worship service that is fast-paced and void of liturgy, preaching that is light on doctrine, and a very heavy emphasis on both music and drama. As one will remember,

²⁴ Barry Kosmin and Seymour Lachman, *One Nation Under God: Religion in Contemporary American Society* (New York: Harmony Books, 1993) 239.

this is the same methodology employed by Moody, Sunday, Graham, and the leaders of the Awakenings.

This new model is affecting churches throughout the country. One local paper advertises, “Church Like You’ve Never Seen It Before!” This is followed by a brief description, typical of the movement:

Outstanding Music...No choirs or pipe organs here. Our music is crisp, contemporary, professional, and yes, even hot! World Class Drama... Each week our Drama Team, “Showcase,” presents a dramatic performance specifically designed to enhance the message. Messages...Our pastor...teaches ageless truths tailored to people’s needs.²⁵

The Dallas Morning News writes similarly:

Shortly before the benediction at Fellowship Church of Las Colinas last Sunday, the pastor made a gridiron move. Wearing Troy Aikman’s jersey, some baggy pants and athletic shoes, the Rev. Edwin “Ed” Barry Young deftly threw a football, not across a yard line but a row of seats. Michael Wood caught the flying pigskin. He and his wife, LaWanna, sporting football game duds, were honored for bringing six friends to church. And hours before the Dallas Cowboys whipped the New York Giants, they got their trophy; a football signed by Dallas’ star quarterback.²⁶

Conferences and seminars abound on how to market the gospel through services geared to the felt needs and personal questions of “seekers.” Simply put, one will notice over the past ten years an almost complete rejection of liturgy, form, creed and formal confessionalism in an ever-increasing number of churches. Most Evangelicals seem to be on a mad pursuit for the perfect contemporary service by transitioning their methods to attract new converts.

²⁵ “Try Us Out,” Charlotte Observer, 19 May 2002. Section D.

²⁶ Michael Williamson, “Fellowship Church is Out of the Ordinary,” The Dallas Morning News, 28 June 2001, Section B.

This embrace of contemporary worship patterns is deliberately aimed at the unchurched. Everything is determined by the question, “how will this make the unchurched person feel?” The seeker church leaders have no significant theological reason to maintain a serious interest in “traditional” worship patterns. “Traditional” is used to denote the church’s commitment to retell the Christian story through the use of liturgy, the church calendar, denominational loyalty, and personal identification with a religious body through membership.

In spite of all the above positive references, the “seeker sensitive” message and methods are not without their public critics. As Os Guinness notes in his text *Dining with the Devil*, this movement does not hesitate to call their techniques “marketing methods,” which raises an unhealthy individualistic consumerism, already pervasive throughout the culture. He notes that the implications are both obvious and serious. First, if leaders follow this kind of strategy for public worship these methods tend to create casual shoppers and individuals develop a very narrow perception of church life. Second, there may be a minimalizing of the importance of objective truth because it becomes vulnerable to intellectual dismissal. Finally, as Guinness states, “Meeting needs does not always satisfy needs; it often stokes further ones and raises the pressure of eventual disillusionment.”²⁷

Although there are hesitations associated with the seeker method, it is very difficult to argue about its success within its target audience. Much like historical revivalists, seeker churches view tradition as antiquated and ineffective in bringing the

²⁷ Os Guinness, *Dining with the Devil* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1993), 27-32.

“unchurched” back to a saving faith and the statistics seem to support this. Traditional church attendance has been on a steady decline since the mid-1950s, while churches who use seeker church methods have single-handedly changed the face of both denominationalism and Evangelicalism. The seeker church movement is not only a modern revival but also, and more notably, a second Re-formation based not only on doctrine like that of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but on the methodology learned from its predecessors. The methods employed by the seeker church movement have resulted in dramatic growth and influence. Thus, the impact of these churches will have a noticeable cultural impact as these churches become, in Willow Creek Community Church’s jargon, “prevailing churches.”

Beginning in 1975, Willow Creek Community Church first opened its doors at the Willow Creek Theater in Palatine, Illinois. The mission was to reach the “unchurched” and convert them into devout followers of Jesus Christ. Its approach to church was quite unprecedented to the ecclesial world at its inception. In an attempt to be culturally relevant, the leaders would present an *uncompromisingly* biblical message in terms that would be easily understood.²⁸ They would change the method, but not the message. The founding leaders, including Bill Hybels, felt a call from God to change the way churches would conduct their ministries in the decades to come.

Twenty years later, this unique church celebrated its anniversary in Chicago’s United Center with nearly 20,000 in attendance. Person after person paraded to the stage telling their stories of how Willow Creek Community Church had changed their lives.

²⁸ Lee Stroble, *Inside the Mind of Unchurched Harry and Mary*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House: 1993) 13.

Some years ago Willow Creek decided to begin the Willow Creek Association. It was to include churches from around the world that followed Willow Creek's model of ministry. Today this growing web of concurring ministries includes over 1,600 churches worldwide from more than 70 denominations.²⁹

Churches such as Willow Creek Community Church are the primary contemporary users of the principles first used by voluntarism. Although this new "voluntarism movement" has been relabeled "seeker-sensitivity," when properly understood it should be very disconcerting to many mainline church traditions. In an article entitled "The Myth of Church Growth," David Dunlap cites some troubling statistics. For example, during the very time megachurches have been sprouting across the landscape, the proportion of Americans who claim to be "born again" has remained a consistent 32 percent. According to Dunlap, growth is not coming from conversions but from transfers. In fact, up to 80 percent of all church growth taking place today is through transfer of membership.³⁰ The author also quotes Peter Wagner, one of the leading spokesmen for the church-growth movement, who admits, "I don't think there is anything intrinsically wrong with the church growth principles we've developed...yet somehow they don't seem to work."³¹

Critics of the movement contend that many church growth specialists are now teaching pastors to treat people more like customers than parishioners. These pastors, it is

²⁹ Ibid., 17.

³⁰ David Dunlap, "The Myth of Church Growth," *Current Thoughts and Trends*, 8/6, (June 1998) 7.

³¹ Ibid., 7.

asserted, now believe that members are more interested in family services and activities than in communing with the God. Speaking of the Evangelical embracing of a “business ethos” in the early part of this century, Doug Abrams says,

The encounter with modern culture affected their values. Like liberal Protestants, they adapted to the business ethos of the 1920s and in doing so contributed to the process of economic modernization. Unwittingly, perhaps, they prized secular values such as efficiency, a mechanistic perspective that centered on results, and increasingly they lost sight of a purer spiritual vision.³²

These critics also contend that parishioners increasingly think that the church exists to fulfill their external family needs, and that a church that “evangelizes” in any form is archaic.

Yet, these seeker churches may become the new mainline American Protestantism, as their leaders become the new “Billy Grahams” of Evangelicalism. Just as frontier revivalism changed the scope and shape of early American religiosity, the same methods are now changing twenty-first century Christianity. The question, however, continues to be, “What *should* the church be doing?” Interestingly enough, the answer is fundamentally a methodological one. Just as frontier revivalism shifted both message and method to meet the needs of the unconverted, seeker churches are shifting the same pair in light of individual felt needs. Although the answer to the question may be elusive, it does not mean it is not a worthy pursuit. Given the popularity of the seeker church model, an exploration of the tension between tradition and transition is worth consideration by those in and out of the movement. What is clear is that the seeker church

³² Douglas Carl Abrams, *Selling the Old-time Religion: American Fundamentalists and Mass Culture, 1920-1940*, (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 2001) 124.

movement will continue to have an impact on the American religious landscape. What is still to be seen is how much society will also transform these churches.

Among the encouraging facets of the seeker-sensitive growth development is the intense focus on getting the unchurched to enter the doors of the church. Yet, this success is not without critics either. Naysayers insist that, in a determined effort to produce rapid growth, many pastors have replaced exhortation with entertainment and the gospel with gimmicks. These compromises, they contend, cannot be healthy for the church. It should not automatically be assumed that the use of culturally relevant modes of communicating a church's message is a compromise in itself, although church leaders must be sure they do not replace the gospel with their communication tools.

The theological problems with modern ecclesial structures and this new voluntaryism movement have not yet been realized, but the tendency to avoid the historicity of the church and its contextual value is problematic for some. At the same time, the very methods purported by these leaders have much historical credibility. Many church historians have noted the strong link between popular culture and the Christian faith. Doug Abrams quotes another prominent church historian in saying that,

The moral and ethical dimensions of the consumer society have been shaped, according to Martin Marty, by three developments in Western society; the Bible, the Enlightenment, and the Industrial Revolution. Ideally, Hebrew prophets and the writers of the Gospels informed Christianity about consumerism, with teachings about community values (the body of believers), the importance of work, the use of material goods, and the charity towards others.³³

Accordingly, religiosity, in particular Evangelical Christianity as institutionalized through voluntaryism, is very difficult to predict because of a deep commitment to individualism

³³ Ibid., 126.

and the fulfillment of felt-needs. Grant Walker says, “Institutional success arose from a delicate balancing of primitive and pragmatic energies.”³⁴

Nevertheless, Nathan Hatch’s contentions about historical voluntarism ring true in this contemporary culture. As illustrated in this thesis, there is an intimate, undeniable relationship between the growth of Evangelicalism and the methods of revivalism as employed by voluntarism. In fact, the commonly held theological presuppositions and highly valued methods of revivalism continue to influence the contemporary church.

