

LOST: AMERICAN EVANGELICALS IN
THE PUBLIC SQUARE, 1925-1955

By

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To Clio

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INTRODUCTION

Of Angels and Angles

“Together with the problem of gaining political and economic power, the proletariat must also face the problem of winning intellectual power. Just as it has thought to organize itself politically and economically, it must also think about organizing itself culturally.”

– Antonio Gramsci (1919)¹

“A fundamentalist is an evangelical who is mad about something.”

– Jerry Falwell (1988)²

In the 1930s and 1940s there were millions of conservative, evangelical Protestants in America, and what we think we know about them can mostly be summed up in a few stubborn stereotypes – both popular and academic – that seem to live by their wits rather than by the strength of the evidence. It is widely known among the general populace, for example, that “fundamentalism” is an exclusively southern, and particularly Appalachian, phenomenon. According to this view, it represents a kind of hill-country voodoo, complete with serpents, ecstatic chants, and wild dancing. But while conservative evangelicals have certainly long been at home in Dixie, the World Christian Fundamentals Association – the first national organization to bring them together – was founded at a 1919 meeting held not in Atlanta or Dallas, but in Philadelphia.³ One of its

¹ Unsigned letter in *L'Ordine Nuovo* (June 27, 1919) as quoted in David Forgacs (ed.), *The Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings, 1916-1935* (New York: NYU Press, 2000), p. 70.

² As quoted by Peter Steinfeld, “There’s Nothing Monolithic About Evangelical Politics” in *The New York Times* (March 13, 1988).

³ The former slave states have long been useful receptacles for all kinds of pathologies that do not fit the greater story of American progress – racism, poverty, illiteracy, ill-health – and so, confining the history of fundamentalism to the South seems to be a way of indicating both its oddness and the inevitability of its demise. For an interesting discussion of what this has meant both for America and for the South, see: C. Vann Woodward, “The Irony of Southern History,” in *The Burden of Southern History* (Baton

main purposes was to combat what promoters saw as the increasing prevalence of heretics and compromisers with heretics in the leadership of *northern* churches.⁴ Several of the WCFA's leaders had ties to the South – J. C. Masee and John Roach Straton, for example, had family roots in the old Confederacy and William Bell Riley had grown up in Kentucky – but they made names for themselves as the pastors of large, urban churches in the North: Masee in Boston; Straton in New York City; and Riley in Minneapolis.⁵

A few recent exceptions notwithstanding, professional academics have long maintained that theologically conservative evangelical Protestants “retreated” from American public life during the Great Depression, forming themselves into various “subcultures” that neither sought nor exerted any influence on the country most people lived in. Sociologists Robert Wuthnow and Robert Liebman captured the nature of the scholarly consensus succinctly in the early 1980s. “For more than 50 years,” they wrote in their examination of the emergence of The Moral Majority, “evangelicals kept studiously aloof from American politics. They sang hymns and tended souls, but left the burdens of legislation and social policy to their more worldly counterparts in the Protestant mainstream.” Since then, social scientists have largely supported Wuthnow and Liebman's conclusion.⁶ In *Redeeming America*, political scientist Michael Lienesch

Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993).

⁴ Martin Marty, *Modern American Religion, Vol. 2: The Noise of Conflict, 1919-1941* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 167.

⁵ See: William V. Trollinger *God's Empire: William Bell Riley and Midwestern Fundamentalism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990) and Charles A. Russell, *Voices of American Fundamentalism: Seven Biographical Studies* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976).

⁶ Sociologist William Martin's work is an important exception. Since at least the early 1990s, Martin has argued for recognition of what we might call “The Long Religious Right.” For all of Martin's prestige, however, he has had less impact on the historiography of twentieth-century evangelicalism than one

recognizes that “Protestant political conservatism has been a part of the American scene for at least two hundred years,” but still claims that evangelical political interest has come in waves, which Lienesch describes as “a fairly predictable pattern of activism followed by relative quietude.” His periods of activism and periods of quietude follow a fairly predictable pattern of their own. More recently, in *Onward Christian Soldiers?*, Clyde Wilcox and Karin Larson judge confidently that “in the aftermath of the Scopes trial and the failure of Prohibition, fundamentalists and other evangelicals retreated from politics.”⁷

Historical accounts have told a similar story. The dean of evangelical historians, George Marsden, has paid only passing attention to the period; in the years between 1925 and 1975, he writes in *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, “there were always right-wing evangelists trying to rally support on political issues, [but] most evangelicals remained on the fringes of American politics. Either they lapsed into political inactivity, or blended in with conservative Republicans in the North or as birthright Democrats in the South.” At the beginning of the two paragraphs he devotes to the fifty years between the Scopes Trial and the rise of the Moral Majority in his history of American evangelicalism, Randall Balmer writes that “evangelicalism grew increasingly and intentionally separate from the larger culture.” Joel Carpenter describes

might otherwise expect. This dissertation, however, owes a tremendous debt to Martin's, “The Transformation of Fundamentalism Between the World Wars” in Kenneth Keulman (ed.), *Critical Moments in Religious History* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1993), pp. 141-160.

⁷ Robert Liebman and Robert Wuthnow (eds.) *The New Christian Right: Mobilization and Legitimation* (New York: Aldine Publishing Company, 1983), p. 1; Steve Bruce, *The Rise and Fall of the New Christian Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Michael Lienesch, *Redeeming America: Piety and Politics in the New Christian Right* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993); Clyde Wilcox and Karin Larson, *Onward Christian Soldiers? The Christian Right in American Politics* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2006), p. 38.

a “sheltered community of congregations, schools, and other religious agencies” where “fundamentalist men and women found some rest from the modern world's relentless buffeting of their beliefs.” Of the years after the Scopes Trial, he writes, “the surviving fundamentalist movement would tend its own affairs, nurse its grudges, and prophesy God's impending wrath.” Mark Noll suggests that latter-day fundamentalists “fled from the problems of the wider world into fascination with inner spirituality or the details of end-times prophecy.”⁸ Marsden, Balmer, Carpenter, and Noll all call themselves evangelicals, and non-evangelical political and social historians have been inclined to follow their lead. In his excellent and insightful book *Why Americans Hate Politics*, political columnist E. J. Dionne claims that, in the late twenties and early thirties, “fundamentalism went underground and sought to revive itself.” British historian Godfrey Hodgson, in a cogent and concise account of American political conservatives' late twentieth-century ascendancy, observes in passing that in the 1950s and 1960s “evangelical, fundamentalist, and pentecostal Protestants, growing in numbers and also achieving the social and financial advancement that had previously eluded them as groups, were not yet involved in politics.”⁹ So entrenched is this argument, even introductory U. S. History textbooks make it. Alan Brinkley's *American History: A Survey* claims that the Scopes trial “was a traumatic experience for many

⁸ Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), p. 94; Randall Balmer, *Blessed Assurance: A History of Evangelicalism in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000), p. 102; Joel Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 8, 58; Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Press, 1994), p. 107.

⁹ E. J. Dionne, *Why Americans Hate Politics* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), p. 215, and Godfrey Hodgson, *The World Turned Right Side Up: A History of the Conservative Ascendancy in America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1996), p. 15. In his notes, Dionne specifically cites Carpenter's work. Hodgson doesn't actually cite anyone, but one can only assume that he has some evangelical historian in mind.

fundamentalists” that “helped put an end to much of their political activism,” while in *Give Me Liberty!* Eric Foner writes of a post-Scopes Trial evangelical “retreat,” noting further that “[t]he battle would be rejoined...toward the end of the twentieth century, when fundamentalism reemerged as an important force in politics.”¹⁰

There is considerable evidence to support these interpretations, of course. Post-Scopes, American evangelical Protestants certainly did not enjoy the same level of power that their elders had possessed in the nineteenth century, when evangelical Protestants had boasted a privileged position in the cultural hierarchy. They were not even the unified force that they had been a few years before, in the early 1920s, when they led the fight against evolution, the foe they had adopted after the success of the 1919 Prohibition amendment. But, the social scientists' cool assurance that fundamentalists suddenly decided to leave the politicking to the professionals rings hollow, while the historians' suggestion that they became sullen naval-gazers seems quite out of character. In the United States, religion and politics have always been partners. (This was old news even in the nineteenth century, when the famous French chronicler Alexis de Tocqueville observed that since early in the American experiment the two had been “in accord” and had “not ceased to be so since.”)¹¹ Dionne's vaguely conspiratorial phrase “went underground” conveys a kind of organized withdrawal for which there is very little proof. In fact, the evidence most often offered in favor of these arguments is absence itself, a tautology that, all by itself, suggests we should view claims of evangelical withdrawal

¹⁰ Alan Brinkley, *American History: A Survey* 12th edition (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2007), p. 661 and Eric Foner, *Give Me Liberty! An American History*, vol. II, Seagull edition (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006), p. 681.

¹¹ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, translated and edited by Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 275

with some skepticism. Who were the leaders of this retreating army? Where exactly did their exodus take them? And why are there so few tangible signs of an evacuation?

Several recent books have challenged this interpretation's authoritative dominance. Steven Miller's excellent study of Billy Graham puts the evangelist's early career at the center of the story of the American South's return to national political relevance, a journey that began after the Second World War. Bethany Moreton has written convincingly on the long-standing links between conservative evangelicalism and American corporate capitalism. Daniel Williams's investigation of the deep ties between evangelical Christianity and the modern Republican Party has indicated once again how dominant an organizing force the Cold War was in the middle years of the twentieth century. Darren Dochuk's rich description of how Southern California became a hotbed of conservative Protestant activism joins the history of evangelical fundamentalism to the important story of the so-called Sunbelt's rise to prominence.¹² These monographs have gone a long way toward mainstreaming evangelical historiography by beginning to fill in the full story of evangelical fundamentalism's eminent place in mid-twentieth-century America's economic, political, and social history, but none manages to make the story seamless. In each of these exceptional books, a brief description of the period between 1925 and 1945 serves as an introduction to the post-WWII period, when the real action begins. The concerns that fundamentalists had fought so tenaciously for and against in the 1920s did not simply go away in the 1930s, however. Fundamentalists continued to

¹² Steven P. Miller, *Billy Graham and the Rise of the Republican South* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009); Bethany Moreton, *To Serve God and Wal-Mart: The Making of Christian Free Enterprise* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009); Daniel K. Williams, *God's Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2011).

be concerned about the effects of sin on the nation's moral fiber, about the power Darwinism might have to corrupt their children, and about the health of what they saw as America's special relationship with Protestantism's God.

Definitional issues have long been a major obstacle to understanding this story. Theologically conservative Protestants in early-twentieth-century America were by no means wholly unified, and their arguments over who best represented the orthodox position could be highly esoteric, complicated, and confusing; they could also be childish and even cruel. In the early years of the 1900s, various evangelicals denounced one another both publicly and privately for supposed breaches of orthodoxy, for allegedly false interpretations of scripture, and for generally betraying the entire spirit of the Christian enterprise. In the 1980s and 1990s, a small fortune in intellectual capital was spent just trying to elucidate who exactly evangelicals and fundamentalists were and how we might usefully distinguish them both from one another and from other kinds of Protestants. The result was a mess of competing and conflicting interpretations. Among the multitude of commentators, there were, however, two main schools of thought: those who believed that a religious formation called evangelicalism existed and those who didn't.

According to the first group, there might be lots of things that evangelicals disagree about, but – much more importantly – there are a shared set of central beliefs around which they cohere. The most widely-accepted description of these beliefs is to be found in British historian David Bebbington's work. Bebbington suggests that an evangelical is identifiable by four basic convictions: biblicism (a special regard for the

authority of the Bible), crucicentrism (a faith in the atoning power of Jesus of Nazareth's death on the cross), conversionism (a confidence in the life-altering potency of a distinctive kind of Protestant conversion experience), and activism (with a particular emphasis on proselytizing).¹³ A good number of subsequent books on the subject have adopted this position as their own.¹⁴ But Bebbington's definition has not been without its critics. Donald Dayton, Darryl Hart, and Michael Horton have each argued – all from quite different points of view – that academics, laypeople, and pundits ought to jettison the label entirely. A historian of theology, Dayton calls the idea of evangelicalism “theologically incoherent, sociologically confusing, and ecumenically harmful.” The objection is based on his contention that most histories of evangelicalism have a decidedly elitist and what he calls “Presbyterian” slant; they do not recognize the astonishing diversity of grassroots “evangelicalisms” – especially, he takes pains to point out, outside of the United States. According Hart, a religious and social historian, evangelicalism simply does not exist. He finds any definition's borders too “porous” and suggests that it has “become such a popular category of explanation that it has ceased to be useful.” Horton, a theologian, proposes giving up the label because arguing over the niceties of a definition are “a profound waste of time and precious energy.”¹⁵

¹³ David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (New York: Routledge, 1989).

¹⁴ Books that take some version of this position include: Randall Balmer, *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory: A Journey into the Evangelical Subculture in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Christine Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1997); Harry Stout, *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1991); Grant Wacker, *Heaven Below: Early Pentecostals and American Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

¹⁵ Donald Dayton, *The Variety of American Evangelicalism* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991), p. 251; D. G. Hart, *Deconstructing Evangelicalism: Conservative Protestantism in the Age of Billy Graham* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic Press, 2004), pp. 16-18; Michael Horton, “The Battle Over the Label ‘Evangelical’” in *Modern Reformation* vol. 10, no. 2 (March/April 2001), p. 16.

What is meant by “fundamentalist” is even less clear. Joel Carpenter takes a narrow definition, and then focuses on the arguments various evangelical Protestants have had with one another over who is or is not a member of that tribe. Mark Noll stresses fundamentalism's supernatural inclinations. George Marsden's work allows for a wide variety of meanings, mixing theological and cultural concerns, but eventually he finds himself agreeing with the eminently quotable late Jerry Falwell, who often suggested that a fundamentalist was best described as an “angry evangelical,” which is amusing, but not very useful.¹⁶ Then there are the shrilly secular analysts who see in fundamentalism a conspiracy to establish a theocracy whose cruel and cartoonish absurdity would give even the Taliban a run for its money. The work of Sara Diamond – who has written that “the competing and conflicting elements within the movement appear to be united in a single overall effort: to take eventual control over the political and social institutions [of] the United States and – by extension – the rest of the world” – is paradigmatic.¹⁷

The drawbacks to these kinds of definitional battles are plentiful. In his fine book *When All the Gods Trembled*, historian Paul Conkin laments the influence of something he calls the “essentialist fallacy” – the assumption that an actual religious phenomenon should match whatever labels we ascribe to groups of believers. This is a mistake, Conkin argues, because most of our intellectual energy is then expended trying “to locate and correctly describe and classify [the] phenomenon” rather than simply trying to think

¹⁶ Joel Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism*, pp. 3-9; Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, pp. 7-9; Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, p. 1.

¹⁷ Open any of Diamond's four books to almost any page and one is likely to find something similar. I have taken this quote from her *Spiritual Warfare: The Politics of the Christian Right* (Boston: South End Press, 1989), p. 45.

intelligently and cogently about how religion is practiced by real people – viz. messily, rawly, and in ways that are difficult to systematize. Writing about his own attempts to give the word “fundamentalism” a meaning, Conkin notes how he finally concluded that “the conventions are so varied [and] the popular use so ambiguous,” that any definition was bound to be “almost perversely arbitrary.” What makes the essentialist fallacy particularly pernicious is that it “turns a formal or definitional issue into an empirical one.” But, as Conkin astutely observed, “the labels we use are not empirical issues at all, but choices about word use.”¹⁸

With this wise counsel in mind, I offer my own definitions of these wily words. In the pages that follow, an “evangelical” is someone who believes: 1) in the importance of the Bible not only as holy scripture, but also as the ultimate authority on the precepts of the Christian faith; 2) in God's intervention in human history in the person of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels; 3) that salvation of the spirit after death comes only through faith in the risen Christ; 4) in an emphasis on the centrality of mission work and of spreading the “good news” of Jesus's death and resurrection; and 5) in the importance of a transformed life after conversion to the faith. A “fundamentalist,” on the other hand, should be understood as a particular kind of theologically conservative evangelical who emerged in the 1910s over mounting concern with the theological, sociological, and political ramifications of the development of something that they called “modernism.”

Modernism itself is a tricky word, because, like “evangelicalism” and “fundamentalism,” its meaning is far from apparent unless placed in a specific context. Most of this ambiguity seems to derive from the root “modern.” A moment's thought

¹⁸ Paul K. Conkin, *When All the Gods Trembled* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), esp. pp. 49-77.

about the typical course offerings at any American university provides fine examples. A course on “modern” western history might begin with the European discovery of the Americas in 1492 or even with the Fall of Constantinople in 1453. A class in “modern” philosophy would probably start in the sixteenth century (with the work of Descartes and Spinoza) and might stop even before reaching the twentieth. An instructor of art history would suggest that only after the 1848 Revolutions in Europe or the Civil War in America do we see art that is truly “modern.” An architecture professor is likely to think that modernity begins only in the middle of the twentieth century. An IT specialist might argue that it began last week. A further complication arises because of the way in which the concept of “modernization” seems to be firmly attached to our notion of what makes modernity. But modernization is nothing more than a process during which technological and engineering advances begin to transform the nature of human life. It exists outside of time; we can see examples as far back as the Neolithic Agricultural Revolution, which occurred anywhere from ten- to fifteen-thousand years ago.

“Modernism,” on the other hand, is a specific culture that emerged in the early twentieth century as a means of coping with a particularly rapid and complex period not only of modernization, but also of political and sociological change.¹⁹ What united (however loosely) the divergent group of characters at the center of this culture was their recognition of the systemic, even fundamental, instability that had come to characterize contemporaneous life, as well as their shared recognition that the present had in some vital, hard-to-define way become unmoored from the past. They often disagreed about

¹⁹ For more on this distinction, see: Daniel Joseph Singal, “Towards a Definition of American Modernism” in *American Quarterly* 39/1 (Spring, 1987), pp. 7-26.

what it might ultimately mean, and held different ideas about how to approach life in light of this existential vertigo, but none thought the imbalance likely to go away. Many of them were also interested in limbering up the Victorians' rigidity, in puncturing their over-inflated insistence that the world was easily knowable, and that it could be neatly categorized. “Modernism” of this sort is most often associated with art and literature, but fundamentalists saw the dangers of modernism almost everywhere, and their use of the word defies a simple definition. For now, let us simply say that the word describes an amorphous set of artistic, cultural, intellectual, and theological movements that began in the late-nineteenth century and stretched well into the first half of the twentieth. (I discuss this development in some detail in the next chapter.)²⁰

To make matters yet more complicated: evangelical fundamentalists were just one of several anti-modernist Protestant groups to appear in the early 1900s. They all opposed the secular tendencies that “modernism” represented, but they also disagreed with one another over the relative significance of arcane theological issues such as dispensationalism, pre- and post-millennialism, and the “fruits of the spirit.” Since these are not widely understood terms, it seems wise to take a moment to define them.

Dispensationalism refers to the idea that history is divided into a number of divinely ordained epochs (dispensations); it was a widely held belief in the nineteenth century, although its exact details varied considerably from denomination to denomination. A “premillennial” eschatology means, simply put, the belief that the risen Christ will return to earth in order to collect the faithful before the end-of-the-world war that he intends to

²⁰ We should also note that there is considerable discrepancy between the way fundamentalists used the word in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, and the way scholars use it now.

wage against Satan. At the conclusion of the final battle between good and evil, Christ will peacefully reign for a millennium. Believers whose eschatology is “post-millennial,” on the other hand, believe that Christ will return only after humans have straightened their affairs to his liking and kept them running smoothly for a thousand years. (Different groups of evangelicals hold both of these beliefs, although premillennialism has long dominated among the theologically conservative.) The “fruits of the spirit” include the ability to prophesy, often through “glossolalia,” which involves speaking in a language other than one's native tongue without any training and, sometimes, without even the ability to comprehend the words being spoken. A related spiritual fruit is the ability to interpret prophecy spoken “in tongues” (as the practice is colloquially known), even when the words seem to be nothing but incomprehensible gibberish. This last debate has most often been associated with the rise of the Holiness movement, a variation on evangelicalism that emerged in the Methodist churches of the late-nineteenth century and that stresses a direct, experiential relationship with the believer's god. Pentecostalism is its most eccentric descendant, arising during a series of 1906 revivals led by a plebeian Los Angeles preacher named William Seymour. Pentecostalism's birth was not without some difficulty, and the intense struggle regarding its development led even some of its *evangelical* critics to label it – among other things – the “last vomit of Satan” practiced by a rag-tag army of “jugglers, necromancers, enchanters, magicians, and all sorts of mendicants.”²¹

As this last bit of vitriol makes clear, there are important differences among these

²¹ There is a highly detailed discussion of this story in Ernest Sandeen's *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970). The above quotes are from Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), pp. 145-146.

groups, and I do not wish to devalue them. But as anyone who comes from a large family is liable to know, the most vicious fights often occur among relatives. This one is no exception. Fundamentalists and Pentecostals are siblings, the children of nineteenth-century American evangelicalism. In the pages that follow, I try to respect the differences between them by meticulously calling each one by its name, but I also think that, for far too long, a focus on these divergences has blinded us to an underlying unity, which is most evident in both fundamentalists' and Pentecostals' strident anti-modernism.

An emblematic example of the tendency to overplay the numerous theological distinctions among evangelicals is the attention that has been paid to the Missouri Synod Lutherans, a deeply conservative denomination whose membership resides almost exclusively in the Upper Midwest. In 1925, there were perhaps half a million Missouri Synod Lutherans in the United States, not an inconsiderable number, but still less than 1% of the population according to the 1920 census. Early twentieth-century Missouri Synod Lutherans were fiercely antagonistic to modernism, but they were also suspicious of denominations that did not share their idiosyncratic views on the sacraments and on prophecy. They are almost inevitably offered as evidence of a conservative evangelical group that is not also fundamentalist or Pentecostal.²² This is a perfectly valid point, but making it in this way masks the fact that the similarities that this group of conservative evangelicals had with other Protestant anti-modernists are far more numerous than the differences. The same is actually true of Pentecostals. Consider the following definitional acrobatics: “Assemblies of God people and other Pentecostals consider

²² See, for example, Milton L. Rudnick, *Fundamentalism & The Missouri Synod: A Historical Study of Their Interaction and Mutual Influence* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1996) and Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, pp. 8-9.

themselves to be doctrinally 'fundamental,' but they [insist] that mere fundamentalists [miss] the 'full gospel,' which includes such miraculous signs and wonders as speaking in tongues."²³ A good many theologically conservative denominations were (and are) made uncomfortable by the Pentecostals' penchant for glossolalia, but this difference of opinion regarding one aspect of the worship service – however central – should not be made to mask the deep theological affinities between anti-modernist Protestant groups. One is reminded of all of the squabbling on the twentieth-century Left over what constituted true Marxism. If one were part of the small group that cared, these were important conversations; but outside of this closed circle objections to the idea that a Stalinist, or a Trotskyist, or a Schachtmanite, or a Cannonite was “a communist” would have seemed (and actually still seem) excessively doctrinaire. Knowing about these differences is undeniably important, but allowing them to dominate the entire conversation is a prime example of a painfully prosaic problem – the obscuration of the whole by the details of the parts – that long ago earned its status as a cliché.

A further complication arises because of the emergence, in the 1940s, of neo-evangelicalism, a second-generation fundamentalist attempt to shed some of the fundamentalist movement's well-deserved reputation for what one scholar has called its “cussedness.”²⁴ Neo-evangelical theology, however, is practically indistinguishable from the fundamentalist variety; the sole difference between the two groups is that neo-evangelical fundamentalists have been less willing to risk denominational schism in pursuit of ideological purity. Separatist fundamentalists, on the other hand, have

²³ Joel Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, p. 8.

²⁴ D. G. Hart, *Deconstructing Evangelicalism*, p. 18.

consistently insisted that true believers “come out” from among the people whose heresies (modernist or otherwise) might harm the faith. In the twenties, the thirties, and even the forties, this typically meant leaving one of the mainline denominations – usually the northern wings of the Baptist or Presbyterian Church – in order to found a new, purer denomination: the General Association of Regular Baptist Churches, the Presbyterian Church of America, the Bible Presbyterian Church, the Independent Fundamental Churches of America (among many others), and then viciously attacking those who had chosen to stay affiliated with the older denominations. This “come-outism” has often been taken as evidence that “fundamentalists” were no longer interested in addressing the problems of the secular world, but this is simply not true. Their willingness to separate themselves from those they saw as apostates represented not a retreat, but a faith so fervent that it would tolerate no disagreement. Carl McIntire, in particular, practiced “come-outism” as a kind of militant art, and his commitment to the cause of anti-communism (for example) was matched only by the devotion of other contemporary “come-outer” fundamentalists, like Billy James Hargis (who released thousands of Bible verses across the Iron Curtain on a flotilla of helium balloons in 1953) and Fred Schwarz (an Australian convert who immigrated to the United States in the 1940s in order to help keep *America* from falling to Marxism).

Definitional troubles of this kind are straightforwardly, if not exactly easily, cleared away. But, there is also a sizable theoretical issue hampering our understanding of this story, and it is far more complicated. Getting around it involves changing the way we think about the parameters of political action, as well as the mechanics of political

transformation.

“What is taught, at any given time, in any culture,” Mark Slouka writes in an essay on education in *Harper's*, “is an expression of what that culture considers important.” How a culture decides what's important, Slouka continues, is far more ambiguous than it might seem. “Real Debate can be short-circuited by orthodoxy,” Slouka concludes, “and whether that orthodoxy is enforced through the barrel of a gun or backed by the power of unexamined assumption, the effect is the same.”²⁵ In his *Prison Notebooks*, the Italian political theorist Antonio Gramsci suggested something similar about the success and failure of political revolutions. Gramsci argues that there are essentially two ways to win a revolution. The “war of maneuver” is an armed *coup d'état*, a literal insurrection intended to topple a state. This can be effective, but it is also quite dangerous, especially if the putsch has not been preceded by what Gramsci calls a “war of position” – an ideological battle that involves the winning of “hearts and minds,” as the famous wartime phrase goes. Gramsci was a Marxist, and it helps to think of this second kind of revolution as the Marxian version of the judo principle. A war of position requires turning a society's weight against it; in the Marxist case, for example, this means the harnessing of the numerical strength of the proletariat, who must be taught to ask the right kinds of questions about the distribution of wealth and power, thus pushing the dominant ideology (capitalism) past its center of balance. After a capitalist society's equilibrium has been upset in this way, Gramsci suggests, revolution can happen much more easily. (So, it is perhaps best to think of these approaches as the two steps to a

²⁵ Mark Slouka, “Dehumanized: When Math and Science Rule the School” in *Harper's* (September, 2009).

successful revolution.) This works, Gramsci explains, according to the unwritten rules that make up the social life of power relations. The key term is “cultural hegemony,” which Gramsci defines as “the spontaneous consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group.” This assent is the result not of some vast conspiracy among an élite, but rather of “the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function” in the society.²⁶ A simpler and perhaps clearer way of putting it would be to say that cultural hegemony is the complicated and never-quite-direct influence that a dominant group or class holds in a culture, its subtle power over the construction and deployment of the ideas and concepts that even the dispossessed are inclined to use to define and demarcate themselves. At its most basic, cultural hegemony is the complicated process that allows one group to make itself the mark by which others are measured.

Gramsci was talking, of course, about the way in which a society's bourgeoisie might dominate its proletariat in spite of the latter's numerical strength, but his observations are curiously apt in the case of modernists and anti-modernists as well, and I would like to use Gramsci's observations as a metaphor for thinking about the aftermath of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy of the 1920s. Terry Eastland, of *The Weekly Standard*, wrote a 1981 piece for *Commentary* about how the 1920s witnessed the “cultural disestablishment of the old faith,” which is yet another way of saying that

²⁶ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), p. 12. Gramsci actually says that cultural hegemony is the result of the dominant group's “position and function in the world of production,” but since we are not using Gramsci in a purely Marxist way here, it makes sense to broaden his definition a little bit.

cultural hegemony shifted hands.²⁷ By the time of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy, the “modernists” – heterogeneous a group as they were – had developed into what Gramsci would have called a “hegemonic historical bloc,” an alliance of forces that had successfully made their interests and ideas seem like the interests and ideas of the whole society. By the late 1920s, these “modernists” set the terms of debate and were thereby able to establish the boundaries of rational conversation. This power was apparent on a number of levels, but it was especially visible at the country's leading seminaries, among its university-educated intellectuals, and in the arts and sciences. Anti-modernist Protestants first thought that they could strong-arm theological modernists out of their denominations, that they could legislate Darwinism and other dangerous ideas out of existence, and that they could shame artists and writers and young people back into the whale-bone corset of Victorian decorum. In other words: that they could mount a kind of cultural war of maneuver, a frontal assault that would destroy “modernism” before it was able to establish its reign. But this campaign was repelled with far more strength than anti-modernist Protestants had anticipated, both because of their own tendency to focus more on the differences within their ranks than on their collective common enemy and because of the cultural power that “modernist” ideas had generated for themselves in the preceding decades.

In the years that followed the Scopes Trial, one group of anti-modernist Protestants (who would come to be called “neo-evangelicals”) would begin to mount a war of position instead. (In Gramscian terms, we might say that they were attempting to become a counterhegemonic historical bloc.) Although, as we shall see, this campaign

²⁷ Terry Eastland, “In Defense of Religious America” in *Commentary* 71/6 (June, 1981), p. 42.

was not without its difficulties, it was far more successful than the cultural war of maneuver that Protestant anti-modernists (“fundamentalists” in the vernacular of the era) had undertaken in the 1920s, and understanding how it worked will help us to better comprehend why it is that evangelicals seem to burst back onto the political and cultural scene in the 1970s.

Since most political revolutions result in such vitriolic bloodlettings – the blood belonging either to the revolutionaries themselves (if they fail) or to suspected counterrevolutionaries (if they succeed) – we have few opportunities to study the strategic aims and actions of the losing party in the period after a revolution takes place. Often, there is simply no losing party left to examine. In the case of a cultural or intellectual revolution, however, death is far less likely a possibility for either side, so certain ideas are allowed to linger where obviously political actors or ideologies would be swiftly dispensed with. So, what follows is an investigation of an intellectual approach that lost its privileged position as the main arbiter of cultural, philosophical, political, and social norms. It is also an account of what people did with that worldview in a radically changed environment. The overarching narrative is not straightforwardly chronological, an approach that I have chosen to eschew because the story I want to tell requires us to think about the fundamentalist movement in a multi-dimensional way that a simple exposition makes more or less impossible. Each chapter still includes, however, a fairly sequential history of the organization, idea, or movement under consideration. I begin each of these examinations in the late-nineteenth or early-twentieth centuries, when American Protestants confronted the cultural, intellectual, sociological, and theological

shifts that many of them thought threatened to obliterate Christianity as it had been practiced traditionally in the United States, and I follow the stories until the middle of the 1950s, when the viciously caricatured “fundamentalists” who appear in the play *Inherit the Wind* actually began to replace in the minds of many Americans the multi-faceted Protestant anti-modernists who not only had actually existed at the time of the Scopes Trial, but who even then continued to live among them.

As Steven Miller, Bethany Moreton, and the other young scholars mentioned above have begun to make clear, conservative evangelicals remained as politically and culturally active and aware in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s as they had been before. The story of their political and cultural life in the 1930s and 1940s, on the other hand, so far exists either in outline form or within the apolitical, disengaged vacuum of the “subculture” argument. In the pages that follow, I argue that anti-modernist evangelicals did not, in fact, *withdraw* from the political and cultural mainstream so much as they were *replaced* by a largely secular set of cultural, intellectual, and political leaders. In the first chapter, I explore the cultural and intellectual revolution that called fundamentalism into existence. In the second chapter I take a survey of the 1930s – looking particularly at what one scholar has called the “Old Christian Right” and at the early country music industry – for evidence of fundamentalism's disappearance before suggesting another way to think about some of the political and popular culture of that most unconventional of decades. In the third chapter, I point out a fairly obvious example of fundamentalist interest in American politics in the 1930s and 1940s, the National Committee for Christian Leadership – sponsor of the annual Congressional Prayer Breakfast. In the

fourth chapter, I consider fundamentalist attempts to win back some of the intellectual respectability they had once enjoyed by examining the work of fundamentalist scholars like J. Gresham Machen, Cornelius Van Til, Gordon Clark, and Carl Henry within the context of the history of American higher education in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Finally, in the fifth chapter, I examine the National Association of Evangelicals' efforts to abandon the censoriousness of the earlier movement and then rebrand itself an organization of all-American Cold Warriors.

CHAPTER I

Revolution and Counterrevolution

“Christianity has preserved a great empire over the American mind, and what I especially want to note is that it reigns not only as a philosophy that is adopted after examination, but as a religion that is believed without discussion.”

– Alexis de Tocqueville (1835)²⁸

“The irreligion of the modern world is radical to a degree for which, I think, there is no counterpart.”

– Walter Lippmann (1929)²⁹

Toward the end of his life, Dwight Moody, a former Chicago businessman and America's most celebrated late-nineteenth-century evangelist, expressed a hope that the disagreement between the theologically conservative Protestants who would soon become evangelical fundamentalists and the liberals who would become “modernists” would pass quickly so that pastors might get back to preaching the simple gospel.³⁰ This was not to be. Moody died in 1899, on the eve of one of the most vitriolic periods in American religious history. The fundamentalist-modernist controversy was an intense struggle over how American evangelical Protestantism would interact with and attempt to incorporate the dramatic changes – cultural, economic, intellectual, political, sociological, and theological – then taking place all around it. The fight was about more than just

²⁸ Alexis De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, translated and edited by Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 406.

²⁹ Walter Lippmann, *A Preface to Morals* (New York: Macmillan, 1929), p. 12.

³⁰ I have adapted this story from Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 33.

dogma. It was a battle over what twentieth-century American society would look like, who its citizens would be, where they would draw their inspiration from, and which assumptions would underlie the system of beliefs by which they would live.