The New World religious experiment continues to be unique and thriving for several reasons: first, the methods and message of voluntarism are deeply rooted in the history of Protestantism and its principles made religious identity and denominational competition an equalizing factor; second, American voluntarism established a milieu which was driven not by congregational polity and denominational loyalty but by populist, charismatic leaders; and finally, the democratic elements of voluntarism allowed an aggressive component to the new religious milieu, giving charismatic leaders the confidence to be assertive in their pragmatic approaches to conversion and voluntary membership in a believer’s church.

³⁴ Grant Walker, “Search for Eden with a Satellite Dish,” found in *Religion and American Culture*, ed. David G. Hackett, (New York: Routledge Publishers, 1995) 452.

Virtual Church and the Fall of Majority Voice

Among the countless ways innovation has changed the nature of Evangelical ecclesiology, maybe the most industrious is the use of new technologies like the internet to create virtual churches. One might trace this creative approach back to the early 1950s and the ministry of Robert Schuller. Taking note of the growing “car culture,” Schuller, in an effort to reach a portion of the population who he believed wouldn’t attend his Sunday morning services, started what he called “Drive-In Church.” These services allowed the congregant to hear the music, preaching, and participate in the Lord’s Supper without ever abandoning their leather seat. Criticism of this method quickly rose. The questions about what was being fostered with these “virtual” attendees and the ability for people to be discipled made this practice a passing fad, but it did fuel a curiosity among many Evangelical leaders around new ways they might be able to take the church to the people.

A new take on the “Drive-In Church” is now sweeping Evangelical churches across the county: internet campuses. It began slowly. Churches began streaming their Sunday morning worship over the internet for parishioners who were unable to attend in person due to travel or illness. This innovation proved to be very popular as leaders encouraged those who were unable to attend their local campus due to distance to “join them online.” As technology and cheap bandwidth have become more readily available, nearly 100 churches have started what has been branded as “Internet Campuses.” These are entirely virtual churches that use web browsers to connect potential converts to both content and community. It is live-streaming of the service with “live interactive features like lobby chat room, message notes, communication card, raise a hand, say a prayer, and

even online giving.”³⁵ Although “proclamation” is at the center of the internet campus movement, thousands partake in sacramental presence each week through virtual baptism and communion. By one estimate, “10 percent of Americans will rely solely on the internet for their ‘religious experience’ as early as 2015.”³⁶

Although this innovative method is very popular and growing quickly, it certainly has some loud critics. Bob Hyatt, the pastor of The Evergreen Community in Portland, Oregon has made criticism of the virtual church movement a cottage industry. He comments,

And while internet campuses provide a great sermon delivery vehicle, and even allow you to virtually raise your hand in response, what they don’t do is allow you to be known and missed. You can’t stand at the end of the gathering and ask for help moving. You can’t help tear things down and clean up afterwards. You can’t look after someone’s kids while they pray with someone else. You can’t take a visitor out to lunch. How can our community be a sign and foretaste of the kingdom when our method of gathering keeps us from ever physically serving, loving, or being present to one another? I know how participating in a congregation begins to make me more like Jesus. I’m unsure how that happens with an internet campus.

He concludes,

In a world struggling to retain its humanity while being drowned in technology, and in a culture fighting to remain deeply connected to a few while filtering through thousands of Facebook “friends,” the Church can and should be a counter-culture. We should use technology, but we must not let it shape (or *misshape*) us.³⁷

³⁵ “Churches With An Internet Campus,” Digital Leadership Network, accessed January 3, 2015, <http://digital.leadnet.org/2007/10/churches-with-a.html>.

³⁶ “Internet Churches and Religious Webcasts Drawing More Congregants,” Denver Post, accessed January 9, 2015, http://www.denverpost.com/technology/ci_7228105.

³⁷ Bob Hyatt, “There is NO Virtual Church,” Christianity Today: Leadership Journal, August 2014, p.4.

To many, the idea of virtual churches and internet campuses seems desperate. If true, the desperation might be founded. Many leaders have realized what all studies suggest: Evangelicals are losing, or maybe have lost, the assumed majority voice in the culture. Without question, American culture has arrived in a post-Christendom reality that puts many of the assumed values and voices that benefited Evangelicals for nearly three centuries on the outside of the culture.

This is causing unrest. In fact, everything about the culture is tilting toward post-Evangelicals value. The shift in ecclesial practices has frequently been motivated by declined church attendance. This period of church decline is a result of what observers are calling post-Evangelicalism. Brian McLaren, a commentator on the changing nature of Evangelical ecclesiology, states,

that post-Evangelicalism doesn't mean "anti" or "non." It means coming from, emerging from, growing from, and emphasizes both continuity and discontinuity. McLaren continues, interestingly, non-Evangelicals are also using the prefix in a similar way (post-liberals, for example). Is it possible that post-Evangelicals, post-liberals, and others who share a sense of continuity and discontinuity with the Christianity of recent memory could come together in mutually beneficial ways for the journey ahead? Could a convergence of postmodern Christians from various traditions bring new life and hope, both to Christianity and to the world? I hope so.³⁸

New methods of allowing people to "count" as connected to faith communities have been sought to balance the lack of adults, particularly Millennials, who are attending church.. In the coming chapters we will explore a series of contemporary examples and evaluate their influences and potential.

³⁸ Brian McClaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing, 2006)120-21

CHAPTER 5

CONTEMPORARY EXAMPLES OF INNOVATION AND INFLUENCE

Previous chapters have explored in some detail the ways in which soteriology and ecclesiology have been historically shaped by Evangelical's use of innovation. This chapter will now turn its attention to the ways in which the utilization of modern innovation has shaped Evangelical faith communities in the 20th and 21st centuries. As contemporary Evangelical communities have embraced these new innovations, it has dramatically impacted the nature of Evangelicalism in America. Some examples to be considered are the Jesus Movement and the Shiloh Youth Retreats, pastors and the uniqueness of hereditary succession, and a series of entrepreneurial efforts that reflect a new season in the development of American Evangelicalism. These illustrate that although the defining characteristics have remained constant and unique to the Evangelical church, practice has changed over the last century and shaped the very nature of gospel missions and ecclesial formation.

The Jesus Movement and Its Future Leaders

The legacies of Moody, Sunday, and Graham changed the nature of Evangelical leadership. These Evangelical leaders had proven that the use of innovation was an

effective, and future leaders would say necessary, tool for reaching the masses. In addition to the innovative tools utilized by the revivalists, their success also implied that successful ministries were more likely to thrive if built around a strong, charismatic personality. Thus, as Evangelicals looked to move beyond the legacy of Graham, not only were Evangelicals longing for the next “great move of God,” but they were also looking for the next prophet who might lead. One prominent group that inherited this mandate is called the Jesus People Movement.

Most historians agree that the Jesus People Movement began around 1967 when a small group opened the Living Room, an Evangelical mission, in the Haight Ashbury district of San Francisco. Started by Christian street musicians, it was immediately successful and replicated in communities across North America. Almost immediately, a series of prominent leaders began to shape the identity of the movement. As example, at the University of California, Dr. Jack Sparks and others associated with Campus Crusade for Christ, started an outreach program called the Christian Liberation World Front aimed at converting radicals on the liberal college campus. While in Seattle, Linda Meissner started the Jesus People Army after seeing a vision of what she interpreted to be an “army of teenagers marching for Jesus.”¹ And on the Sunset Strip, Arthur Blessitt created a 24-hour coffeehouse and nightclub that was a refuge for local youth.²

Like those who led in the frontier lands of Kentucky, the leaders quickly began asking themselves, “which church shall the saved join.” Although some small churches started from this movement, the more common innovation during this season was

¹ Jean Duchesne, *Jesus Revolution: Made in U.S.A.* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1972), 19.

² *Ibid.*, 26.

conservative church leaders who changed their methods and message to reach the “hippies.”³ Although a series of these leaders will be considered in a moment, it seems important to initially examine some of the unique innovations leveraged by those seeking to participate in the movement. First, the Jesus Movement effectively adopted existing forms of communication and made them relevant for a younger generation. In the shadow of Woodward and Bernstein, newspapers were the primary tool for a new generation to receive their news. The popularity of these publications had spawned a network of underground weeklies like the *Berkley Barb*, which covered topics like the civil-rights and anti-war movements, and the openly evangelistic *Hollywood Free Paper*, started by Duane Pederson which coined the phrase “Jesus Movement.”⁴ Others, like *Street Level* and *The Fish*, followed suit and spread the news about these growing groups.⁵

Another unique innovation was the developed of a controversial music culture, which combined rock music with gospel lyrics. During this season a whole subculture of Jesus Movement bands started, including All Saved Freak Band and Love Song, with the goal of communicating spiritual themes through familiar sounds. These bands became very popular in outdoor festivals and Christian coffeehouses. This widespread acceptance quickly gave these bands placement in the mainstream music scene. As popularity spread, contemporary Christian radio stations launched and new publications printed as a way of

³ Ronald M. Enroth, Edward E. Ericson and C. Breckinridge Peters, *The Jesus People: Old-Time Religion in the Age of Aquarius* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1972) 71.

⁴ Shawn David Young, *Hippies, Jesus Freaks, and Music* (Ann Arbor: Xanadu/Copley Original Works, 2005) 34.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 36.

spreading the news about a new Jesus-proclaiming innovation.⁶ But it was not welcomed by all. The same churches that adapted their message to welcome the Jesus Movement were less excited about modifying the method. Critics argued that allowing the secular world to dictate the tone of the worship service was a step too far. In fact, many churches split over the controversy. Pastors of these churches would often retort with the famous quote from Martin Luther, “The devil has no need of all the good tunes for himself.”⁷

A more remarkable, noteworthy, and likely longer enduring innovation is theological. During this period there was a rise of a particularly nasty version of apocalyptic teachings by the dispensationalists. John Walvoord wrote a very popular book near the end of the 1960s entitled *The Rapture Question*. In this work he argued that the rise of communism was a prophetic sign pointing to the rapture. He stated “The rise of communism is peculiar in many respects because never before in history has an atheistic philosophy gained such a wide footing in any generation. The significance of an atheistic system such as communism in the end of the age fits into the prophetic picture with remarkable precision.”⁸ Yet, at the fall of communism this theory lost most of its followers.

Following Walvoord’s success, Edger Whisenant, an accomplished NASA engineer, published a book entitled, *88 Reasons Why the Rapture Will Be in 1988*. Whisenant claimed he had discovered a long-hidden mathematical code buried in the

⁶ David, Di Sabatino, *The Jesus People Movement: An Annotated Bibliography and General Resource* (Lake Forest, CA: Jester Media, 199) 136.

⁷ Richard Friedenthal, *Luther His Life and Times* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1967) 463.

⁸ John Walvoord, *The Rapture Question* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing, 1979) 111.

prophetic literature of the Bible, which, when properly decoded, pointed to a small range of dates when the rapture would occur. In the weeks leading up to the expected event, the Trinity Broadcasting Network preempted all scheduled programming to provide detailed instructions on how to adequately prepare for the coming events. A revised edition of the book was later published under the title *The Final Shout: Rapture Report 1989*, but the later editions did not sell nearly as well as the first edition.

The most influential of the Jesus Movement apocalyptic purveyors was prophetic speculator Hal Lindsey – a student and friend of John Walvoord. His bestseller, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, proclaimed his certainty that Jesus would rapture His church within one generation of Israel’s statehood – meaning 1988. Once again, his subsequent writing efforts have been less successful. These teachings even had their own Jesus Movement theme song, Larry Norman’s “I Wish We’d All Been Ready,” which mournfully proclaimed, “Two men walking up a hill, One disappears and one’s left standing still. I wish we’d all been ready.”

Finally, the Jesus Movement spawned a unique form of revivalism with quite a few radical groups. For instance, the Christian World Liberation Front started Spiritual Counterfeits Project whose primary goal was to weigh theological orthodoxy and render groups as heretics. In addition, Way International, a non-Trinitarian group that rejected the traditional view of Jesus’ divinity, and the Alamo Christian Foundation, who practiced street evangelism and started its own record label, serve as examples of the unique groups that launched during this era.⁹

⁹ Randall Herbert Balmer, *Encyclopedia of Evangelicalism* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004) 622.

As the Jesus Movement was going strong on the West Coast, it remained relatively unnoticed in the rest of the country until 1971. That year both *Christian Life* and *Christianity Today* ran articles about what they called “Jesus freaks,” and the Jesus People were the religious event of the year while ranking third in *Time*’s story of the year poll.¹⁰ That same year, the Jesus People Army planted a new group in Chicago, Illinois called Jesus People USA. The following year, Campus Crusade hosted Explo ‘72 at the Cotton Bowl in Dallas, Texas.¹¹ Nicknamed the “Christian Woodstock,” the event boasted 80,000 attendees from 75 countries, and included the best-selling Jesus Movement bands and most influential speakers.¹² The Jesus Movement was now a national movement with media attention, cultural influence, diversity of organizations, and a stable of leaders poised to reshape American Evangelicalism. Nevertheless, two examples stand out as groups who best illustrate the innovative methods and influence of the Jesus Movement: Chuck Smith’s Calvary Chapel and the Shiloh Youth Revival Centers.

¹⁰ Edward E. Plowman, *The Jesus Movement* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1972) 17.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹² Di Sabatino, *The Jesus Movement*, 16-17.

Calvary Chapel

It might be accurate to say that Calvary Chapel remains the most prominent of the Jesus People movements, although it started as a sort of protest to the Jesus Movement. Chuck Smith, the founder of the ministry, had become frustrated with the church growth fascination of many churches launched during the Jesus Movement so in 1965 he took over leadership of a very small congregation in Costa Mesa, California. Shortly afterward, Smith and his wife were moved by the local youth rallies in Huntington Beach and began new efforts among the congregants to reach these students. During the same season, with the help of John Higgins and Lonnie Frisbee, Smith birthed The House of Miracles, a commune focused on drug rehabilitation.¹

Smith quickly became the father figure for thousands of the nomadic young adults that flocked to his church to hear a more hopeful version of premillennialism that many others were proclaiming – although not without its similar predictions and publications. As the church grew it spawned a network of similar churches, over 1,000 in number, in cities throughout the country that experienced nearly unparalleled growth.² As example, in 2012 the Calvary Chapel in Santa Ana claimed attendance of nearly 35,000 and is considered by many to be the first multi-site church in America. Smith was considered “one of the most influential Christian pastors in Southern California...known for training other prominent ministers.”³

¹ Ibid., 68.

² Frisbee, Lonnie; Sachs, Roger, *Not By Might Nor By Power* (Santa Maria: Freedom Publications, 2012) 17.

³ Time Magazine, "The New Rebel Cry: Jesus Is Coming!," Time.com (June 21, 1971. Retrieved April 10, 2015).

Although Calvary Chapel owned buildings, it frequently held outreach events on the beach and baptized in the Pacific Ocean.⁴ Like most examples of the Jesus Movement, the worship life of Calvary Chapel was contemporary; in fact much of what we know as Contemporary Christian Music has its roots in Smith's worship services. Smith was a gifted communicator who insisted on verse-by-verse expository preaching that helped make the Bible easily understandable to the "hippies" who called Calvary home. Pastors from around the country flocked to Smith's pastor gatherings to hear him teach the Bible, and they exported his methods back to their churches. In addition to a vast network of churches, Smith used the latest innovations to launch the powerful radio networks Calvary Satellite Network International and Effect Radio, start Maranatha Music, and give birth to Calvary Chapel Bible College, which would train the next generation of Calvary's leadership, including Greg Laurie (Harvest Bible Church), John Wimber (Vineyard Church Movement), and Skip Hertzog (Calvary of Albuquerque).

Smith's innovative methods for reaching people for Jesus weren't without their share of criticism. Like many before and after him, Smith predicted the return of Jesus would happen by 1981, within one generation of the statehood of Israel. In his work, *End Times: A Report on Future Survival*, he noted that from his "understanding of biblical prophecies... [he was] convinced that the Lord [will come] for His Church before the end of 1981."⁵ Many leaders who had supported Smith for decades left the church once the

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Chuck Smith, *End Times: A Report on Future Survival* (Costa Mesa, California: Maranatha House Publishers, 1978) 35–36.

prediction proved wrong.⁶ He also received much criticism the way he connected current events to God's divine wrath. Although not without his faults and need for correction, Smith, even in his passing, remains one of the most influential leaders from the Jesus Movement, as well as a prominent example of contemporary innovation and its lasting impact on American Evangelicalism.