American evangelicalism arose in the middle of the eighteenth century in what has come to be known as the “Great Awakening” – a multi-denominational and geographically-dispersed movement among Protestants in both Britain and North America. It was led by the famous preachers of the day – George Whitefield, John and Charles Wesley, Jonathan Edwards – and its main thrust was an increased concern with public preaching and personal piety. The movement was a grand success in several of the colonies. One Rhode Island observer is reported to have marveled that whereas one could usually expect perhaps “ten or twelve Indians” to occasionally join a church meeting there were now “near a hundred that come very constantly.” Further south, in Pennsylvania, an evangelical enthusiast noted that “even in Baltimore” – at that time less hostile to Catholics than most other colonial cities – there appeared to be “very satisfying evidences” of revival.³¹

By the turn of the nineteenth century, however, these revivals had lost their

³¹ The quotes are from Frank Lambert’s *Inventing the “Great Awakening”* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 3, which is perhaps the best recent account of the period. See also: Richard Bushman, *From Puritan to Yankee: Character and the Social Order in Connecticut, 1690-1765* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967); Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990); Rhys Isaac, “Evangelical Revolt: The Nature of the Baptists’ Challenge to the Traditional Order in Virginia, 1765-1775” in *William and Mary Quarterly*, 31 (July, 1974), pp. 345-368; Paul Johnson, *A Shopkeepers Millenium* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978); George Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956); Mark Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: the Age of Edwards, Whitefield, and the Wesleys* (volume one in the series *A History of Evangelicalism: People, Movements, and Ideas in the English-Speaking World*, edited by David Bebbington – Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003); Harry Stout, *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Press, 1991). For a provocative view of these revivals, see: Jon Butler “Enthusiasm Described and Decried: The Great Awakening as Interpretative Fiction,” *Journal of American History*, 69 (1982-1983), pp. 302-325.

momentum, and evangelical leaders were desperate for a way to rekindle the flames that had blazed so hotly among the faithful only a half-century before. In the early 1800s, they found a spark: another long series of revivals in New England, in the western counties of New York (the famous “burned-over” district), in western Virginia, western North Carolina, and eastern Tennessee, in Ohio, and, most famously, at Cane Ridge, in Kentucky. Led by Timothy Dwight and Lyman Beecher in New England, Charles Grandison Finney in New York, and Barton Stone and Alexander Campbell in the Cumberland River Valley, these gatherings exhibited influences spanning the Protestant spectrum. Their roots lay in the “Holy Fairs” held by Scottish Presbyterians along the southern border with England in the mid-eighteenth century, but coming on the heels of the American Revolution as they did, they also exhibited a strong streak of Arminianism, as evidenced by the tremendous success of the Baptists and Methodists.³² These meetings were raucous and unruly and seem to have been fueled to a great extent by that peculiar phenomenon that Émile Durkheim called “collective effervescence,” the feeling of transcendence that comes along with being swept up in the commotion of an excited

³² The conflict between its Calvinist and its Arminian influences is a recurring theme in the history of American evangelicalism. Calvinists believe that mankind is totally depraved and, therefore, completely dependent upon God's grace for salvation. Their theology suggests that, because of the rottenness of the human soul, God was forced to pick out those upon whom he would bestow his blessing. Salvation, then, is not something we choose or earn, but rather something we are given. This doctrine is known as predestination, and it is one of the main theological differences between so-called “Reformed” denominations (*viz.* – Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Dutch Reformed, Huguenots) and other Protestants. Arminians, on the other hand, believe that without the freedom to reject it, salvation becomes meaningless and human life therefore worthless. Calvinists are offended by the Arminian idea that God's plan is somehow subject to man's will, while Arminians cannot accept the Calvinist notion that we are merely God's playthings. For a good discussion of the role of Calvinism and Arminianism in this period, see: Nathan Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), pp. 162-192. For more on the Scottish influence, see: Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Holy Fairs: Scottish Communion and American Revivals in the Early Modern Period* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

crowd.³³ Many of those in attendance expressed their fervor with dramatic outbursts. They flung their arms into the air, danced, shook uncontrollably, and even barked like dogs.

Even after the meetings had ended, new converts often felt called upon to go out into the world and prepare it for the second coming of Christ. For a time, they were remarkably successful. As historian Richard Carwardine has written, in the middle of the nineteenth century “a harmonious Christian republic beckoned, as theaters closed, grocery keepers poured away their liquor, and prostitutes lost custom.”³⁴ During this “Second Great Awakening,” a robustly activist Protestantism became one of the most important cultural forces in North America, and by the middle of the century (as sociologist James Davison Hunter has observed) “a distinctly Protestant ethos of work, morality, [and] leisure” had come to prevail across the United States.³⁵ In fact, American society became so heavily influenced by an evangelical intellectual, political, and social order that it was hard to tell the difference between evangelical culture and American culture; the two had practically fused. (Or, as historian Michael Kazin memorably put it, “an eloquent preacher could be a sexy celebrity, the leader of one or more reform movements, and a popular philosopher – all at the same time.”)³⁶ There were plenty of critics – “No person is warranted from the word of God to publish to the world the

³³ Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, translated by Joseph Ward Swain (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1915), esp. pp. 210-226.

³⁴ Richard Carwardine, *Evangelicals and Politics in Antebellum America* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997), p. 294.

³⁵ James Davison Hunter, *Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 4.

³⁶ Michael Kazin, “The Gospel of Love” (a review of Debby Applegate's *The Most Famous Man in America*), in *The New York Times Book Review* (July 16, 2006).

discoveries of heaven or hell which he supposes he has had in a dream, or trance, or vision,” one wrote to a Connecticut periodical in 1805³⁷ – but even so, more than three quarters of America's churches were evangelical at the outbreak of the Civil War.³⁸

The crisis over slavery would, of course, split evangelicals (not to mention the Republic) into opposing camps well before the war and thereby dash any hope of everlasting harmony. Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians were especially divided over the South's peculiar institution, with each denomination fracturing into a pro-slavery southern and an anti-slavery northern wing. John Brown's righteous, and finally murderous, indignation over the “peculiar institution's” threat to spill over the Missouri border into Kansas is well known, and when war finally came – with a decisive push from Brown – northern evangelicals felt especially vindicated.³⁹ “The great irrepressible conflict between liberty and slavery has at last broke into war, and a war of no ordinary magnitude it may yet be,” one man wrote to his nephew, a northern Methodist bishop. “But the Lord reigns,” he continued, and “as bad as war is, He can cause good to follow.”⁴⁰ By the end of the struggle, Union soldiers were marching south singing a spirited hymn to the Protestant God's righteous wrath.⁴¹ At the war's conclusion, William

³⁷ As quoted in Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, p. 10.

³⁸ Mark A. Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 170.

³⁹ On Brown, see: Merrill D. Peterson, *John Brown: The Legend Revisited* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002).

⁴⁰ As quoted in Carwardine, *Evangelicals and Politics in Antebellum America*, p. 312.

⁴¹ There was a celebrated revival among Confederate troops in 1863, but its origins were far more morose. The most immediate cause seems to have been the increasing realization that the war would be no waltz among the magnolias, but rather a terrible and bloody ordeal that the South might very well lose. See: Drew Gilpin Faust, “Christian Soliders: The Meaning of Revivalism in the Confederate Army” in *The Journal of Southern History* 53 (1987), pp. 63-90; James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 75-76; and, more generally, Steven E. Woodworth, *While God is Marching On: The Religious World of Civil War Soldiers* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001).

Adams (one of the founders of Union Theological Seminary in New York and a northern Presbyterian), neatly summed up the prevailing attitude: “we as individuals, and as a nation, are identified with that kingdom of God among men, which is righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.”⁴² It was a heady time, especially for northern evangelicals, who found themselves in charge of what many of them saw as the New Jerusalem, the “city upon a hill” of John Winthrop’s celebrated sermon. But, it was not to last.

George Marsden has convincingly argued that the nineteenth-century American intellect was constructed upon two basic fundamentals: Baconian science and Scottish Common Sense Realist philosophy. The mere mention of Francis Bacon's name, Marsden suggests, “inspired in Americans an almost reverential respect for the certainty of the knowledge achieved by careful and objective observation of the facts known to common sense.”⁴³ Using Bacon’s inductive method, one could “scientifically” prove – provided one’s audience listened in good faith – the authenticity of Christianity’s tenets

⁴² William Adams as quoted in George Marsden, *The Evangelical Mind and the New School Presbyterian Experience* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), p. 207.

⁴³ George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, p. 15. For more on the influence of Reid and Bacon on the intellectual climate of the American nineteenth century, see Marsden, "Everyone One's Own Interpreter? The Bible, Science, and Authority in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America" in *The Bible in America*, N. Hatch and M. Noll, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982) and "Understanding Fundamentalist Views of Science," *Science and Creationism*, Ashley Montagu, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); as well as Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *Protestants in an Age of Science: The Baconian Ideal and Antebellum American Religious Thought* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977). In the course of my research, I stumbled across a bit of anecdotal evidence that Marsden seems to have missed, but that further supports his emphasis on Bacon: Thomas Jefferson is said to have been inspired to create the University of Virginia lest the denizens of the Commonwealth be forced “to send [their] children for education to Kentucky or Cambridge” (to Transylvania or Harvard, one assumes). But Transylvania wasn’t the only college in Kentucky in the early nineteenth century. Thornton F. Johnson (a professor and Disciples of Christ layman who lost his job as the Baptists consolidated their control over Georgetown College) founded yet another short-lived central Kentucky college in 1829 – Francis Bacon College. For a short history see: John E. Kleber, Lowell H. Harrison, and Thomas D. Clark, *The Kentucky Encyclopedia* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1992), p. 43. The Jefferson quote is taken from Lowell H. Harrison and James C. Klotter, *A New History of Kentucky* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1997), p. 152.

as spelled out in the Bible. In Scottish philosopher Thomas Reid, on the other hand, American evangelicals found a persuasive (and no doubt comforting) answer to David Hume's radical epistemological skepticism.⁴⁴ Both Hume and Reid argued in the empirical tradition, but while Hume used empiricism to insist that one could hardly know anything at all, Reid was convinced that the senses could be trusted. He was sure that their purpose was to make us aware of the very real objects and phenomena that surround us, regardless of what – or even whether – we thought of them.⁴⁵ “Empirical knowledge, in this scheme of things,” writes historian Cynthia Russett, “was valued less perhaps for its own sake than for the evidence it offered of the wonderful cosmic pattern.”⁴⁶ In nineteenth-century America, then, Christianity wasn't just common sense; it was good sense, too, sound and scientifically verifiable.

But it was variations on Charles Darwin's work that would come to dominate the leading edge of late-nineteenth-century American intellectual life. Darwin's ideas were a grave threat to the kind of common-sense Christianity we have been discussing, although not for the reasons most people now suppose. It was not – or at least not primarily – Darwin's belief in evolution that troubled his critics; evolution was an old idea even in the 1850s. By the mid-nineteenth century, many scientists were evolutionists, that is, they

⁴⁴ My understanding of both Reid and Hume are based primarily on secondary sources, especially the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (<http://plato.stanford.edu>; last accessed September 27, 2012) and Peter Millican's *Reading Hume on Human Understanding* (New York: Oxford, 2002). It is interesting to note, however, that by embracing Reid over Hume, they also turned their backs on (or at least stood at a 45° angle to) John Locke, hero to so many of the nation's founders. See: Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Unbelief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

⁴⁵ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Thomas Reid and the Story of Epistemology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

⁴⁶ Cynthia Eagle Russett, *Darwin in America: The Intellectual Response, 1865-1912* (San Francisco: W. H. Freeman and Company, 1976), p. 3.

believed that species had not been created once and for all, but that they had changed and would continue to change over time. Jean Baptiste Lamarck had suggested one of the first modern theories of evolution as early as 1809. Lamarck thought that simple organisms always and inevitably gave way to more complex ones in an orderly process that would eventually lead to perfection. (He also believed that individual animals could affect the rate and direction of evolution, a belief that he called “the inheritability of acquired traits.” His giraffe example is a standard Biology 101 joke.)⁴⁷ Lamarck's friend and colleague, Etienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire was another pioneer. He suggested that evolution was the working out of the inherent potential of every type of life. In a kind of biological Platonism, each variation was a step toward absolute refinement. Even Charles Darwin's own grandfather, Erasmus Darwin, was an early advocate of evolution.⁴⁸

The purpose of *On the Origin of Species* was not to introduce the concept of evolution at all; it was to debunk the concept of supernatural intelligence – the notion that the universe is the result of an idea – and it was this merciless materialism that raised eyebrows. Darwin thought that luck and blind chance drove evolution, not the will of God. Darwinian evolution was an emotionless procedure that offered nothing to the human desire for things to make sense or at least be straightforwardly explicable. Animals that happened to be better adapted to their environment were better able to reproduce and therefore thrived; those who were not died out. Darwin called this process

⁴⁷ With the rise of a field known as “epigenetics,” Lamarck may very well get the last laugh. See: Judith Shulevitz, “Why Fathers Really Matter,” in *The New York Times* (September 8, 2012).

⁴⁸ He wrote a number of fairly clunky poems on the subject: “Organic life beneath the shoreless waves was born and nurs'd in ocean's pearly caves” one begins – not unpromisingly – before veering off course: “as successive generations bloom, new powers acquire and larger limbs assume.” See: Erasmus Darwin, *The Temple of Nature: A Poem with Philosophical Notes* (London: 1803), p. 27.

“natural selection,” a label that belies its chilling details. Since natural selection wants nothing, aims for nowhere, and reaches no resolution, it follows no plan. It cannot even be thought of as progression. There is change, but no progress; after all, there is no aspiration, no place to get to. Most patently offensive to nineteenth-century Christians, Darwin's theory suggests that our own species, *Homo sapiens*, is nothing more than a tiny twig on the tree of life, and that, one day, we will be gone.⁴⁹

Even so, Darwin's ideas found a multitude of champions: botanist Asa Gray, professional historian and amateur philosopher John Fiske, early sociologist William Graham Sumner, *Popular Science* founder Edward Youmans, and many others. Gray even predicted a kind of Darwinian struggle between them all, a “spirited conflict...not likely to be settled in an off-hand way.”⁵⁰ In the nineteenth-century United States, however, hardly any interpretation of Darwin's work became so widely influential as Herbert Spencer's. And although Spencer wrote at length on topics pertaining to biology, it is primarily for his sociological views that he is now remembered. Like Lamarck, Spencer argued that the whole world, including human society, was evolving toward a kind of ultimate perfection.⁵¹ That, according to his theory, it would be many generations before a useful and final moral framework could develop and that this would entail untold human suffering seemed not to bother him. “The poverty of the incapable, the distresses that come upon the imprudent, the starvation of the idle, and those shoulderings aside of the weak by the strong, which leave so many in shallows and miseries, are the decrees of

⁴⁹ Daniel C. Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meanings of Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995).

⁵⁰ Asa Gray, *Darwiniana: Essays and Reviews Pertaining to Darwinism* (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1876), p. 10.

⁵¹ Herbert Spencer, *First Principles* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1862).

a large, far-seeing benevolence,” Spencer wrote in 1865. “The same beneficence,” he continued, “brings to early graves the children of diseased parents, and singles out the low-spirited, the intemperate, and the debilitated as the victims of an epidemic.”⁵² It was in fact Spencer, rather than Darwin, who popularized the idea that natural selection was akin to “the survival of the fittest,” an idea widely understood as a suggestion that all life, including human life, is a relentless contest that only the very strongest-willed, the most ferociously competitive, can hope to succeed at.

This was not exactly what Darwin had had in mind. In fact, he had sharply warned against this very line of reasoning. “Nor could we check our sympathy, even at the urging of hard reason, without deterioration in the noblest part of our nature,” Darwin wrote in 1871 in *The Descent of Man*. “The surgeon may harden himself whilst performing an operation, for he knows that he is acting for the good of his patient; but if we were intentionally to neglect the weak and helpless, it could only be for a contingent benefit, with a certain and great present evil.”⁵³ Nevertheless, Spencer was widely regarded – at least during his lifetime – an able evolutionary theoretician. Henry Ward Beecher wrote to him in 1866, explaining that “the peculiar condition of American society” had made Spencer's work “far more fruitful and quickening” here than it was in Europe.⁵⁴ Columbia University President F. A. P. Barnard went even further:

⁵² Herbert Spencer, *Social Statics or The Conditions Essential to Human Happiness Specified and the First of Them Developed* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1865), p. 354.

⁵³ Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* (London: John Murray, 1871), pp. 168-169.

⁵⁴ Henry Ward Beecher to Herbert Spencer (June 1866) in *The Life and Letters of Herbert Spencer*, edited by David Duncan (London: Methuen and Company, 1908), p. 128. We can only assume that by “peculiar condition” he meant the general fluidity and uprootedness that had long characterized the social life of the New World. Beecher was a curious case of a minister who somehow managed to happily occupy the uncomfortable space between Social Darwinism and the Social Gospel – perhaps because he died before Spencer’s philosophy had begun to show its darker side.

As it seems to me, we have in Herbert Spencer not only the profoundest thinker of our time, but the most capacious and most powerful intellect of all time. Aristotle and his master were no more beyond the pygmies who preceded them than he is beyond Aristotle. Kant, Hegel, Fichte, and Schelling are gropers in the dark by the side of him. In all the history of science, there is but one name which can be compared to his, and that is Newton's.

John Fiske considered Spencer's notion that evolution was *the* underlying, universal principle of human life “the supreme organizing idea of modern thought.”⁵⁵ Intellectuals were not the only fans Spencer won. Freewheeling American capitalists also quite appreciated the idea that the only obstacle to unrestrained financial advancement could be overcome. Primogeniture, *Noblesse Oblige*, and all the other baroque and byzantine European customs could be neither simply nor easily vanquished. Fitness, however, could be honed. One need only acquire, and then practice, the right kinds of virtues: discipline, frugality, determination, perhaps even a certain cunningness. Proponents of Anglo-Saxon racial superiority, too, took comfort in Spencer's social theories, which flattered their keen sense of their own robustness. Along with German biologist Ernst Haeckel's work – first published in English in 1901 – Spencer lent the everyday racism of the nineteenth century a patina of intellectual respectability. These developments alone would have insured that Darwinism acquired a bad reputation among American Christians, that it became inseparably associated with both the ruthless and ferocious competition and the ugly racial hierarchies that characterized so much of life in the Gilded Age.⁵⁶ But there was more, yet.

⁵⁵ Barnard as quoted in Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1944), p. 31; Fiske as quoted in John Offer (ed.), *Herbert Spencer: Critical Assessments of Leading Sociologists* (New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 613.

⁵⁶ See, for example: Andrew Carnegie, “Wealth” in *North American Review*, 148/391 (June 1889), pp. 653-665 and Josiah Strong, *Our Country: Its Possible Future and Its Present Crisis* (New York: The American Missionary Society, 1885).

In the early decades of the twentieth century, some of the intellectual chaos that Darwin's theory helped to cause coalesced into a loosely-connected philosophical movement. Virginia Woolf's famous line – “On or about December 1910, human character changed” – is epigrammatic, but philosopher Richard Rorty's take is more useful. He reckons it was a “big change in the outlook of the intellectuals” that happened around 1910; this is when many of them first began to be confident that “human beings had only bodies, and no souls.”⁵⁷ By the turn of the twentieth century, most leading American philosophers supposed that human problems required human solutions; if people could make a mess, they declared, then people could also clean it up – all by themselves. They did not need, or at least need not expect, the help of God. William James put it this way:

And if we have to give up all hope of seeing into the purposes of God, or to give up theoretically the idea of final causes, and of God anyhow as vain and leading to nothing for us, we can, by our will, make the enjoyment of our brothers stand us in the stead of a final cause; and through a knowledge of the fact that that enjoyment on the whole depends on what individuals accomplish, lead a life so active and so sustained by a clean conscience as not to need to fret much.⁵⁸

James had been part of the audience that saw Sigmund Freud give his first – and, in fact, only – set of talks in the United States, in 1909. According to historian Russell Jacoby, Freud worried about the possibility that “American prudishness” would keep his remarks from being very well received, but he was also aware of the power that they would have should they go over. Looking out at the Manhattan skyline from the deck of his arriving transatlantic steamer a few days before his speaking tour began, Freud

⁵⁷ Richard Rorty, “Religion as Conversation-stopper” in *Philosophy and Social Hope* (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), p. 169.

⁵⁸ William James to Thomas Ward (January 1868). From: Elizabeth Hardwick (ed.), *The Selected Letters of William James* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Cudahy, 1961), p. 53-54.

famously remarked that Americans had no idea he was “bringing them the plague.” His prescience is perhaps most clearly illustrated by the delighted reaction of one of early twentieth-century America's most outspoken political and sexual rebels, Emma Goldman (who attended the lectures with her lover, the anarchist physician and birth-control advocate, Ben Reitman). Goldman was “deeply impressed” by Freud's talk and called the visitor from Vienna a “giant among pygmies.” With a friend like Goldman, Freud's ideas would not long lack for American enemies. But Goldman was not alone in welcoming the idea that man – and, perhaps more threateningly, woman – was driven by largely unseen and uncontrollable animal forces. The famous Austrian doctor was pleasantly surprised to learn that classes in psychoanalysis were already a part of the curriculum at Clark University, the college to which he had been invited to speak.⁵⁹ As he stepped up to deliver his inaugural address, Freud later recalled, “it seemed like the realization of some incredible daydream: Psychoanalysis was no longer a product of delusion – it had become a valuable part of reality.”⁶⁰

Another German thinker, Friedrich Nietzsche, spent his short career pulverizing the concepts most dear to the nineteenth-century American intellect – its belief in metaphysics, in the unity of truth, in the value of morality even – and his ideas were a

⁵⁹ At the time of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy, Freud's work was familiar only to a small group of northeastern intellectuals. However, the efforts of psychologist G. Stanley Hall (Clark's president) to convince people that children had sexual compulsions were widely known, especially among educators and social hygienists. See: Jeffrey P. Moran, “Modernism Gone Mad: Sex Education Comes to Chicago, 1913” in the *Journal of American History* 83/2 (September, 1996), pp. 494-495 and G. Stanley Hall, *Adolescence: Its Psychology and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion, and Education* (New York: 1904).

⁶⁰ See: Freud's autobiographical essay in Peter Gay (ed.), *The Freud Reader* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1989), p. 32; Nathan G. Hale, Jr., *Freud and the Americans: The Beginnings of Psychoanalysis in the United States, 1876-1917* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971); Russell Jacoby, “When Freud Came to America” in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (September 21, 2009); and Vivian Gornick, *Emma Goldman: Revolution as a Way of Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011).

major challenge to Christians who wanted their faith to be thought intellectually serious. America's ministers were understandably worried by a thinker who was – to borrow from historian Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen – “armed with a bracing intellect, savage wit, pitch-perfect historical sense, and haunting prophetic voice who wanted nothing less than to annihilate their religion.” Nietzsche's obituary for the Christian God alone would have brought on infamy enough, but he also declared Jesus his enemy, called Christianity a religion of and for slaves, and recommended that anyone handling the New Testament should don a pair of thick gloves – “the presence of so much filth,” he explained, “makes it highly advisable.”⁶¹ Nietzsche was, in the words of an American disciple, the “*enfant terrible* of modernism” and a serious threat to common-sense religious faith. How big a threat is hinted at by the frequency with which his critics' resorted to pathology in their attempts to discredit his philosophy. “From the first to the last page of Nietzsche's writings,” one imaginative detractor noted, “the careful reader seems to hear a madman, with flashing eyes, wild gestures, and foaming mouth, spouting forth deafening bombast.” This reviewer's Nietzsche was not only a madman – whom he envisioned “breaking out into frenzied laughter” and “skipping about in a giddily agile dance” – but also a perverted deviant, “unable to experience any sexual stimulation without the immediate appearance in his consciousness of an image of some deed of violence and blood.” Rabid, degenerate maniac or not, the German philosopher was unavoidable. As one disheartened minister put it, “no one can think and escape Nietzsche.”⁶²

⁶¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, H. L. Mencken (trans.), (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1918), p. 133.

⁶² Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen, *American Nietzsche: A History of an Icon and His Ideas* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012). The quotes are from pp. 31, 59, and 74.

The world of early-twentieth-century art and literature went through changes similar to those occurring in science and philosophy, plunging into a time of inventive chaos. There seem to have been two broad sea changes taking place – one in content and one in form. The revolution in form is easy enough to see. We find it in Dada, in Eliot's *The Waste Land*, in the Bauhaus, in Stravinsky – representatives, all of them, of something we regularly, and without too much disagreement, call “modern”: modern art, modern poetry, modern architecture, modern music. But late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century literature and art also highlighted the chaotic interior of the human psyche, and its practitioners took a distinct pleasure in revealing the strange little worlds most of us inhabit – especially when the guardians of good taste thought this kind of revelation shocking or improper. Henry James exploited this chasteness to great literary effect in early novels like *Daisy Miller* (1879) and *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), both of which involve guileless American women ravaged by European sophistication and unwholesomeness (neither of which James, it seems, wholly disapproved of). The writers of the Bloomsbury Group tweaked and toyed with the rigid boundaries of Victorian sexuality. Virginia Woolf, who carried on a long affair with her friend Vita Sackville-West, frankly confessed that she often preferred the romantic and sexual company of women to men.⁶³ Edna St. Vincent Millay, 1923's Pulitzer-Prize winner for poetry, spent half a decade “breaking hearts and wreaking havoc” after the 1917 publication of her first book. She had affairs and abortions, took a tour of the wilds of Albania, and sat for a

⁶³ Other literary examples include the smoldering sensuality in D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* (1913) and Marcel Proust's rather frank discussions of homosexuality in *Sodom and Gomorrah* (1921). Regarding the Bloomsbury Group's sexual antics and experiments, see: Quentin Bell, *Bloomsbury Recalled* (New York: Columbia U. Press, 1996) and Virginia Nicholson, *Among the Bohemians: Experiments in Living, 1900-1939* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2005). The last two are, respectively, the son and granddaughter of Vanessa Bell (who was Clive Bell's wife and Virginia Woolf's sister).

portrait by surrealist photographer Man Ray.⁶⁴ Impressionists, and then Cubists, experimented wildly with perspective and abstraction. Later still, the Dadaists gleefully thumbed their noses at traditionalist definitions of art.⁶⁵ In 1917, Marcel Duchamp bought a cast-off pissoir, signed it “R. Mutt,” and submitted it to the Society of Independent Artists' show in New York. We now recognize that Duchamp's toilet was a crucial question about the nature of art – i.e., What is it? – made solid, but at the time one horrified reviewer reportedly barked that “Dada philosophy is the sickest, most paralyzing, and most destructive thing that has ever originated from the brain of man.”⁶⁶

These examples suggest that, in the 1910s in both Europe and North America, the uncontested reign of an old way of thinking – about morality and religion, about history and philosophy, a way of thinking about *thinking* – was coming to an end. The hard sciences provided the toppling shove. As Daniel Joseph Singal describes:

Radical theoretical shifts that served to demolish a host of familiar and distinct concepts were taking place at both the cosmic and microscopic levels: space, far from being a void, was now seen as filled by fields of energy, while the atom, far from being solid, was itself made up of tiny particles that orbited each other at a distance. The discovery of radium, demonstrating that seemingly solid matter could turn into energy, was shocking enough, but it was soon followed by Albert Einstein's proof early in the century that space and time could no longer be construed as separate and distinct entities, but must be placed on a continuum.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Millay's poetry was not technically ground-breaking, but she did exemplify a lifestyle that cultural conservatives must have found unnerving. See: Nancy Milford, *Savage Beauty: The Life of Edna St. Vincent Millay* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 2001). The quote is attributed to one of Millay's lovers, Edmund Wilson, in J. D. McClatchy's review of Milford's book, “Like a Moth to the Flame” in *The New York Times* (September 16, 2001).

⁶⁵ Witness Picasso's *Le Guitariste* (1910) or Marcel Duchamp's *Readymades*. The German publisher TASCHEN has recently released a coffee-table-sized book on Cubism: Anne Gantefuhrer-Trier, *Cubism (25)* (New York: Taschen American, 2009). The National Gallery of Art has also published a beautiful, but hefty, comprehensive guide to Dadaism, see: Leah Dickerman et al, *Dada: Zurich, Berlin, Hannover, Cologne, New York, Paris* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 2008).

⁶⁶ As quoted in Dickerman et al, *Dada: Zurich, Berlin, Hannover, Cologne, New York, Paris*, p. 446.

⁶⁷ Daniel Joseph Singal, “Towards a Definition of American Modernism” in *American Quarterly* 39/1, p. 12.

Combined with the rest of the intellectual, economic, and social turmoil of the Industrial Age, these developments led many people to question the basic axioms on which much of both American and European society were built.

A great many other people rejected these notions, however, and this was the heart of the *Kulturkampf* that dominated so much of American and European intellectual and cultural life in the early decades of the twentieth century. To American intellectual and cultural conservatives all of it was a dangerous aberration, but evangelical Christians felt especially threatened. A fundamentalist pastor worried that the United States would “go the same route that the ancient nations of Babylon, Greece, and Rome went – into sinful pleasures, unchristian philosophy, heathen practices, and pagan art,” all of which would inevitably “bring sudden destruction from a living God of justice.” Another conservative Christian commentator assessed the latest developments in philosophy and found them seriously lacking: “Great is the mischief already accomplished by these mighty agencies of evil,” he wrote, “and we are as yet but at the beginning of their destructive career.” An evangelical critic of the introduction of sex education in Chicago characterized the plan to inform children of the mechanics of reproduction as “modernism gone mad.”⁶⁸

In America at least, whatever solidity there had been before had been based on evangelical Protestantism, and it was from evangelical Protestantism that the vanguard of

⁶⁸ See: Joseph Larsen, “What Makes the United States Great and What Detracts from Her Greatness” in *Moody Monthly* (July 1929), p. 526; Jeffrey Moran, “Modernism Gone Mad: Sex Education Comes to Chicago, 1913” in the *Journal of American History* 83/2 (September, 1996), pp. 481-513; Philip Mauro, “Modern Philosophy” in *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth* (Los Angeles: Bible Institute of Los Angeles, 1917). John Dewey allowed that the detractors had a point. “Let us admit the case of the conservative,” he wrote, “if we once start thinking, no one can guarantee where we shall come out, except that many objects, ends, and institutions are doomed. Every thinker puts some portion of an apparently stable world in peril and no one can wholly predict what will emerge in its place.” Dewey as quoted in the epigram of Joseph Ratner (ed.), *Intelligence in the Modern World: John Dewey's Philosophy* (New York: The Modern Library, 1939).

the reaction against the “modernist” revolt would emerge. The origins of an organized movement against modernism in early-twentieth-century American Protestantism is a series of pamphlets published in the 1910s, *The Fundamentals*. The articles were written by a collection of evangelical theologians and preachers along with a smattering of popular writers and laymen and were sent, free of charge, to ministers, missionaries, and Sunday-school teachers across the country. Many of the contributors had at one time or another been associated with Princeton Theological Seminary, which established itself early in its history as a theologically conservative bulwark. (One of Princeton Seminary's presidents, Charles Hodge, famously announced that “no new idea ever originated” at the school.)⁶⁹ The essays in *The Fundamentals* were mostly an affirmation of traditional Protestant orthodoxy as it had been widely understood since the Reformation.⁷⁰ But, contributors also inveighed against Darwin's theory of evolution, disparaged secular-minded biblical criticism as the efforts of “rationalists and unbelievers” whose work could be “neither expert nor scientific,” took shots at William James, and denounced the Catholic Church. They were resolute, but not exactly bellicose. (Although several did pillory Mormonism and the Jehovah's Witnesses.)⁷¹

These pamphlets were not meant to be a declaration of war, however. The initial

⁶⁹ Here as quoted in E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 377, but this is an oft-cited remark.

⁷⁰ By “traditional Protestant orthodoxy as fundamentalists believed it had been widely understood” I mean, in effect, the definition of evangelical in the introduction.

⁷¹ Lots of the essays took these as their theme, but see especially: Rev. Henry H. Beach, “The Decadence of Darwinism”; Canon Dyson Hague, “The History of Higher Criticism”; Phillip Mauro, “Modern Philosophy”; Rev. J. M. Foster, “Rome, the Antagonist of the Nation”; Rev. R. G. McNiece, “Mormonism: Its Origin, Characteristics, and Doctrines”; and Prof. William G. Moorehead, “Millennial Dawn: A Counterfeit Christianity” in *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), a reprint of the original 1917 collected edition.

aim of *The Fundamentals* was to unify conservative Protestants in opposition to both the social changes we have been discussing as well as the concurrent theological changes taking place in the more liberally-minded seminaries. In the 1910s, a fundamentalist was someone who had read the pamphlets, or heard about them in church, while nodding firmly in agreement; he was concerned, but not yet incensed. The rancor that we associate with the term would come at the end of the decade. Curtis Lee Laws, editor of *The Watchman Examiner* – the Baptist paper that first published a now widely-cited (albeit apocryphal) report on Charles Darwin’s alleged death-bed conversion to Christianity – is most often credited with having coined “fundamentalist” as a kind of battle cry.⁷² “We suggest,” Laws wrote in 1920, “that those who still cling to the great fundamentals and who mean to do battle royal for the fundamentals shall be called fundamentalists.”⁷³

In theology, the “modernist impulse” (as one scholar has termed it) mostly involved subjecting holy books to the same kinds of critical inquiry applied to other ancient texts.⁷⁴ Theological modernists hoped to downplay traditional Christian dogma in order to accommodate the idea that God moved in history primarily by way of cultural and intellectual developments rather than with miracles and divine intervention. This method soon came to be called “higher” criticism, a label meant to separate it from “lower” criticism, which was an approach to Biblical scholarship that emphasized

⁷² For a thorough debunking of the conversion myth, see: James Moore's chapter in Ronald Numbers's, *Galileo Goes to Jail* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), pp. 142-151.

⁷³ As quoted in Larry D. Pettegrew, "Will the Real Fundamentalist Please Stand Up?" *Central Testimony* (fall 1982), pp. 1-2, but this is easily Laws's most famous line.

⁷⁴ See: William R. Hutchison, *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press).

language and the exact meanings of ancient words. Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr. was frank about higher criticism's implications. "The truth," he wrote to Frederic Hedge, a professor of church history at Harvard's Divinity School, "is staring the Christian world in the face; the stories of the old Hebrew books cannot be taken as literal statements of fact."⁷⁵ It was one thing for Holmes, a physician and poet who moved in rarified New England circles (he coined the term "Boston Brahmin"), to write off biblical literalism in a letter to Hedge – a Unitarian and a Transcendentalist – but it was quite another for American evangelical Christians to embrace such a profane treatment of their holy book. Many found it blasphemous. Traveling fundamentalist evangelist Billy Sunday's reaction to higher criticism was the most colorful; he once told a cheering crowd that he didn't "know any more about theology than a jack-rabbit knows about ping-pong," but was still "on [his] way to glory."⁷⁶

Militant evangelicals, almost all of them now calling themselves fundamentalists, blamed theological modernism for sowing the seeds of religious doubt, and for a time they offered a united front against it. Augustus Strong – a theological conservative who had also been president of Rochester Seminary, a place (in)famous for its theologically liberal faculty – spent his career trying to make peace between different evangelical factions. He made a decisive move toward fundamentalism, however, after he witnessed firsthand the impact of liberal theology on missionaries in Asia. Liberalism, he wrote in a published report of the trip, "deprive[s] the gospel message of all definiteness, and

⁷⁵ Holmes to Frederic Hedge, as quoted in Francis Weisenberger, *Ordeal of Faith: The Crisis of Church-Going America, 1865-1900* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959), p. 84.

⁷⁶ As quoted in Marty, *Modern American Religion*, vol. 1, p. 217.

[makes] professors and students disseminators of doubts.”⁷⁷ Skepticism remained a consistent bugbear for fundamentalists. John Roach Straton of Calvary Baptist in New York City, assured his radio listeners in an early broadcast that they would “not get any doubts or negations or question marks from the Calvary pulpit.”⁷⁸ Some of the essays in *The Fundamentals* addressed this conflict as well. Contributor and University of Glasgow theologian James Orr suggested that “in this whirl of confusion and theories, is it any wonder that many should be disquieted and unsettled and feel as if the ground on which they have been wont to rest was giving way beneath their feet?” John Dewey himself could not have written this better. Orr had a straightforward remedy to all of this confusion, an answer to the questions modernism raised about truth and certainty, about the point of human life even: the Bible. “Follow its guidance,” Orr wrote, “and you cannot stumble, you cannot err in attaining the supreme end of existence.”⁷⁹

In the essays that made up *The Fundamentals*, some of Protestantism's traditional beliefs were assigned an unprecedented importance. Before the early 1900s, for example, almost no one had felt the need to vigorously defend the idea that every word of the Bible must be literally true and spoken directly from the mouth of God.⁸⁰ Throughout much of Christianity's history in America, it was a theological point that very rarely incited much debate; it was, if anything, quietly assumed to be true, a given, the exact details of which

⁷⁷ Augustus H. Strong, *A Tour of the Missions: Observations and Conclusions* (Philadelphia: The Griffith and Rowland Press, 1917), p. 189. Strong was a sometimes opponent of biblical literalism, however, which indicates how loose a coalition we are talking about here. See: Grant Wacker, *Augustus H. Strong and the Dilemma of Historical Consciousness* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1985), esp. pp. 127-129.