Shiloh Youth Revival Centers

Closely aligned with the Calvary Chapel movement were the Shiloh Youth Revival Centers. After conversion, John Higgins started attending the struggling Calvary Chapel in Costa Mesa in 1966 where he befriended Lonnie and Connie Frisbee. Two years later, they launched the House of Miracles with the financial support of Chuck Smith. Under the leadership of Higgins similar communities developed throughout the Southwest. Subsequently, Higgins planted a mission in Oregon that he named 'Shiloh' after an Old Testament prophetic passage and the Shiloh Youth Revival Centers Organization (SYRCO) began launching communal houses throughout the Pacific Northwest. Most historians agree that over the next decade Higgins started 178 locations with 100,000 participants.⁷

At first, membership in the SYRCO was loose and functioned like a community rescue mission. As the movement grew, Higgins bought a 90-acre plot of land in Dexter, Oregon and, through hard labor by SYRCO members, built a central office that he named "The Land." Members were expected to donate all of their possessions and financial

⁶ Gustavo Arellano, "Remembering When Chuck Smith Predicted the End Times--And They Didn't Happen," OC Weekly. Retrieved March 18, 2015.

⁷ Larry Eskridge, *God's Forever Family: The Jesus People Movement in America* (Oxford University Press: London, 2013) 19.

resources after joining. The centralizing of resources allowed Shiloh to form work teams, bid on reforestation and other mass-work contracts, operate a school, and send out evangelistic teams.⁸

Shiloh adapted most of its theological tenets from that of the National Association of Evangelicals, but mixed them with more traditional charismatic practices. Higgins had a very assertive leadership style. He sought to minimize the voices of others and, in a departure from Calvary Chapel, he taught that sins committed near death could lead to damnation.⁹ As the community grew, they developed a collective identity and economic system around shared values and principles. Higgins noted that he chose to lead his community based on A. T. Pierson's biography on George Müller, a Brethren member from Plymouth who developed teachings on financial provision. Pierson wrote that Müller read his Bible 200 times, prayed for in millions of dollars for orphans while never asking directly for money, and never took a salary.¹⁰ These were all things that Higgins admired and attempted to replicate.

Without question, the most lasting legacies of Shiloh Youth Revival Centers are the leaders it developed and the new value Evangelicals placed on community. We will consider the Evangelical leaders that developed from this movement in the next section, but it shouldn't surprise anyone that the leaders who were either raised or inspired by the Shiloh movement developed churches with a particular bent toward Christian community. Life at "The Land" and in other similar communities was governed by many

⁸ Ibid., 29

⁹ Arthur T. Pierson, *George Mueller of Bristol and His Witness to A Prayer-Hearing God* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel, 1999), 248. Originally published as "Authorized Memoir" (Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell, 1899) 28.

rules concerning everything from personal hygiene to living spaces, which were designed to ease friction among the people. These strict rules gave communities more time for annual Bible reading programs led by community pastors. Higgins, who had been strongly influenced by Chuck Smith's view of Scriptural study, required these expository Bible studies in an effort to build deep theological understanding within the community, although much of what they learned was a series of paraphrases from the King James Version.¹¹ In addition, they also developed biblically based speech, song, letters, publications, performances, and arts and crafts.¹²

Unfortunately by the 1980s, the same financial crises that took down many of the other communities, also closed the doors to the Shiloh Youth Retreat Centers; however, the lasting impact of the "hippie communities" continues to shape contemporary Evangelical communities.¹³ As those who grew up in the Jesus People Movement launched their own churches, it was no surprise that the hallmarks of the movement, such as informality in worship, singable music, and drama presentations, made their way...into these new communities. In addition, as these new churches grew, leaders put enormous value on small "community groups" that studied the Scriptures that were preached during the Sunday worship services. These were values either learned or emulated from what this new generations of leaders saw as new innovations in the Jesus People Movement.

¹¹ Eskridge, *God's Forever Family*, 71.

¹² David Tabb Stewart. "A Survey of Shiloh Arts." *Communal Societies* 12:40-67, 1992.

¹³ Marion Goldman. "Continuity in Collapse: Departure from Shiloh." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 34:342-53, 1995. For more information and a deeper study of the financial crisis that brought about the end of Shiloh and other Jesus Movement communities, see David Tabb Stewart and James T. Richardson. "Mundane Materialism: How Tax Policies and Other Governmental Regulations Affected Beliefs and Practices of Jesus Movement Organizations." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 67/4:825-47, 1999a.

A New Era of Evangelical Leadership

As the American public was becoming increasingly disillusioned with the political system, mostly because of the impeachment of Richard Nixon and the widely unpopular Vietnam War, many of the most popular efforts of the Jesus Movement began to close as the public became more suspicious of what some considered widespread cultic practices and brainwashing tactics from the leadership of the Jesus Movement. Yet, among the most lasting influences of the Jesus Movement was a series of innovative leaders – some who still lead today. Below are a few that merit mention.

Larry Norman. Among the most influential of all the musical performers involved in the Jesus Movement, Norman penned the anthems that defined the era including, “I Wish We’d All Been Ready” and “Why Should the Devil Have All the Good Music.” He became the premier performer for large revivals and continues to tour at time of publication. Norman’s focus on repeatable, singable music created a new genre of worship that continues to define the contemporary Evangelical church today.¹⁴

Jack Sparks and the Christian World Liberation Front. Sparks was one of the founders of the Christian World Liberation Front (CWLF) on the Berkeley campus of the University of California in 1969. He was particularly interested in outreach efforts toward liberal students on the campus. As his ministry grew, he moved away from his affiliation with Campus Crusade and joined the Eastern Orthodox Church. He later developed what he considered a better translation of the Scriptures, the *Orthodox Study Bible*, and joined

¹⁴ Di Sabatino, *The Jesus Movement*, 71

the faculty of St. Athanasius Academy of Orthodox Theology in Englewood, New Jersey.¹⁵

David Berg and The Children of God. Berg initially began his ministry in the Huntington Beach coffeehouse ministry, which was previously operated by David Wilkerson's Teen Challenge Organization. His fundamentalist separatism led him to encourage those who followed his teaching to aggressively break from society and make a commitment to his Teens for Christ. The promise given to recruits was that Jesus' return was imminent and that Berg's followers would be prepared. Between the impending pressure from parents and California police, Berg took his newly named "Children of God" on the road and finally to Europe. Near the end, Berg's followers renamed themselves "The Family of Love" and continued to prophetically proclaim that Jesus would return during 1993. After this prediction missed the mark, former followers made accusations about widespread sexual abuse of children and other sexual malfeasance.¹⁶

Kathryn Kuhlman. Kuhlman was a leader in the charismatic healing niche of the Jesus Movement and was very early to utilize television as a method to share her message with her showed entitled "I Believe in Miracles."¹⁷

Edward E. Plowman. Plowman, former editor of *Christianity Today*, shaped the narrative of the Jesus Movement, was the first to aggressively report emerging 'street Christians,' and openly allowed editorial pieces that positively covered the movement.¹⁸

¹⁵ Ibid., 22.

¹⁶ Ibid., 111.

¹⁷ Ibid., 114.

¹⁸ Ibid., 71.

David Rose. Rose was a young, charismatic hippie who converted under the ministry of Jack Sparks and the Christian World Liberation Front. He opened the House of Agape in Kansas to reach a generation in the Midwest. He then hired Paul Clark, the leader of the The Hallelujah Joy Band, and the church grew rapidly. This began a renewed energy among Evangelicals to take short-term mission trips for evangelism and Christian ministry, particularly to Israel. Later, Rose launched the first Evangelicals video production company, where he continues to serve today.¹⁹

Mario Murillo. Murillo launched the Pentecostal leaning Resurrection City near the campus of University of California at Berkeley, and was the first among his peers to use local television to spread the message of his popular Bible study.²⁰

Greg Laurie. Laurie, the “hipster” evangelist, came to faith through the ministry of Frisbee and began his preaching on the lawn of Newport Harbor High School. In 1972, Laurie joined the Calvary Chapel staff where he took over leadership of All Saints Episcopal Church, which he renamed Harvest Christian Fellowship. It has become the most influential of all of Calvary’s campuses.. Chuck Smith eventually anointed Laurie as his successor and made him the headliner for the Harvest Crusades. These Crusades continue today across America and are some of the most influential examples of Evangelical revivalism that remain, as well as some of the most innovative in their use of technology.²¹

¹⁹ Ibid., 102

²⁰ Ibid., 122.

²¹ Ibid., 66.

Sons of Our Fathers: Schullers, Stanleys, and Youngs...Oh My

Many of the leaders of the Evangelical church over the last three decades, some of whom developed their own ministerial identity during the Jesus Movement, planted thriving churches that have grown to be places of influence and innovation. Yet, many of them have neglected to answer an important question: “Who will lead next?” Some intended to pass their ministry on to their children, but these plans often failed. Consider, by way of exploration, the father-son tandems of Robert H. Schuller and Robert A. Schuller, Charles Stanley and Andy Stanley, and Ed Young Sr. and Ed Young Jr.

Robert H. Schuller founded Garden Grove Community Church, a church plant of the Reformed Church in America, in 1955 at a rented theater in the Orange Drive-in outdoor movie theater.¹ The church grew quickly with Schuller’s unique evangelistic style and a heavy dose of “possibility thinking” theology, and in 1961 the church commissioned renowned architect Richard Neutra to design a new worship space. The Tower of Hope was completed in 1968 and was a structural marvel. It included 10,000 rectangular panes of glass, could withstand an 8.0 magnitude earthquake, and cost nearly \$18 million to construct.² During the transition to the new space, Schuller changed the church’s name to the Crystal Cathedral. As the congregation grew, it also started a widely-viewed weekly program, *Hour of Power*, which featured Schuller’s preaching and interviews about faith with music artists and celebrities.

¹ Amy Taxin, "Crystal Cathedral Bankruptcy: Megachurch Files For Chapter 11," Huffington Post. (October 18, 2010) Retrieved May 15, 2014.

² Robert Lindsey, "Opening of Glass Cathedral Is a Feast for Eyes and Ears," The New York Times. p. A20, (May 15, 1980) Retrieved March 5, 2010.

In 2006, Schuller Sr. retired as the senior pastor of the Crystal Cathedral, and placed his only son over the ministries of the church, including the weekly television program. The transition was anything but successful. In October of 2008, Schuller Sr. removed his successor from the television show, noting “a lack of shared vision.”³ The elder Schuller commented that he and his son, Robert A. Schuller, had “different ideas as to the direction and the vision for this ministry,” which “made it necessary... to part ways in the Hour of Power television ministry.”⁴ Two months later, Schuller Jr. announced he was resigning as Senior Pastor of the Crystal Cathedral.

Sheila Schuller Coleman replaced him and promised to continue her father’s work. She was an innovator, making changes to the worship and style and ceasing use of the organ; however, attendance continued to decline and by the end of Coleman’s tenure the once thriving megachurch had less than 400 congregants. In 2012, Coleman resigned and Bill Bennett took over the Senior Pastor duties. He quickly reinstated traditional worship and many of the methods that built the church, but, unfortunately, it was too late to right the ship. With nearly 55 million dollars of debt, the church filed for bankruptcy and was eventually sold to St. Callistus Parish of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Orange in 2014.⁵

A more promising example of the successful transition from innovative Evangelical leader to another is that of Charles Stanley and Andy Stanley. The elder

³ "Hour of Power' Preacher Removed by Father". Fox News Channel. October 26, 2008. Retrieved 2015-03-26.

⁴ Robert H Schuller, "America's Television Church — The Church of Tomorrow" (Press Release: Crystal Cathedral Ministries) Retrieved October 18, 2011.

⁵ Taxin, "Crystal Cathedral Bankruptcy."

Stanley claims he began public ministry at the age of 14. He received his theology education at the University of Richmond and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. He joined the staff of First Baptist Church of Atlanta in 1969 and took his position as senior pastor in 1971. In 1972, noting the television success of many contemporaries in the Jesus Movement, he launched his own 30-minute program called The Chapel Hour, and subsequently started In Touch Ministries. Today, his radio program is heard on nearly 500 stations, and his preaching is shown on over 300 television stations in 50 languages. Stanley's digital ministry is among the most successful in the entire Evangelical sphere.⁶

It was always Stanley's plan to pass the ministry to his son, Andy, upon retirement. Yet, the younger Stanley parted ways with his father in 1995 over a rumored disagreement about his father's relationship with his mother.⁷ Andy and a group of his closest friends, with whom he had connected during his many years of youth ministry work, began meeting to develop a vision for a new type of church in the suburbs of Atlanta. Stanley said, "Atlanta does not need another church. What Atlanta does need is a safe environment where the unchurched can come and hear the life-changing truth that Jesus Christ cares for them and died for their sins." After Stanley prepared to launch North Point Community Church, he remarked about the clarity of their task, "We made a strategic decision not to focus on growth but instead to focus on leadership development.

⁶ "Meet Dr. Stanley," <http://www.intouch.org/about-us/meet-dr-charles-stanley>, accessed July 12, 2015.

⁷ "Charles Stanley, wife divorce – Atlanta church affirms pastor" (The Layman Online, Baptist Press) Retrieved 2015-09-01.

As a result, when we moved to our own facility and began regular Sunday morning services, we had a core of leaders who knew exactly what we were trying to do and exactly where they fit in.”⁸

After the successful launch of North Point, the church purchased 83-acres in Alpharetta, Georgia and built a 2,700 seat worship space and state-of-the-art children’s and youth space. By the end of its first year, worship attendance had grown to 4,000 and the leadership was considering ways to expand. First, in 2001 after outgrowing 3 worship opportunities, North Point built a second identical worship space on their Alpharetta property so as to hold simulcast services. This space quickly filled up as well, and there was little desire to build more property north of the city, so with the help of a motivate group in southern Atlanta, a new campus was launched in Buckhead. Five years later, North Point found itself in a similar position and launched Browns Bridge Church. Both of these campuses used rebroadcasted messages from Stanley, a live band, and localized church staff to facilitate the Sunday morning experience.⁹ Although North Point was not the first church to become a multi-site congregation, they may have perfected it.

North Point’s growth and increased influence did not go unnoticed. Churches that were in crisis began approaching North Point with pleas for revitalization through the North Point model. The first two efforts were the currently named Watermarke Church and Gwinnett Church, both launched in 2011. In the last five years, North Point created an international network of strategic partners that have the same vision, mission, and strategy as each other and adhere to the theological and model of the five primary

⁸ “History,” www.northpoint.org/about/history, accessed August 3, 2015.

⁹ Ibid.

campuses. North Point says their goal over the next decade is to increase its influence through this model; it is unlikely it will plant any more campuses. Here is how they describe this initiative: “Strategic Partners are autonomous churches that have an official relationship with North Point Ministries. These churches are built upon the same vision, mission, and strategy as our Atlanta-area churches.”¹⁰

Yet, equally as successful as the influence that Charles had on Andy is what is seen in the ministries of Ed Young, Sr. and Ed Young, Jr. As the nineteenth century was well underway, there was a unique revivalism breaking out in the central and western regions of New York. As the Second Great Awakening was sweeping the still new nation, this unique geographical location was fueled not only by religious fervor but also the social ideals of both women’s rights and abolition that made it a nearly utopian experiment. In his autobiographical reflections, Charles Finney coined the phrase “burnt-over district,” remarking that this area was so saturated by the fires of revival that there were no more unconverted to be reached.¹¹

There is a potential contemporary parallel to this season in the history of Evangelicalism found in Dallas, Texas. The Dallas area is home to many of the nation’s largest and fastest growing churches, including Friendship-West Baptist, Potter’s House Ministries with T.D. Jakes, Gateway Church, The Village Church, and Highland Park United Methodist. It is also home to Fellowship Church in Grapevine, Texas, where Ed

¹⁰ “Learn More,” www.northpointpartners.org, accessed August 3, 2015.

¹¹ For more information, see Whitney R Cross, *The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800–1850*, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1981).

Young Jr. serves as Senior Pastor. Young Jr.'s father, Ed Young Sr., is also the pastor of the thriving Second Baptist Church in Houston, Texas.

Fellowship Church started in 1989 as a mission of First Baptist Church of Irving, Texas, when approximately 150 members moved to start a church near the Irving Arts Center. The new church hired Ed Young, Jr. as its leader. Young was drawn to the methodology of Willow Creek Community Church, commonly referred to as "Seeker church," and implemented many of Bill Hybels's methods.¹² Fellowship Church quickly outgrew its rented facility and rented the space next door, a local school, to hold simultaneous services. After outgrowing these two spaces, the church bought 160-acres in Grapevine, Texas near DFW Airport, and they moved into their new facility in 1998.

In 2005, Fellowship launched three new campuses in Grapevine and Fort Worth, and in 2006, Fellowship ventured outside of Texas by launching a campus in South Miami.¹³ The church continued its expansion through a series of new satellite campuses and an online campus, all broadcasting Young Jr.'s message. Little is said about Young Jr.'s relationship with his father, whose church has nearly 20,000 weekly attenders, but, like his father did in a previous generation, Young Jr. is shaping the way millennial pastors leverage innovation to shape future ecclesial practices.¹⁴

Evangelical leaders have historically been an innovative crew, and these three examples show both the perils and success of the methods most likely to define the next season in the life of these churches. In the next section, this work examines how

¹² "One Family at a Time." <http://www.outreach.com/04novdecfronefamilyatotime.asp>, (Oct 12, 2004) Accessed July 22, 2015.