⁷⁸ As quoted in *Time*, “Twisting the Devil's Tail” (March 16, 1953). The exact date of the sermon is unclear in the article.

⁷⁹ Orr, “Holy Scripture and Modern Negation” in *The Fundamentals*.

⁸⁰ George Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, pp. 36-39.

were relatively unimportant. By 1925, debates over even the most minute details of the Bible's literal truth could make or break a denomination, and often did.

Historicism and higher criticism were not the only problem theologically conservative evangelicals had to contend with, however; there was also the social gospel – “godless social service nonsense,” Sunday called it, carried out by “weasel-eyed, sponge-columned, jelly-spined, pussyfooting” weaklings.⁸¹ Born out of a handful of young, liberal theologians’ early-career encounters with the ugliness of industrialization, the grinding poverty of immigrant ghettos, and the brutal violence unleashed on organizing industrial workers, the social gospel was an attempt to equate the “good news” of Jesus with social progress here on Earth. Sympathetic historian Eugene McCarragher writes that for these Christians, theology was “neither a hoary liberal art nor a recondite conviction, but rather a mode of critical attention to political economy, social relations, cultural life, work, and technology.”⁸² It was demystified Christianity with a social conscience. In 1931, Alva Taylor, a social gospel veteran then teaching at Vanderbilt University's divinity school, described the impetus behind the movement: “When science gives the technique and the Church gives the social passion, we will possess power to make the world over into the Kingdom of God.” Walter Rauschenbusch wrote the seminal text, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, in 1907. The book is a four-hundred-page trek through the history of the organized church’s failure to live up to its social obligations with particular emphasis on the problems of the late nineteenth century.

Rauschenbusch’s progressive approach was the result of his years pastoring a church in

⁸¹ As quoted in Richard Ostling, “Jerry Falwell’s Crusade” in *Time* (Sept. 2, 1985).

⁸² Eugene McCarragher, *Christian Critics: Religion and the Impasse in Modern American Social Thought* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), pp. 1-2.

the Hell's Kitchen neighborhood of Manhattan, a dirty and dangerous immigrant quarter that would later become famous for being the home of both "Typhoid Mary" Mallon and Owney "the Killer" Madden.⁸³ "It is either the revival of social religion," Rauschenbusch wrote, "or the deluge."⁸⁴

To conservative evangelicals, social religion was the deluge, however. Rauschenbusch's theology was intensely focused on this world, on building the Kingdom of Heaven here on Earth. Speculation about the afterlife concerned him little. This worried conservatives, who owed a good portion of their theological stance to the frontier revivals of the Second Great Awakening, which placed a particularly strong emphasis on the conversion experience, an experience with mostly otherworldly consequences. The convert was expected, of course, to exhibit a change in outlook and behavior in this life, but the important change had taken place in heaven, where the new believer would be remembered.

It is worth reiterating here that fundamentalism was a movement originating *from* and operating *within* American evangelicalism. It spanned numerous divisions within the evangelical community, taking similar, if still distinguishable, forms among the Baptist, Methodist, Pentecostal, and Reformed communities. And because evangelicals had made up the great majority of the American population in the nineteenth century, the people

⁸³ Alva Taylor, "Obstacles to Progress" in William P. King (ed.), *Social Progress and Christian Ideals* (Nashville, 1931), p. 191 as quoted in Anthony Dunbar, *Against the Grain: Southern Radicals and Prophets, 1929-59* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press), p. 29. For a bit more on Rauschenbusch and his place in the social gospel movement, see Gary Dorrien's article, "Kingdom Coming," in *Christianity Today*, vol. 124, no. 24 (Nov. 27, 2007). Regarding Mary Mallon, see the excellent "The Most Dangerous Woman in America," an episode in the PBS series *NOVA*. On Owney Madden, see (for example): Graham Nown, *The English Godfather: Owney Madden* (London: Ward Lock, 1987).

⁸⁴ Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1907), p. 286.

around to ask uncomfortable questions about their view of the world and life in it were small in number. This began to change dramatically toward the end of the nineteenth century. Between 1880 and 1920 nearly 23 million immigrants arrived in the United States, the vast majority of them from Southern and Eastern Europe. They came at an astonishing rate, averaging a million a year from 1900 to 1914. Considering the fact that the total American population was only 76 million people in 1900, this represents a considerable addition. These new arrivals brought with them to the United States religious creeds that had either long been suspect (like Catholicism) or that were largely unfamiliar to most Americans and therefore potentially threatening (like Eastern Orthodoxy and Judaism).⁸⁵

Nineteenth-century American evangelicals had been quite content to live their lives according to a worldview under which their common-sense understanding of the reasonableness of Protestantism comfortably coincided with a scientific system that reliably backed up their common-sense understanding of nature and the universe. They were reluctant to abandon this virtuous intellectual circle, but the circle could no longer remain whole: the world had shifted too dramatically. A good number of liberal Protestants were eventually able to embrace these changes and alter their theology accordingly, but many others were not, and they felt their loss of influence keenly. As far as fundamentalists and other anti-modernists were concerned, one either believed in the foundations of the faith and refused to back down or joined the mainline denominations

⁸⁵ For more on the story of immigration in this period, see: John Bodnar, *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), Roger Daniels, *Coming to America: A History of Immigration and Ethnicity in American Life* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002), and Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

and bowed to the changes wrought by modernism, which led further out of traditional Christianity's orbit, to skepticism, then to atheism, and finally to nihilism and barbarism. The broader cultural, intellectual (particularly theological), and social developments of the first few decades of the twentieth century had acted as a centrifuge. By the 1910s, there was no in-between; evangelicalism's theologically conservative wing had swallowed its center. For these evangelicals, the integrity and essence of the faith were at stake, and they meant to defend them. Modernism represented a violent and dangerous revolution in the history of American cultural and political identity; militant anti-modernism ("fundamentalism") was their counterrevolution.

Following the First World War, anti-modernist Protestants dramatically upped the stakes in their quarrel with modernism. Blame for the increased tension cannot be laid solely at the feet of the fundamentalists, however. The Progressive movement partially collapsed in the wake of the Great War, but many Progressive ideas lingered: the Nineteenth Amendment was added to the Constitution in 1920 when Tennessee became the thirty-sixth and deciding state to ratify; Margaret Sanger founded the American Birth Control League in 1921; Robert La Follette ran for President on the Progressive Party's 1924 ticket and received nearly five million votes.⁸⁶ Emboldened by the social and political climate of the early 1920s, theological modernists pressed forward, too. In 1922, Harry Fosdick preached his famous and provocative "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?" sermon at New York's First Presbyterian Church. He put the matter plainly enough. "The best conservatives," he wrote, "can often give lessons to the liberals in true

⁸⁶ For a discussion on Progressivism's lingering influence in the 1920s, see: Arthur S. Link and Richard L. McCormick, *Progressivism*, part of *The American History Series* edited by John Hope Franklin (Arlington Heights: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 1983), pp. 105-118.

liberality of spirit, but the fundamentalist program is essentially illiberal and intolerant.”⁸⁷

The blast shot across the fundamentalists’ bow with the desired effect. The conservative reaction came from Clarence Macartney, a Philadelphia Presbyterian, who replied to Fosdick’s question with a pointed query of his own. “Shall *unbelief* win?” he demanded.

This infighting badly affected the Northern wings of the Baptist and Presbyterian churches as conservatives attempted to work against the most liberal elements in each denomination. When this strategy failed, many of the conservatives bolted; they were determined to keep liberal influences out of their churches at all costs, even if that meant secession.⁸⁸ “Just now the fundamentalists are giving us one of the worst exhibitions of bitter intolerance that the churches of this country have ever seen,” Fosdick observed in 1922.⁸⁹ Fosdick, of course, did not know it at the time, but Fundamentalists’ indignation was just beginning to spill over its banks. By the middle of the decade it would reach flood stage.

The fundamentalist-modernist controversy reached its public apogee in 1925, at the trial of John T. Scopes in Dayton, Tennessee.⁹⁰ After years of minor skirmishes over

⁸⁷ Fosdick was a Baptist, but held an associate pastorate at New York’s Presbyterian church by special arrangement. Conservative Presbyterians were especially irritated that the sermon, preached at one of their churches, originated from the pen of an interloper.

⁸⁸ This is a complex story that I have shortened pretty dramatically. Probably the best discussion is to be found in Marty, *Modern American Religion: The Noise of Conflict*, pp. 155-214.

⁸⁹ Harry Emerson Fosdick, “Shall the Fundamentalists Win?” *Christian Work* 102 (June 10, 1922): 716–722.

⁹⁰ There is literature about nearly every aspect of the Scopes Trial, starting with Frederick Lewis Allen’s 1931 book *Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the 1920s* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1931). I quote here from the Harper’s Perennial paperback edition (1964). See also: Michael Kazin, *A Godly Hero: The Life of William Jennings Bryan* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006); Edward J. Larson, *Summer for the Gods: The Scopes Trial and America’s Continuing Debate Over Science and Religion* (New York: Basic Books, 1997); John T. Scopes and James Presley, *Center of the Storm: Memoirs of John T. Scopes* (New York: Hold, Rinehart, and Winston, 1967); Ray Ginger, *Six Days or Forever: Tennessee vs. John Thomas Scopes* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958). Marsden’s brief description of what the trial meant to the Fundamentalist movement in *Fundamentalism and American Culture* is very good.

Darwinism in various state legislatures, Tennessee passed the Butler Act in early 1925; it became a crime to teach evolution in any state-supported public school, including the universities. Encouraged by local boosters, Scopes – a young high school science teacher and coach – took up the American Civil Liberties Union's offer to become a test case. The resulting scene can only be described as carnivalesque. According to Frederick Lewis Allen's popular Depression-era history of the 1920s, the atmosphere both in- and outside the courthouse was oddly festive in spite of the combativeness of the participants, with “hot-dog vendors” joining “gaunt Tennessee farmers,” and “every sort” of revivalist “as if it were circus day.” (“It was a strange trial,” Allen concedes in his introduction.)⁹¹ William Jennings Bryan and Clarence Darrow posed for a photograph in which it is possible to recognize them as the old friends that they actually were. Since the trial was as much a publicity stunt as a judicial affair, this is perhaps unsurprising. (Historian Garry Wills has gone so far as to call the Scopes Trial “a nontrial over a nonlaw, with a nondefendant backed by nonsupporters.”)⁹² A number of scholars testified about the age of the earth and about the evolutionary process, but the jury was not allowed to hear them. The question at hand, after all, was not whether natural selection was an accurate explanation of biological diversity, but whether John Scopes had taught it in a Tennessee public school in contravention of the law. Since Scopes did not deny that he had done so, he was duly convicted and fined.

This seemed to be the end of the matter, and it indeed looked as if the fight over evolution were finished. For a time it even looked as if, in spite of Scopes's conviction,

⁹¹ Allen, *Only Yesterday*, pp. 168-170.

⁹² Garry Wills, *Under God* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990) p. 112.

that the Darwinists had won. Twenty-one state legislatures considered nearly fifty separate anti-evolution proposals in the 1920s, most of them failed. Only five states actually ratified an anti-evolution law, and all of these were either quickly annulled or widely understood to be unenforceable. Oklahoma's 1923 law, the first in the nation, passed with little fanfare as a rider to a free-textbook bill, but was repealed in 1925. Florida's anti-evolution statute did not even allow for offenders to be punished. No less an authority than William Jennings Bryan wrote to advise a state senator: "We are not dealing with a criminal class and a mere declaration of the state's policy is sufficient."⁹³ Even Tennessee mostly reneged on its seemingly strong initial stance. When the state's Supreme Court upheld the Butler Act in 1927 (on Scopes's appeal of his 1925 conviction), it was made clear to the Attorney General that there was "nothing to be gained by prolonging the life of this strange and bizarre case" and that – for "the peace and dignity of the state" – no more indictments were to be brought before the bench.⁹⁴ Liberal commentators rejoiced. The *Christian Century*'s response was typical; it called the whole movement "hollow and artificial" and looked forward to the day that fundamentalism would "disappear" from America's religious scene.⁹⁵

Like *Christian Century*'s editors, the secular cognoscenti saw the Scopes Trial as a resounding defeat for fundamentalism, a debacle even. The out-of-the-way setting, along with the general poverty and simplicity of some of the local observers, seemed to confirm many of the least considerate stereotypes about fundamentalism. Bryan's performance as

⁹³ As quoted in Edward Larson's *Trial and Error: The American Controversy Over Creation and Evolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 52.

⁹⁴ See the decision of the Tennessee Supreme Court in *John Thomas Scopes v. The State* (Nashville, 1926).

⁹⁵ See the editorial, "Vanishing Fundamentalism" in *Christian Century* (June 24, 1926), p. 799.

an “expert witness” was almost certainly ill-advised; neither an ordained minister, nor a scholar, he looked like a dullard on the stand. When the Great Commoner died scarcely a week after the trial concluded, some claimed that he had been “broken” by his encounter with Darrow; a few smart alecks even suggested that it was Darrow's interrogation that had killed him.

In the years after the trial, this version of the story came to dominate popular understanding. Jerome Lawrence and Robert Lee's *Inherit the Wind* (the 1955 play written in reaction to the McCarthy era, but based on the events surrounding the Scopes Trial) simplified things considerably by turning the case into a major victory for science. But as historian Edward Larson has shown, the outcome of The Scopes Trial was in no way a clear loss for anti-Darwinian Christians. In fact, it was a partial victory: the brouhaha surrounding the proceedings actually had a profound effect on the publishers of high-school science textbooks that went decidedly in fundamentalists' favor. “The legal controversy [surrounding evolution] finally cooled into a quiet standoff by 1930,” Larson writes in his history of the Creationist movement, “but only after textbook publishers bowed to the demands of anti-evolutionists by deëmphasizing the offending theory in most high-school texts.”⁹⁶ If people wanted school books that did not mention natural selection, then publishers began to think that maybe they should provide them not just in Tennessee, but in public schools throughout the nation.

Fundamentalist opposition to evolution was not simply a crude and benighted reaction to the idea of man's being related to apes.⁹⁷ In a statement that accompanied his

⁹⁶ Larson, *Trial and Error*, p. 3.

⁹⁷ Although there was plenty of that, too – “There's no chimpanzee in my pedigree” is how the 1925 song “You Can't Make a Monkey of Me” put it

signature on the Butler Act, Tennessee Governor Austin Peay wrote: “Right or wrong, there is a deep and widespread belief that something is shaking the fundamentals of the country, both in religion and morals. It is the opinion of many that an abandonment of the old-fashioned faith and belief in the Bible is our trouble to a large degree.”⁹⁸ Anti-evolution laws, then, were political signifiers, an effort to declare that the people thought Darwin wrong, that they continued to place their faith in the Christian creation story, regardless of whatever advances scientists might suppose they were making.

Surprisingly – considering how he is typically cast in retellings of the trial – H. L. Mencken seems to have been among the few lookers-on who understood that if modernism had won the battle, it had not yet won the war. At the end of the trial, Mencken wrote this in the Baltimore *Evening Sun*: “There is no bitterness on tap, but neither is there any doubt. It has been decided by acclimation, with only a few infidels dissenting, that the hypothesis of evolution is profane, inhumane, and against God, and all that remains is to translate that almost unanimous decision into the jargon of the law and so have done.”⁹⁹ Most modern-day readers seem to see here only Mencken's justifiably celebrated sneer. But, the sage of Baltimore was very clearly worried about fundamentalism, even in what many have taken to be its darkest hour. In his obituary for Bryan, Mencken famously quipped that one could “heave an egg out of a Pullman window and [...] hit a fundamentalist almost anywhere in the United States.” This is a comical proposition, but few of those who have since quoted the line bother to mention the uneasy tone of the rest of the piece. “They swarm in the country towns,” Mencken

⁹⁸ As quoted in Larson, *Trial and Error*, p. 57.

⁹⁹ Mencken, “Impossibility of Obtaining a Fair Jury Insures Scopes' Conviction Says Mencken” in *The Baltimore Evening Sun* (July 10, 1925).

continued a few lines later, “inflamed by their pastors, and with a saint, now, to venerate.”
His conclusion? “They have had a thrill, and they are ready for more.”¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ The obituary was originally published in the *Baltimore Evening Sun* on July 27, 1925. A later, expanded version (from which these quotes are taken) appeared in *The American Mercury* in October of the same year. It was reprinted in Lawrence E. Spivak and Charles Angoff (eds.), *The American Mercury Reader* (Baltimore: The American Mercury, Inc., 1944), pp. 34-37.

CHAPTER II

I'm Going Where There's No Depression

“In acquiring one's conception of the world one always belongs to a particular grouping which is that of all the social elements which share the same mode of thinking and acting.”

– Antonio Gramsci¹⁰¹

“Hell, they ain't even old timey.”

– Homer T. Stokes¹⁰²

After the Scopes Trial, fundamentalists seemed poised, if not for tremendous success, then certainly for continued influence. Evangelical Protestants had always been a major force in American life, and, as H. L. Mencken so colorfully observed, there seemed to be no reason why this would not continue to be the case: the evolutionists had been fought to a draw and – following “Wet” Democrat Al Smith's solid defeat in the 1928 presidential election – the forces of intemperance turned away. And yet, the hillbilly inquisition that Mencken had predicted in 1925 never came to pass. In fact, most Americans seem to have been able to pay anti-modernist Protestants less attention after the trial than they had before it. What happened?

For nearly two generations, scholars have suggested that the anti-modernists' political and cultural concerns went into abeyance shortly after the Scopes Trial, reemerging only in the late 1970s in reaction to the nearly decade-long celebration of sex, drugs, and rock 'n roll that we now refer to as “the Sixties.” This “Moral Majority” – as

¹⁰¹ Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, p. 324.

¹⁰² Stokes is a character who appears in the Coen Brothers 2001 film *O Brother Where Art Thou?*

anti-modernist Protestants would eventually come to call themselves – was particularly upset by a trio of landmark Supreme Court decisions: two in the early 1960s that outlawed school prayer and Bible readings in the public schools (*Engel v. Vitale*, 1962 and *Abington School District v. Schempp*, 1963) and another, in the early 1970s, that affirmed a woman's right to terminate an unwanted pregnancy both with the help of her doctor and without the interference or permission of the state (*Roe v. Wade*, 1973). Until these Age-of-Aquarius provocations, so the story goes, anti-modernist Protestants were content to spend their days in a self-righteously self-imposed isolation, snugly burrowed deep inside of the various heaven-focused “subcultures” they had designed to keep worldliness at bay, one hopeful eye always kept out for signs of Jesus’s imminent return.

The earliest historians of the inter-war period's politics ignored anti-modernists entirely. The only kind of fundamentalist to appear in Arthur Schlesinger Jr.'s three-volume *The Age of Roosevelt* are the Jeffersonian, the constitutional, and the laissez-faire. In *The Perils of Prosperity*, William Leuchtenburg claims that the anti-modernist movement “quickly subsided” with the death of Bryan. In a later book, *The FDR Years*, Leuchtenburg makes passing reference to evangelical fundamentalists, but they are very clearly just extras; they do not even play a supporting role.¹⁰³ Writing several decades later, social historians also largely ignored the political concerns of Depression-era anti-modernist Protestants. They receive only a brief mention in Lizabeth Cohen's fine history of how industrial workers helped form the New Deal, even though she focuses on Chicago, the home of Dwight Moody's famous Bible college. While skillfully illustrating

¹⁰³ Arthur Schlesinger, *The Age of Roosevelt*, vols. 1-3 (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1957); William E. Leuchtenburg, *The Perils of Prosperity, 1914-1932* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 223 and *The FDR Years: On Roosevelt and His Legacy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 84.

the important role that religion played in the social lives of the Dust Bowl migrants, James Gregory still writes that “there was no evangelical movement to speak of in the 1930s” in his interesting book about the Okies' struggle to become an accepted part of California society, *American Exodus*.¹⁰⁴

At the end of *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, George Marsden argues that, after the Scopes Trial, the term “fundamentalist” came less to mean a distinct set of Protestant beliefs organized in opposition to theological modernism, and became instead a rather general stereotype for rural backwardness, anti-intellectualism, and a reflexive anti-urban bias that seemed to clash loudly with the prevailing ethos of the Jazz Age.¹⁰⁵ But, in spite of what we might call fundamentalism's “cultural turn,” anti-modernists are also mostly absent in cultural histories of the 1930s. In his magisterial book, *Dancing in the Dark*, Morris Dickstein's attention is drawn to topics one might expect to appeal to an early twenty-first century Manhattan intellectual: the WPA projects, film, jazz, and literature like Steinbeck's iconic and timely *Grapes of Wrath* and Nathaneal West's hilarious and grotesque send-up of Horatio Alger, *A Cool Million*. Michael Denning's efforts in his superb *The Cultural Front* are entirely dedicated to the culture of the Depression-era Left. Woody Guthrie gets a chapter, as do Duke Ellington and John Dos Passos – as well they might in such a work – but The Carter Family and Charles Fuller (for example) are not even mentioned in the footnotes.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Lizabeth Cohen, *Making the New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 136; James Gregory, *American Exodus: The Dust Bowl Migration and Okie Culture in California* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 211.

¹⁰⁵ Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, pp. 184-195.

¹⁰⁶ Morris Dickstein, *Dancing in the Dark: A Cultural History of the Great Depression* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2009); Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture* (New York: Verso, 1997).

There are good reasons for this oversight, of course. The outbreak of the Great Depression represents not only a massive rupture in America's economic history, but in its social and cultural history as well; the breakdown in the industrial, capitalist system that had been growing since the end of the Civil War seems to have pushed much of the social turmoil of the Twenties aside. The culturati of the era also found anti-modernism's rural contingency especially easy sport. Sinclair Lewis's book *Elmer Gantry* – about a fabulously corrupt and sin-soaked fundamentalist charlatan – is typical. Lewis's biographer, Richard Lingeman, suggests that the book was Lewis's “vision of what might happen if fundamentalists gained the power to regulate morality, art, and education in America.” (It was dedicated to the author's friend and mentor, H. L. Mencken.) In spite of the fact that Lewis was ignoring the heart of the anti-modernist movement – the highly intelligent and intellectually sophisticated group of scholars in and around Princeton Seminary whom we will meet in a later chapter – and grossly caricaturing the part he thought he understood – small-town congregations understandably upset over the economic, intellectual, and social turmoil of the previous fifty years – the book sold nearly two-hundred-thousand copies in a matter of months.¹⁰⁷ It didn't help that several isolated, but high-profile, events seemed to indicate that the “fundamentalist” movement was either out of control or about to come apart. First, Billy Sunday issued a kind of Protestant *fatwah* against Lewis, suggesting that if he were God, he might have landed the author “a haymaker right on the old button.” Not to be outdone, a church

¹⁰⁷ On Lewis, see: Sinclair Lewis, *Elmer Gantry* (New York: Harcourt, 1927); Richard Byrne, “The Good Book” in *The American Prospect* (February 20, 2005); Mark Schorer, *Sinclair Lewis: An American Life* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961); and Richard R. Lingeman, *Sinclair Lewis: Rebel From Main Street* (Minneapolis: The Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2002). The quotes are taken from Lingeman, pp. 284-301.

congregation in Virginia invited Lewis to come down for a visit so that he might be lynched. Then, Texas fundamentalist J. Frank Norris – nicknamed the “Texas Cyclone” – gunned down a friend of his Catholic rival, the mayor of Ft. Worth, after a heated argument in the papers. Next, famed Los Angeles Pentecostal preacher “Sister” Aimee Semple McPherson disappeared – first into the Pacific and then somewhere else (with her married lover up the coast to Big Sur or with her uncannily *noir* kidnappers into the Mexican desert, depending on the storyteller). Finally, Des Moines University, a conservative Baptist school in Iowa, collapsed on accusations that its president had spurious academic credentials and was also carrying on a “morally turpitudinous” affair with a young secretary.¹⁰⁸

There were also personnel issues, which appear most obviously in the form of a serious leadership vacuum. Billy Sunday's ship had started to sink just after the First World War, when the radio and movies began to compete with tent revivals for people's entertainment dollar; it was mostly submerged by the time of the Depression. Aimee McPherson was never quite as popular after her alleged kidnapping as she had been before it. William Jennings Bryan, of course, was dead. This lack is made even more evident by the presence of Franklin Roosevelt, who bestrides the period like a colossus. (The epigram to Schlesinger's trilogy comes from Emerson: “Every revolution was first a thought in one man's mind.”) The various radio preachers (Charles Fuller, Robert P.

¹⁰⁸ On the various reactions to Lewis, see: Lingeman, *Sinclair Lewis: Rebel From Main Street*, pp. 284-301. On Norris, see: Barry Hankins, *God's Rascal: J. Frank Norris & the Beginnings of Southern Fundamentalism* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996). On McPherson, see: Daniel Mark Epstein, *Sister Aimee: The Life of Aimee Semple McPherson* (Orlando: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1993) and Matthew Avery Sutton, *Aimee Semple McPherson and the Resurrection of Christian America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007). On the Des Moines University scandal, see: “Baptists at Buffalo” in *Time* May 27, 1929.

Shuler) who were then beginning to establish themselves were still vying for influence, and it would be some years before a famous national figure emerged to rival Sunday's or McPherson's or Bryan's eminence – much less Roosevelt's. Billy Graham is the most likely candidate as successor, but he did not even graduate college until 1943.

None of this necessarily means, of course, that anti-modernists actually vanished or that they lost interest in efforts to shape the society around them. They did, however, do themselves a number of disservices. The most debilitating was to turn their attacks just as often on fellow conservatives – even on fellow fundamentalists – as on their liberal or secular enemies. The Baptists and Presbyterians were especially affected by this development. Beginning in the years after the First World War, fundamentalists in these denominations put themselves and their colleagues through two decades worth of heresy trials, defrockings, and schisms. The resulting Babel of believers is dizzying. To take just the most salient example: In 1937 the Bible Presbyterian Church split from the Presbyterian Church of America. The main issue was the latter's refusal to support a renewed focus on Prohibition (the legal framework of which had been dismantled four years earlier). This might be unremarkable if not for the fact that the Presbyterian Church of America was itself a relatively young denomination, having broken away from the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America in 1936 over the theological underpinnings of missionary work in the Far East. Relations between these groups deteriorated further in 1939, when the PC of A was forced to change its name to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church after the PCUSA sued to protect its brand. American Baptists also spent the 1920s and 1930s splitting into an abundance of rival factions,

giving rise to organizations as diverse as the American Baptist Churches (USA), the American Baptist Association, the Premillennial Missionary Baptist Fellowship, the National Association of Free Will Baptists, the Ohio Valley Association of the Christian Baptist Churches of God, and many, many others.

This is not unusual, of course. From John Winthrop, Roger Williams, and Anne Hutchinson to Barton Stone, Alexander Campbell, and Joseph Smith, the history of American Protestantism is one of rancorous and sometimes bitter breaks led by various diviners, prophets, and visionaries (or, if one prefers, apostates, dissenters, and heretics) of one kind or another. The main difference between this and earlier Protestant battles, however, is that this intra-party fighting was not the main event. While evangelical anti-modernists pummeled one another, religious and secular modernists usurped much of the cultural, intellectual, and political influence that evangelicals had previously enjoyed. And once they did, they also assumed one of the most satisfying of the victor's prerogatives: they wrote the history books.

In his history of the fundamentalism over the course of the 1930s and 1940s, Joel Carpenter ably describes a movement that was both apolitical and isolated from the culture at large, content to live within the limits of its own “subculture.”¹⁰⁹ I would like to evoke another version of this story, a version in which fundamentalists (in loose cooperation with the broader anti-modernist coalition) are more politically engaged and culturally aware. I do this first by taking another look at a collection of figures who formed part of the anti-Roosevelt coalition, and then at the development of the country music industry. Both of these topics have received substantial scholarly attention, but no

¹⁰⁹ Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, pp. 11, 33-64, 244.

one has yet adequately pointed out how very many of the forces driving them, and how very much of the ethos uniting them, seem uncommonly related to the concerns of the Protestant anti-modernist coalition of the 1920s.

#

In August, 1935, President Franklin Roosevelt received a letter about the burgeoning Townsend movement from Rev. Stanley High, a liberal Methodist minister whom the administration had sent out into the country to gauge levels of support in the 1936 election. “The more I see of it,” High wrote to the President, “the more I am impressed with its power.”¹¹⁰ Dr. Francis Townsend had a simple plan for tackling the country's economic woes: give America's elderly citizens a regular government stipend and require them to spend it before they could get another one. Millions of Americans lent the doctor their support. High thought the Townsend Plan was about more than just money, however; he thought it was “doing for a certain class of people” what Prohibition had done a decade before, which was to allow them what he called “a sublimation outlet.” *New York Times* reporter Duncan Aikman also thought the Townsend movement was a stand-in for other concerns. “In no sense did Dr. Townsend found a new economic faith,” he wrote in the *New York Times Magazine* in 1936. Instead, Aikman argued, Townsend had made it “possible for several million men and women to believe once more in the certainties they had been taught in their childhood.”¹¹¹ Both High and Aikman were suggesting that the Townsend Plan provided its followers an obvious hook

¹¹⁰ Letter from Stanley High to Stephen Early (August 29, 1935) Official File 1542 (Townsend, Dr. Francis E.: 1933-1935) in the Official Papers of the President (Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library, Hyde Park, NY).

¹¹¹ Duncan Aikman, “Townsendism: Old-Time Religion” in the *New York Times Magazine* (May 8, 1936).

on which to hang their complex and confusing feelings about the overwhelming changes through which the country had been going since the end of the First World War, a channel for the anger they felt about the hardship and displacement and uncertainty. In an earlier report to the President, High had even advised the Roosevelt campaign that the most fervent opponents they could expect to meet in 1936 “would come not from [among] the economic reactionaries, but from the religious reactionaries.” In the original letter that line is followed by a fascinating parenthetical: “if you can separate the two.”¹¹² What did High mean by this, and what is it that gave both him and Aikman the impression that the level of support the Townsend plan enjoyed was the manifestation of something deep and knotty, a Freudian tangle of angst and neurosis? After all, a proposal to give away free money is almost guaranteed to be an attractive idea; in the lean years of the Great Depression, it must have been practically irresistible.

Historian Matthew Avery Sutton has investigated the links between Depression-era fundamentalism and conservative opposition to the New Deal's expansion of the federal government. He argues that increasingly troubling developments abroad – the Bolshevik revolution in Russia, Mussolini's attempts to resurrect the Roman Empire, Hitler's anti-Semitism, the travails of the Great Depression, the increasing likelihood of a massive war – combined with fundamentalists' fascination with the apocalypse to create a kind of theological anti-statism in the early years of the Roosevelt administration.¹¹³

Fundamentalists' premillennial proclivities, according to Sutton, led them to see certain

¹¹² Letter from Stanley High to Stephen Early (August 15, 1935) in the Official Papers of the President (Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library, Hyde Park, NY).

¹¹³ Matthew Avery Sutton, “Was FDR the Antichrist? The Birth of Fundamentalist Antiliberalism in a Global Age,” in *The Journal of American History* 98/4 (March, 2012), pp. 1052-1074.

surface similarities between Stalinist Russia, Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and some of the programs of the New Deal state in America (*viz.* the paramilitarism of the CCC, the NRA's Blue Eagle campaign) as ominous developments that intimated the coming of the end of the world. Since a premillennial eschatology promised a Jewish state in the Middle East, powerful kingdoms in Russia, Rome, and “the East,” pestilence, famine, and war, it is easy to understand why fundamentalists saw many of the events of the 1930s as confirmation of their most disturbing prophecies. And while Sutton is right to point out the role that international events played in deepening fundamentalist suspicion of Franklin Roosevelt, it seems like a mistake to suggest that they caused it. Fundamentalist opposition to the New Deal state was more complicated than just an intuition that it might help give rise to the Antichrist, important as Sutton's research suggests that fear was.

Fundamentalists had never been opposed to the state, *per se*. William Jennings Bryan's role as a movement spokesman should make this fairly clear, as should the fact that the fundamentalist movement's first forays into politics had been hyper-statist attempts to ban booze and outlaw Darwinism. They were, however, opposed to state support of what they saw as modernist prerogatives. Fundamentalists (and other anti-modernist Protestants) were distrustful not of the New Deal state itself, but of its pluralism, its insistence that Catholics and Jews were valuable citizens who had come to be an indispensable part of the nation. They were wary also of the New Deal's ideological links to liberal Progressivism, particularly its reliance on university-educated experts; its embrace of pragmatism (especially the educational philosophy of John Dewey); its trust in social-science data; and its chumminess with a wide array of cultural

and political radicals (as evidenced by the WPA). All of this, from a fundamentalist point of view, smacked of a deep attachment to modernism.¹¹⁴

The Share Our Wealth program, Huey Long's plan to redistribute some of Louisiana's badly-hoarded resources is a good example of the kind of state action that a large number of fundamentalists could get behind. Part of what shaped Long's political vision, historian Alan Brinkley has argued (in an echo of Duncan Aikman), was a memory of small-town life around the turn of the century. The town Long grew up in, Brinkley writes, "was an autonomous unit, and within it each individual had a clear sense of where power resided and where assistance, when needed, could be found." That began to change when Long was a young man. For Long, this change represented an unwelcome "encroachment from without," and he was deeply disturbed by it.¹¹⁵ Long's concerns were primarily economic; they centered on the oil and gas industry on the Gulf, planters along the Mississippi, Baton Rouge's political oligarchs, and the New Orleans machine. Louisiana's voters were worried about all of these things as well, but for many of Long's followers, the biggest problems were the new ideas and conventions that had emerged in the teens and twenties – the same ideas and conventions that had driven the formation of the Fundamentalist Movement. This anxiety is best illustrated by the career of Long's one-time right-hand man, Rev. Gerald L. K. Smith.¹¹⁶

Born in Wisconsin, Smith enrolled at Indiana's Valparaiso University, a growing Methodist institution just outside of Chicago, in the 1910s. While in school, he worked

¹¹⁴ Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible*, pp. 130-139.

¹¹⁵ Alan Brinkley, *Voices of Protest* (New York: Knopf, 1982), pp. 13, 240.

¹¹⁶ The following biographical sketch of Smith is based on Glen Jeansonne, *Gerald L. K. Smith: Minister of Hate* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997).

as an assistant minister at the First Christian Church of Deep River, a small Hoosier community one county over from the college. He graduated in 1917, just before Valparaiso went bankrupt for the second time in its then short history.¹¹⁷ After completing his studies, Smith began a career as a Midwestern preacher, but he managed to fall in with Huey Long after moving to Shreveport in an effort to provide a healthier environment for his wife, who was suffering from tuberculosis. (The pollution of the Great Lakes' industries aggravated Mrs. Smith's condition, and, at the time, Shreveport had a reputation as a fine place for tubercular convalescence.)¹¹⁸ Smith was a gifted public speaker – he had majored in oratory – and Long recognized a man he could use almost immediately. In the early 1930s, Smith stumped all over Louisiana on behalf of the Governor, all the while recruiting members to the Share Our Wealth Society. In fact, Brinkley argues that “except for Huey himself, no one was more effective in 1934 and 1935 in the work of spreading the Share Our Wealth gospel and organizing local chapters of the Society” than Smith was.¹¹⁹ It seems likely that if Long had not been assassinated, Smith might have ridden his coattails into a position of even more power, but after Long's death, Smith had a difficult few years. He remained personally popular – at Long's Baton Rouge funeral in September, 1935, 150,000 people gathered to hear him deliver the eulogy – but was ostracized by more powerful factions of the Kingfish's coalition. In spite of these setbacks, however, Smith managed to remain closely associated – at least in

¹¹⁷ The first time had been during the Civil War, when most of its students and faculty had joined the army. Interestingly, the Indiana Ku Klux Klan made an offer to reopen the school in 1923, but were outbid by the Lutheran Church, with which Valparaiso is still affiliated. See: Richard Baepler, *Flame of Faith, Lamp of Learning: A History of Valparaiso University* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2001).

¹¹⁸ Jeansonne, “From Wisconsin Roots to National Notoriety,” in the *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 86/2 (2002-2003), p. 23.

¹¹⁹ Brinkley, *Voices of Protest*, p. 171.

the public's imagination – with Share Our Wealth.

After leaving Louisiana, Smith shortly lent his oratorical talents to Eugene Talmadge's ill-fated run for the White House, but after he upstaged Talmadge at a rally, the Georgia Governor broke off the relationship. Smith next took up with Dr. Francis Townsend, proponent of the plan that had so worried Stanley High. By the middle of 1936, Smith was the country's leading proponent of the Townsend Plan, more famous than the doctor himself, even. It was probably Smith's help that actually caused the plan to take off as it did. Townsend had always been able to draw a healthy number of people to his rallies, but ten thousand showed up in Cleveland on a night that Smith was the featured speaker. This seemed to suit Townsend just as well. Asked by reporters if he would make a run for the Presidency, the nearly seventy-year-old doctor supposed the office belonged to a younger man, “like Gerald Smith.” Smith had once again found his meal ticket.¹²⁰

In spite of his obvious penchant for politicking, Smith remained, at heart, a fundamentalist preacher. His college nickname had been “Billy Sunday,” and he came from a long line of Disciples of Christ ministers.¹²¹ He had spent more than a decade in the pulpit before he started working for Long, and his public appearances often looked as much like tent revivals as political rallies. He would close Share Our Wealth Society meetings with a zealous prayer:

Lift us out of this wretchedness, O Lord, out of this poverty; lift us who stand here in slavery tonight. Rally us under this young man who came out of the woods of north Louisiana, who leads us like a Moses out of the land of bondage

¹²⁰ For the Townsend quote, see: “Third Parties: Merger of Malcontents” in *Time* July 27, 1936

¹²¹ Leo Ribuffo, *The Old Christian Right: The Protestant Far Right from the Great Depression to the Cold War* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983), p. 145.

into the land of milk and honey where every man is a king, but no man wears a crown.

As the conservatively-dressed Smith intoned this benediction with a Bible tucked under his arm, people in the audience shouted out hearty amens.¹²²

Alone, Smith might seem like an anomaly, but in the 1930s, he was only one of many grassroots organizers who effectively used the language and posture of old-time religion in the service of a grassroots political movement. Many of these leaders were conspiracy nuts and virulent anti-Semites, and therefore get written off as bumbling, would-be American fascists. But, we should be careful of the temptation to dismiss them. Individually, these movements may have been rather small, but collectively they had far more supporters than one might suppose.

In 1938, the Rev. Gerald K. Winrod of Kansas ran for U. S. Senate. He had emerged in the 1920s as what one scholar has called a “second-level figure” in the fundamentalist movement.¹²³ He addressed the World Christian Fundamentals Association in 1926 to a standing ovation, eventually turning this performance into a job as extension secretary in the group's Midwestern section. Like most fundamentalists of the era, Winrod was particularly vexed by Darwinism, which he tried to have banned from Kansas public schools in 1926. The next year, he helped William Bell Riley author a proposal to ban it in Minnesota as well. In fact, from Winrod's headquarters in Wichita, the “Flying Fundamentalists” – a kind of anti-Darwinian crack team that traveled in a long automobile caravan at a time when such a thing was still a rarity – lobbied state legislatures all over the country to ban the teaching of evolution well into the 1930s. “We

¹²² Brinkley, *Voices of Protest*, p. 173.

¹²³ Ribuffo, *The Old Christian Right*, p. 87.

realize that it will take a long time – perhaps years – before we can accomplish our desired ends,” Winrod declared in 1927, “but as was the case with Prohibition, we can win out in the long run, and it is a program to that end that we are outlining.”¹²⁴

With Franklin Roosevelt's election in 1932, Winrod found a second adversary, the one that would eventually lead him to run for office himself. He was sure that after FDR's presidency, America would “never be the same again.” In the New Deal, Winrod saw an amalgamation of evil influences: the TVA was “socialistic”; the NRA was a “first taste” of American totalitarianism; the FDIC was the culmination of a long-developing conspiracy of bankers dating back to the Illuminati.¹²⁵ For Winrod, the Depression was divine punishment for America's wickedness, and so the best way to combat it was not reform, but revival. “More religion – rather than more legislation – is the need of the hour,” he wrote in January of 1931, a full two years before Franklin Roosevelt even took office.¹²⁶

Another example is Elizabeth Dilling, who had been raised an Episcopalian and educated at a Catholic high school, but who kept in close contact with a number of fundamentalist leaders to whom she also owed her career. She visited the Soviet Union in 1931 and returned a rabid anti-communist crusader. A friend at Dwight Moody's Chicago church invited Dilling to share her impressions of the USSR with a Sunday School class, which was duly horrified by the report. After speaking about her trip on the Moody Institute's house radio station, Dilling began a successful public speaking tour and was soon regularly appearing not only before Sunday School classes, but also before

¹²⁴ The Winrod quote is from an article entitled “Religion: Irony” in *Time* (May 16, 1927).

¹²⁵ Ribuffo, *The Old Christian Right*, pp. 102-104.

¹²⁶ Winrod, “Babson Speaks” in *Defender* 5/1 (January, 1931), p. 1.

Daughters of the American Revolution and American Legion gatherings.¹²⁷

The harshness of life in Soviet Russia and the chilling political climate were bad enough, but it was the Soviet regime's atheism Dilling said she most despised. “There was no God,” she wrote later, “no conscience, a rule of force, might and brutality, and no mercy.” After she reluctantly viewed Lenin's mummy – a “small, sandy-whiskered little thing” – Dilling declared the former Soviet leader a “poor substitute for Jesus Christ.” She was appalled by the gutting of Leningrad's St. Isaac's Cathedral as well as by plans to destroy Moscow's Cathedral of Christ the Saviour.¹²⁸

When she returned home, after a month abroad, she had become a militant. Dilling left a church sewing circle because she suspected that a communist had provided the group with needles and thread. She withdrew her membership from another church after the pastor informed her that he was uninterested in her crusade. She attacked the YMCA, accusing it of being a communist front organization. Finally, in 1934, with help from friends at the Moody Institute, Dilling self-published *The Red Network: A Who's Who and Handbook of Radicalism for Patriots*. Dedicated to all “sincere fighters for American liberties and Christian Principles,” the book consists primarily of lists of people Dilling suspected of being “red.”¹²⁹

William Dudley Pelley's father was a sometime preacher, sometime businessman,

¹²⁷ For more on Dilling, see: Glen Jeansonne, *Women of the Far Right: The Mothers' Movement and World War II*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996) and Christine K. Erickson, “I have not had One Fact Disproven!: Elizabeth Dilling's Crusade Against Communism in the 1930s” in *The Journal of American Studies* (Dec. 2002) 36/3, pp. 473-489.

¹²⁸ As quoted in Jeansonne, *Women of the Far Right*, p. 14. The plan was to build a colossal monument to Socialism in its place, but World War II interrupted construction and the site was eventually turned into the world's largest outdoor swimming pool. In 1994, construction of a replica cathedral was begun and in 2000, the reconstructed cathedral was consecrated.

¹²⁹ Elizabeth Dilling, *The Red Network: A Who's Who and Handbook of Radicalism for Patriots* (Chicago, 1934).

and sometime journalist, who sent his son to church half a dozen times a week. Like any normal boy, Pelley rebelled by becoming a lukewarm socialist. He wound up following in the paternal footsteps, however, when he bought a newspaper in Western Massachusetts. It failed, but the experience helped Pelley land a job with the Methodist Church, reporting on missionary activity in China. The aftermath of the First World War left him stranded in Japan, but from there he was able to join a YMCA brigade supporting American troops in the Russian Far East. Back in America, he seems to have been part of the postwar Lost Generation, abandoning his wife and children back east for long stretches traveling along the Pacific Coast, writing magazine articles, and cavorting from time to time with a twice-divorced San Francisco bohemian. For a time, Pelley even worked as a scriptwriter in Hollywood.¹³⁰

In 1928, however, something strange happened to him. He reported in *American Magazine* that he had spent several minutes in heaven before being returned to Earth and that he regularly received messages from prominent, long-deceased Americans like George Washington and Mark Twain.¹³¹ The experience changed the course of Pelley's life. Simply put: he spent the 1930s organizing a political movement around visions that he claimed to have begun receiving after he had briefly “died.” Chapters of Pelley's group emerged in nearly every part of the United States, from Cleveland and Youngstown in the east, to Seattle and San Diego in the west. Of course, Pelley's beliefs were too bizarre to classify him as a fundamentalist, or even a Christian for that matter – he seems

¹³⁰ For more on Pelley, see: Scott Beekman, *William Dudley Pelley: A Life in Right-Wing Extremism and the Occult* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2005).

¹³¹ The article was later reprinted in an expanded version; see: Pelley, *My Seven Minutes in Eternity with Their Aftermath* (Noblesville: Soulcraft Press, 1952).

more like a Swedenborgian – but his efforts were heavily flavored by the language of evangelicalism. He often spoke of himself having been “born again” and required his organization's militia recruits to swear to uphold a vague set of “Christian principles.”¹³²

It is tempting, of course, to dismiss Smith, Winrod, Dilling, and Pelley as so many aberrations, the outermost orbit of the Depression-era's lunatic fringe. And, in fact, much of the time, they did little to help their cause. After the failure of his 1944 run for the U. S. Senate, Smith began a long descent into madness, claiming that he planned to organize a political party that would “seize the government of the United States.” In the 1960s, long after he ceased being politically relevant, Smith publicly called Lyndon Johnson “a pervert” and suggested that Richard Nixon was a “super-beatnik cross between Elvis and Franklin Roosevelt.” Perhaps most outrageously, he claimed that Alabama's segregationist governor, George Wallace, was “the most Christ-like” man he had ever met.¹³³ Winrod was a vitriolic anti-semite known colloquially as the “Jayhawk Nazi.”

His book *The Truth About the Protocols* begins with this defense:

After observing the title of this book, some will accuse me of being anti-Semitic. If by this they mean that I am opposed to the Jews as a race or as a religion, I deny the allegation. But if they mean that I am opposed to a coterie of international Jewish bankers ruling the Gentile world by the power of gold, if they mean that I am opposed to international Jewish Communism, then I plead guilty to the charge.¹³⁴

Dilling, on the other hand, was bedeviled by the loosened sexual morals of the post-Flapper period and convinced that “foul sex ideas” were the main way by which communists infiltrated the United States. This obsession crops up all over *The Red*

¹³² Robert Summerville, “Just What Is the Silver Legion?” in *Liberation* (October 14, 1933), pp. 10-11.

¹³³ Calvin Trillin “The Sacred Projects” in *The New Yorker* (July 26, 1969), pp. 69-79 and Schlesinger, *The Politics of Upheaval*, p. 630.

¹³⁴ Gerald Winrod, *The Truth About the Protocols* (Wichita: Defenders Publishing, 1935), p. 1.

Network. “Ask yourself,” she advised readers, “if in recent years sex, pacifistic, atheistic, and socialistic propaganda have increased in America.”¹³⁵ Elsewhere, she gasps that she has “movies of nude bathing in the river taken in the heart of Moscow, men and women together, with the Church of the Redeemer in the background.” She was particularly suspicious of Sigmund Freud – whom she denounced as a “Red Jew” who “probably did more than any single man to break down moral decency and spread sex filth in the guise of science” – and deeply concerned that his books so regularly turned up in university libraries.¹³⁶ Pelley made pronouncements that were so extravagantly bizarre – including the claim that the articles in his magazine “were received 'clairaudiently' via the Psychic Radio, from Great Souls who have graduated out of this Three-Dimensional world into other areas of Time and Space” – that it is nearly impossible to take his movement seriously.¹³⁷

Easy though it is, we should resist the urge to write these figures off so glibly. By 1936, in spite of the recent passage of the Social Security Act, somewhere between two and four million Americans belonged to “Townsend Clubs.” Merchants who refused to put the Doctor's picture in their shop windows were liable to be subject to boycott by the group's members.¹³⁸ Winrod received almost 21% of the vote when he ran for the Senate in 1938. His newsletter, *The Defender*, had a circulation approaching 100,000 readers.¹³⁹

¹³⁵ Dilling, *The Red Network*, pp. 11, 17.

¹³⁶ Jeansonne, *Women of the Far Right*, p. 12.

¹³⁷ As quoted in Ribuffo, *The Old Christian Right*, p. 64. See also: Johan Jakob Smertenko, “Hitlerism Comes to America” in *Harper's* (Nov. 1933), pp. 660-670; and Arthur Graham, “Crazy Like a Fox: Pelley of the Silver Shirts” in *The New Republic* (April 18, 1934), pp. 264-265.

¹³⁸ Brinkley, *Voices of Protest*, pp. 222-226.

¹³⁹ Ribuffo, *The Old Christian Right*, pp. 119-124.

Dilling's shrill denunciations of “communist sympathizers” like Eleanor Roosevelt, John Dewey, Louis Brandeis, and Edna St. Vincent Millay kept her mostly out of the political mainstream, but she was still able to lead a surprisingly plucky attempt to defeat the Lend-Lease Act – perhaps the only thing that kept the Soviet war effort from collapsing in the face of a Nazi invasion – in 1941.¹⁴⁰ Even Pelley's militia, the Silver Legion, acquired a membership of around 15,000 men in the middle years of the 1930s.¹⁴¹

By way of comparison, we might consider for a moment the scholarly attention that has been devoted to the American Communist Party, which had approximately 25,000 members in 1935, a number that would rise only to around 100,000 over the next few years, during the Popular Front period – a time one scholar has called “the heyday of American Communism.”¹⁴² Even the most precursory library search will turn up books on American Communists in Alabama, in California, in North Carolina, in Harlem, in World War II, in Major League Baseball, and at the heart of the Civil Rights Movement. The grassroots Right has not received nearly as much attention.

One reason that the Right has remained mostly unexamined is that, as we have seen, it appears on first glance to have been made up of little more than a disparate group of strange cranks. Upon closer examination, however, it is possible to see a thread that ties them together: they all pitched their appeals in a tone both familiar and agreeable to the anti-modernists of the 1910s and 1920s. At a 1936 rally in Cleveland, Smith preached that the Union Party – a shaky coalition of malcontents built by Townsend,

¹⁴⁰ “Mrs. Elizabeth Dilling Stokes, Foe of Communism, Dies at 72” in *The New York Times* (May 1, 1966).

¹⁴¹ Ribuffo, *The Old Christian Right*, p. 64.

¹⁴² Harvey Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism: The Depression Decade* (New York: Basic Books, 1984).

Smith, and the Catholic “radio priest,” Father Coughlin, whose nominee for the White House was an ineffectual North Dakota Representative named William Lemke – stood for an America that believed in “Santa Claus, Christmas trees, the Easter Bunny, the Holy Bible, and the Townsend Plan.” When the crowd went wild, Smith was only able to subdue them by reciting the Lord's Prayer.¹⁴³ Winrod was convinced that a literal army of satanic minions – “organized demon intelligences,” he called them – were responsible for all manner of mischief, from murder, rape, and theft to communism and the theory of evolution.¹⁴⁴ Dilling's lectures ended with a revival-style altar call, during which new converts would “pledge their lives to Jesus as an antidote to Communism.”¹⁴⁵ Pelley often claimed that he dreamed of replacing the republicanism of the United States with a “Christian Commonwealth.”¹⁴⁶ If these kinds of religious pronouncements were not meant for fundamentalists, Pentecostals, and other anti-modernist Protestants then whom were they for?

This chorus of voices on the Depression-era Protestant Far Right seems to indicate that fundamentalists may not have stalked huffily off the stage in the years after the Scopes Trial, after all. In fact, Smith's work with Long and Francis Townsend, Winrod's surprisingly successful run for the Senate, Dilling's busy speaking career, and even Pelley's bumbling troops all suggest that many of the grassroots anti-modernists who had been at the forefront of the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy were able to find a relatively comfortable political home among the various panaceas proposed in the

¹⁴³ F. Raymond Daniel, “Lemke Pledges Aid to Townsend Plan; Convention Closes” in *The New York Times* (July 20, 1936).

¹⁴⁴ Winrod, “Satan and Demons,” in *The Defender* (October 1928), p. 16.

¹⁴⁵ Jeansonne, *Women of the Far Right*, p. 12.

¹⁴⁶ Pelley, “Know America After Collapse” in *Pelley's Weekly* (April 1, 1935), p. 1.

years of economic collapse. And so, treating the Depression-era grassroots Right as an interesting, but ultimately meaningless collection of ugly curiosities limits not only our understanding of the political dynamics of the 1930s, but also our understanding of the trajectory of anti-modernist political engagement.

If we cast an eye once again toward Gramsci's work, then we can begin to see this story in a new light. For Gramsci, culture mattered; it was one of the main ingredients in a complex soup of ideas and beliefs that the Italian communist referred to as “spontaneous philosophy,” a powerful force that can be used to set the terms of debate and even to draw the lines that make up “reality.” In an insightful essay on Gramsci's usefulness to contemporary scholars, T. J. Jackson Lears observes that “in Gramsci's scheme a given group or class ... finds some values more congenial than others, more resonant with its own everyday experience.” According to Lears, a group may even adopt a “spontaneous philosophy” so enthusiastically that it develops into a “world view” which Lears describes as “an ideology that cements [the group] into what Gramsci called a 'historical bloc,' possessing both cultural and economic solidarity.”¹⁴⁷ If we begin to think of Depression-era anti-modernists as a momentarily leaderless and disorganized historical bloc searching both for the material to build a new hegemony in order to counter “modernism's” rising cultural power, as well as a torchbearer to make it seem attractive, then the way we think about the arc of anti-modernist Protestantism's history would change dramatically. No longer could they be cast as the sullen losers of the 1920s culture war who then wandered off into obscurity. Rather, we would be forced to view

¹⁴⁷ T. J. Jackson Lears, “The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities” in *The American Historical Review* 90/3 (June 1985), p. 571.

them as they had long seen themselves: active players in an ongoing struggle to nurture and protect American culture.

We need not even look to the furthest political edges to find hints of this kind of conservative evangelical engagement. And, in fact, it might be better not to. Another node around which the politics of the 1930s and the continued relevance of evangelical anti-modernism converge is, curiously, the emergence of the country music industry. Three short anecdotes provide an opening.

In 1932, Eugene Talmadge ran for governor of Georgia. A graduate of the university law school in that state, he had practiced only briefly before winning the job of Agricultural Commissioner in 1926. Out on the campaign trail, Talmadge would sometimes volunteer to give a Sunday morning sermon at whatever country church his caravan might happen across. A friend remembered Talmadge as “the best preacher [he] ever heard,” a talented part-time parson who often had “whole congregations crying and yelling before him.” When they were not being treated to an impromptu homily, Talmadge's audiences could usually be found enjoying a serenade by the father-daughter combo of “Fiddlin' John” and “Moonshine Kate” Carson, who, nearly a decade before, had made what is often called the very first “country music” recording.¹⁴⁸

In 1941, a young Texas Congressman named Lyndon Baines Johnson ran for the U. S. Senate and lost. He was defeated by the state's governor, W. Lee “Pappy” O'Daniel, a radio personality and mill owner whose political career had been built on what *Life* magazine called “his homely, throbbing tributes to Mother, life insurance and the

¹⁴⁸ William Anderson, *The Wild Man From Sugar Creek: The Political Career of Eugene Talmadge* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1975). The quotes are from p. 101.

Bible.”¹⁴⁹ O'Daniel's winning platform was a combination of the ten commandments, the golden rule, and a \$30 per month pension for the elderly. In addition to his jobs as deejay, head of state, and flour tycoon, O'Daniel also managed and emceed the “Light Crust Dough Boys,” a Texas swing band that sang jingles for his milling company.

Three years later and one state over, Louisianans elected James Houston “Jimmie” Davis to be their governor. Even before he moved into Huey Long's old place in Baton Rouge, Davis was a worldwide celebrity; in 1938, *Collier's* magazine named him one of the two biggest stars in country music. (Gene Autry, the singing cowboy, was the other.) As a young man, Davis had been an instructor of history at Dodd College, a private school for women that was run by a fundamentalist preacher who would go on to head the Southern Baptist Convention in the mid-1930s. Davis's biographer summed up the governor's life succinctly when he called it a “story of faith in a nation and belief in God.”¹⁵⁰

The intimacy of country music and anti-modernist Protestantism's close relationship, as well as the strange way we take it for granted, becomes all the more stark when we consider early country alongside other popular musical entertainment of the 1920s and 1930s. The great composers of the day – George Gershwin, Richard Rodgers, Oscar Hammerstein, Irving Berlin – never became popularly identified with a specific

¹⁴⁹ *Life*, “Pappy Passes the Biscuits as O'Daniels Move into Texas' Governor's Mansion,” 6/5 (January 30, 1939), p. 9.

¹⁵⁰ O'Daniel and Davis appear in the Coen Brothers' 2001 masterpiece *O Brother Where Art Thou?* in hybridized form as Menelaus “Pappy” O'Daniel, who runs a radio program called the “Flour Hour” and whose campaign song is “You are My Sunshine” – which Davis wrote. For more on the real O'Daniel and on Davis, see: Bill Crawford, *Pappy Please Pass the Biscuits: Pictures of Governor W. Lee “Pappy” O'Daniel* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004); Gene Fowler, *Border Radio*, pp. 158-198; and Gus Weill, *You Are My Sunshine: The Jimmy Davis Story* (Waco: Word Incorporated, 1977) – the quote is from the Introduction (no page number).

religious stance, in spite of their collective Jewishness.¹⁵¹ Berlin, especially, came to be seen as so prototypically American that Jerome Kern, in a now-famous letter to *The New Yorker's* Aleck Woollcott, wrote that “Berlin has no place in American music. He is American music.” Likewise, the popular singers of the era – Al Jolson, Hoagy Carmichael, Johnny Mercer, Bing Crosby – seem to have had no strong, public religious inclinations. Theirs were the conventional public convictions of the inter-war period, mild and somewhat sentimental.¹⁵²

Early blues musicians were typically raised in the highly religious black communities of the rural South and many of them wove explicitly Christian themes into their songs. But rarely – in spite of performers like Blind Willie Johnson (of “Jesus Make Up my Dyin' Bed” fame), Sister Rosetta Tharpe (a gospel singer who accompanied herself with scorching riffs on a Gibson electric guitar), and Rev. Gary Davis (a ragtime finger-picker and Baptist minister) – are the blues associated with the black church in quite the same way that country music is associated with the white church. Blues musicians have been much more likely to be affiliated with a hearty appetite for trouble, and even an alliance with the devil himself, as the stories and legends that surround bluesman Robert Johnson indicate. (Johnson supposedly died at the hands of a lover's irate husband, laid low by a dram of strychnine-laced liquor; he was also said to have traded his soul for a guitar lesson from Satan.)¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ Although several observers have argued that they should be. See: Jack Gottlieb, *Funny, It Doesn't Sound Jewish: How Yiddish Songs and Synagogue Music Influenced Tin Pan Alley, Broadway, and Hollywood* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2004) and David Lehman, *A Fine Romance: Jewish Songwriters, American Songs* (New York: Schocken, 2009).

¹⁵² Jerome Kern to Alexander Woollcott as quoted in Stephen Holden, “Irving Berlin's American Landscape” in *The New York Times* (May 10, 1987). Wilfrid Sheed, *The House that George Built: With a Little Help from Irving, Cole, and a Crew of About Fifty* (New York: Random House, 2007).

¹⁵³ Jeff Todd Titon, *Early Downhome Blues: A Musical and Cultural Analysis* (Chapel Hill: University of

Jazz emerged out of New Orleans's polyglot milieu, in the bars and brothels of Storyville and on the streets where funeral procession bands played brass and reed instruments left over from the Civil War on the slow march from cathedral to cemetery. A cross of ragtime and the blues with a pinch of what composer “Jelly Roll” Morton called the “Spanish tinge” – a hint of Latin flavor via the Caribbean – early jazz was sensual music, associated with dances like the Bunny Hug, the Jitterbug, and the Shim Sham Shimmy. One contemporary critic suggested that it had originally been meant to provide the rhythm to voodoo dances. She objected, she wrote in *Ladies Home Journal* in 1921, because jazz seemed “[to stimulate] half-crazed barbarians to the vilest of deeds.”¹⁵⁴

Country music is, and always was, different. Historian Bill Malone has observed that the “religion-shaped approach to life... permeates the entire country music repertoire and bears chief responsibility for the strong slices of fatalism, moralism, guilt, and self-pity unselfconsciously expressed in country songs.”¹⁵⁵ Many of the earliest songs, according to Malone, “saw prophetic meaning in the societal instability and political events of the day.”¹⁵⁶ These types of sentiments should come as no surprise since country music was invented in the contentious socio-political atmosphere of Prohibition under the shadow of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy. Indeed, from its beginnings, the

North Carolina Press, 1995) and George Lipsitz, "Remembering Robert Johnson: Romance and Reality" in *Popular Music and Society*, 21/4 (Winter 1997), p. 40. Patricia Schroeder has written an interesting study of the Johnson myth in *Robert Johnson, Myth Making, and Contemporary American Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004).

¹⁵⁴ Anne Shaw Faulkner, “Does Jazz Put the 'Sin' in Syncopation?” in *Ladies Home Journal* (August, 1921), pp. 16-34.

¹⁵⁵ Bill C. Malone, *Don't Get Above Your Raisin': Country Music and the Southern Working Class*, p. 90.

¹⁵⁶ Malone, “The Gospel Truth,” p. 220.

country music industry proved to be a major carrier of the basic messages behind conservative, Protestant evangelicalism: the danger of sin and the power of salvation.

Although the topic of so many country songs seems at first glance to be iniquity – adultery, brawling, carousing, drinking – they are often softened by the aura of piety, of regret and redemption, that surrounds so much country music.¹⁵⁷ For every song about a rowdy Saturday night of troublemaking, there is at least one about the sorrow this causes – usually to the good-time rounder's mother or the one pure-hearted girl he knows. Regret and redemption, of course, are also two of the great driving forces behind evangelical Christianity.

Country music's founding myth begins with a July, 1927 newspaper story in the *Bristol New Bulletin*. In the 1920s, Bristol – a tidy town on the Tennessee/Virginia state line – was the largest and most vibrant urban area in Appalachia. The article was basically an advertisement for Victor Records' A&R man Ralph Peer's efforts to record “hillbilly music.” Peer had converted an old downtown factory into a recording studio, and was offering \$50 to anyone who would let him capture their singing. Peer had already made a name for himself in the field of “race records” – mostly Mississippi Delta blues and New Orleans jazz recordings that he sold to the emerging Black middle class in places like Chicago, Detroit, and New York City – but he was sure that a similarly underserved market was still waiting to be tapped among the country's white population. Although Peer did not “invent” country music, he was deeply involved in its formation. It was Peer who had first recorded John and Kate Carson in Atlanta, and it is largely

¹⁵⁷ Another scholar has called this dichotomy the “metanarrative of desire and loss.” See: Aaron A. Fox, “The Jukebox of History” in *Popular Music* 11/1 (January, 1992), pp. 53-72.

because Carson's screeching voice and scratchy fiddle style never really caught on that Peer came to Bristol in the first place.

Among the many who answered Peer's call was a sometime carpenter and amateur folklorist named A. P. Carter, who brought his wife Sara and her cousin Maybelle from their home in Maces Springs, Virginia, where they were locally celebrated for their close-harmony singing. The Carters played songs with a mighty religious current. Some of them they wrote themselves, but mostly they sang old-time songs – mountain ballads and miners' tunes that A. P. collected from people throughout rural Appalachia's hills, hollows, and coal camps – and church songs familiar to congregations all over the country. Sometimes they played them in the familiar way, and sometimes they tinkered with them a bit (or “worked them up” as A. P. famously put it), adding harmonies where before there had been none, composing fiddle parts, and arranging new leads and melodies for Maybelle to pick out on the guitar in the distinctive style she is credited with having invented (with help from an African-American friend): the so-called “Carter Scratch.”¹⁵⁸

The Carter Family owed its success to how effectively it tapped into a certain segment of the cultural Zeitgeist in the period just after the Scopes Trial. The keg poured both quickly and powerfully. Mark Zwonitzer, the Carter Family's biographer, writes that “the Carters won fame – if not fortune – because they could recast the traditional music

¹⁵⁸ My telling of the Carters' story has been “worked up” from versions told in an excellent PBS *American Experience* documentary, *The Carter Family: Will the Circle Be Unbroken*, from Paul Kingsbury (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Country Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); from Malone's *Don't Get Above Your Raisin*; from Mark Zwonitzer and Charles Hirshberg's *Will You Miss Me When I'm Gone? The Carter Family and Their Legacy in American Music* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002), and from John Atkins's chapter on the Carters in Malone and McCulloh, *Stars of Country Music*, pp. 95-121. David Gates also has an informative, if critical, review of Zwonitzer and Hirshberg's biography: “The Circle Unbroken” in *The New York Times Book Review*, September 1, 2002.

of Appalachia for a modern audience. And like their music, the Carters themselves had to negotiate the gap between the insular culture of preindustrial Appalachia and the newly modern America.”¹⁵⁹ They were hardly alone in their attempt to make sense of the modern world, of course. And traditional music was not the only thing being recast in America; many American Christians were trying to do the same thing with their religion, attempting to “negotiate the gap” between their mothers' and fathers' faith and modern ideas about any number of things: from science and philosophy, to women's fashion, to liquor. This was, indeed, the heart of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy.

Many early country musicians actually had deep attachments to fundamentalism, Pentecostalism, or some other anti-modernist Christian creed. A. P. Carter, for example, had grown up in a strict fundamentalist household; his mother's disapproval of the instrument was one of the main reasons why he so seldomly played the fiddle he always seemed to be carrying around. Ernest Phipps and Alfred Karnes, each of whom laid down tracks for Ralph Peer in Bristol, were both ordained ministers. Blind Alfred Reed was a part-time preacher, as was his contemporary Blind Andy Jenkins. Reed wrote heavy-handed, but catchy, songs about sin and damnation – “Walking in the Way with Jesus”; “The Prayer of the Drunkard's Little Girl”; “There'll Be No Distinction There.” One of his most well-known songs, “Why Do You Bob Your Hair, Girls?” (1927) was a direct attack on the most popular hair style of the day. It included this line: “And every time you bob it / You're breaking God's command / You cannot bob your hair, girls / And reach the glory land.”¹⁶⁰ The tune was so popular that in 1929, Reed recorded a reprise –

¹⁵⁹ Zwonitzer and Hirshberg, *Will You Miss Me*, p. 10.

¹⁶⁰ The lyrics are from my transcription of a 1998 Document Records release, *Blind Alfred Reed: Complete Recorded Works in Chronological Order*.

“Why Do You Bob Your Hair, Girls? – No. 2.” Jenkins wrote nearly a thousand songs, almost all of them religiously inclined. His most famous compositions were “event songs,” a popular 1920s form, drawn mostly from the news of the day. Jenkins’ “The Death of Floyd Collins,” for example, told the story of a spelunker trapped in Mammoth Cave in 1925. These types of songs were widely admired, and country musicians quickly adopted them as stage material. Another popular event song of the era was “The John T. Scopes Trial.” Its first verses tell a much different story than the one told in *Inherit the Wind*:

Then to Dayton came a man with his new ideas so grand,
And he said we came from monkeys long ago.
But in teaching his beliefs Mr. Scopes found only grief;
For they would not let their old religion go.

You may find a new belief;
it will only bring you grief.
For a house that's built on sand is sure to fall.
And wherever you may turn, there's a lesson you will learn:
That the old religion's better after all.

As these examples illustrate, the typical story in an event song usually involved some kind of fall from grace that led, parable like, to an important moral lesson.

Old church numbers and gospel-inspired songs also quickly became a major part of early country musicians' performance repertoires. Some of this is due to the fact that these types of songs were widely known, and so formed a kind of musical vernacular that allowed amateur musicians just beginning to go pro to begin figuring out how to play together.¹⁶¹ But much of it was by request – radio listeners regularly sent postcards to their local station asking that the on-air performers play certain favorite tunes. Bradley

¹⁶¹ Bill Malone, “The Gospel Truth: Christianity and Country Music” in *The Encyclopedia of Country Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 218-221.

Kincaid, one of the first stars of commercial country radio, reportedly received nearly half a million such letters over the course of his career. Few of these missives survive, but even without them, there is strong evidence to suggest that religious songs were important to country music's early listeners. A 1935 advertisement in the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum lists more than a dozen tracks that the Carter's had recorded for their label; at least half of them are gospel numbers.¹⁶² Country songbooks – a popular Depression-era distraction – relied heavily on tunes about piety and alcohol's nearly unfailing power to work evil. Dorsey Dixon's "I Didn't Hear Nobody Pray" (1936), for example, was based on a real car crash that occurred in Richmond County, North Carolina; its message is clear:

Who did you say it was, brother?
Who was it fell by the way?
When whiskey and blood run together
Did you hear anyone pray?

The names I'm not able to tell you,
But here is one thing I can say:
Their whiskey and blood mixed together,
But I didn't hear nobody pray.

I didn't hear nobody pray, dear brother,
I didn't hear nobody pray.
I heard the crash on the highway,
But I didn't hear nobody pray.¹⁶³

Since the earliest country musicians were only semi-professional, the ways in which they made their money also helped consolidate country's conservative image and

¹⁶² See the case containing Carter Family memorabilia in the Country Music Hall of Fame's permanent collection, "Sing me Back Home" and Bill Malone, "The Chuck Wagon Gang: God's Gentle People" in the *Journal of Country Music* 10/1 (1985), p. 8.