¹³ "Some mega-churches closing for Christmas." USA Today. 2005-12-06. Retrieved 2007-11-21

¹⁴ "Learn More," <https://www.fellowshipchurch.com/about>, Accessed July 22, 2015.

preachers are using innovation to shape not only the local church experience but also interdenominational church networks, to renew theological distinctiveness, and to mold the understanding and delivery of theological education. For much of contemporary Evangelicalism, the local pastor has been more than simply the provider of a Sunday sermon. The Evangelical church pastor is expected, if not required, to develop a mission and vision that is appealing to the current congregants, all the while creating a product that is appealing to the unchurched in the community. This has created an expectation that pastors be equal parts shepherd, marketer, and entrepreneur. Carey Nieuwhof, a widely read Christian blogger on ecclesiology, remarks about this shift:

The church today is flooded with leaders who fit the shepherd model, caring for people who are already assembled, managing what's been built and helping to meet people's needs. (This is also a spiritual gift.) But we have far too few leaders who have the spiritual gift of apostleship. I believe this helps explain the malaise in much of the Western church in which the vast majority of churches are plateaued or declining. We quite literally need people to get in a boat (or a car or a plane) and start new things, shake up the old and lead into a better tomorrow.¹⁵

Being innovative and entrepreneurial, Nieuwhof points out, is not without risk.

“Entrepreneurs bring a bias for action that is often astonishing. Spiritual entrepreneurs accomplish things nobody else accomplishes because they do things nobody else is willing to do. If you think about the (much criticized) innovations in today's church (video venues, multisite churches, online campuses etc.) you realize that you open yourself to a world of criticism when you start bold new things.”¹⁶

¹⁵ Carey Nieuwhof, “Why We Need More Entrepreneurial Church Leaders, Not More Shepherds,” <http://careynieuwhof.com/>, Accessed March 24, 2014.

¹⁶ Ibid.

Yet, this shift from shepherd to entrepreneur has its critics. Matt Svoboda, who serves at a growing church in the greater Nashville area as a Family Ministries Pastor and is a frequent critic of morphing ecclesial models, comments:

Pastors can have a tendency to see people as a means to their work and not as the work. My church has a leadership axiom that I love: We don't use people to get ministry done, we use ministry to get people done. I think this nails the true nature of pastoral ministry. Entrepreneurship can tempt us to see our people as the tools for what we think God wants to accomplish through us. We need to see our people as the very thing God wants to accomplish through us.¹⁷

As Evangelical church leaders continue to think about innovative ways to reach the increasing number of unchurched people in their communities, it seems appropriate to briefly examine two examples of how Evangelical pastors and their entrepreneurial spirits are changing the nature of the American church: the rise of the church network and the resurgence of theological orthodoxy.

First, and maybe most importantly for this study, as denominational loyalty has hit an all-time low, many church leaders are finding a new affinity for like-minded theological and missional networks. For many denominational leaders this new phenomenon is mystifying. Although denominations have planted churches, trained leaders, and provided resources to their connected churches, these new networks are younger and by almost any measure more successful. A church's ability to franchise its uniqueness has become the common thread between many Evangelical churches, just as Calvary Chapel did in the 1970s and North Point Community Church and Fellowship

¹⁷ Matt Svoboda, "The Dangers of Pastoral Entrepreneurship," www.ftc.co (May 18, 2015) Accessed May 18, 2015.

Church perfected. Observers like Donald Miller, have argued convincingly that these new networks are “the new normative.”¹⁸

These networks are frequently built around church planting, multi-site expansion, and the adoption of common theological tenants that reach across traditional sectarianism. Some examples of these types of networks are New Thing, Stadia, Association of Related Churches, 9Marks, Global.net, Acts 29, Redeemer City to City, C2C Network in Canada, and Sojourn Network. Many of these started in response to the complacency they were observing in their own denominations around orthodoxy and growth. There have been prophetic voices that have predicted this shift. In particular, Roger Olsen, who has long studied American denominations, comments, “The acids of modernity brought about by modern philosophy were just as corrosive for traditional religion as were the ones created by the new sciences.”¹⁹ For Olsen, modernity changed the relationship that parishioners had with the traditional religious structures and gave birth to affinity groups that crossed denominational lines.

Although networks are launching and growing, Stetzer doesn't think the role of the denomination has gone away.

Some people may think that denominations have had their day—I don't think so. Actually, pastors don't think that is the case. Three out of four pastors think it vital they are part of a denomination. That includes non-denominational pastors, so, needless to say, the vast majority of pastors who are in denominations consider them vital. The fact that non-denominational Evangelicalism and networks are growing should not distract us from the fact that denominations are key in mission and ministry in most contexts. Furthermore, U.S. denominations like the

¹⁸ Donald Miller, *Reinventing American Protestantism: Christianity in the New Millennium* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1999), 23.

¹⁹ Roger E. Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition and Reform* (Downer's Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 278.

Assemblies of God and Southern Baptist Convention are resurgent in regard to planting. When you look at the planting results, it is denominations that do most of the church planting.²⁰

Yet, networks are strengthening and are getting much attention as churches across denominational lines are abandoning historically held relationships to join entrepreneurial ventures.

Second, entrepreneurial Evangelicals are changing the face of the American church through a renewed commitment to theological orthodoxy. Among those who are benefiting the most from this is a group that is commonly referred to as neo-Calvinism. In 2009, *Time Magazine's* annual "10 Ideas Changing the World Right Now" list included a new group of Protestants it called "The New Calvinism." It commented:

Calvinism is back, and not just musically. John Calvin's 16th century reply to medieval Catholicism's buy-your-way-out-of-purgatory excesses is Evangelicalism's latest success story, complete with an utterly sovereign and micromanaging deity, sinful and puny humanity, and the combination's logical consequence, predestination: the belief that before time's dawn, God decided whom he would save (or not), unaffected by any subsequent human action or decision.²¹

Neo-Calvinist leaders are primarily connected to a ministerial network called The Gospel Coalition, and they include prominent pastors such as Tim Keller (Redeemer Church, New York), Matt Chandler (Acts 29 Network and The Village Church), and John Piper (Desiring God Ministries). Their theology is a form of Dutch Calvinism, which most trace to the teaching and writing of Abraham Kuyper, the former Dutch prime minister, who famously said, "No single piece of our mental world is to be sealed off from the rest and there is not a square inch in the whole domain of human existence over

²⁰ Ed Stetzer, "Monday is for Missiology: Can Church Planting Networks and Denominations Coexist?" *Christianity Today* (November 4, 2013).

²¹ David Van Biema, "What's Next 2009: The New Calvinism," (March 12, 2009).

which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not cry: ‘Mine!’”²² The New Calvinists hold to a strict version of penal substitutionary atonement and sphere sovereignty, and they call their adherents back to a more primitive piety. Piper contends, “The New Calvinism puts a priority on pietism or piety in the Puritan vein, with an emphasis on the essential role of affections in Christian living, while esteeming the life of the mind and being very productive in it, and embracing the value of serious scholarship. Jonathan Edwards would be invoked as a model of this combination of the affections and the life of the mind more often than John Calvin, whether that’s fair to Calvin or not.”²³

Like most movements within Evangelicalism, neo-Calvinism is not without critics – and it has a bunch. Chief among those critics is Jonathan Merritt, a senior columnist for Religion News Service, who remarks:

Sometimes it seems as if Calvinists view themselves as judge, jury, and executioner of the Christian movement at large—determining who is faithful and not, who believes the gospel and who doesn’t, who is in and who is out. (One might call to mind John Piper’s iconic and infamous “Farewell, Rob Bell” tweet.) Some within the movement talk of God’s sovereignty while seeking to control the destinies of other Christians and often speak of man’s depravity with a haughtiness that undermines it.²⁴

However, Neo-Calvinism appears to be here to stay. A recent Barna poll found that three out of ten Protestant leaders self-identify as Calvinist or Reformed, and it is among the

²² James E. McGoldrick, *Abraham Kuyper: God’s Renaissance Man* (Welwyn, UK: Evangelical Press, 2000), 19.

²³ Jared Oliphint, “John Piper’s Twelve Features of the New Calvinism,” <http://reformedforum.org/john-pipers-twelve-features-new-calvinism/>, Accessed March 27, 2015.

²⁴ Jonathan Merritt, “The Troubling Trends in America’s ‘Calvinist Revival,’” <http://jonathanmerritt.religionnews.com/2014/05/20/troubling-trends-americas-calvinist-revival/#sthash.d9U1C6D2.dpuf>, Access May 27, 2014.

fastest growing of all Evangelical sects.²⁵ As *Time* correctly concluded, “It will be interesting to see whether Calvin’s latest legacy will be classic Protestant backbiting or whether, during these hard times, more Christians searching for security will submit their wills to the austere demanding God of their country’s infancy.”²⁶

Present and Future Ambition

Before moving forward toward a series of trends and speculations about the future of innovation’s influence on the Evangelical church, it should be noted that much of the urgency sensed by modern Evangelical leaders is driven by statistics that show a significant rise in what are called the “nons” or “nones.” As noted at the beginning of this work, recent research by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life entitled “Nones on the Rise” found that nearly 20% of all Americans claim no religious identity. Still, there remains hope for Evangelicals. *Christianity Today* notes that,

Over the past seven years, Evangelicals have lost less than 1 percent of their share of the population, holding steady at about 1 in 4 American adults (25.4% in 2014, vs. 26.3% in 2007) and preserving their status as the nation’s largest religious group. In contrast, mainline Protestants have lost almost 3.5 percent of their population share and are currently less than 15 percent of American adults, while Catholics lost about 3 percent of their population share and are currently about 21 percent of adults.²⁷

Most certainly some of this sustainability is due to the Evangelical instinct to innovate. As this study has illustrated, through the utilization of modern innovation, first

²⁵ George Barna, Is There a "Reformed" Movement in American Churches?,
<https://www.barna.org/barna-update/faith-spirituality/447-reformed-movement-in-american-churches#.VjloIK6rSLJ>, Accessed November 17, 2014.

²⁶ Van Biema, “What’s Next 2009.”

²⁷ Sarah Eekhoff Zylstra, “Pew: Evangelicals Stay Strong as Christianity Crumbles in America,”
<http://www.christianitytoday.com/gleanings/2015/may/pew-Evangelicals-stay-strong-us-religious-landscape-study.html>, (May 11, 2015) Accessed May 22, 2015.

seen in the revivals and camp meetings, many Evangelicals have experienced the decline of their social influence as the battle over modernity has heated up in the last several decades. However, while some Evangelicals have resigned themselves to fighting a battle that has no apparent end, others have modified their methodology to the changing social environment by adapting the principles learned and practiced by other American Evangelicals.

Among the most surprising statistics the Pew study discovered was that one-third of all Evangelicals are non-white. The same article continues, “About a quarter (24%) of Americans in Evangelical denominations are non-white, up from 19 percent in 2007. (The bump comes primarily from Hispanic Evangelicals, up from 7 percent in 2007 to 11 percent in 2014. Black Evangelicals have stayed stable at 6 percent, as have Asian Evangelicals at 2 percent).²⁸

Without question, the next frontier for Evangelical innovation is the generation of Americans born after 1980, labeled “Millenials,” who find the current church irrelevant to their lives. Evangelicals tend to think that Millenials care about the fight to win the culture wars, but Millenial voices argue that the church is missing the point. Consider the thoughts of Sojourners contributor Brandon Robertson,

What millennials are calling for is for the old guard of Evangelicalism to return to orthodoxy and to stop putting their political and social positions on top of their definition of orthodoxy and then using them as a measuring stick to determine who is in and who is out. We are calling leaders of Evangelicalism to repent of making Jesus in their own image by imposing on the Christ of the Scriptures social and political ideas that were completely foreign to him. And most of all, we’re calling the leaders of Evangelicalism to stop demonizing the next generation who is doing our best to worship, obey, and follow Jesus Christ in a

²⁸ Zylstra, “Pew: Evangelicals Stay Strong.”

cultural context that they know little about. All of us truly desire to see our world transformed by the Gospel of Jesus and the way that is going to look will be radically different than the way it looked for them.²⁹

What Millennials are seeking isn't political persuasion, but authenticity. This tendency to simply leverage innovation for the purpose of "selling the product" to the consumer is contrary to the nature of those who are in the buying business. Barna's research indicates this continues to be true. He says,

To be successful in the industry, churches have to compete in a marketplace undergoing massive disruption as a generation of young consumers becomes ever more knowledgeable and selective about what they do and don't want. If the church were just another business seeking market share, this frame of mind would be harmless or even beneficial. But the church is not. And many of the very people churches are trying to reach—Millennials—are hyperaware and deeply suspicious of the intersection of church and consumer culture. This doesn't mean they're not avid consumers, for most certainly are. But many also have a sense that church should be different somehow, above or beyond the dirty business of sell, sell, sell.³⁰

Daniel Burke, CNN Religion Editor, reflects on the desire for authenticity this way:

"Many Christian denominations have been riven by internal struggles over homosexuality, particularly in the last decade. While most Millennials back gay rights, according to separate surveys, they are more interested in working with the wider world than holding endless debates over sexual morality."³¹

²⁹ Brandon Robertson, "How Conservative Evangelicals Misunderstand Millennials," <https://sojo.net/articles/how-conservative-Evangelicals-misunderstand-millennials#sthash.MQmhPIU1.dpuf> (May 4, 2014) Accessed May 21, 2015.

³⁰ George Barna, "What Millennials Want When They Visit Church," <https://www.barna.org/barna-update/millennials/711-what-millennials-want-when-they-visit-church#.VjmErK6rTqR> (March 3, 2015) Accessed May 3, 2015.

³¹ Daniel Burke, "Millennials Leaving Church in Droves, Study Finds," <http://www.cnn.com/2015/05/12/living/pew-religion-study> (May 14, 2015) Accessed May 21, 2015.

If Evangelicals are going to successfully reach Millennials, their leaders must put aside innovation as a tool for marketing goods and services and use their resources to create authentic environments where authentic community can be fostered. According to one study, “When Barna Research asked Millennials to choose from word pairings to describe their vision of the ideal church, a two-thirds majority or greater picked “community” (78%) over “privacy” (22%); and “casual” (64%) over “dignified” (36%).”³² As example, at Clear River Church of Lafayette, Indiana, 80% of the congregation is under 39 years old, activity takes a backseat. “We don’t do a lot of activity,” says Pastor Tony Ranvestel. “We call people to follow Jesus; that’s our primary activity. If you follow Jesus, this leads to serving and justice.”³³

The next decade is going to be vital for the Evangelical church. As Stetzer rightfully contends, “The sky still isn’t falling on American Christianity or Evangelicalism. Rather, there is a stunning growth in nondenominational Evangelicalism that is reshaping the religious landscape today. More and more churchgoing Christians, when asked about denomination, are saying, ‘none.’”³⁴ Although this is encouraging because Evangelicalism is not in decline like the mainline church, it could quickly miss its moment as well. Innovation is at the very heart of the church that was shaped by revivalism, grew through aggressive frontier expansion, and has continue to use the very best tools to share with the world its message; however, as new challenges arise the

³² Exponential Group, “5 Things Millennials Wish the Church Would Be,” <https://www.exponential.org/5-things-millennials-wish-the-church-would-be>, Accessed May 16, 2015.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ed Stetzer, “The Rise of Evangelical ‘None,’” <http://www.cnn.com/2015/06/12/living/stetzer-christian-nones> (June 12, 2015) Accessed July 3, 2015.

church will have to be responsive in new ways that examine cultural shifts, weigh the theological implications of its methodology, and consider the felt needs of an altogether different generation. The conclusion will explore more fully these possibilities and trends being observed in the modern Evangelical church.

CONCLUSION

FUTURE IMPLICATIONS OF MODERN INNOVATION

This work argues that American voluntarism, as seen in the aggressive implementation of modern innovation, has deep historical roots in movements that shaped American Evangelicalism. As such, modern innovation has directly and indirectly impacted the ecclesiology and soteriology of Evangelical churches, creating opportunity and distraction from their identity and ministry. The use of modern innovation has garnered significant attention through its aggressive use in many Evangelical churches that see it as central to their mission, making such innovation a significant vehicle of twenty-first century voluntarism. Yet many leaders of this movement ignore the historical roots that have shaped it.

Beginning with the sixteenth century, modern innovation has been at the heart of the revivalistic methodologies that undergirded the church's method and message in the twenty-first century and may well represent the future of the Evangelical church. Two questions remain: why is the use of modern innovation so influential within Evangelicalism and what are the future trends that will define this religious institution?

First, why does the use of modern innovation, as seen in the Evangelical church, remain so influential on American ecclesiology and soteriology? These reasons include, 1) decreasing loyalty to denominations; 2) people's increasing willingness to change their church or denomination; and 3) the decline of religious identity, which poses a crisis for the mainline church. The leaders of the Evangelical church movement saw very early the staggering number of "church dropouts" and proposed to use new methods as an opportunity to bring the recently unchurched back in the door. In fact, the emergence of the seeker church movement, a subset of the Evangelical church, is a response to this crisis caused by the decreasing denominational loyalty, which in turn prompted a new level of innovation.

The Evangelical church, as a result of the practices adapted from voluntaryism, has become one of the most innovative church movements in Protestant history. Among the many changes which have resulted in increased popularity and influence, is the downplaying of formal theology in their message. While some pastors in this movement claim that theology remains important to them, it is apparent that these churches believe the unchurched are more interested in meaning, purpose, and practice than theological orthodoxy.

To those attending these innovative Evangelical churches, the entry point for those returning to the congregation seems to be the church's ability to meet their family's felt needs. Discovering what is appealing to the seeker – and how to present theology in a more engaging style – is at the heart of the seeker church movement. If you remember, lively worship, singable music, and "preachable" doctrine was also at the heart of post-revolutionary revivalism. Among the many things that knit together the seeker church

leaders, and all those who embrace the principles of voluntarism, is the agreement that the old ways of organizing the church's work are no longer sufficient.