¹⁶³ The song was also recorded by Roy Acuff in 1942. The lyrics here are as performed by Dorsey Dixon ("The Wreck on the Highway"): Call number FC-785, General Collection/Sound Recordings #30001 (Southern Folklife Collection, Manuscripts Department, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill).

ethos. Most were unable to earn a living by way of royalties, and so they typically cobbled one together by way of part-time or seasonal work coupled with occasional touring. These tours consisted of small shows played in schools, city halls, theaters, and town squares all over the country. Historian Pamela Grundy has convincingly argued that the audiences at these early concerts were partially responsible for the tenor that commercial country music took in the 1930s. Grundy writes that “musicians' emphasis on religion, sobriety, and respectability reflected one of the ways that [listeners] believed their own determination could bring a portion of dignity and stability to extremely difficult lives.”¹⁶⁴

Folk wisdom had long suggested that the fiddle was the Devil's favorite instrument and many an old tale connected musicians to demonic forces. A popular tall tale among country musicians was about a Virginia sheriff who went so far as to suggest that anyone “seen drunk or carrying a guitar case” ought to be arrested. Although the pleasures of a toe-tapping Saturday evening – however potentially illicit – mostly insured that few pickers or singers actually did time for their art, there was still a genuine threat to musicians' livelihood embedded in these fears. And so, early country musicians went to great lengths to convince the audience that their performances were wholesome. Bills advertising The Carter Family's public appearances prominently carried a straightforward assurance: “The Program is Morally Good.”

This stance carried over as country performers became full-fledged entertainment professionals. By the late 1930s country music was reaching a wide audience by way of

¹⁶⁴ Pamela Grundy, “We Always Tried to Be Good People: Respectability, Crazy Water Crystals, and Hillbilly Music on the Air, 1933-1935” in the *Journal of American History* 81/4 (1995), pp 1591-1620. The quote is from p. 1595.

both records and radio. Ralph Peer sold well over a million Carter Family albums in spite of the Great Depression and the near-total collapse of the industry.¹⁶⁵ But record sales are actually a relatively poor indicator of these artists' widespread popularity, because the country stars of the 1930s were radio stars. Two of the most popular early radio shows were the National Barn Dance, which was sponsored by Alka-Seltzer and broadcast on WLS out of Chicago, and the Grand Ole Opry, a Saturday-night program courtesy of Martha White Flour and the National Life & Accident Insurance Company on WSM in Nashville. Like the rest of commercial country music, each of these shows drew heavily on vaudeville and the chautauqua circuit, but their most direct influence was the imagination of George D. Hay who had worked at the Memphis *Commercial Appeal* as a reporter and then as a disc jockey at the newspaper's radio station, WMC. In 1924, Hay moved to Chicago to join WLS, where he hosted a regular program supposedly reminiscent of a hootenanny he had once seen in the Ozark Mountains of Arkansas. *Radio Digest* soon named him the most popular radio announcer in the United States. Hay's success at WLS led the newly created WSM in Nashville to offer him a high-profile job. Within a year, he had created a second country variety show, which he called the "Grand Ole Opry." Both shows were wildly popular. (The Opry remains the longest running program in radio history).

Perhaps the most famous early member of the Opry was "Uncle Dave" Macon, a banjo player who had previously made a living in vaudeville and freight hauling. "Now I don't believe in evolution or revolution," Macon used to say between songs, "but when it

¹⁶⁵ Record sales in 1929 had totaled around \$75 million (or ca. 100 million individual records); by 1933, they had fallen to about \$6 million. Country records somehow largely managed to avoid getting caught up in this collapse. See Peterson, *Creating Country Music*, p. 50.

comes to the good old Bible, from Genesis to Revelations, I'm right there."¹⁶⁶ When one recalls the religious and political atmosphere of the 1910s and 1920s, along with the fact that the Anarchist attack on Attorney General Palmer, the Scopes Trial, and the Sacco-Vanzetti Trial had all occurred within the lifetime of the first country musicians, Macon's stage banter takes on an entirely unexpected seriousness. Whether Macon actually believed what he was saying is beside the point. Professionals in an increasingly finely-tuned industry, the country musicians of the 1930s consistently incorporated a religious point of view into their public personas, a move they no doubt hoped would resonate with their listeners.

Playing on major national radio shows like the Barn Dance or the Opry also meant playing for sponsors who – *plus ça change* – resolutely refused to court controversy. Few of them tolerated artists who had trouble toeing a very fine line. In 1933 "Pappy" O'Daniel fired a member of the Light Crust Doughboys, a fiddler who was having trouble making noontime broadcasts because of his propensity to stay up all night drinking. (That fiddler, incidentally, was Bob Wills, who seems to have managed alright without O'Daniel.) J. W. Fincher – whose laxative was one of the first products widely identified with country music – told his musicians that they had to be "gentlemen" and avoid alcohol if they wanted to represent his Crazy Water Crystals.¹⁶⁷ Even Hank Williams – as exalted a saint as ever there was in country music – was thrown off the

¹⁶⁶ Malone, *Don't Get Above Your Raisin'*, p. 94. Macon was never all fire-and-brimstone-all-the-time, however. An early band of his performed as the "Fruit Jar Drinkers" (their name was changed to the "Dixie Sacred Singers" when they played gospel numbers). He also wrote a song praising the Democrats' 1928 presidential candidate, Al Smith, a "wet" ("Governor Al Smith"). (Macon's son claims that his father was a part-time bootlegger in the 1920s.) See: Charles Wolfe's interesting chapter on Macon in Bill Malone and Judith McCulloh (eds.), *Stars of Country Music: Uncle Dave Macon to Johnny Rodriguez* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975), pp. 40-63.

¹⁶⁷ Pamela Grundy, "We Always Tried to Be Good People," p. 1603.

Grand Ole Opry over his abuse of alcohol and pills. Sponsors knew keenly that disreputable spokesmen were likely to hurt the bottom line. The vigorous efforts advertising agencies had put into researching the effects of their product in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries paid off handsomely; by the 1920s, marketers were quite skilled in the manipulation of would-be customers' fears and desires.¹⁶⁸

Because country music was born in the jazz age and because it was rooted, broadly speaking, in many of the same economic, social, and technological circumstances, some commentators have concluded that country is a decidedly “modern” phenomenon.¹⁶⁹ Literary scholar Edward Comentale goes so far as to suggest that country music's modern pedigree is “no less significant than the Futurist manifesto, the Cubist collage, or the Imagist poem.”¹⁷⁰ This seems like a mistake. Whatever is “modern” about country music is solely about “modernization.” Its fans and practitioners had no trouble learning to exploit modern technology like the radio. A. P., Sara, and Maybelle Carter regularly traveled the thousand miles between their home in Virginia and Del Rio, Texas, to play on Dr. John Brinkley’s XER, a quasi-pirate, million-watt radio station that broadcast – most of the literature on Brinkley’s station preferred more

¹⁶⁸ T. J. Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), particularly part II, pp. 137-260. Lears also points out how interesting and undeniably similar talk about various patent medicines was to evangelical Protestant talk about the rejuvenating experience of conversion. It is perhaps no accident, then, that so many of the early sponsors of country radio shows made medicines – Alka-Seltzer, Crazy Water Crystals, etc.

¹⁶⁹ Several scholars have addressed country music's “modernity” with varying degrees of success. See: Bob Coltman, “Across the Chasm: How the Great Depression Changed Country Music” in *Old Time Music* 23/ (Winter 1976-1977), pp. 6-12; Edward Comentale, “‘Thought I Had Your Heart Forever’ or The Modernity of Country Music” in the *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 20/3 (September, 2008), pp. 211-239; Richard A Peterson, *Creating Country Music: Fabricating Authenticity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Patrick Huber, *Linthead Stomp: The Creation of Country Music in the Piedmont South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008); Charles K. Wolfe, *Kentucky Country: Folk and Country Music of Kentucky* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1982).

¹⁷⁰ Comentale, “The Modernity of Country Music,” p. 217.

onomatopoeic adjectives like “bellowed” or “boomed” – from a newly constructed, three-hundred foot tower on the Mexican side of the Rio Grande.¹⁷¹ XER was a “border blaster,” one of the stations that American radio entrepreneurs established in Mexico in the early years of the medium in an effort to avoid the otherwise long reach of the U. S. government's regulatory arm. Brinkley’s powerful Mexican station might have been enough to spread country music’s influence on its own. Residents of the Mountain West reported that they could pick it up via the barbed wire that kept their cattle contained, and on certain clear days listeners as far away as Philadelphia sometimes had trouble tuning their radios to any other station. But in addition to XER in Villa Acuña, there was WSB in Atlanta and WBT in Charlotte, WLW in Cincinnati and WBAP in Ft. Worth, KFWB in Los Angeles and WWVA in Wheeling, along with dozens of lesser stations throughout the country that regularly played country music.

Country music's modernity is in no way related to “modernism” – that nebulous culture that emerged in the early twentieth century as a means of coping with a particularly complex and confusing period of modernization and that so thoroughly vexed anti-modernist Christians. The difference in outlook between country on the one hand, and futurism, cubism, and imagism could not be more striking. Neither, for that matter, could the differences between country and jazz. Jazz musicians embraced the radical changes of the day, and many times its composers and arrangers attempted to embody them, or at least to incorporate them somehow into the music. One only has to think for a

¹⁷¹ The story of Brinkley’s medical practice is both astonishing and riveting, but unfortunately not germane to the discussion at hand. The curious will not regret a look at Pope Brock’s *Charlatan: America’s Most Dangerous Huckster, the Man who Pursued Him, and the Age of Flimflam* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2008); Gene Fowler and Bill Crawford: *Border Radio: Quacks, Yodelers, Psychics, and the Other Amazing Broadcasters of the American Airwaves* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002); or R. Alton Lee’s *The Bizarre Careers of John R. Brinkley* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2002).

moment about a consciously “modern” jazz composer – like, say, Duke Ellington (whom the *Memphis Press-Scimitar* – a now defunct liberal newspaper famous for its arts coverage – called “the negro Stravinsky”) – to see this clearly.¹⁷² Country music, on the other hand, has always been wary and nostalgic; a modern creation that looks longingly backward. In the early years, the music had many names. In addition to “country” or “hillbilly” music, it was also called “Old Time Tunes,” “Old Familiar Tunes,” and “Hearth and Home,” names that suggest a music heavily laden with a sepia-tinged wistfulness.¹⁷³

Anti-modernist Protestants also took to the radio quite quickly and enthusiastically, recognizing its evangelistic potential almost immediately. (“Whenever I first heard a radio,” Cormac McCarthy has a fundamentalist preacher say at the end of his 1993 novel *All the Pretty Horses*, “I knew what it was for and it wasn't no question about it neither.”)¹⁷⁴ By the late 1930s, it was regularly observed that radio preachers could minister to more potential converts in a single broadcast than Dwight Moody had reached in his entire career. By 1940, fundamentalists controlled nearly a hundred of the nation's roughly 750 stations.¹⁷⁵ But like country musicians, the message that they spread over the airwaves was backward- rather than forward-looking.

¹⁷² For a quick glimpse, see: Geoffrey O'Brien's review – “The Grandest Duke” – of Harvey Cohen's *Duke Ellington's America*, in *The New York Review of Books* (October 28, 2010).

¹⁷³ Bill Malone, *Country Music, USA* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), pp. 34-40.

¹⁷⁴ The book is set in the 1940s. Cormac McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses* (New York: Vintage International, 1993), p. 296.

¹⁷⁵ Tona Hangen, *Redeeming the Dial: Radio, Religion, and Popular Culture in America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Christopher H. Sterling and John M. Kittross, *Stay Tuned* (Belmont: Wadsworth, 1978); and Carole Scott, “History of the Radio Industry in the United States to 1940” in the EH.Net Encyclopedia (Robert Whaples, editor). Available online at: <http://eh.net/encyclopedia/article/scott.radio.industry.history> (last accessed September 5, 2012).

Chapter III

Nobody Knows You When You're Down and Out

“As soon as several of the inhabitants of the United States have conceived a sentiment or an idea that they want to produce in the world, they seek each other out; and when they have found each other, they unite. From then on, they are no longer isolated men, but a power one sees from afar, whose actions serve as an example; a power that speaks, and to which one listens.”

– Alexis de Tocqueville¹⁷⁶

“It’s a tradition that I’m told actually began many years ago in the city of Seattle. It was the height of the Great Depression, and most people found themselves out of work. Many fell into poverty. Some lost everything. The leaders of the community did all that they could for those who were suffering in their midst. And then they decided to do something more: they prayed.”

– Barack Obama

At the 2009 National Prayer Breakfast¹⁷⁷

The grassroots of the far Right and the honky-tonks of early commercial country music were not the only sites of evangelical political and cultural engagement in the years between the Scopes Trial and the release of *Inherit the Wind*. Another effort carried their message right to the very heart of American political power. This campaign was successful primarily because of the way in which it yoked the social concerns of anti-modernist Christianity to the pecuniary concerns of American corporate capitalism. Although the idea of a movement that combines theologically conservative Protestantism with vocal support for the market seems dully familiar to us now, in the early part of the 1900s, it was a fairly new species and, therefore, one whose origins deserve some

¹⁷⁶ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, p. 492.

¹⁷⁷ The President's comments were reprinted in *The New York Times* (February 5, 2009).

discussion.

Most Americans reflexively hold to a founding myth that portrays their country as providentially prepared to become the land where the invisible hand would be given the most room to roam (the metaphor requires the reader to imagine something rather disturbing: a disembodied invisible hand not unlike the one operating the record player in Charles Addams' famous *New Yorker* cartoon). That account, however, is not without its complications. Although, Captain John Smith may have suggested that in New England “every man may be master and owner of his own labour and land” and that even “if he have nothing but his hands, he may ... by industry quickly grow rich,” John Winthrop's vision of a “city upon a hill” was hardly as encouraging to budding individualists. “We must be willing to abridge ourselves of our superfluities, for the supply of others' necessities,” Winthrop wrote in 1630, just before he and a band of Puritan settlers first set foot upon Salem's shores. In spite of the fact that the essay begins with a theological defense of inequality, Winthrop's hope for the Massachusetts Bay colony sounds not like a bourgeois utopia populated by rough individualists bravely making a go of it for themselves, but rather more like a commune. “We must delight in each other,” he continued, “make others' conditions our own; rejoice together, mourn together, labor and suffer together, always having before our eyes our commission and community in the work, as members of the same body.”¹⁷⁸ *The Virtue of Selfishness* this is not.

In the late nineteenth century, the most prominent evangelicals were both strong

¹⁷⁸ John Smith, *A Description of New England* (London: 1616); and John Winthrop, “A Model of Christian Charity” (Massachusetts, 1630). Both of these texts are in the public domain and widely available on the internet. I am quoting from the Smith volume edited by Paul Royster and viewable at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's DigitalCommons website and from the version of Winthrop's sermon found at the Religious Freedom page at the University of Virginia's library page.

critics of capitalism and equally strong supporters of labor. Boston Baptist minister Francis Bellamy was an outright Socialist, a political position he believed to be the only one compatible with the teachings of Jesus. His cousin, Edward, was one, too; he wrote one of nineteenth-century America's most celebrated novels, *Looking Backward*, which follows its hero into a dreamworld where he tours a utopian version of the United States in which everyone retires at forty five and nobody works more than a few hours a day. Edward Bellamy's critique of the Gilded Age was a jeremiad worthy of the most excoriating of the ancient Jewish prophets: "It must not be forgotten," an imaginary future American reminds an audience toward the end of the book, "that the nineteenth century was in name Christian, and the fact that the entire commercial and industrial frame of society was the embodiment of the anti-Christian spirit, must have had some weight, though I admit it was strangely little, with the nominal followers of Jesus Christ." Even Eugene Debs, railroad unionist, five-time Socialist Party candidate for President, and co-founder of the radical Industrial Workers of the World, used the language and cadence of an evangelical minister in his rousing stump speeches and electrifying essays. "Wherever capitalism appears in pursuit of its mission of exploitation," he wrote in 1898, "there will Socialism, fertilized by misery, watered by tears, and vitalized by agitation be also found, unfurling its class-struggle banner and proclaiming its mission of emancipation." These men were not outliers, either. Francis Bellamy was a freemason and a respected pastor who composed the words to the Pledge of Allegiance; *Looking Backward* outsold all of its competitors in the latter part of the 1800s except *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Ben-Hur*; and Gene Debs got nearly a million votes in his last run for the

White House even though he was serving time in a federal prison in Atlanta for violating the 1917 Espionage Act.¹⁷⁹

The most obvious example of a capital-critical, labor-supporting evangelical in these years, however, is William Jennings Bryan, whose otherwise progressive reputation was sullied by his late-life embrace of anti-Darwinism. At the end of *Inherit the Wind*, the character meant to represent Bryan – in the play he is called Matthew Harrison Brady – turns into a vicious and vitriolic hayseed fanatic, a kind of Savonarola in suspenders. But as historian Michael Kazin's biography has made clear, Bryan was much more complicated than this interpretation allows.¹⁸⁰ Bryan's acceptance speech at the Democratic Party's 1896 presidential nominating convention in Chicago, for example, is one of the most stirring defenses of the interests of ordinary citizens in American political history. Like a great number of Americans, Bryan was deeply concerned about the way in which the concerns of capital were increasingly able to push aside claims on the government's attention made by anyone else. This seemed a disgrace, since as far as Bryan was concerned, the whole purpose of a government was to watch out for the interests of regular people. His position was a popular one. As he ended the speech (with what is probably the most well known of his many memorable lines: "You shall not press down upon the brow of labor this crown of thorns, you shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold."), *The New York World* reported that "the floor of the convention seemed to

¹⁷⁹ Jeffrey Owen Myers and Peter Meyer, *The Pledge: A History of the Pledge of Allegiance* (New York: MacMillan, 2010); Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward, 2000-1887* (New York: Ticknor, 1887), the quote is from p. 395; and Nick Salvatore, *Eugene V. Debs: Citizen and Socialist* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984). The Debs quote is from "The American Movement," in *Debs: His Life Writing and Speeches*, Julius Wayland, ed. (Girard: Appeal to Reason Press, 1908), pp. 95-117.

¹⁸⁰ Michael Kazin, *A Godly Hero: The Life of William Jennings Bryan* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006)

heave up” with everyone going “mad at once.”¹⁸¹

In the 1920s, when Bryan – now an old man – came to the aid of the forces arrayed against evolution, his political views were more or less the same as they had been in the 1890s. The various legislative acts outlawing Darwinism in the public schools are nothing if not an example of a government at work on behalf of the common folk. Several things had changed, however. For one, Bryan was now rich. Once he resigned his job in the State Department in 1915, Bryan was effectively unemployed; and since he neither came from money nor had any, and since neither he nor his wife were in the best of health, he had to figure something else out rather quickly. His solution was to start requesting a speaker's fee from those who wanted to witness his by that time legendary talent. And since many people still felt that this was money well spent, Bryan managed to accrue a considerable late-life fortune. (George Merrick, for example, the Florida developer who founded Coral Gables, paid the Great Commoner a six-figure honorarium to hang around the town's “Venetian Pool” and sing the new city's praises.)¹⁸² None of this seems to have changed Bryan's feelings about money, however. Even as late as the early 1920s, he was still calling for nationalized railroads and a federally-administered telephone system. He still favored a government-mandated living wage, as well as laws guaranteeing workers' right to unionize and to engage in collective bargaining. In 1922, he delivered a series of lectures to an audience of Virginia seminary students in which he maintained that statutes that “put human rights before property rights, put the teachings of the Saviour into modern language and [applied] them to present-day conditions.”¹⁸³ This

¹⁸¹ As quoted in Lingeman, “The Man with the Silver Tongue” in *The New York Times* (March 5, 2006).

¹⁸² Kazin, *A Godly Hero*, p. 265-266.

¹⁸³ Kazin, *A Godly Hero*, p. 274.

is all standard Bryan fare, and might have been a part of any one of his many nineteenth century stump speeches. Increasingly, however, Bryan's ideas about reform were heard only by audiences that had grown skeptical of his brand of activist Christianity, which was more and more coming to be associated with the Social Gospel and, by extension, with Socialism. The kinds of people likely to show up to hear Bryan speak in the 1920s were more interested in the pietism of a private and personal religious faith than they were in overturning the status quo. The fact that Bryan had become an elderly gentleman (in his later years, he often went about in a linen suit and a white panama hat) must have made his quasi-revolutionary rhetoric that much easier to write off as little more than a hold-over eccentricity from his younger days. At any rate, issues of labor and capital were no longer the target of Bryan's best oratorical efforts; these he now reserved for talks on the evils of Darwinism. The other difference, of course, was that, between 1896 and 1925, America had become “incorporated,” a simple word that – like “evangelical,” “fundamentalist,” and “modernist” – masks a dizzying complexity.¹⁸⁴

What we see here (once again) is that Bryan occupied a strange and complicated place in the cultural and intellectual shift that was happening in early twentieth-century America. And what the existence of this space indicates is that in addition to the labor-friendly, activist kind that dominates historical accounts of the late nineteenth century, this period also witnessed the emergence of another strand of evangelical Christianity, one that felt quite at home in the nation's banks and boardrooms.¹⁸⁵ Russell Conwell, for

¹⁸⁴ It refers not only to the rise of the corporation, but also to the culture to which this rise gave birth. See: Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture & Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1982), as well as William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993), esp. pp. 191-224.

¹⁸⁵ Or perhaps, even, the *reëmergence* – In 1858 there was an enormous revival that began in New York City and then spread to cities all over North America before jumping the Atlantic and appearing in

example, made a career and a fortune with his “Acres of Diamonds” speech, which he gave literally thousands of times over the last two decades of his life. (He died in December of 1925, just a few months after Bryan.) Vacationing in the Fertile Crescent, Conwell supposedly joined a party of Englishmen on a trip down the Euphrates. His guide was fond of telling stories, and one day began the tale of a Persian farmer visited – curiously, it would seem – by a Buddhist monk, who relates a saga about the creation of the universe and everything in it out of a “bank of fog.” In the beginning, so the story goes, the Almighty stirred the fog into a ball of fire that then turned into a magnificent thunderstorm. From these tempestuous origins came not only mountains and hills and valleys, but also different types of rocks and minerals. The most brilliant of these, diamonds – “congealed drops of sunlight” in Conwell's telling – were made last. “With a handful of diamonds,” the farmer is told, “you could buy a whole country.” As is so often the case in tales such as this one, the otherwise well-situated farmer immediately becomes possessed by a diamond fever so severe that he abandons his land to begin a quest that he hopes will bring him a mine of his own. This odyssey takes him from Mesopotamia to Palestine, and on to Europe, where – bereft at his bad luck as a miner – he casts himself into the squally Mediterranean. Back in the Middle East, when his property is sold, it is naturally discovered that the modest farm sat atop a fabulous mine,

towns throughout the United Kingdom, and it first stirred not among the clergy, but among businessmen. According to its most prominent historian, Kathryn Teresa Long, it was “the closest thing to a truly national revival in American history.” Long even argues that the 1858 revival was the crucible in which nineteenth-century American “evangelicalism” was formed. Occurring as it did in the shadow of the coming Civil War, however, this “awakening” has received far less attention than it is perhaps due. See: Kathryn Teresa Long, *The Revival of 1857-58: Interpreting an American Religious Awakening* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 7. An earlier, but somehow less dynamic, account of the revival can be found in Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), pp. 63-79.

so wealthy that it “exceeded the Kimberley in its value.” The most obvious moral of the story is a *Candide*-like injunction always to tend primarily to one's own affairs. The not-so-obvious point of the talk – but, in fact, the one most often taken home – was that God wanted, and perhaps even expected, everyone to become rich.¹⁸⁶ The speech was printed as a pamphlet and widely distributed, so plenty of people in turn-of-the-century America who never had the opportunity to hear Conwell deliver the speech were familiar with its contents.

Bruce Barton, a partner at one of the most successful advertising firms in the history of Madison Avenue, took up Russell Conwell's message with his 1925 book, *The Man Nobody Knows*, which depicts Jesus as “the founder of modern business.” This short volume – it is barely a hundred pages long – has been widely offered as an example of a shallow, Christian apologia for the corybantic business culture of the twenties, a “glorified Rotarianism” in one scholar's estimation.¹⁸⁷ But, Barton's father, William, was a devout adult convert to the cause of Christ, ordained at the hands of his teachers at Berea College in Kentucky and then put in charge of a half-dozen small congregations in a remote corner of Tennessee's Cumberland Mountains. Sensing that his theological knowledge was spottier than it ought to have been, the elder Barton enrolled at Oberlin Seminary in Ohio in 1887. With this training under his belt, he was able to secure the pastorate of a respectable Congregationalist Church in Boston as well as the Vice Presidency of the American Peace Society, which put the Barton family in close contact

¹⁸⁶ Russell Conwell, *Aces of Diamonds* (Westwood: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1960), the quotes are from pp. 9-15, 37.

¹⁸⁷ Wayne Elzey, “Jesus the Saleman: A Reassessment of *The Man Nobody Knows*,” in *The Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 66/2 (1978), pp. 151-177.

with patrician New England families like the Hales, the Higginsons, and the Howes. Barton's biographer claims that *The Man Nobody Knows* was more than just a cheeky, cross-eyed look at the life of Jesus; it was the result of a profound religious faith.¹⁸⁸

Neither Conwell, nor Barton was an anti-modernist, per se. During the years that the social and theological schism between the fundamentalists and the modernists was building, Conwell was busy founding and leading Temple University, an institution fully in the modern vein whose establishment in 1884 was in line with the developments of the day.¹⁸⁹ Barton supported evolution, and a chapter of *The Man Nobody Knows* portrays Jesus as a highly sought after attendee of sophisticated soirées, a convivial chap who turned water into wine in order to “keep a happy party from breaking up too soon.”¹⁹⁰

Plenty of anti-modernists, however, were an eager part of this business-friendly version of evangelical Protestantism. The essays that make up *The Fundamentals*, for example, spend little time on social issues, preferring headier theological fare, but they do take a hard line against Marxism. This is unsurprising; their publication was financed by the Stewart brothers, Lyman and Milton, of the Union Oil Company of California, neither of whom harbored any love for communism. In Princeton Theological Seminary professor Charles R. Erdman's essay, “The Church and Socialism,” there is much ballyhooing about the increasing tendency to “identify Socialism with Christianity.” “Popular Socialism,” Erdman complained, was too often “suggested as a substitute for

¹⁸⁸ Bruce Barton, *The Man Nobody Knows: A Discovery of the Real Jesus*, (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1925); and Richard M. Fried, *The Man Everybody Knew: Bruce Barton and the Making of Modern America* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2005), esp. pp. 5-8 and 84-107.

¹⁸⁹ Which, incidentally, is why the Temple football squad wears a diamond motif around the collar of its uniform and awards diamond-shaped helmet decals for particularly valiant play.

¹⁹⁰ Barton, *The Man Nobody Knows*, p. 65.

religion” even though it was “antagonistic to Christianity.” “The strength of Socialism,” he explained, consisted “largely in its protest against existing social wrongs to which the Church is likewise opposed” but which could be “finally righted only by the universal rule of Christ.”¹⁹¹ The issue, then, was less an irreconcilable disagreement over the nature of the problem, than a different take – or, rather, a *much* different take – on which tactics one might employ to remedy it. Communists and Christians actually agreed on many of the causes of life's difficulties, Erdman admitted, but where the Communists called for revolution, Christians counseled repentance.

In 1930, a group of Chicago go-getters – led by C. B. Hedstrom (the proprietor of a Clark-Street shoe store) and A. J. Leaman (a preacher and part-time teacher at the Moody Bible Institute) – started conducting noontime prayer rallies in the Loop, at the Garrick Theatre.¹⁹² Both Hedstrom and Leaman were members of the Gideons, a group founded at the turn of the twentieth century in an effort to provide traveling Christian salesmen a professional organization with which to associate. Initially, the Gideons were a kind of proselytizing fraternity, interested primarily in the man to man work of converting fellow salesfolk. A decade later, they began the practice with which the group is even now most strongly affiliated: leaving Bibles in the drawers of motel-room bedside tables all over North America. Leaman and Hedstrom's original plan in Chicago was to

¹⁹¹ Charles R. Erdman, “The Church and Socialism” in *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*.

¹⁹² This short reconstruction of the early years of the Christian Business Men's Committee (CBMC) is based on David Enslow's *Men Aflame: The Story of the Christian Business Men's Committee International* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Press, 1962), which is the only book on the group. Enslow was CBMC's Director of Publications and seems to have based the book on personal interviews and internal documents. There are no footnotes, however, and the documents do not appear to have been donated to any archives. The book is part history, but also part modern-day Book of Acts – a long list of deathbed conversions, suicides averted, and murders halted by the power of evangelical Christianity as preached and practiced by a small, but growing group of faithful laymen. The stories are invariably of the I-once-was-lost-but-now-am-found variety.

hold a series of meetings in the weeks leading up to the Easter holiday, both a way of celebrating the season and a nod to earlier urban revivals (particularly the “Businessman's Revival” of 1858, noted above). But the gatherings were so successful that Leaman and Hedstrom decided to continue them into the summer. They wound up holding what amounted to a multi-year revival. By mid-1931, they were holding prayer meetings three days a week, and broadcasting them live over the Moody Institute's house radio station, WMBI.¹⁹³ This revival might have remained a Chicago institution, but for the fact that radio evangelist Paul Rood took Hedstrom and Leaman's idea out to Los Angeles.¹⁹⁴ From there, it quickly spread up and down the West Coast, eventually picking up impressive momentum: there were five Christian Business Men's Committees in 1938 (Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle, and New York City); 75 in 1944; 162 in 1947; and more than 200 by 1950. A speaker at the group's 1944 conference was so confident in the organization's future that he proclaimed the country “on the verge of a great awakening.”¹⁹⁵ Founded in the late 1930s, the Seattle CBMC was one of the earliest chapters. It met daily at noon in the Metropolitan Theater (a beautiful, Progressive-era downtown gem short-sightedly demolished in the 1950s). Methodist minister Abraham Vereide was its Executive Secretary and a major presence in both the city's religious and its political circles.¹⁹⁶

Born in 1886, Vereide immigrated to the United States from Norway in 1904.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹³ For a more detailed version of this story, see Sarah Ruth Hammond, *God's Business Men: Entrepreneurial Evangelicals in Depression and War* (Yale, Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, 2010), pp. 83-88.

¹⁹⁴ Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, p. 122.

¹⁹⁵ The numbers and quote are from Enslow, *Men Aflame*, pp. 19, 35-36, and 55.

¹⁹⁶ On Vereide and the CBMC, see: Grubb, *Modern Viking*, p. 62-63.

Hearing of opportunity in the Rocky Mountains' cavernous industrial mines, he was quickly sucked into the powerful current that had already carried so many other Scandinavian newcomers to the American West. He washed up in Butte, Montana. In those days, Butte was an untamed, nearly ungovernable town, its men wild for whiskey and women, its renowned red light district the site of a breathless and unremitting bacchanalia. (One widely celebrated former Butte brothel is now listed in the National Register of Historic Places.)¹⁹⁸ It was also a seedbed of radical trade unionism, the place where hard-rock miners from all over the mountain west joined together in 1893 to form the Western Federation of Miners, then the country's most outspoken and pugnacious labor group. Led by William D. "Big Bill" Haywood – himself a larger-than-life figure, a one-eyed organizer unafraid to be caught at either end of an act of violence – the WFM was the forerunner of America's legendary, homegrown anarcho-syndicalist union, the Industrial Workers of the World. Formed the year after Vereide arrived in the United States, the IWW was a band of militant misfits – African-American, immigrant, and white native alike – who lived to mock bourgeois pretensions and who practiced among themselves a stunningly radical democracy that they hoped other Americans would one day learn to appreciate. As one anonymous Wobbly put it, the union lived out

“something that was not so in the hope that sometime it would be.”¹⁹⁹ Having been raised

¹⁹⁷ My description of Vereide's life is based on a 1961 biography by Norman Grubb – *Modern Viking* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1961) – and from the notes that Vereide gave Grubb in order to complete it, which are housed in the Billy Graham Center Archives, in Collection 459 (Records of the Fellowship Foundation). Much of what I cover here is also addressed in Jeff Sharlet's recent book *The Family: The Secret Fundamentalism at the Heart of American Power* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2008).

¹⁹⁸ See the Butte-Anaconda Historic District's National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (available online at www.nps.org), pp. 22-23 and Kirk Johnson, "Dark Days for a Reminder of the Wild, Wild West in Montana" in *The New York Times* (May 30, 2005).

¹⁹⁹ For more on both the WMF and the IWW, see: Melvyn Dubofsky, "The Origins of Western Working-Class Radicalism, 1890-1905" in *Labor History* 7 (Spring 1966), pp. 131-154 and *We Shall Be All: A*

in a fairly pious and conservative household, the young Vereide was less than impressed with the prurient and radical American Valhalla in which he found himself stranded. He spent a few weeks digging, and then decided to attend seminary instead.

After his graduation and ordination, Vereide spent most of his young professional life working for Goodwill Industries, an organization he served in a variety of capacities throughout the 1920s and early 1930s. In 1934, however, he was struck with an undeniable yearning to win his adopted hometown of Seattle for Christ. The city was bogged down in the Great Depression with nearly 30% unemployment and a dirty, sprawling Hooverville creeping outward from the old Skinner and Eddy Shipyard. The slum's residents were a small and unrepresentative sampling of the city's downtrodden – out of Seattle's nearly 33,000 unemployed, only six hundred made their permanent home in the camp, and most of these were men – but half of them would live there for more than a year, a constant, all-too-tangible reminder of the city's abysmal economic fortunes.²⁰⁰

Seattle was also one of the epicenters of the 1934 Longshoremen's Strike, a labor disturbance that began in California, but soon spread up and down the West Coast. When Bay-area stevedores walked off the job in July, politicians on the far side of the Rockies reacted strongly. The mayor of San Francisco, Angelo Rossi, immediately declared a State of Emergency. California Senator Hiram Johnson warned of the "ruin of the Pacific Coast." Oregon's governor claimed he would ask for the support of federal troops if the

History of the Industrial Workers of the World, abridged edition, edited by Joseph A. McCartin (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000). The quote is from p. 6.

²⁰⁰ My description of Seattle during the Depression is drawn from: Murray Morgan, *Skid Road: An Informal Portrait of Seattle* (Sausalito: Comstock Editions, Inc., 1951) and Richard Berner, *Seattle, 1921-1940: From Boom to Bust* (Seattle: Charles Press, 1992).

strike spread to Portland. Brain-truster General Hugh Johnson, visiting on behalf of President Roosevelt's National Recovery Administration (of which he was the head), claimed that the western states were on the verge of “a Civil War.”²⁰¹ When the dockers did not go back to work – in spite of repeated warnings that they had better – violence ensued. Mike Quin, a journalist who had covered the strike for the *Daily Worker*, later recalled the scene in San Francisco:

A general maritime strike had paralyzed all shipping up and down the Pacific Coast for more than two months; the merchant marine was tied up in the harbors like so many dead whales. The town bristled with bayonets and hospitals were jammed with the wounded. Clouds of tear and nausea gas had swept through business districts, penetrating windows and driving panic-stricken throngs from the buildings. Pedestrians running for shelter [were] winged by stray bullets and crumpled to the pavement. The sounds of shouting, running crowds, pistol shots, screams, breaking glass, and wailing sirens filled the streets.²⁰²

A young Tillie Lerner (who was soon to become Tillie Olsen) wrote of the aftermath in *Partisan Review*. “All life seemed blown out of the street,” she reported, “the few people hurrying by looked hunted, tense, expectant of anything.” The forces of capital had prevailed in this struggle, and the commercial piers were reopened. But Lerner also reported seeing “a pregnant woman standing on a corner,” whose “face was a flame.” The woman said that the strikers would never forget what had happened to them, and ensured Lerner that they would “pay it back ... someday.”²⁰³

Following the story of the strike from his own corner of the Pacific Northwest, Vereide worried that San Francisco had fallen under the influence of a host of anti-Christian forces: Anarchists, Communists, Socialists, Wobblies, radicals in general, and

²⁰¹ Schlesinger, *The Age of Roosevelt: The Coming of the New Deal, 1933-1935*, pp. 391-392.

²⁰² Mike Quin, *The Big Strike* (Olema: Olema Publishing Company, 1949), p. 4.

²⁰³ Tillie Lerner, “The Strike” in *Partisan Review* (September/October), 1934.

the Soviet Union in particular. The strike – in spite of Walter Lippmann's judgment that it was “a revolutionary weapon wielded by men who [did] not want a revolution” – seemed to confirm these fears.²⁰⁴ Vereide was discouraged by what he saw as the “utter helplessness of the rank and file” who were, he maintained, “under the political control of subversive forces.”²⁰⁵ A bit closer to home, Vereide was particularly concerned about a “Swedish” agent he thought the Soviets had sent to infiltrate Seattle's dock unions, a villain so sinister that Vereide would only refer to him by a single initial: “B” (who seems to have been a Vereide-invented amalgamation created from bits and pieces of Seattle's Teamster-boss Dave Beck and former IWW organizer Harry Bridges, leader of the most radical element of the International Longshoremen's Association).²⁰⁶

At first, Vereide could think of nothing to do but pray. “Crushed and burdened by [Seattle's] spiritual apathy,” he wrote in an unpublished autobiography, “I sought God, not for myself, but for my city, state, and nation.”²⁰⁷ After months of fretful invocation, Vereide decided that he had to do more. And so, at his behest, a group of nearly two dozen business and civic leaders drawn from the Seattle chapter of CBMC met over a hotel breakfast in April, 1935 in order to talk about the future of their city. By late spring, they were meeting regularly; the men quickly realized their mutual interests, understood that in order to neutralize Seattle's increasingly strong labor unions – with their various unholy influences – they would have to band together, to work more closely with one

²⁰⁴ Walter Lippmann, *Interpretations: 1933-1935* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1936), pp. 139-140.

²⁰⁵ As quoted in Grubb, *Modern Viking*, p 53.

²⁰⁶ For more on both Beck and Bridges, see: Bruce Nelson, *Workers on the Waterfront: Seamen, Longshoremen, and Unionism in the 1930s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988) and Murray Morgan, *Skid Road* (esp. Chapter V).

²⁰⁷ The remains of the book are in the BGC Archives, 459/502/1.

another than they ever had before. In the summer of 1935, the men Vereide had recruited travelled to the Cascades for a weekend of prayer and civically-minded strategizing.

Vereide later remembered what happened:

By the great stone fireplace we grouped. Each man made a moral and spiritual inventory. We faced the problems of our own city and state, and those of the nation, as well as our respective businesses. The deeper and further we went, the more we readied ourselves to face God and His word. We went on our knees to pray with a deep sense of utter helplessness. Subversive forces had taken over. What could we do, and who would dare confess it and begin to lead on for better things?

The result of all this supplication was another organization, called City Chapel, which, according to the group's by-laws, aimed “to develop a Christian America.” The idea was to begin to combat what the organizers saw as the most detrimental absences in their community: the lack of “a vital religious life” and of “the cultivation of religious ideals.” In the midst of the Great Depression, these men were convinced that their religion was “the only basis for economic security [or] any permanent reconstruction.” The program, they stressed, would “emphasize personal work, through a growing organism of vitalized individuals.” City Chapel was to be, in other words, a grassroots organization composed of believing men who felt called to action. Its members would seek to draft Seattle's business, social, and educational leadership in the “service of a greater warfare than anything we have experienced heretofore – for righteousness, decency, home, and society; for God, His Christ, [and] His Way of Life.”²⁰⁸ They sought, in no uncertain terms, a city-wide religious revival, particularly among the better classes.

After the weekend retreat to the mountains, a junior member of City Chapel volunteered to run for mayor of Seattle. Arthur Langlie had come to the prayer breakfast

²⁰⁸ See the City Chapel documents in BGCA 459/167/3.

group representing a Washington-wide fraternity for young men interested in middle-class reform efforts: the New Order of Cincinnatus.²⁰⁹ Although it was nominally bipartisan, the Order was made up almost entirely of Republicans; this reflected the enormous imbalance of power in Washington politics. Between 1914 and 1930, fewer than 10% of the seats in the state House of Representatives were occupied by Democrats. A lone representative of the party sat in the state Senate on four separate occasions; in other years there had been only two or three, and even these were mostly of the nineteenth-century variety, conservatives who represented largely rural districts.²¹⁰ Like Vereide, the Cincinnatans were nervous about the strong labor presence on Seattle's waterfront. They also hoped to rid the city of the graft and corruption that they thought had for too long characterized its politics. At the time of the prayer sojourn in the Cascades, Langlie was already a member of the Seattle City Council, having won a seat – with strong support from the Cincinnatans – in March of 1935. He spent most of his short tenure as a councilman investigating the Seattle Police Department for venality and trying to slash the budget of Mayor Charles L. Smith (who is best known not for his political accomplishment, but rather for being one of the last people to have his picture taken with Will Rogers before the comedian's untimely death in an airplane crash.)²¹¹

Langlie actually lost his first City Chapel-backed run for mayor, in 1936, to John Francis

²⁰⁹ For more on the New Order of Cincinnatus see George W. Scott, “The New Order of Cincinnatus: Municipal Politics in Seattle During the 1930s” in *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 64/4 (October, 1973), pp. 137-146.

²¹⁰ Thomas Hoemann and Barbara Baker, *State of Washington: Members of the State Legislature by District Since 1889*, (Olympia: Legislative Information Center, 2009).

²¹¹ George William Scott, *Arthur B. Langlie: Republican Governor in a Democratic Age* (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Washington, Seattle, 1971). The photograph is item 9291 in the Engineering Department Photographic Negatives Series (2613-07) of the Seattle Municipal Archives.

Dore, a labor-friendly candidate who happened to have Teamster President Dave Beck's backing. Dore seems to have been something of a sybarite. "Seattle will be no Sunday school if I am its next mayor," he told voters at the outset of his campaign; he promised, instead, to "make a San Francisco out of it." Labor infighting quickly crippled most of his plans, however. By the summer of 1937, William Hillyer, Congress of Industrial Organizations field representative at the Coulee Dam site in Eastern Washington, was calling Beck "labor's public enemy No. 1" and Dore a "national stooge and new king of the strikebreakers."²¹² This outburst seems mostly to have had to do with Beck and Dore's public support for the establishment AFL over the insurgent CIO. Dore lost whatever middle class support he had by his inability to keep Seattle's streetcar company solvent. Politically broken and mortally ill, Dore lost to Langlie in a landslide in 1938. The new mayor was even able to take office early when the city council relieved Dore of his duties for health reasons. By inauguration day, Dore was dead.²¹³

Looking back on the 1938 Seattle mayoral election nearly two decades later, Vereide remarked in a letter to Langlie about how he had been thinking about the City Chapel weekend retreat and about how Langlie had "volunteered to take up the torch and become a candidate for mayor." From the (no doubt rufescent) perspective of 1955, Vereide reminisced with Langlie about the "political house cleaning" they had overseen in the Emerald City.²¹⁴ This assessment of Langlie's effectiveness as an executive is surely overinflated: he only served as Seattle's mayor for two years before being elected,

²¹² See the anonymously-written article "John F. Dore Friend to Coulee Dam" in *The Spokane Chronicle* (February 21, 1936).

²¹³ See the essays on Dore and Langlie at *History Link: The Free Online Encyclopedia of Washington State History* (www.historylink.org).

²¹⁴ Letter from Vereide to Langlie (July 8, 1955) in BGCA, 459/349/5.

in 1940, governor of the state of Washington – a job from which he was ousted in 1944 by Democrat Monrad Wallgren. (“Most of Gov. Langlie's good work will likely go out the window in the next four years,” an acquaintance wrote to Vereide after that election.)²¹⁵ Langlie won the office back in 1948, but by that time he had distanced himself both from Vereide and the New Order of Cincinnatus. For Vereide, though, Langlie's 1938 election represented something more important than can be measured in the failures or achievements of even a three-term governor. A group of determined Christians, Vereide now knew, could turn back the communist scourge, could even pray the right man into a position of power. What might a group of already powerful Christians be able to accomplish with the same effort?

In the late summer of 1941, Vereide moved to Washington, DC, where he planned to organize the U. S. government in much the same way that he had Seattle's business community. Members of Congress, he thought, should “know each other on a spiritual basis” so that they might “find a comradeship based on [their] mutual relationship to a heavenly Father.”²¹⁶ He moved to the capital with the intention to “enlist as many as possible in a central national program,” recruiting his targets with fervid letters: “My heart is burdened and I am fired with a consuming concern and passion to *recruit, cultivate, and promote a Christian Leadership* commensurate with the responsibilities before us. Here is a chance for *teamwork* and *sacrificial service*, corresponding to that of wartime.”²¹⁷ He arrived in the District of Columbia, full of hope, in September, 1941,

²¹⁵ Wendell Nelson to Vereide (November 11, 1944) in BGCA, 459/167/3.

²¹⁶ As quoted in Grubb, *Modern Viking*, p. 68.

²¹⁷ Letters to Vereide's wife are collected in Grubb, *Modern Viking*, pp. 81-95. The recruitment letters can be found in BGCA, 459/8/1.

checking into the University Club of Washington, a residence popular with national politicians. “In a day or two,” he wrote to his wife, “many will know that I am in town and by God's grace it will hum.”²¹⁸

The first District of Columbia prayer breakfast meeting occurred just a few months later – and barely a month after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor – in January of 1942. It is unclear exactly who attended – nobody seems to have taken roll and no copies of the guest list have survived – but estimates of the size of the crowd consistently put it around seventy five.²¹⁹ Both Howard Coonley, the president of the National Association of Manufacturers, and Francis Sayre, former high commissioner of the American-occupied Philippines, spoke. Coonley's presence is unsurprising; NAM's history of anti-labor activity made it a natural ally for Vereide. Sayre's participation is a bit more remarkable, and illustrates even the early length of Vereide's influential reach. Sayre was Woodrow Wilson's son-in-law and – as recently as December, 1941 – had been presiding over the slow decolonization of the Philippine Islands when the Japanese invasion cut his work short. No copies of these men's speeches survive, but Vereide later called their messages “splendid.”²²⁰ Vereide also addressed the assembly, telling them about his firm belief that he and his associates had saved Seattle from an imminent Communist takeover. He told them about his idea for a “God-directed and God-

²¹⁸ Vereide to his wife, Mattie, (September 6, 1941) as quoted in Grubb, *Modern Viking*, p. 69.

²¹⁹ The closest we can get to a primary source estimate is probably Grubb's in *Modern Viking*, p. 69. He seems to be quoting Vereide when he claims that there were seventy four attendees, but the exact source is unclear.

²²⁰ For more on Coonley and Sayre, see: Howard Coonley, “Financing as the Manager Sees It” in *Modern Manufacturing: A Partnership of Idealism and Common Sense* (Philadelphia: The American Academy of Political and Social Science, 1919) and the introduction to the Sayre papers at the Williams College Archive and Special Collections (available online at: <http://archives.williams.edu/manuscriptguides/sayre/index.php>). Vereide as quoted in Grubb, *Modern Viking*, p. 70.

controlled nation” and that he hoped they would “begin to meet and set the pace for national life.” He closed the meeting with a quote that he attributed to William Penn: “Men must either be governed by God or ruled by tyrants.”²²¹ By 1943, the Senate had its own regularly-scheduled prayer group, and, beginning in 1944, the House had one as well.

Vereide was far from finished, however. He next tried to orchestrate a much larger and more public gathering: a national day of prayer and thanksgiving, timed to coincide with President Franklin Roosevelt's fourth inauguration, in January of 1945. The event, Vereide explained in a letter to a supporter, would promote “spiritual fortification, national unity, and preparedness for the responsibilities before us as a nation.” Economic and social stability, he continued:

depend upon the moral and spiritual fiber of our citizens. We have been so preoccupied with things material and in building the super-structure that the sub-structure of the moral and spirit values has been neglected. The result is social disintegration. The danger signals are in evidence. The two pillars supporting our American way of life are constitutional representative government and free private enterprise. A dynamic Christian life made possible through a Bible-reading people supports those two pillars of our democracy. We must become real patriots who will begin to raise the standard to which honest citizens may rally, a standard and a torch of apostolic Christianity in faith, experience, and vital living.²²²

Interviewed in the *Washington Post*, Vereide observed that the occasion was “designed to stress the need of spiritually undergirding our national leadership and of invoking God's wisdom in solving our international and domestic issues.”²²³ He invited representatives from the American Bankers Association, the American Bar Association, and the

²²¹ From letters Vereide wrote to his wife in 1942 as quoted in Grubb, *Modern Viking*, p. 70.

²²² Vereide to Henry Kaiser (December 14, 1944) in BGCA 459/8/1

²²³ As quoted in Robert Tate Allan, “Notables to Take Part Here In Spiritual Dedication Plan” in *The Washington Post* (January 10, 1945). To get a better idea of the scope of what Vereide had in mind, see the proposed schedule in BGCA, 459/30/1.

American Medical Association to attend. Robert LeTourneau, the head of an earthmoving-equipment company, was recruited to be the keynote speaker. Nicknamed “God's Businessman,” LeTourneau was just then in the process of making his fortune selling heavy-duty machinery to the federal government for use in the various theaters of the Second World War. He was also head of both the Gideons and the CBMC, organizations that had played a vital role in getting Vereide's efforts off the ground.²²⁴ Vereide also contacted Chief Justice of the Supreme Court Harlan Stone, wondering if the judge might “kindly present the scriptural basis for national strength and individual fitness.”²²⁵ When a Washington paper published an article suggesting that Henry Wallace had been recruited to take part in the program, he wrote to Wallace letting him know that the article was “unauthorized and premature,” but, sensing an opportunity, invited the former Vice President by the office to talk about it anyway.²²⁶ He leaned heavily on Harry Truman – would the new Vice President “give expression to our hopes, our faith, and our dedication to the tasks before us?” he asked. Truman's message, Vereide preemptively suggested, “must be a call to a new advance on a higher level.” It should be “a mutual recognition of the sovereignty of God [and] the inevitable victory of His plans.” A day of prayer, he added, would be “a great opportunity for the President to strengthen his own hand and unite the nation in a mutual devotion to God, country, and the world.”²²⁷ Finally, Vereide wrote to the President, asking for a proclamation declaring

²²⁴ See LeTourneau's autobiography: *Mover of Men and Mountains* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1967).

²²⁵ Vereide to Harlan Stone 12/14/1944 in BGCA, 459/29/19.

²²⁶ Vereide to Wallace 12/11/1944 in BGC Archive 459/29/19. It's unclear in the letter which paper it was.

²²⁷ Vereide to Truman 11/21/1944 and 12/13/1944 in BGCA, 459/29/19. Vereide also, perhaps prudently, wished Truman time to recover from the campaign and the “conflicting emotions which naturally have been created because of the onslaught against you, and many of the unpleasant experiences of the campaign.”

January 20, 1945 a national day of prayer and adding his hope that FDR would invite the cabinet to partake in communion in the morning and that they might all join Vereide for dinner after the inauguration.²²⁸

As far-fetched as this all might seem, Vereide appears to have been serious. Before the inauguration, he moved the headquarters of his new organization – the National Committee for Christian Leadership – to a house on Jackson Place (“near the White House,” as the *Post* observed).²²⁹ He wrote to a supporter about the “great spiritual stirrings” that he felt were moving through the land. “Probably we have never witnessed in our national life a greater spiritual upsurge than the present.” Missing, however, was “bold Christian leadership.” Success would require an “instrument for the Almighty to work through.” And Vereide was confident that he knew just the right candidate for the job: the President.²³⁰

If we pause for a moment to consider that the United States was deeply engaged in the task of winning the Second World War in January of 1945, Vereide's ambitious program begins to look downright foolish.²³¹ The inauguration ceremony that year was one of the shortest in history; the usual pomp and ceremony seemed to Roosevelt decidedly inappropriate at a time when he was asking the country to make serious

²²⁸ Vereide to Roosevelt 11/28/1944 in BGCA, 459/29/19.

²²⁹ Robert Tate Allan, “Christian Leader Headquarters Moved to D. C.” in *The Washington Post* (January 19, 1945). A look at a DC map reveals that the building was, indeed, *very* “near the White House” – at the corner of H Street and Connecticut Ave NW, a block north of Pennsylvania Ave, right on LaFayette Square.

²³⁰ Vereide to Henry Kaiser (December 14, 1944) in BGCA 459/8/1.

²³¹ A number of people with whom Vereide corresponded tried to convince him to back off. “I should like to explain that I feel that there are challenging possibilities in the plan you have conceived,” Robert McLeod, a Vereide acquaintance who worked for the FDIC wrote just after Thanksgiving. See McLeod to Vereide (November 25, 1944) in BGCA 459/29/19.

wartime sacrifices for a fourth consecutive year. Roosevelt was also quite ill; so ill, in fact, that the swearing in was conducted not at the Capitol, as was customary, but on the South Portico of the White House. He died, of course, that April.²³²

Imperious as the plan first seems, however, Vereide was not just making a cold call on the President, and there is reason to believe that he might have come closer to succeeding under less trying national circumstances. As governor of New York, Roosevelt had personally invited Vereide to a state conference on relief programs. Roosevelt was interested in Vereide's success organizing teams of Seattle housewives to collect unwanted household items for resale, Goodwill style. His hope was that Vereide would move to New York in order to set up a similar program for the state's public relief agency, but Vereide demurred when he learned that he would not be allowed to cast his work in religious terms.²³³ It was hardly a wasted effort, though. At Roosevelt's conference, Vereide befriended James Farrell, the President of U. S. Steel, who supposedly gave him the idea that would eventually lead to the Seattle prayer breakfast group, as well as Carl Vrooman, who had been Secretary of Agriculture under Woodrow Wilson. In 1932, Vrooman asked Vereide to join a policy advisory panel he had been charged with setting up in advance of Roosevelt's run for the White House.²³⁴ It was from meetings like these that Vereide drew the confidence necessary to attempt his ambitious campaign in Washington.

Still, it will come as no surprise that the National Day of Prayer and Thanksgiving

²³² Jean Edward Smith has produced an excellent biography of the 32nd president. See Smith, *FDR* (New York: Random House, 2007).

²³³ Grubb, *Modern Viking*, p. 48 and Sharlett, *The Family*, p. 96.

²³⁴ Grubb, *Modern Viking*, pp. 21-28, 47-51.

seems to have been far less momentous an occasion than Vereide had originally hoped it would be. In fact, it is clear that he dramatically overplayed his hand. Apart from the (albeit prodigious) planning documents and a couple of newspaper articles previewing the event that appeared in the *Post* – both written by the same reporter – the record seems to contain no other mention of the rally.²³⁵ There is not even much evidence that it took place. The last document in the NCCL's papers pertaining to the event is dated late December 1944. After that, it is as if the rally never crossed anyone's mind again. The papers do include an undated tentative schedule that promises addresses by Chief Justice Stone, William Green of the AFL, John L. Lewis of the United Mine Workers, Vice President Truman, and even President Roosevelt himself, but there is little to suggest that any of them actually agreed to appear. Stone seems never to have replied to Vereide's request to take part. There are short letters of regret from both Green and Lewis, as well as a non-committal letter from Truman that acknowledges receipt of Vereide's request and then abruptly ends with the hope that Vereide continue to think well of him. There is nothing to indicate that Roosevelt ever considered attending except a letter from William Hassett, his secretary, indicating that the White House had received Vereide's request. Hassett reminded Vereide that the President had “on many occasions appointed days of prayer for the Nation.” He particularly called Vereide's attention to Roosevelt's 1944 Thanksgiving Proclamation, in which the President “made a special appeal for all Americans to read the Sacred Scriptures.” He also tersely pointed out to Vereide that, so far as calling for days of prayer was concerned, it was “not possible for the President to

²³⁵ Robert Tate Allan, “Notables to Take Part Here In Spiritual Dedication Plan” in *The Washington Post* (January 10, 1945) and “Christian Leader Headquarters Moved to D. C.” in *The Washington Post* (January 19, 1945).

conform to the days set by various organizations.”²³⁶ Even if the President read Vereide's request, one suspects very strongly that the War was just then occupying the preponderance of his and his administration's attention and energy. (In his letter, Hassett suggested that Vereide consider “the great demands on the President's time.”) One suspects very strongly that Vereide's missive was simply filed away with the rest of the piles and piles of mail that Roosevelt received every day.²³⁷

While he was less successful at converting the very highest-level politicians than he would have hoped, Vereide did manage to win considerable access to a number of lower-level national authorities, which turned out to have been opening enough for his liking. In a letter that Vereide sent to both Representative Brooks Hays of Arkansas and Senator Alexander Wiley of Wisconsin in the fall of 1945, Vereide outlined his “convictions regarding the objectives and policies for the NCCL and the Breakfast Groups.” The main purpose of the organization was “to produce social stability and orderly progress through regenerated (individual) leadership, guided by the Spirit of God.”²³⁸ In later letters, Vereide distilled this description of the organization down to its essence. The NCCL was “interested in discovering and developing, in positions of influence, men and women committed to Christ.”²³⁹ The higher up the leadership ladder Vereide could climb, the better, but any kind of leader would do. The important thing was to capture the hearts and minds of “key men” and then watch as their influence

²³⁶ See the letter from Hassett to Vereide (December 13, 1944) in BGCA 459/30/19.

²³⁷ Roosevelt apparently received so much mail that the letters became a fire hazard. See the transcript of NPR *Weekend Edition* host Audie Cornish's interview (October 9, 2011) with Eli Saslow, author of *Ten Letters: What Americans Tell Obama* (New York: Doubleday, 2011) available online at: <http://www.npr.org/2011/10/09/141192281/ten-letters-what-americans-tell-obama>.

²³⁸ See the letter from Vereide to Hays and Wiley (October 4, 1945) in BGCA 459/30/1.

²³⁹ Vereide to the Retired Officers Association (November 14, 1958) in BGCA 459/31/1

transformed not only their own lives, but the lives of those around them as well. The NCCL was not meant to act as a lobbying organization, but as a missionary group to people in power. It operated according to a kind of trickle-out theory of social policy. Under this plan, getting even a few of the nation's leaders “to face God in humility, prayer and obedience” was a step in the right direction.²⁴⁰

Vereide was preternaturally good at talking to politicians. He had “a quality of humility” that men of power liked, his daughter Alicia claimed in 1961. “He does not blow a trumpet as some men do when they speak to senators and are trying to impress them. He is always trying to push the other man forward, and is himself never anything but that poor boy from Norway who [knows] the Lord.”²⁴¹ It is a skill he had to develop, however. At the start of his ministry, Vereide's biography reports, he was forced to “pray his way through” to Senators and Congressmen. Indeed, his initial political strategy seems to have been little more complicated than the frequent use of his uncanny ability to charm or elbow his way past the “battery of secretaries” that protect elected officials against “time-wasters.” Eventually, however, he perfected his approach, made it an art. By the 1950s Vereide was keeping up a vast and varied correspondence with members of Congress, foreign heads of state and their ambassadors, the leaders of civic organizations like the Lion's Club and the Jaycees, government bureaucrats in all manner of Washington offices, as well as state and local officials across the country. His letters to newly elected congressmen were elegant and eager without being servile. Vereide congratulated the man on his victory, informed him of the prayer breakfast meeting most

²⁴⁰ Vereide to Goble (April 2, 1947) BGC Archive, 459/8/1.

²⁴¹ As quoted in Grubb, *Modern Viking*, pp. 99-100.

likely to get his attention, and closed with the assurance that whenever he could personally “be of service,” the congressman could certainly count on him.²⁴²

Vereide also apparently had an unusual talent for turning ordinary conversations into prayers. His biographer observes that he had “the simple habit on all occasions of passing from conversation to prayer, without announcing it, and in the most natural way – merely changing from talking to a man to talking to God. He is talking with you, and before you know where you are, you are praying.” As odd as this tactic seems, it appears to have served Vereide well. Senator Ralph Flanders of Vermont reportedly said that a visit from Vereide always led him to “expect a message from the Lord,” while Senator Willis Robertson of Virginia claimed that “of all [his] experiences” in Washington, he found his “attendance at the meetings of the Senate Breakfast Group the most interesting and the most valuable.”²⁴³ These types of men were vital to the success of NCCL's project; they were meant to form the beachhead of a Christian elite that would help speed up America's transformation back into the godly society NCCL's leaders thought the country had once been.

In spite of the failure of his 1945 inauguration-day gala, Vereide's contacts in the federal government eventually grew quite wide-ranging and influential. Arthur N. Young, an economist who had served as a State Department-funded financial advisor to dozens of countries in Latin America in the 1930s, regularly wrote to Vereide. Young had been trained at Princeton by Edwin W. Kemmerer, a noted early twentieth-century deficit hawk and gold bug who had organized the Philippine economy on behalf of the U. S.

²⁴² See any of Vereide's astonishingly extensive correspondence in BGCA (collection 459), but I quote here in particular from a 1956 letter addressed to “All New Senators” in 459/31/1.

²⁴³ Grubb, *Modern Viking*, p. 98.

government in the 1910s and also attempted to stabilize a run-away Polish economy in the 1920s. Young spent the 1930s in China, working as an adviser to the Nationalist government of Chang Kai-Shek, and, in the weeks leading up to the 1944 election, often lamented to Vereide about the likelihood of another Roosevelt victory, which Young thought would “fulfill the prophecies made so long ago of the end of this age.”²⁴⁴

Another of Vereide's acquaintances, Donald Stone, served as the Assistant Director in Charge of Administrative Management at the Bureau of the Budget. Part of his job was to work on the Marshall Plan. At the 1947 Conference on Science, Philosophy, and Religion in Philadelphia, Stone told an audience that:

Germany and Japan can become peace-loving and emotionally competent nations only when enough of their citizens and leaders have developed a philosophy and mode of life which will support community and national life of an orderly character. To this end justice and brotherhood must replace the law of the jungle, the satanic character of the Nazi and Shinto mind, and the destructive spiritual effect of materialistic philosophies which now stand in the way. This means that the Allies must be concerned primarily in their occupation program with ideological, cultural, and moral values, with social drives, and with the ethical orientation of these peoples.²⁴⁵

“Christianizing” these occupations, he wrote to Vereide privately, was “vital,” something he “worked at constantly.”²⁴⁶

The best descriptor for Vereide – better than “networker,” better than “connector,” better than “schmooser” – might actually be “social capitalist.” In “The Forms of Capital” social theorist Pierre Bourdieu writes that social capital results from relationships that are “directly usable” in the acquisition of “material or symbolic

²⁴⁴ See: Young to Vereide February 17, 1944 in BGCA 459/167/3, along with the Oral History interview with Young conducted by the Truman library in February, 1974, available online at: <http://www.trumanlibrary.org/oralhist/young.htm>.

²⁴⁵ Stone, “The Necessity of Morally Dynamic Government For the Achievement of National Harmony and International Cooperation” in BGCA, 459/474/21.

²⁴⁶ Stone to Vereide (February 24, 1948) in BGCA, 459/474/21.

profits.” More simply, perhaps, we might say that social capital is made up of the tangible benefits that derive from a wide network of powerful friends and associates.²⁴⁷ For Bourdieu, it was primarily the means by which elites maintain their mastery of a society, but Vereide's careful construction of the Congressional prayer breakfast groups suggests that it might work in any number of other directions as well, that it might even be – good-old-boy-network style – a way of joining and then influencing the elite. Sociologist James Coleman has further observed that social capital is enhanced if it is seen as “a by-product of activities engaged in for other purposes.”²⁴⁸ As Vereide pursued his evangelistic project, he rarely talked about using his connections to in any way promote his political ideas. Quite the opposite: he regularly disavowed any partisan aims whatsoever. In 1947, he wrote that his prayer groups were “unifying the [capitol] on a Christian basis, as leadership of government, business, finance, and education meet together to read through God's Word and in frankness, honesty, and sincerity counsel together, invoking the guidance of God and His blessings upon the city, state, and nation.”²⁴⁹

Even if Vereide never appeared to be pursuing partisan aims, there can be little doubt but that he had every intention of eventually exchanging whatever social capital he earned from his friendships with the nation's political elite into political capital. After all,

²⁴⁷ Pierre Bourdieu “The Forms of Capital” in J. Richardson (ed.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), p. 52. I am also indebted to Stephen Baron, John Field, and Tom Schuller (eds.) for their explanation of the various uses of the term “social capital” in the introduction to *Social Capital: Critical Perspectives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 1-38.

²⁴⁸ Coleman as quoted in *Social Capital: Critical Perspectives*, p. 7. Coleman writes, actually, that social capital “depends on” its being “a by-product of activities engaged in for other purposes.” In light of both Bourdieu's and Putnam's work I find this view a bit strong.

²⁴⁹ Vereide to a Mr. A Allen (November 15, 1947), BGCA, 459/8/1.

the first thing the Seattle prayer group had done was look for a mayoral candidate. If the prayer breakfast movement were to become the “cohesive and functioning fellowship” that Vereide envisioned, however, an “army” that would conquer the nation, it would first have to conquer Washington, DC. And so, the first Congressional prayer breakfast was held at the Willard Hotel, a location laden with political symbolism and the historical ground zero for Washington politicking. Nathaniel Hawthorne observed in 1862 that the hotel could “more justly be called the center of Washington than either the Capitol or the White House or the State Department.” Its first-floor seating area was the home base of the earliest “lobbyists,” a term supposedly coined there.²⁵⁰

The question arises, of course, as to whether or not Vereide was ever able to transform any of these connections into something we might call real political power. Was he able to shape policy or to sway individual lawmakers' decisions to support or reject particular bills? The evidence is primarily circumstantial, and the most honest reply is that it is hard to tell. The National Day of Prayer and Reconciliation was a complete bust, but in 1952, when four of Vereide's Washington acquaintances (including a U.S. Senator) flew to Europe to take part in an NCCL event in the Netherlands – both at the public's expense *and* in a military aircraft – a spokesman for the Secretary of Defense told curious reporters that their trip had a “direct relationship to the national interest.”²⁵¹ Is this an example of Vereide infiltrating the federal government and using its resources

²⁵⁰ Nathaniel Hawthorne, “Chiefly About War Matters, by a Peaceable Man” in *Atlantic Monthly* 10/57 (July, 1862); Barbara Gamarekian's “The Willard is Restored as a Jewel of Pennsylvania Avenue” in *The New York Times* (September 4, 1986).

²⁵¹ The reporters were interested because apparently Wiley had taken his new wife along for a honeymoon. See: “Wiley Trip Declared in U.S. Interest” in *The Washington Post* (May 21, 1952). The NCCL connection to the Netherlands was a close one. Queen Wilhelmina was a strong Vereide supporter and honorary president of the group. See Grubb, *Modern Viking*, pp. 137-146.

for his own purposes? Or is it an example of the Cold War state using whatever agents were available in order to further the cause of the United States?

As historian Timothy L. Smith observed in 1960, the American Cold War narrative leant itself to a spiritual interpretation, and it is easy to see how even empty invocations of Christianity provided mid-century politicians with considerable Cold War political capital.²⁵² At a 1949 prayer group meeting, former Attorney General Huston Thompson reminded the assembly that they had to be “redeemed spiritually in order to serve politically.” Congressman Clyde Doyle of California suggested that those who were Christians should “come to Congress to serve God.” Even Percy Priest, a relatively liberal Democrat from Tennessee, spoke at the meeting about filling the capitol with a “dynamic Christianity.”²⁵³ Robert Ten Broeck Stevens, the Secretary of the Army under Eisenhower, actually responded to one of Vereide's letters with the reassurance that he, too, was “firmly convinced that a strong religious faith [was] an indispensable weapon in the arsenal of the free world in its struggle against aggression and tyranny.”²⁵⁴ This all sounds rather formulaic, and probably was, but that hardly mattered. In a struggle against “Godless Communism,” befriending the Almighty was almost always a useful political move, and Vereide's prayer breakfasts acted as a convenient platform from which to do it. There was no harm in participating even if one did not quite share all of Vereide's fervent religious convictions or quite approve of his efforts to insert Christianity into even the most mundane workings of the federal government.

²⁵² Timothy L. Smith, “Historic Waves of Religious Interest in America,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 332 (November, 1960), p. 18.

²⁵³ See the greetings to be read at the 1949 annual meeting in BGCA, 459/349/8.

²⁵⁴ Stevens to Vereide (March 25, 1955) in BGCA 459/474/22

Vereide, like so many conservatively-minded people in the 1930s, was deeply concerned about left-wing radicalism, and regardless of however real or imagined the battle might have been, the prayer breakfast groups' origins lay in a fight to keep Seattle from going “Red.” If we think about the prayer breakfasts as just another feverish American reaction to the threat of communism, then the whole movement becomes difficult to take seriously. But if we think about Vereide's work within the Gramscian framework laid out in the Introduction, what we see is a textbook effort to wage a war of position. From this point of view, the prayer breakfasts look instead like a significant and successful effort to steer America's power brokers toward a certain understanding of the country and of Christianity's place in it, an effort to build a set of norms that the nation's political elites would share and that would then set a firm example for the rest of the populace. We begin to notice the way in which Vereide took full advantage of whatever anti-radical mood he could find in his pursuit of influence. When he first moved to the District of Columbia, Vereide exploited an especially fertile field in the Capitol's small core of hardline anti-New Deal Republicans. Senator Frank Carlson of Kansas – who thought Franklin Roosevelt a “destroyer of human rights and freedom” – became one of his closest allies. Senator Alexander Wiley of Wisconsin – who argued as late as 1939 that the key to economic recovery was “self-reliance” (and who would later call George Kennan's recommendations on how to deal with the post-war Soviet Union “panty-waist diplomacy”) – served on NCCL's Board of Directors. Vereide also developed close relationships with House members Walter Judd of Minnesota – a former missionary to China and virulent anti-communist crusader who called himself a “political missionary” –

and Rep. Paul Dague of Pennsylvania, a regular prayer breakfast attendee, who wrote in a 1948 pamphlet that the Congressmen in his prayer group hoped to work “more of God's mandates into current legislation.”²⁵⁵ All of these men were members of the 83rd Congress, which passed the Communist Control Act of 1954 by a jaw-droppingly wide margin, considering the fact that the Act's main thrust was the outright ban of an American political party.²⁵⁶ As the Cold War began to heat up, Vereide helped to establish a prayer group in Havana that included a Merrill Lynch executive and representatives of the United Fruit Company. He lent support to the bill that successfully added “under God” to the pledge of allegiance as well as to an unsuccessful campaign to make the phrase “in God we trust” the official cancellation mark of the U. S. postal service.²⁵⁷ He was even indirectly responsible for the making of perhaps the silliest of the various films of the 1950s that served as allegories for the spread of communism: *The Blob*, in which a man-eating, gelatinous mass terrorizes the town of Phoenixville, PA until a young Steve McQueen pieces together a plan to defeat it by figuring out that the creature is deathly allergic to the cold. (At the end of film, the monster is parachuted from a military aircraft into the Arctic.) The film was made by a Pennsylvania studio that also made educational films for Sunday Schools; at the 1957 National Prayer Breakfast, its would-be director, Irvin Yeaworth, apparently found a willing screenwriter in B-movie actress Kate Phillips.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁵ “U. S. to Emerge from Crisis, Club is Told: Senator Wiley Warns Nation Must Gain Self-Reliance” in *The Washington Post* (February 17, 1939); Lee Edwards, *Missionary for Freedom: The Life and Times of Walter Judd* (New York: Paragon House, 1990); Dague as quoted in Sharlett, *The Family*, p. 142.