Leith Anderson, pastor of Wooddale Church, in Eden Prairie, Minnesota, argues that this new reality confronting churches in "our highly mobile, consumer-oriented society requires dramatic changes in the organization and philosophy of church ministry. The church that is ready for the future will make these changes. Churches that do not change will eventually die."¹ Inside the Evangelical movement, the seeker church developed from this type of thinking. The examples cited in this work establish a foundation for change and methodological rethinking and, as a result, when the old paradigm became ineffective for sustaining growth and health, voluntarism gave these churches the freedom to make changes ranging from worship style to denomination omissions in church names. For these pastors, the seeker church movement represents the best hope for avoiding a deepening crisis of attrition.

This brings us to the second question: what are the future trends that will define this religious institution? First, the role and necessity of denominational identity will continue to decrease as the development of new affinity networks rise. Although the local church has been affected by this crisis, it pales in comparison to the toll denominations have taken. In fact, the more successful local churches become, the less dependent these bodies are on the traditional resources provided by the denomination; for instance, curriculum, missionary support, and training. As churches grow, they are more likely to associate with common interest groups like the Willow Creek Association, North Point Resources and 9 Marks over their long held denominations. The successes of these

¹ Leith Anderson, *Dying for Change* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1990), 17.

churches give them an identity independent of their denomination. As churches pull their financial resources to join common interest groups instead, the fate of the denomination is called into question.

Consequently, long-standing denominations will no longer have the resources to help small churches, local organizations, and foreign missionaries in the manner they once did. In fact, many churches are increasingly willing to try new approaches that may not have denominational support and are relying on these common interest groups – who are much more willing to tailor solutions to the local congregations needs. It is in many ways, the mainline denominations' slow and inadequate response to the changing religious milieu which bolsters the Evangelical church's use of innovation. It was this same type of slow response that spread the popularity and effectiveness of the institutionalized revivalism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries.

A second trend should include some speculation about the future of the principles of voluntaryism as seen in the Evangelical church. One characteristic of the future of voluntaryism is a new level of cooperation and the reduction of theological distinctiveness that leads to division. As Evangelical churches reduce their identification with and dependence upon denominations they will most certainly create new patterns of cooperation that no longer reside within denominational lines, but across. It is likely that identification as an Evangelical will include a variety of subheadings (e.g., reformed, pro-life, social justice oriented, open and affirming). In fact, this is already happening on a small scale. Matt Chandler, Senior Pastor of the Village Church in Dallas, Texas, leads a group of churches called Acts 29. These are contemporary, Evangelical congregations from a variety of denominations who hold to a strict form of Calvinism.

As the Evangelical church continues to be transformed and as innovation dictates new methods and means of communicating its message, the church will find new ways to act as an attraction body that celebrates when the “other” shows up. This reality requires the “laying down” of many long held theological essentials and the “taking up” of new values that allow cross-denominational alliances. This stands in contrast to the biblical admonition to be present in the world. Charles Van Engen summarizes this correctly when saying, “The kerygmatic confession ‘Jesus is Lord’ necessarily involves movement outward toward the world as the area and recipient of the Church’s kerygmatic proclamation. The Church recognized that the reconciling, redeeming, and renewing kingdom of this Lord is a universal kingdom which includes all nations.”²

Briefly, a third trend will be the return to smaller, missional communities of faith which serve urban areas more aggressively. While larger percentages of church attendees are attending mega-churches, millennials are almost demanding smaller worship gatherings. The primary assumption that undergirds Evangelical missiology is foundationalism. David Fitch argues that foundationalism ultimately results in imperialism and reduces the “other” to the “same.” Fitch, when summarizing John Howard Yoder’s view of de-constantinianization, says:

Putting this in the Anabaptist terms of John Howard Yoder, “mission” by definition entails the church’s forsaking of the Constantinian alliance, i.e. alliance with Empire. For its very existence as authentic witness, the church must focus less on “contextualization” and more on “de-constantinianization.” Or more to the point, such “de-constantinianization” makes possible “contextualization” (and/or mission). In agreement with Yoder and other theologians then, the church’s first task, given the realities of Empire, must be to provide a political

² Charles Van Engen, *God’s Missionary People: Rethinking the Purpose of the Local Church* (Ada, Michigan: Baker Academic, 1991), 93.

formation in order for her to be present as a participant in *missio Dei* (God's Mission for the world).³

Foundationalism, which leads to disconnect from society, keeps those in the body of Christ from leading lives that are incarnational. In contrast, de-constantinianization, which makes possible contextualization, both forces and allows the people of God to embody the Gospel as we live among the people. This is the incarnational model of Jesus, “who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men” (Philippians 2:6-7). Jesus is our model for incarnational living, and he challenges his followers to live similarly. As example, Fitch points to Luke 10, “Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you. Heal the sick in it and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’”⁴

If the assumption that drives Evangelical ecclesiology is foundationalism, it stands in contrast to the model and assumptions of Jesus' ministry – and this has not gone unnoticed by those outside the church. Jesus demanded that his followers go out, in, and among the people. Missions is not work done from thirty-thousand feet or done by making the “other” the “same.” These misguided efforts lack the humility of the incarnational Jesus. Fitch comments:

This social presence however is never colonial imperialist in posture. For in these very practices the social body takes on the very humility of Christ, always renouncing worldly power so as to live under her Lord as servant to the world. Whenever the church does not exhibit itself as humble and incarnational servant,

³ David Fitch, “The Trinitarian Foundation for Mission Amidst Empire: or, Why Political Formation and Mission are not Mutually Exclusive,” Unpublished Article.

⁴ Luke 10:8-9.

it has disqualified itself as Christ's body and it loses any power via its unfaithfulness.⁵

For Fitch, the church must use post-attractional, post-positional, post-universal language.

Lesslie Newbigin argues that the church, functioning in a pluralistic society, is no longer able to operate out of the assumed foundations of reason or cultural power. He argues that the church must embody the Reign of God in Christ to the world through locating itself in communities of need and fulfilling the incarnational mission of Jesus. In the coming years, the Evangelical church will begin to more aggressively change its assumption for operating in the world.⁶ Tim Keller, in his address to Lausanne Congress, makes similar remarks about the adequacy of the church's response:

They [ministers] also find it difficult to prepare Christians for life in a pluralistic, secular, culturally engaged setting. Just as the Bible needs to be translated into readers' vernacular, so the gospel needs to be embodied and communicated in ways that are understandable to the residents of a city.⁷

Keller continues:

Evangelical ministries tend to give believers relatively little help in understanding how they can maintain their Christian practice outside the walls of the church while still participating in the world of the arts and theatre, business and finance, scholarship and learning, and government and public policy.⁸

The efforts that were historically derived from foundationalism are no longer sufficient in the "post-anything" world. If this trend proves correct, Evangelical churches will be

⁵ Fitch, "The Trinitarian Foundation," 18.

⁶ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1989), 27.

⁷ Tim Keller, "Urban Realities: What is God's Global Urban Mission?," (Lausanne Congress, March, 2010), 7.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

inhabiting neighborhoods, moving from presentation to invitation, and providing safe on-ramps into our community of faith. The church will move from de-constantinianization to contextualization, as Yoder articulated. The church of Jesus cannot engage justice from a distance, while remaining passive through complicity.

Finally, a future manifestation that may occur and is total conjecture, involves a return to traditional forms of worship. Traditions swing on a pendulum and many would note that it seems the trend toward contemporary worship has swung a bit too far. In a culture that is inundated with immediate information updates and sensory overload, the church should recognize the need of many to have silence, solitude and times of reverence. In the same way that voluntarism allowed churches to use new methods to attract adherents, the same principles may allow the church to swing back towards more historical expressions of worship and piety.

In conclusion, this dissertation contributes to the study of American religion by providing, in some broad strokes, an examination of how modern innovation has directly and indirectly impacted the ecclesiology and soteriology of Evangelical churches. In addition, this paper uses the series of selected modern innovations as pragmatic examples for consideration and speculation regarding the future of American Evangelicalism.

One of the post modern realities of western Christian communities in general, and Reformation Protestant communities in particular, is the loss of culture privilege. This continued through the first two and a half centuries of American history, yet this is certainly not true any longer. For a variety of reasons, the mainline American church is in a time of crisis and is quickly being replaced by Evangelical churches, in particular the seeker church, using the historically rooted methods of voluntarism. The world of

modernity, and even post-modernity, poses particular challenges for the American church. Instead of fleeing from these challenges, seeker churches are using the methods and message of voluntaryism to combat a growing swell of religious apathy and disloyalty. In the end, the innovations employed by the American Evangelical church, as illustrated in this work, have found a home in a society historically composed of spiritual seekers – giving all in the New World an equal opportunity to be seekers no more.

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