²⁵⁶ The vote was 79-0 in the Senate and 265-2 in the House.

²⁵⁷ See: Rep. Louis Rabaut (sponsor of the “Under God” Bill) to Vereide (May 10, 1954) as well as the April 14, 1954 press release in BGCA, 459/31/3.

²⁵⁸ See: Sharlet, *The Family*, pp. 181-183 and the interview with Kate Phillips in Tom Weaver's *Science*

Perhaps most remarkably telling is the fact that Vereide's tactics were uncannily similar to those of his adversaries. In 1921, Gramsci's colleagues in the Workers Party of America adopted an organizing strategy that called for “boring from within” existing labor unions.²⁵⁹ This meant that rather than establishing a new organization for industrial workers, its agents would attempt to infiltrate the ones that were already there. Energy spent building a new institution, Workers Party functionaries decided, was wasted; it was much better to direct the union's efforts toward steering the old confederations in the direction of communist goals. As they put it: “The revolutionists must be more practical than their opponents. They must be more efficient and hard-working in handling the daily routine of the union, and at the same time strive with all their power to bring it into line with the more advanced unions for the proletarian revolution.”²⁶⁰ And so it was with NCCL. In 1959, as Abraham Vereide began to consider retiring, he tapped a young Oregonian named Doug Coe as a potential successor. Coe had been working on the staff of both the Navigators and Young Life, two evangelical organizations that specialized in proselytizing among military personnel and high school students. In his application letter to become the Assistant Executive Director of NCCL, Coe told Vereide that he thought the organization should push strongly ahead with its mission to court “high-ranking officials in government and business.” One of the first things Coe hoped to do when he began the job, he explained, was to “train men who can concentrate on specific areas in Washington,” offering both the State Department and the Pentagon as examples. He

Fiction Confidential: Interviews with Monster Stars and Filmmakers (Jefferson: McFarland, 2002), pp. 234-246.

²⁵⁹ “Red Party Plans to 'Fool' Workers” in *The New York Times* (December 27, 1921).

²⁶⁰ See the *Program and Constitution* of the Workers Party of America (New York: Lyceum and Literature Department of the Workers Party, 1921), pp. 18-19.

would accomplish this by having half a dozen young initiates live in his house and learn from his example. “Once these men are recruited and trained,” Coe predicted, “they would thereafter be available as NCCL representatives in their respective fields.”²⁶¹ (The slightly paranoid contemporary phrase for what Coe is describing here is a “sleeper cell.”) In response, Vereide's deputy, Richard Halverson, wrote that he thought Coe a natural to take over the continuation of Vereide's work, work that represented “an unusual opportunity for a strategic Christian influence among top leadership.” He praised Coe's “great vision,” and commended his plans to build an “intensive ministry” meant to “saturate” its targets with the gospel. In the letter offering Coe the job, Halverson posed a provocative question. “What better place to conduct this kind of ministry,” he asked, “than in the heart of national, and with certain qualifications, international affairs?”²⁶²

²⁶¹ Coe to Vereide (April 31, 1959) in BGCA 459/512/2.

²⁶² Richard Halverson to Doug Coe (May 22, 1959): BGC Archives, 459/512/2.

CHAPTER IV

Eyesight to the Blind

“One of the most important characteristics of any group that is developing towards dominance is its struggle to assimilate and to conquer 'ideologically' the traditional intellectuals...”

– Antonio Gramsci²⁶³

“There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not cry: Mine!”

– Abraham Kuyper²⁶⁴

A broad section of the general public may have sided with William Jennings Bryan at Dayton – of the thirty seven anti-evolution resolutions put before state legislatures, more than half were introduced after the Scopes Trial – but the prosecution was clearly intellectually outgunned. H. L. Mencken called Bryan's performance “frenzied and preposterous” before concluding that the three-time Democratic candidate for President had, at last, become “a pathetic fool.” Clarence Darrow suggested that, considering how widely accepted evolution was among scientists, anti-Darwinist fundamentalism could only be described as a religion for “bigots and ignoramuses.” Writing in *The Nation*, Joseph Wood Krutch – a native Tennessean, incidentally – noted Bryan's “obvious intellectual incompetence,” “mental backwardness,” and “complete insensibility.”²⁶⁵ In fact, the great majority of the country's taste- and opinion-makers

²⁶³ Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, p. 10.

²⁶⁴ Abraham Kuyper, “Sphere Sovereignty” in James Bratt (ed.), *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans Press, 1998), p. 488.

²⁶⁵ See Mencken's obituary for Bryan in *The Baltimore Evening Sun* (July 27, 1925); Darrow as quoted in the trial transcript, a version of which is available in Jeffrey P. Moran's *The Scopes Trial: A Brief*

backed Darrow and the Darwinists. In the years after the trial, this view became common knowledge; in *The Age of Reform*, Richard Hofstadter summed up the prevailing sentiment: “the pathetic postwar career of Bryan, once the bellwether for so many of the genuine reforms, was a perfect epitome of the shabbiness of the evangelical mind.”²⁶⁶

There is an incongruity, here, however, because at the same time, Fundamentalists' Bible Colleges were thriving. By 1930, there were more than fifty of them located throughout both the United States and Canada. Gordon College in Boston and the Northwestern Bible School in Minneapolis (presided over by William Bell Riley) had virtual monopolies on pastoral training in their respective geographical orbits. Led by former editor of *The Fundamentals* R. A. Torrey, the Bible Institute of Los Angeles was a fixture of Southern California anti-modernism. The school's press, publisher of a widely-read magazine, was able to keep even the most remote West Coast congregations connected to a broader network. The largest and most important of these colleges was the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago. Like its sibling in Los Angeles, the Moody Institute ran a thriving press, but it also hosted the radio station, WMBI, that helped Elizabeth Dilling get her start.

These colleges might have been – as historian Joel Carpenter has described them – “tight-knit, familial, and religiously-intense” places, but they were not centers of cutting-edge thought.²⁶⁷ In the aftermath of the Scopes Trial, a small group of fundamentalist intellectuals became convinced that the only way to reclaim the cultural

History with Documents (New York: Bedford/St. Martin's Press, 2002), p. 156; Joseph Wood Krutch, “Darrow v. Bryan” in *The Nation* 121/3134 (July 29, 1925), p. 136.

²⁶⁶ Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Knopf, 1955), p. 286.

²⁶⁷ Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, p. 16.

hegemony that evangelical Christianity had enjoyed in nineteenth-century America was to match secular scholarship with an equally rigorous Christian kind. Like Gramsci, they recognized the built-in power of good ideas.²⁶⁸ In the 1930s, these men began to devise an agenda that they hoped would overturn modernism's inroads. If enough Americans could be convinced of both the absolute truth *and* the intellectual seriousness of the fundamentalists' version of Christianity, then they would be inoculated against the evils of modernism and Darwinism, along with all of the skepticism and materialism that came along with them. From a small remnant of the old Protestant intellectual order, anti-modernists began their most serious attempt to establish a critical, Christian anti-modernism. This program provided much of the ballast that kept anti-modernist Protestantism's boat from tipping over in a largely secular intellectual sea.

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Until the late nineteenth century, American colleges were almost uniformly religious. The country's two oldest institutions of higher learning, both founded in the seventeenth century, initially aimed to produce not scholars, but preachers. Classes at Harvard began a mere six years after the Puritans established themselves in Massachusetts, and the colony's ministers trained there for nearly one hundred and fifty years. Likewise, the College of William and Mary was, according to its charter, founded so that "the church of Virginia may be furnished with a seminary of ministers of the Gospel, and that the youth may be piously educated in good letters and manners, and that the Christian faith may be propagated amongst the Western Indians to the glory of

²⁶⁸ For more on the importance of intellectuals in Gramsci's scheme, see *Selections from The Prison Notebooks*, pp. 5-23.

Almighty God.”²⁶⁹ Later, in the eighteenth century, the impetus to found a new college in colonial America was frequently the opinion that an older institution had lost its religious zeal. The Boston father-son clergy team of Increase and Cotton Mather, for example, were both early supporters of Yale; they feared that Harvard had become hopelessly misguided, abandoning religious orthodoxy for the *fata morgana* of a newfangled theology. (This is in spite of Increase Mather's long tenure as Harvard's sixth president.)²⁷⁰ Dartmouth College's founders were similarly inclined. Rutgers, originally known as Queen's College, was born in the midst of the Great Awakening, the child of Dutch nervousness about the Anglican character of King's College (now Columbia University), which was itself founded upon suspicion of Princeton Presbyterianism.²⁷¹ Even as late as the 1860s, nearly all of the colleges in the United States were still affiliated with a religious body of one kind or another. In fact, most of them were little more than sophisticated high schools that provided the basic training one needed to become a member of the clergy. They were nothing like the great universities of Europe.

Small and provincial though they were, however, nineteenth-century American

²⁶⁹ See: Samuel Eliot Morrison, *Three Centuries at Harvard, 1636-1936* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1936) and College of William and Mary, *The History of the College of William and Mary: From its Foundation, 1660, to 1874* (Richmond: J. W. Randolph & English, 1874), the charter is quoted on p. 38.

²⁷⁰ In *Three Centuries at Harvard*, Morrison calls Increase Mather “one of the least useful of Harvard's presidents.” (p. 45). It's a sentiment, Mather seems to have shared – the website of Harvard's Office of the President quotes a 1702 diary entry: “The Colledge is in a miserable state [...] The Lord pardon me in that I did no more good whilest related to that society.” (<http://www.president.harvard.edu>).

²⁷¹ See: Brooks Mather Kelley, *Yale: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974); Alexander Leitch, *A Princeton Companion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978); Robert McCaughey, *Stand, Columbia: A History of Columbia University in the City of New York, 1754-2004* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003); Richard P. McCormick, *Rutgers: A Bicentennial History* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1966). The exception, of course, is Thomas Jefferson's proudly secular University of Virginia (founded in 1819 – in reaction to William and Mary's orthodoxy). But, for thirty years, even it was the academic home of William Holmes McGuffey, whose archly Calvinist *Readers* taught generations of Americans literacy. See: Virginius Dabney, *Mr. Jefferson's University: A History* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1981), pp. 12-13, 358.

colleges were still united in their adherence to a certain intellectual stance, the main component of which was an idea that educational historian Julie Reuben has called the “unity of truth,” which is best thought of as a kind of uniform field theory for epistemology. It was idealistically empirical and assumed that any one truth would fit snugly together with any other truth and that everything that was true added up elegantly and obviously to an accurate vision of the universe. Since most of America's earliest educational pioneers were also Protestant Christians, the sum of all this truth was casually assumed to be equivalent with God's will.²⁷²

Proponents of the unity of truth felt confident that learning was inextricably linked with morality; knowing what was right, in this scheme of things, led to doing what was right. And training young people to know and to do right was the alpha and omega of early American education, which is why almost every American college required graduating students to take part in a capstone seminar on moral philosophy. Antebellum schools took these seminars quite seriously: they were typically taught by the college president, who was as often as not also an ordained minister.²⁷³ Few American colleges survived the nineteenth century as arbiters of moral character, however, because the prevailing intellectual winds, as we saw in Chapter One, were blowing in a distinctly different direction.²⁷⁴ At the same time, the nature of higher education in America was

²⁷² Julie A. Reuben, *The Making of the Modern University* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 17-35.

²⁷³ Julie A. Reuben, *The Making of the Modern University* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 17-35.

²⁷⁴ Several books tackle this subject. Among them: George Marsden's *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Unbelief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994) and Laurence R. Veysey's *The Emergence of the American University* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965).

undergoing a deep and profound reformation. The work of two men stands out.

Charles W. Elliot was Harvard's twenty-first president. He was also its most influential. His appointment in 1869, Louis Menand writes in *The Metaphysical Club*, “constituted a recognition that...science, not theology, was the educational core of the future.” Elliot's overhaul of Harvard was total, and it represented the apex of a change that was sweeping American higher education. According to Menand, Elliot's tenure is associated with:

almost everything that distinguishes the modern research university from the antebellum college: the abandonment of the role of *in loco parentis*; the abolition of required coursework; the introduction of the elective system for undergraduates; the establishment of graduate schools with doctoral programs in the arts and sciences; and the emergence of pure and applied research as principal components of the university's mission.²⁷⁵

Elliot was not single-handedly responsible for these transformations – many of the changes he made at Harvard had originated in various guises at Yale, Cornell, and Brown before he implemented them in Cambridge – but his wholesale adoption was a major catalyst for further reform.

From Massachusetts, Elliot's ideas about university education travelled west on the back of the Morrill Act, passed in 1862, which granted large tracts of federally-owned land to the states on the condition that it be used to establish schools that would advance commerce and further development. The midwestern states benefitted enormously. In February of 1863, Kansas State became America's first land-grant university. Iowa State,

²⁷⁵ Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club*, p. 230 and *The Marketplace of Ideas: Reform and Reaction in the American University* (New York: W. W. Norton Company, 2010), p. 44. Most of my discussion here is built on Menand, but the interested reader should also see: James Turner, *The Liberal Education of Charles Eliot Norton* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999) and Hugh Hawkins, *Pioneer: A History of the Johns Hopkins University, 1874-1889* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1960).

Michigan State, Ohio State, Penn State, and the Universities of Kentucky and Wisconsin soon followed. Elliot's innovations were also the founding principles of the new University of California, established at Berkeley in 1868, from whence they quickly turned around and headed back east in the form of Daniel Coit Gilman.

Gilman, Berkeley's first president, had been almost immediately set upon by a populist-minded legislature concerned over the new school's curriculum. Led by members of The Grange, Sacramento legislators worried that Gilman was prone to putting too much emphasis on the liberal at the expense of the mechanical arts.²⁷⁶ In 1875, the trustees of the freshly constituted Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore hired Gilman away from California – partly on Eliot's recommendation – to build their school into the American equivalent of one of the great European universities. Under Gilman's leadership, Hopkins became America's first modern university, and for a while the only one with a graduate school. In fact, it was initially all graduate school.²⁷⁷ Undergraduate teaching, Gilman told *The Nation's* editor E. L. Godkin in January, 1875 as he was beginning to organize the curriculum, would be left to other schools. (The implication

²⁷⁶ Verne A. Stadtman, *The University of California, 1869-1968* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1970), esp. pp. 68-84.

²⁷⁷ As unlikely as it now seems, American graduate education almost began in Tennessee, when a group of wealthy and influential southerners concerned about northern dominance of higher education set about to found a great *southern* university. (The University of Virginia, they feared was neither “sufficiently Southern, sufficiently central, [nor] sufficiently cottonized” to satisfy the need.) The result was The University of the South, established at Sewanee, on top of Monteagle Mountain, near Chattanooga, in October, 1860. Its founders hoped to “secure for the South a Literary centre, a point at which mind may meet mind, and learning encounter learning, and the wise, and the good, and the cultivated, may receive strength and polish, and confidence, and whence shall go forth a tone that shall elevate the whole country.” Four years later the university's buildings and library collection had been destroyed, and its main backer, Louisiana Episcopal Bishop (and Confederate General) Leonidas Polk, killed in action near Atlanta. The man most likely to have taken Polk's place and to have rebuilt the school, former University of Mississippi president F. A. P. Barnard, had sided with the North; in 1864, he became the president of Columbia. See: Richard J. Storr, *The Beginnings of Graduate Education in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), pp. 117-128. The quotes are on pp. 118 and 120, respectively.

seems to have been that he meant other, *lesser* schools.) Godkin was impressed with the plan, and hoped that Hopkins would “enable the country to play its proper part in the best intellectual work of the day.”²⁷⁸

To begin his tenure as the head of a major American university, Gilman took exploratory trips to Britain and Ireland, to Austria, Germany, and Switzerland, and to France. He was especially impressed with the newly revamped *Kaiser Wilhelm Universität* in Straßburg – the Alsatian city that had recently come, once again, under German control – as well as with the Humboldt brothers' (Alexander and Wilhelm) efforts at the University of Berlin. It would be hard to overemphasize the extent to which German universities dominated higher education in the late nineteenth century, even in America. Nearly ten thousand Americans studied in Germany in the nineteenth century, and they wound up making up a good percentage of this country's first university faculty members.²⁷⁹ Studying in Berlin in 1856, Andrew Dickson White, the future president of Cornell, saw his “ideal of a university not only realized, but extended and glorified – with renowned professors, with ample lecture-halls, with everything possible in the way of illustrative materials, with laboratories, museums, and a concourse of youth from all parts of the world.” Returning home, White resolved to “do something for university education” in the United States.²⁸⁰ He was starting on the right foot. If a young man of

²⁷⁸ See Godkin's “Notes” in *The Nation* 20/500 (January 28, 1875), p. 60.

²⁷⁹ I have taken this number from Richard Hofstadter and Walter P. Metzger, *The Development of Academic Freedom in the United States* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), p. 365. I owe my understanding of developments in Germany largely to Metzger's chapter “The German Influence,” pp. 367-412. Even my own graduate school department, at Vanderbilt, was initially staffed by several graduates of the University of Leipzig. See: Conkin, *Gone with the Ivy: A Biography of Vanderbilt University* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985).

²⁸⁰ Andrew Dickson White, *The Autobiography of Andrew Dickson White* (New York: The Century Company, 1905), p. 291.

White's era wished to pursue a career in the academy, his path almost invariably took him through Tübingen, Leipzig, Heidelberg, or some other Teutonic college town.

What Elliot, Gilman, White, and others hoped to reproduce in the United States were the German universities' freedom from ecclesiastical control and their faculties' dedication to *Wissenschaft* – a word most often translated as “science,” although its German meaning is much broader and more complicated than that English word allows.²⁸¹ *Wissenschaft's* complex etymology is related to matters concerning nineteenth-century German educational policy, specifically *Lehrfreiheit* (loosely, “academic freedom”), and to the concept of *Bildung*, a highly personal quest to be educated that had grown out of the German Romantic period. Like German university professors today, nineteenth-century Bavarian, Prussian, and Saxon academics were civil servants, employed by the state. This insulated them from the most pressing of the many extracurricular concerns that American professors had to contend with, among them: local intellectual idiosyncrasies, meddling clergymen, and chronic underfunding.²⁸² Unlike regular bureaucrats, however, German professors were set apart by the privilege of *Lehrfreiheit*: the freedom to research, publish, and lecture on topics entirely of their own choosing, without outside interference. This right was even enshrined in the Prussian Constitution of 1850, which proclaimed that “science and its teaching” should remain “free.”²⁸³ Most importantly – unlike the majority of their colleagues in America –

²⁸¹ Menand suggests “pure learning” as a more accurate translation, which seems reasonable even if a bit awkward. See: *The Metaphysical Club*, p. 256.

²⁸² On the problem of money, one observer wrote that an American professor was often “thankful if his quarter's salary is not docked to whitewash the college fence.” As quoted in Hofstadter and Metzger, *The Development of Academic Freedom in the United States*, p. 375.

²⁸³ The Prussian Constitution is quoted in Hofstadter and Metzger, *The Development of Academic Freedom in the United States*, p. 385.

German professors did not have to answer to theological overseers. As George Santayana observed in an otherwise sharply critical examination of German philosophy, the “controlling purpose” of the German university was neither political nor religious; it was philosophical. “In no other country,” Santayana wrote, “has so large, so industrious, and (amid its rude polemics) so coöperative a set of professors devoted itself to all sorts of learning.”²⁸⁴ This was something that visiting Americans found bracing. German professors, they observed, were mostly left alone to pursue their scholarly passions. The students, for that matter, were too. (They were protected by a similar concept: *Lernfreiheit*, a student's right to arrange his education to his own liking.) This led to the general impression that German academics' central task consisted of the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, rather than for some utilitarian or moral end.

This association between the pursuit of knowledge and freedom (very broadly defined) was fortified by *Wissenschaft's* relationship to *Bildung*, another complex term often badly translated (usually as “education”). *Bildung* is much more than just “an education” in the usual sense of the word. Its meaning has long been tied up with notions of maturation and the acquisition of wisdom, with becoming fully human even. (Wilhelm von Humboldt, a reformer whose role in German higher education closely parallels Charles Elliot's work in the United States, suggested it was like trying to cram as much of the world into oneself as possible.)²⁸⁵ *Bildung* and *Wissenschaft* were the intellectual

²⁸⁴ George Santayana, *Egotism in German Philosophy* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916), p. 29.

²⁸⁵ The German verb, (*sich*) *bilden*, is reflexive and is almost never used as a synonym for the other education-related verbs that involve a variation on the teacher-student relationship – *erziehen* (broadly speaking, “to educate,” but most often used in the sense of “to bring up,” as in raising a child), *lehren* (“to teach”), or *unterrichten* (“to instruct”). Information can be passed along, one generation to the next, but an education – a highly personal, highly subjective enterprise – has to be won. See: David Sorkin, “Wilhelm Von Humboldt: The Theory and Practice of Self-Formation (*Bildung*), 1791-1810” in *The Journal of the History of Ideas* 44/1 (January – March, 1983), pp. 55–73.

ideals of the nineteenth century German-speaking world, and together they were a powerful force. Freud, Hegel, Kierkegaard, Marx, Nietzsche, and Schopenhauer – to name only the most famous recipients – all earned doctorates at Germanic universities in the 1800s.

America's small colleges could not compete with these Teutonic archetypes. The future Columbia University president Nicholas Murray Butler's years in Germany “left an ineffaceable impression of what scholarship meant, of what a university was and of what a long road higher education in America had to travel before it could hope to reach a place of equal elevation.”²⁸⁶ This was, of course, a large part of the impetus for Eliot's lusty embrace of innovation and for the string of universities founded in the last third of the nineteenth century, including Cornell, Vanderbilt, and Stanford – whose German motto reads *Die Luft der Freiheit Weht* or “The Wind of Freedom Blows.” The influence the German experience had on Daniel Coit Gilman was so great that Johns Hopkins was colloquially known as “the Göttingen at Baltimore.” These were schools where, in their founders' imaginations, a highly idealized research scientist could singlemindedly pursue his work regardless of religious or political objections – regardless of *any* objections.

There was more. “To an unmeasurable degree,” historian Walter Metzger observes, “the German university's reputation rested on the remembrance of freedoms enjoyed that were not in any narrow sense academic.” Rather, they had to do with a certain German *joie de vivre* – or, more appropriately perhaps, *Deutsche Lebensfreude*. Only “an American in whom the asceticism of Calvin and the prudishness of Victoria

²⁸⁶ Nicholas Murray Butler, *Across the Busy Years: Recollections and Reflections*, volume 1 (New York: Charles Scriber's Sons, 1935), p. 127.

were deeply and ineradicably ingrained could resist the blandishments of the carefree German Sabbath, the *Kneipe* in the afternoon, and perhaps an innocent, initiating love affair.”²⁸⁷ Germany's generally more permissive atmosphere seems to have acted like the bitters in a cocktail, bringing out the most pleasant flavors of the more potent ingredients. G. Stanley Hall, the renowned psychologist and first president of Clark University, fell hopelessly for all of it. “Germany almost remade me,” he wrote in his autobiography, noting the huge sense of relief he felt after arriving in Leipzig, a release from “the narrow inflexible orthodoxy, the settled lifeless *mores*, the Puritan eviction of joy” – in short “the provincialism” – that he had suffered under back home. Hall even developed a taste for beer and spent hours in Leipzig's many barrooms (including, one suspects, the *Auerbachs Keller*, scene of Faust's famous ride on an enchanted wine barrel). Upon his return from a second stint in Europe, he found American prudery and teetotalism “not only depressing, but almost exasperating.”²⁸⁸

American university reform, when it finally came, took place in a broader climate of growing doubt about moral certitude and of increasing uncertainty that the intellect could definitively figure these sorts of things out. Into this inviting clime strolled the German ideals. *Wissenschaft* informed emerging notions of science, undergirding American intellectuals' desire to question common-sense notions about knowledge, morality, and religion. *Bildung* inspired the concept of a “liberal” education, which

²⁸⁷ Hofstadter and Metzger, *The Development of Academic Freedom in the United States*, p. 393.

²⁸⁸ See Hall's remarkably forthright *Life and Confessions of a Psychologist* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1927), esp. pp. 219-224. The quotes are from p. 223. Even the frequently dyspeptic William James seems to have enjoyed Germany's freer social climate; in Berlin in the 1870s, he became involved with a young woman, another American living abroad. Sadly, she turned out to be deeply troubled, yet another heartache for the sensitive James. Louis Menand says that the girl was “even more neurotic than [James] was.” Menand, *American Studies* (New York: Farrar, Strous and Giroux, 2002), p. 22.

produced a new kind of person, one equipped with a set of skills and tools that could be used to solve problems rather than someone in possession of a block of answers called “truth.” *Lehr-* and *Lernfreiheit* were the fuel that powered the engines of questioning and uncertainty that allowed for the rejection of beliefs and practices that did not stand up to scientific scrutiny. This was no accident; the fathers of modern American higher education were deeply influenced by their years in Germany, and the experiences they had there underlay most of the late-nineteenth-century developments they undertook.

German scholarship may have been deeply appealing to these men, but this was not without its difficulties. *Wissenschaft* and *Bildung*, concepts that had excited the most gifted of Germany's young American students, were culturally specific and historically contingent. Unleashed in the New World, they evolved and cross-pollinated. They also – as invasive species are wont to do – wrought a certain amount of havoc. Unlike in Europe, American intellectuals had to operate in a society whose members, as intellectual historian David Hollinger has observed, thought of Christianity as something much more serious than just “a nominal affiliation inherited from a distant past.”²⁸⁹ Julie Reuben has written that the “separation of knowledge and morality was an unintended result of the university reforms of the late nineteenth century.”²⁹⁰ This was a very serious development, because in nineteenth-century America, the cultural standing of Christian morality was sacrosanct. Rumors of American students being turned into atheists floated back across the Atlantic. Even as early as 1819, George Bancroft went out of his way to reassure Harvard president John Thornton Kirkland that he was in “no danger of being

²⁸⁹ David A. Hollinger, “Jesus Matters in the USA” in *Modern Intellectual History* 1/1 (2004), p. 135.

²⁹⁰ Julie A. Reuben, *The Making of the Modern University: Intellectual Transformation and the Marginalization of Morality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 4.

led away from the religion of [his] Fathers” during his stay in Göttingen.²⁹¹

The work of German theologians was especially caustic. Drawing on the ideas of Schleiermacher and Hegel, F. C. Baur and his colleagues at the University of Tübingen argued for a much later dating of many of the Pauline epistles, thus challenging the common belief that the apostle Paul had actually authored them.²⁹² Baur also offered an interpretation of early Christian writings that drew on the political and cultural context in which they had been written, rather than trying to fit them into an eternal, cosmic, and ultimately timeless storyline. After a post-baccalaureate stay in Berlin in the 1860s, Charles A. Briggs brought the German heresies back to Union Theological Seminary in New York City. “The Bible has been treated as if it were a baby,” Briggs wrote in defense of the critical reading he had learned abroad, “to be wrapped in swaddling clothes, nursed, and carefully guarded lest it should be injured by heretics and skeptics.” He thought the Bible tough enough to stand the extra attention: “What peril can come to the Scriptures from a more profound critical study of them?” Briggs thought that religion, like everything else in the world, must adapt in order to survive. “Progress in religion, in doctrine, and in life,” he wrote, “is demanded of our age of the world more than any other.”

Briggs made a distinction between two kinds of critics: those who wanted to see the Bible discredited and those who wanted to see it better understood. He worried that a

²⁹¹ See Bancroft to Kirkland (January 1819) as quoted in Orie William Long, *Literary Pioneers: Early American Explorers of European Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1935) – I quote from a 1963 Russell and Russell (New York) reprint, p. 115.

²⁹² From Schleiermacher, Baur inherited the idea that one could study religion critically. From Hegel, he adopted the idea of the dialectic, arguing that modern, European Christianity was a synthesis of Jewish traditions and Pauline innovations. Johann Gottfried Eichhorn (in Göttingen) and Julius Wellhausen (in Greifswald) performed a similar surgery on the Pentateuch.

full-throated, uncritical defense of the Bible's infallibility would ultimately only serve to undermine the faith by making Christians seem ridiculous. Critics looking to tarnish Christianity, Briggs maintained, should be met not with “cries of alarm for the Church and the Bible,” but rather with “argument and candid reasoning.” In the 1891 address that inaugurated his tenure as the chair of biblical studies at Union, Briggs pounced, arguing that the Bible contained obvious errors that no one had been able to successfully explain away. The Presbyterians tried to have Briggs fired from his position, but rather than lose him, Union cut its ties with the Church.²⁹³

Higher criticism quickly spread. Andover and Newton, two of the oldest theological schools in the country, became modernist strongholds. The new University of Chicago Divinity School was ostensibly Baptist, but its true identity was rather broadly ecumenical and, most importantly, liberal. Conservatives were outraged. “German universities,” the president of Wheaton College, an evangelical school in Illinois, wrote in 1893, “have done more to make the Bible contemptible than have all other causes since Luther rescued it from the convent of Erfurt.”²⁹⁴

For all of the wailing and gnashing of teeth that accompanied anti-modernists' opposition to higher criticism – Billy Sunday is reported to have once observed that if one were to “turn hell over” the phrase “Made in Germany” would be stamped on the

²⁹³ Mark S. Massa, *Charles Augustus Briggs and the Crisis of Historical Criticism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990). The quotes are from Briggs's *Biblical Study*, excerpted in Hollinger and Capper (eds.), *The American Intellectual Tradition, Vol. II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 37-41. See also: the transcript of PBS's *God in America* (Part IV, “A New Light” - written by Sarah Colt and Thomas Jennings), available online at: <http://www.pbs.org/godinamerica/transcripts/hour-four.html> (last accessed: August 14, 2011) and Hart and Muenther, “Turning Points in American Presbyterian History – Part 8: Confessional Revision in 1903” in *New Horizons* (August 2005).

²⁹⁴ As quoted in W. Wyeth Willard, *Fire on the Prairie: The Story of Wheaton College* (Wheaton: Van Kampen Press, 1950), p. 64.

bottom – it is both curious and ironic just how indebted to German ideas late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century evangelical scholars actually were. Fundamentalists were particularly enamored with the concept of *Weltanschauung*, or “worldview,” which heavily informed their response to modernism. In 1891, when Scottish evangelical theologian James Orr was invited to give the Kerr Lecture at the University of Edinburgh, he lamented how little work had been done to articulate to the English-speaking world the word's importance.²⁹⁵ “The history of this term has yet to be written,” he observed in the first lecture, a cause of some consternation, because, Orr noted, “within the last two or three decades the word has become exceedingly common in all kinds of books dealing with the higher questions of religion and philosophy – so much so as to have become in a manner indispensable.”²⁹⁶ Although the word was probably coined – at least philosophically speaking – by Immanuel Kant and developed to a great extent by his protégé Johann Fichte, it is in F. W. J. Schelling's work that conservative evangelical thinkers found a compelling explication. In Kant and Fichte, a *Weltanschauung* seems to

²⁹⁵ Orr's intellectual influence on American fundamentalists – even though he was born in Scotland and spent the vast majority of his life studying and teaching in Glasgow – was considerable. He lectured widely in the United States, and served as visiting faculty at Allegheny College, Auburn Seminary, and even Princeton. He was also a key contributor *The Fundamentals*. His books were required reading in most conservative American seminaries and Bible colleges, and his work was regularly called upon to settle private theological disputes among fundamentalists. See, for example; Carl F. H. Henry, *Confessions of a Theologian* (Waco: Word Press, 1986), p. 75, as well as letters from J. Gresham Machen to G. A. Dunn, (January 7, 1926) in WTS (JGM) 1/“A-M” and J. Oliver Buswell to Henrietta Mears (January 22, 1936) in the PCA HCA, 3/285/18.

²⁹⁶ From the published version of the Kerr Lectures: James Orr, *The Christian View of God and the World as Centering in the Incarnation* (New York: Charles Scribners's Sons, 1908), p. 365. This was a common observation, and it is echoed in the work of conservative thinker Richard Weaver, whose *Ideas Have Consequences* deeply affected America's burgeoning postwar secular conservative movement. Weaver writes: “Those who have not discovered that world view is the most important thing about a man, as about the men composing a culture, should consider the train of circumstances which have with perfect logic proceeded from this. The denial of universals carries with it the denial of everything transcending experience. The denial of everything transcending experience means inevitably – though ways are found to hedge on this – the denial of truth.” Richard Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences*, p. 3.

be nothing more complicated than our awareness of the physical world around us; in Schelling, however, the meaning changes dramatically. Martin Heidegger took the most famous notice of this shift. According to Heidegger, Schelling made *Weltanschauung* into “a self-realized, productive as well as conscious way of apprehending and interpreting the universe of beings.”²⁹⁷ In other words, as evangelical philosopher David Naugle has observed, “from its birth in Kant to its use by Schelling, the term’s primary meaning shifted from the *sensory* to the *intellectual* perception of the cosmos.”²⁹⁸ Rather than a more-or-less unconscious observation of the fact of being, a *Weltanschauung* became a quite conscious way of *knowing about* being.

For evangelicals, Christianity was as much a worldview – in the latter sense – as a religion. Christianity’s “fundamental assumptions,” Orr declared in the Kerr lecture, ought to be “in harmony with the conclusions [of] sound reason.” Although not “a scientific system,” he granted, “if its views of the world be true,” they would have to be “reconcilable with all that is certain and established in the results of science.” This is why Darwinism had been so disruptive in the United States; beginning with the theory of natural selection, science had begun to develop a conception of the world that was fundamentally at odds with a Christian worldview. The Darwinian world was random

²⁹⁷ Martin Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, revised edition (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), p. 5.

²⁹⁸ David Naugle, *Worldview: The History of a Concept* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002), p. 61 – emphasis added. Naugle’s book is one of the few to tackle the subject in English. It should come perhaps as no surprise that there is an overwhelming amount of German-language literature on the idea of *Weltanschauung*. In addition to Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Heidegger, a small sampling: Alfred Götze, “Weltanschauung” in *Euphorion: Zeitschrift für Literatur-geschichte* 25 (1924), pp. 42-51; Franz Dornseiff, “Weltanschauung: Kurzgefasste Wortgeschichte” in *Die Wandlung: Eine Monatsschrift* 1 (1945-46), pp. 1086-88; Werner Betz, “Zur Geschichte des Wortes ‘Weltanschauung’” in *Kursbuch der Weltanschauung* (Frankfurt: Verlag Ullstein, 1980), pp. 18-28; Andreas Meier, “Die Geburt der ‘Weltanschauung’ im 19. Jahrhundert” in *Theologische Rundschau* 62 (1997), pp. 414-420.

and arbitrary with little room for a deity that resembled American evangelicals' characterization of "God" – a caring and creative father-figure.

Even as Orr delivered his speech, the doubt and uncertainty that were modernism's obsessions – as well as the thrillingly shaky foundation upon which it built itself – had already begun to alienate intellectual conservatives, including many Christians. Orr noted in his lecture that "the opposition which Christianity has to encounter is no longer confined to special doctrines or to points of supposed conflict with the natural sciences." Rather, the conflict "extends to the whole manner of conceiving of the world, and of man's place in it, the manner of conceiving of the entire system of things, natural and moral, of which we form a part. It is no longer an opposition of detail, but of principle." As Orr saw it, the emerging fundamentalist-modernist controversy was an all-out ideological war. He advised that evangelicals put forth a much greater effort to develop a Christian worldview. If Christianity was to be successfully defended from the onslaught, believers had better set about developing a "comprehensive method" of resistance. "It is the Christian view of things in general which is attacked," Orr wrote, "and it is by an exposition and vindication of the Christian view of things as a whole that the attack can most successfully be met."

This kind of campaign would require serious battlements, and in the early years of the twentieth century, Princeton Theological Seminary – "a Gibraltar of Orthodoxy" as one scholar has termed it – provided the fundamentalist movement with nearly all of what little intellectual firepower it possessed.²⁹⁹ Princeton was one of the few places that

²⁹⁹ Ned Stonehouse, *J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Press, 1954), p. 61-62.

aspiring fundamentalist intellectuals could go for doctoral training. In fact, it was the only strongly conservative seminary with any kind of academic reputation at all. Partly this was due to its esteemed history, but mostly it was the result of its being the academic home of Professor J. Gresham Machen.

Founded in 1812, Princeton was the nineteenth-century home of several towering figures in the conservative evangelical intellectual tradition, Archibald Alexander, Charles Hodge, and B. B. Warfield among them. Alexander was the seminary's first president, and he set the tone that would dominate most of the institution's early history. His *Brief Outline of the Evidences of Christianity* is a robust defense of the faith. Section II of the book carries this obstreperous title: "If Christianity Be Rejected There is No Other Religion Which Can Be Substituted in Its Place; At Least, No Other Which Will At All Answer the Purpose for Which Religion Is Desirable." Hodge was the country's most eminent opponent of Darwinian evolution until his death in 1878. The "denial of design in nature," Hodge maintained, was equivalent to "the denial of God." (Hodge was also one of Charles Briggs's most vocal critics.) A nephew of Kentucky's John C. Breckinridge – who was ejected from the U. S. Senate for his outspoken pro-Confederate views – Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield was the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries' most vociferous proponent of biblical inerrancy.³⁰⁰

A Baltimorean from a wealthy old family with maternal roots in Georgia's antebellum aristocracy, J. Gresham Machen was the most talented and intellectually

³⁰⁰ See: Archibald Alexander, *A Brief Outline of the Evidences of the Christian Religion* (Princeton: Princeton Press, 1825), p. 32; John W. Stewart and James H. Moorehead (eds.), *Charles Hodge Revisited: A Critical Appraisal of His Life and Work* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002) and as quoted in Reuben, *The Making of the Modern University*, p. 31; Gary L. W. Johnson, David B. Calhoun, Mark A. Noll, *B. B. Warfield: Essays on His Life and Thought* (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 2007).

rigorous conservative theologian of his day. In 1901, he earned an undergraduate degree at Johns Hopkins, and then enrolled as a theology student at Princeton Seminary, completing his studies there in 1905. Like so many other young men of his day, he spent the next year in Germany, studying theology at the universities of Marburg and Göttingen. Machen, too, was charmed by the freedom he found in Europe. He joined a fraternity and wrote boastfully to his brother of the many hours he was spending enjoying fine food, drinking beer, playing tennis, and dancing with women. He also admitted in letters to his parents that while the modernist interpretations of the Bible that he was being exposed to were most certainly blasphemous, they also held an undeniable intellectual appeal. (His mother responded with impassioned pleas for him to avoid getting too mixed up with the critics.)³⁰¹ What seems to have most impressed Machen about his professors was the rigor with which they approached their work. He later described the time he spent abroad as “an epoch” that finally forced him to confront the intellectual inadequacies of conservative Christian scholarship. In the fall of 1906, determined to remedy these shortcomings, and certain that they could only be overcome from the university (as opposed to the pulpit), Machen joined the faculty at Princeton Seminary, a place he described as “imbued with university spirit in its best form.”³⁰² His goal at Princeton, he wrote to his mother, was to “make modern culture subservient to the gospel.”³⁰³ Machen wanted Princeton Seminary to become, like his *alma mater* Johns

³⁰¹ See the letters from J. Gresham Machen to his brother Tom Machen (esp. May 13 and July 15 1906) and from Minnie Gresham Machen to J. Gresham Machen (esp. September 17, 1906) in the J. Gresham Machen Archives at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia.

³⁰² As quoted in D. G. Hart's *Defending the Faith: J. Gresham Machen and the Crisis of Conservative Protestantism in Modern America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), p. 24.

³⁰³ Machen to Minnie Gresham Machen (October 4, 1908) in the Machen Archives, Philadelphia.

Hopkins, an American Göttingen. When the seminary's students staged a small-scale revolt over what they saw as the increasingly academic nature of their training, Machen's reaction revealed little sympathy.³⁰⁴ The students wanted, he wrote to his mother, “to be pumped full of material which, without any real assimilation or any intellectual work of any kind, they can pump out again upon their unfortunate congregations.” They were rebelling, he continued tellingly, against “modern university methods.”³⁰⁵

His students' unwillingness to work up the requisite enthusiasm he thought university study required put Machen in a persistently sour mood by the middle of the 1910s. For a time he considered leaving Princeton altogether, but quickly realized that there was nowhere else to go; the seminary was, after all, the best theologically conservative school in the country. The First World War gave Machen the escape that he was looking for. In 1917, he volunteered with the YMCA, which sent him to France to run a canteen. Machen set up shop in a series of half-destroyed houses near the front lines, and then spent the last few months of the war selling cigarettes and hot chocolate to soldiers and citizens alike. In the end, the war both failed to provide the opportunities for adventure that he had sought and also turned out to be far more horrible in reality than he had anticipated. The devastation, he wrote to his family, was “abominable.” He returned to the United States in 1919 grateful for the regularity of his life at the seminary, and with a renewed sense of commitment to his work there.³⁰⁶

The American religious environment to which Machen returned after the war was

³⁰⁴ For more on this miniature rebellion, see: Ronald Thomas Clutter, *The Reorientation of Princeton Theological Seminary, 1900-1929* (Th.D. diss. Dallas Theological Seminary, 1982).

³⁰⁵ Machen to Minnie Gresham Machen (February 21 and March 14, 1909) in the Machen Archives, Philadelphia.

³⁰⁶ See the letters from Machen to Minnie Gresham Machen (May – September 1918) in the Machen Archives, Philadelphia.

far different than the one he had left to go escapading, however. By 1920, the disagreements between theological liberals and theological conservatives that were just beginning to simmer in the 1910s were beginning to boil over. Machen's own feelings toward the fundamentalist movement were always somewhat ambiguous. When they went all in on Prohibition, for example, he defended a man's right to take a drink – a stance which caused him considerable trouble in his congregation and also cost him an academic chair. Nevertheless, Machen's *Christianity and Liberalism*, which appeared in 1923, was by far the most compellingly argued defense of the anti-modernist position. In it, Machen insisted that modernist interpretations of Christianity were not actually Christianity at all, but rather an entirely new religion.³⁰⁷ The liberal believer, he reasoned, “after abandoning to the enemy one Christian doctrine after another” was left not with Christianity, but with a belief system that must be put “in a distinct category” as Machen delicately put it. “The great redemptive religion which has always been known as Christianity,” he wrote later in the book, a bit more directly, “is battling against a totally diverse type of religious belief.” Without supernaturalism, without the possibility that the Bible was the source of eternal truths, Christianity became contingent and thereby,

³⁰⁷ A great many people who were not fundamentalists actually agreed with Machen's assessment of the situation – including, surprisingly, both H. L. Mencken and Walter Lippmann. If Machen were wrong about what liberal theology meant to Christianity, Mencken wrote, “then the science of logic is a hollow vanity, signifying nothing.” He admired Machen's “remarkable clarity and cogency as an apologist” – even as he found Machen's beliefs “excessively dubious.” The obituary that Mencken wrote for Machen is most telling. Mencken was remarkably generous: “The Rev. J. Gresham Machen, D. D., who died out in North Dakota on New Year's Day [1937], got, on the whole, a bad press while he lived, and even his [other] obituaries did much less than justice to him. The generality of readers, I suppose, gathered thereby the notion that he was simply another Fundamentalist on the order of William Jennings Bryan and the simian faithful of Appalachia. But he was actually a man of great learning, and, what is more, of sharp intelligence.” There was still at least a little of the old vitriol Mencken had famously exhibited in Dayton; the article's conclusion is classically droll: “Dr. Machen was to Bryan as the Matterhorn is to a wart.” Lippmann called *Christianity and Liberalism* “cool and stringent,” a book with “acumen,” “saliency,” even “wit.” See: Mencken “Dr. Fundamentalis” in *The Baltimore Evening Sun* (January 18, 1937) and “The Impregnable Rock” in *American Mercury* 9/ (1931), p. 411, along with Lippmann, *Preface to Morals*, p. 32.

according to Machen's logic, false. "If everything we say about God," Machen wrote, "has value merely for this generation, and if something contradictory to it may have equal value in some future generation, then the thing that we are saying is not true even here and now."³⁰⁸

For a brief moment, in the mid-twenties, it looked as though Machen and his colleagues might mount a serious campaign to resist the theological changes that so troubled anti-modernists. But, righteous separatism would again prove an ineluctable albatross. In 1929, Princeton Seminary, the country's most formidable bastion of conservative Presbyterianism, was breached. The Presbyterian General Assembly voted that year to allow two signers of the Auburn Affirmation to sit on the school's board of directors. Drawn up in 1924, the Auburn Affirmation was, in effect, Presbyterian moderates' parry and riposte to the fundamentalist attack. The touch landed. The Auburn Affirmation declared that the church had no right to require tests of orthodoxy beyond the Westminster Confession of Faith. Conservatives had hoped to oblige aspiring Presbyterian ministers to pledge their belief in biblical inerrancy, in the virgin birth, in bodily resurrection, and in the authenticity of Christ's miracles – in other words: in some of fundamentalists' favorite issues. When the General Assembly rejected these obligations, Machen and his followers were furious. The resulting fissure would cause Princeton to break apart. With supporters of the Auburn Affirmation on the Seminary's board, fundamentalists declared Princeton apostate and decamped. They re-entrenched not far down the Delaware River at a new institution, Westminster Theological Seminary,

³⁰⁸ See: J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1923), p. 2, 5 and "What is Christianity" in D. G. Hart (ed.), *J. Gresham Machen: Selected Shorter Writings* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2004), p. 91-94.

in Philadelphia.

The address Machen gave to open the new seminary set an almost insufferably defensive tone and – as was so often the case among fundamentalists – his truculent pose as a Christ figure standing against the Princeton pharisees was far less successful than he hoped it would be. Only three professors and a few dozen students left civilized Princeton for Westminster's wilderness. “Our new institution is devoted to an unpopular cause,” he told them on the first day of classes in the late summer of 1929; “it is devoted to the service of One who is despised and rejected by the world and increasingly belittled by the visible church, the majestic Lord and Saviour who is presented to us in the Word of God. From him men are turning away one by one. His sayings are too hard, his deeds of power too strange, his atoning death too great an offense to human pride.” From this rather prickly position, Machen lashed out, warning theological liberals that “no mystic Christ whom we seek merely in the hidden depths of our own souls” could ever replace the very real “majestic Lord and Saviour” conservatives saw in the scriptures. Even modernism's less-resolute enemies were a target: “Most seminaries, with greater or less clearness and consistency, regard not the Bible alone, or the Bible in any unique sense, but the general phenomenon of religion as the subject-matter of their course.” Westminster would follow no such plan. “From all such,” Machen preached to his remnant, “we turn away.”³⁰⁹ Westminster trudged along for the next several years, but after Machen's death in 1937, it was never really able to regain its footing.

Westminster's failure to become the next Princeton marked a decisive defeat for

³⁰⁹ J. Gresham Machen, “Westminster Theological Seminary: Its Purpose and Plan” in *The Presbyterian* (October 10, 1929).

the fundamentalist movement. The lesson of its demise was not entirely lost, however. Beginning in the late 1920s, a number of fundamentalist-oriented schools started to restructure in accordance with the developments that had taken place at secular universities a generation before. Like Machen before them, fundamentalist scholars all over the country began to hope that they could incorporate many of the structural and curricular changes that the institutions most closely associated with the new American university system had gleaned from Germany. Gramsci would have said that they were suffering from “contradictory consciousness”; they wanted very much to reject the developments that had put the secular university ahead of the denominational college, but the “spontaneous philosophy” of the new system of higher education had rendered such a repudiation nearly impossible. They rejected modernism, but were forced to recognize the necessity of its institutional matrix.

In *Reforming Fundamentalism*, his history of Fuller Theological Seminary, George Marsden suggests that fundamentalists turned to this kind of intellectual rebuilding because they were tired of the failure of political action.³¹⁰ But, this formulation represents a false dichotomy, because one cannot meaningfully choose intellectual *over* political reform in an effort to promote an evangelical or any other kind of society. Marsden has put in competition two phenomena that are perhaps better thought of as cause and effect. Changes to the law are informed by ideas, but, ultimately, societies are ruled by statutes rather than concepts. Mid-century fundamentalists knew this, and it should come as no surprise that they did; as we shall see, they had been taught

³¹⁰ Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, pp. 7-8. This view is shared by Ed Larson, who notes that “the string of legislative defeats suffered in the 1920s” convinced fundamentalists to give up their legislative efforts and turn to the schoolhouse. Larson, *Trial and Error*, p. 83.

some variation of this idea over and over again from the time they started college – during the fundamentalist-modernist controversy – until the time they themselves became the fundamentalist movement's leaders and began calling themselves – in an effort to rise above fundamentalism's embarrassing past – “neo-evangelicals.”

In the 1930s, Wheaton College, in Illinois, became one of the leading centers of neo-evangelical thought. Unlike so many of the other small colleges in the Northeast and Midwest that were founded by nineteenth-century evangelicals (like Amherst or Oberlin, for example), Wheaton managed to maintain its robust religious identity long after the others had given theirs up. It was founded in 1860 by a Congregationalist pastor on the ruins of an earlier Methodist effort to start a school.³¹¹ The young college's board of trustees was split between the two denominations, but all of them were mid-nineteenth-century radicals of one type or another. It showed: half of the college's first class volunteered to fight in the Civil War. Matriculating students were also long expected to sign pledges that they would abstain from dancing and drinking, smoking and sex (at least the extramarital kind) so long as they were enrolled. After nearly going bankrupt during the economic depression of the 1870s, Wheaton weathered the rest of the nineteenth century in relative obscurity. (Although, its first president, Jonathan Blanchard, did run for president on the anti-masonic American Party ticket in 1882.)

Twenty-five miles to the east, Northwestern (a Methodist school) and the University of Chicago (a Baptist institution) were growing rapidly, but as they did, each fell under the influence of the then-predominant liberalizing trends. Wheaton's trustees

³¹¹ The aborted college was called the Illinois Institute. My interpretation of Wheaton's early history is based on W. Wyeth Willard, *Fire on the Prairie: The Story of Wheaton College* (Wheaton: Van Kampen Press, 1950).

dug in their heels; the school would not succumb. By 1900, the college's defining characteristic was its stiff opposition to higher criticism.

In 1926 – one year after the Scopes Trial – Wheaton began efforts to make itself a more academically rigorous institution.³¹² The Illinois school's trustees called upon J. Oliver Buswell to lead the effort. Buswell was a dedicated fundamentalist, but – contrary to the popular stereotype – he was no intellectual slouch, holding degrees from the University of Minnesota, the University of Chicago, and NYU. At thirty-one, he was also the nation's youngest college president. Buswell initiated an intensive campaign to raise academic standards at Wheaton, ensuring that it received accreditation, tripling enrollment, and even beginning a program in the natural sciences, with a field station in the Badlands of South Dakota – a major effort at reform considering how far university education, particularly in the sciences, had, by that time, drifted from a model conservative evangelicals trusted. By the end of the 1930s, Wheaton was the eighth largest liberal arts college in the country.

Buswell next went on a hiring spree. One of his boldest moves was an attempt to woo Henrietta Mears away from the Hollywood Presbyterian Church in Los Angeles, where she served as education director, a position from which she almost single-handedly managed to revolutionize Sunday-school education in the late 1920s. Concerned that many Sunday School teachers were grossly unqualified amateurs, Mears assembled a basic curriculum, set standards for instructors, organized camps, and whipped up both support and enthusiasm. A few years after she arrived in California, the Hollywood

³¹² A number of institutions attempted to tackle fundamentalism's intellectual inadequacy's in the 1920s and early 1930s: Eastern University in Philadelphia (founded 1925), The Master's College in Los Angeles (founded 1927), Bryan College in Dayton, TN (founded 1930), Bob Jones College (founded 1927 in Panama City, FL, but closed and reconstituted in Cleveland, TN in 1933).

Presbyterian Church had thousands of regular Sunday-school students. When a *Sunday School Times* editorial endorsed her program, Mears became a national leader. Although she remained a famous Sunday-school teacher for most of her career, Mears was a major presence in the world of fundamentalism, and she deeply impressed a large number of mid-century evangelical leaders, including Buswell.³¹³ “I believe you would be multiplying your influence a thousandfold if you could be on our staff here,” he wrote to Mears in January, 1936, in his recruitment letter. In addition to the official query, Buswell also enclosed a personal appeal: “We need you and your ministry very greatly just at this point in the development of the College,” he implored.³¹⁴ This charm campaign was unsuccessful, but the effort helps illustrate Buswell's ambition; at the time, Henrietta Mears was the most famous fundamentalist educator in the country.

Buswell was, on the other hand, able to hire Gordon H. Clark. Before joining the Wheaton faculty in 1936, Clark had finished both a B.A. in French and a Ph.D. in philosophy at the University of Pennsylvania. (Between these two degrees he studied at the Sorbonne.) After completing his graduate work at Penn – with a dissertation on Aristotle – Clark spent the better part of a decade working there as an instructor in the philosophy department. Although he seemed destined for a successful career in the academy, Clark was not a normal academic. He was instead a devout Presbyterian

³¹³ Two biographies have drawn admiring book jacket comments from Campus Crusade founder Bill Bright, from Richard Halverson of International Christian Leadership, from Oregon Senator Mark Hatfield, as well as from Billy Graham, who called Mears “one of the greatest Christians I have ever known.” See: Earl Roe's *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story* (Ventura: Gospel Light, 1990) and Marcus Brotherton, *Teacher: The Henrietta Mears Story* (Ventura: Gospel Light, 2006).

³¹⁴ See the letters from J. Oliver Buswell to Henrietta Mears (January 22, 1936) at the Presbyterian Church of America Historical Center Archives (St. Louis), in the Papers of J. Oliver Buswell (Collection MS 3), Box 285, Folder 18 (“Correspondence with Henrietta Mears, 1931-1937”). Henceforth PCA HCA 3/285/18.

interested in developing a purely Christian epistemology, a kind of Calvinist Aquinas. In the introduction to his most widely read book – the title of which, *A Christian View of Men and Things*, is both an obvious nod to and an attempted extension of James Orr's *The Christian View of God and the World* – Clark writes longingly about the “substantial unanimity” of thought that had prevailed in the nineteenth century. This unanimity, Clark argued, had provided nineteenth-century Americans and Europeans with whatever stability they had enjoyed. So long as Western people had believed in the same god and trusted that this god was in control of the universe, life had been “comparatively peaceful.” (Compared to just what Clark didn't say.) But then something happened: things got unappealingly messy; people lost their faith, or at least did not practice it in as earnest a way as Clark thought they might, and indeed once had. In the twentieth century, Christianity had become, Clark wrote, “not so much a serious conviction” as “the vestigial remains” of the faith of the fathers. He knew exactly whom to blame: philosophers. The “present ills of society,” Clark suggested, could be traced to a “general repudiation of the theistic philosophy on which western civilization was originally erected.” The most immediate cause of this “general repudiation” was the universities' abandonment of “the Christian presuppositions that [had] previously pervaded the entire curriculum.” The great problem of the age, Clark thought, was the modern university. This way of thinking was understandably out of bounds at Penn, and so Clark moved to Wheaton.

But Clark was unusual in an even more exuberant way: he thought the whole of Western philosophy, starting with Plato and running right on through to Dewey and

Heidegger, a failed exercise. Clark was particularly disgusted with secular epistemology, which was, he maintained, “inescapably” doomed. The proof lay in its inability to produce “eternal principles,” without which one could not make “intelligible objections” to truth claims. Without eternal principles, nothing could be said to be absolutely prohibited, and, therefore, it was possible to argue that everything was permissible. This led not to knowledge, Clark argued, but to “chaos.”³¹⁵ (This was, indeed, a return to Aquinas, whose fourth proof argues that without an objective standard, all comparisons – including truth comparisons – become meaningless.) On the other hand, Clark suggested, if one were simply to accept that the Bible is the revealed word of God (and therefore coequal with “Truth”) then everything else would fall easily into place. Accepting the presuppositions that come with Christian belief allows some of life's most pressing and persistent questions – Where do we come from? What should we live for? What happens when we die? – to be answered. In the marketplace of ideas, Clark thought this a decided advantage. “If,” Clark asked, “one system can provide plausible solutions to many problems while another leaves too many questions unanswered, if one system tends less to skepticism and gives more meaning to life, if one worldview is consistent while others are self-contradictory, who can deny us, since we must choose, the right to choose the more promising first principle?” As Clark saw it, the only way to build a reliable

³¹⁵ We might compare this position to John Dewey's: “Wherever the thought of unity rules, that of all-inclusive unity rules also. The popular philosophy of life is filled with desire to attain such an all-embracing unity, and formal philosophies have been devoted to an intellectual fulfillment of the desire. Consider the place occupied in popular thought by the search for *the* meaning of life and *the* purpose of the universe...It is impossible, I think, even to begin to imagine the changes that would come into life – personal and collective – if the idea of a plurality of interconnected meanings and purposes replaced that of *the* meaning and purpose. Search for a single, inclusive good is doomed to failure.” See: Dewey, “What I Believe,” first published in *Forum* 83 (March 1930). I am quoting from Larry A. Hickman and Thomas M. Alexander (eds.), *The Essential Dewey: Pragmatism, Education and Democracy*, vol. 1 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), p. 25.

philosophy for life was to apply the concept of *sola scriptura* to the entirety of human thought. And since he thought a reliable philosophy such an important part of good living, Clark chose to choose Christianity.³¹⁶ This was not a giving up, he thought, but a Kierkegaardian leap.

A former student wrote in Clark's *Festschrift* that his teacher was “interested in preparing a generation of Christian scholars for serious intellectual engagement,” and it is clear that Clark wanted his students to understand that their choice to accept Christianity's first principle was not cowardly or anti-intellectual, but rather an entirely rational reaction to the complicated problems that even a brief look at the history of philosophy illustrates.³¹⁷ “There has been,” he wrote, “an immense amount, not merely of inadequacy, but of inconsistency in some of the greatest philosophers.” If one could witness first hand all of the contradictions and confusions then one could feel confident in the choice to believe in Christianity's God. This approach seems to have been successful. A sampling of student papers from Clark's 1939 Contemporary Philosophy course at Wheaton suggest that his message was getting through. Hume took a particularly savage beating at the hands of Clark's charges. His philosophy, one concluded with a sophomore's smirk that one can almost see on the page, “is in effect a demonstration that consistent empiricism leads to skepticism.” Never mind, of course, that this was precisely Hume's point; he thought skepticism the only honest position one could hold.

Like many of Hume's contemporaries, however, Clark's students found his conclusions

³¹⁶ My understanding of Clark's philosophy comes from Gordon H. Clark, *A Christian View of Men and Things* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Press, 1952) and Ronald Nash (editor), *The Philosophy of Gordon H. Clark* (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1968). The quotes are from p. 34.

³¹⁷ See Carl F. H. Henry's chapter, “A Wide and Deep Swath” in Nash, *The Philosophy of Gordon H. Clark*, p. 15.

damnable.³¹⁸

George Marsden writes that Clark “inspired students to take seriously classical Reformed theology, to know equally well the history of Western thought, to be convinced that the Christian faith could be defended rationally, to be alert against modernism, and to regard ideas as the key to the future of civilization.”³¹⁹ Clark's work at Wheaton, combined with his sophisticated understanding of the practical importance of a worldview, indicates that American fundamentalists were more than just dupes and rubes clinging stubbornly and ignorantly to archaic, outmoded ideas about God and the universe. Clark trafficked not in obscurantism or abstruseness, but in clarity. His brand of fundamentalism was meant for dissenters interested in getting intellectually involved, rebels digging in for a fight. What Buswell's students learned from Clark was not to withdraw behind unexamined axioms in the face of the modernist critique, but rather to advance confidently, secure in the knowledge that their faith could withstand any attack.

While Clark provided young American evangelicals a theoretical understanding of the importance of *Weltanschauung*, the American disciples of Abraham Kuyper – a nineteenth-century Dutch preacher, politician, and education reformer – gave them a practical model of a politically engaged Christian worldview successfully at odds with modernism.³²⁰ Kuyper looms large in the American evangelical imagination and his accomplishments helped them acquire the confidence they needed to develop and begin

³¹⁸ See the packet of papers produced by the class of 1940 in Clark's faculty file in the Wheaton College Special Collections and Archive.

³¹⁹ Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, p. 45.

³²⁰ He may, actually, have been influenced by Orr, as well. See: Peter S. Heslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview: Abraham Kuyper's Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

to practice their distinctly Christian worldview.³²¹

The son of a minister in the Dutch Reformed Church, Kuyper was born in 1837 in the Dutch town of Maassluis, a seaport in the southwestern part of the Netherlands nestled comfortably between Rotterdam and the North Sea coast. The young Abraham seems to have been subject to a fairly typical late-nineteenth-century experience: when he arrived at the Netherlands' most prestigious university, in Leiden, in the mid-1850s, he promptly rejected his father's religion for a more stylish and up-to-date one, falling under the influence of Professor J. H. Scholten, a modernist. The conversion did not quite take, however. According to Kuyper's recollection it was the purportedly miraculous discovery of a collection of books by the sixteenth century Polish protestant Jan Łaski that began his journey back to the Calvinist orthodoxy of his native church.³²² Shortly after his graduation, Kuyper was appointed minister to the town of Beesd, where, by all accounts, he was duly impressed by the devoutness of the villagers, who found themselves only superficially under the young minister's spiritual guidance. In

³²¹ There is a fair amount of literature on Kuyper's life, though little of it is in English. The best English-language discussion of Kuyper's life is James D. Bratt's introduction to *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) and chapter 2 of his *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America: A History of a Conservative Subculture* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Press, 1984), pp. 14-36. John Bolt has also published the wide-ranging, if somewhat confusing, *A Free Church, A Holy Nation: Abraham Kuyper's American Public Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Press, 2001). For the truly intrepid, Bratt's essay – "In the Shadow of Mt. Kuyper: A Survey of the Field," in the *Calvin Theological Journal* 31/1 (April 1996): pp. 51-66 – provides a comprehensive review of all the literature regarding Kuyper's life, most of which is in Dutch. A short selection: P. Kasteel, *Abraham Kuyper* (Kampen: Kok, 1938); George Puchinger, *Abraham Kuyper: De jonge Kuyper (1837-1867)* (Franeker: T. Wever, 1987); Jan Romein, "Abraham Kuyper, 1837-1920: De klokkenist der kleine luyden," in Jan and Annie Romein (eds.), *Erflaters van onze beschaving* (Amsterdam: Querido's, 1971), pp. 747-770; Johannes Stellingwerf, *Dr. Abraham Kuyper en de Vrije Universiteit* (Kampen: Kok, 1987). Jan de Bruijn has edited a book of photos pertaining to Kuyper's life, *Abraham Kuyper: Leven en werk in beeld* (Amsterdam: Passage, 1987).

³²² The story is that Kuyper was having trouble tracking down Łaski's work in the great libraries of Europe, but managed to stumble upon a complete collection in his professor's father's private library in some far-flung Dutch village. Kuyper's dissertation compared Łaski's theology with Calvin's.

retrospect, it appears to have been entirely the other way around. An oft-repeated story about Kuyper tells of his final re-conversion to the Reformed Church at the hands of an elderly village woman known for her steady and determined piety. Whatever the ultimate cause, Kuyper became a mainstay of Dutch religious and political conservatism.

According to historian James Bratt, the “central motives behind all [Kuyper's] labor” were two: “to stir the orthodox from their passive isolation and to direct the ensuing passion against liberalism's political and cultural hegemony.”³²³ For Kuyper, all of the political and social upheaval of the nineteenth century had one source: Europe's increasing secularism. He had begun to think in this way in the 1860s, after he began corresponding with the Dutch aristocrat and secretary to King William II of Holland, Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, whose *Lectures on Unbelief and Revolution* were a kind of anti-*Communist Manifesto* that pinned the blame for Europe's 1848 upheavals primarily on the lax religious beliefs of the underclass.³²⁴ Kuyper was sure that, if politically mobilized, the Netherlands' conservative majority could roll back the socially and politically liberal advances that he thought had begun with the French Revolution and then travelled with Napoleon's armies across the continent. But they would first have to discredit the widespread and increasingly strong belief in human spiritual autonomy that had originated with the Enlightenment and then reached its climax in the *citoyen* of revolutionary France, who no longer recognized hereditary titles and who worshipped at the Temple of Reason rather than at the Cathedral of Notre Dame.

³²³ Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America*, p. 16.

³²⁴ Groen van Prinsterer further argued that civilized society was destined to be wracked by increasingly violent revolutions unless all of humanity could be persuaded to accept Christianity. See: Harry Van Dyke, *Groen Van Prinsterer's Lectures on Unbelief and Revolution* (Jordan Station: Wedge Publishing Foundation, 1989).

Shortly after he began writing to Groen van Prinsterer, Kuyper got deeply involved in Dutch politics. In 1876, he authored an election platform for members of the anti-revolutionary caucus of the Dutch Parliament, explaining that there was a natural ‘antithesis’ (*tegenstelling*) between Christian and non-Christian politics.³²⁵ In 1879, he used this platform to establish his own political party, the Anti-Revolutionary Party. The 1880s found Kuyper serving as the ARP's chairman. In 1894, he was elected to Parliament, where he served until the turn of the century, when he became the Prime Minister, a position he held from 1901-1905. Kuyper's most lasting political achievement was the articulation of a theory of government that would come to be known as “sphere sovereignty,” a kind of extreme version of the separation of church and state. (“Church” is used here very loosely, and rather than referring to a body of Christians with similar beliefs who regularly meet together for worship, it has a much broader meaning; it is a community of people with a similar “life and world view,” as Kuyper preferred to translate *Weltanschauung* into English.)³²⁶ According to Kuyper’s estimation, these different communities (*zuilen* or “pillars” is what he called them) should be responsible for running their own social institutions: newspapers, hospitals, unions, and – especially – schools and universities. Vincent Bacote argues that for Kuyper “there were two objectives in making the case for sphere sovereignty. First...that education had the right to operate free of government intervention, [and second]...that Christians had the right to operate their own confession-based institutions in a context that had grown hostile to the Reformed faith throughout the nineteenth century.”³²⁷ The primary purpose of the state,

³²⁵ Kuyper, *Ons Program*, fifth edition (Hilversum and Pretoria: Höveker & Wormser, 1907), pp. 72-77.

³²⁶ In Dutch he preferred *wereldbeschouwing*, which is etymologically related to the German.

³²⁷ Vincent E. Bacote, *The Spirit in Public Theology: Appropriating the Legacy of Abraham Kuyper*

then, was to divvy up tax revenue between the communities and, when necessary, to provide for their common defense. In Kuyper's view, the whole state apparatus ought be little more than a confederation of *Gemeenschappen* with limited power to influence any particular group's inner workings, what political theorist Chandran Kukathas has called – albeit in another context – an “association of associations.”³²⁸ This was by no means a withdrawal from politics – Kuyper was the Prime Minister and the head of a major political party after all – but rather a way of carving out a political and social space in which conservatives could operate without interference from secular liberals. This space would, of course, require a robust intellectual framework, and so, in 1880, Kuyper helped to found the *Vrije Universiteit* (Free University) in Amsterdam, a school he hoped would train young men in the dynamics of proper Christian belief. The college held its first classes in a church.

Kuyper's ideas found their easiest port of entry into the United States at Michigan's Calvin College, a Grand Rapids school that mostly served the Midwest's immigrant Dutch community. Founded in 1876, the college has always been – as its name suggests – a theologically conservative institution. In spite of the academic and intellectual upheaval taking place at its founding, Calvin continued strictly to maintain its ethno-religious identity. (In its early years, one was as likely to hear Dutch on the campus as English.) Geerhardus Vos, a celebrated American student of Kuyper's, was one the Calvin's most distinguished early professors. Born in the Netherlands in 1862, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), p. 62.

³²⁸ To his credit, Kuyper also thought that Dutch atheists, humanists, and socialists should be allowed the same latitude as Protestants and Catholics when it came to *zuij* formation. As I read both Kuyper and Kukathas, sphere sovereignty is actually surprisingly and curiously reminiscent of Kukathas's theory of the “liberal archipelago.” See Chandran Kukathas, *The Liberal Archipelago: A Theory of Diversity and Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003)

Vos moved with his family to Western Michigan in 1881 when his father received the call to be a pastor at a Dutch church there. Shortly after the family's arrival, the younger Vos enrolled at Calvin – then called simply The Theological School or even “onze school” (“our school” in Dutch) – but he eventually moved to Princeton Seminary. After graduating from Princeton, Vos spent a year studying theology in Berlin and then, in 1888, earned a Ph.D. from the University of Straßburg (incidentally, one of the two schools that had so impressed Daniel Coit Gilman on his 1875 European tour). Upon his graduation, Vos was actually offered an academic chair in Old Testament Theology at Kuyper's Free University. He declined, choosing instead to return to America and join the faculty at his *alma mater*. He was the first Calvin College faculty member to hold an advanced degree. Too talented and ambitious to remain affiliated with a backwoods ethnic college for very long, however, Vos left Calvin for Princeton for the second time five years later.³²⁹

Vos's influence at Calvin lingered even after this promotion. Louis Berkhof, Calvin Class of 1900, had barely missed studying with Vos as an undergraduate, but when he went on to Princeton Seminary, he picked Vos to be his mentor. Shortly after Berkhof's graduation from Princeton in 1902, he also took a faculty position at the *alma mater*. Berkhof's subsequent scholarly work owes a heavy debt to both Vos and Kuyper, who together receive several hundred citations in his *Systematic Theology* (a one-thousand page apologia for Calvinist orthodoxy that Wayne Grudem – author of another one-thousand page plea for Calvinism – has called “the most useful one-volume

³²⁹ Richard A. Harms, “Flashback: Gerhardus Vos, Calvin's First Ph.D.” in *The Spark: The Magazine for Alumni and Friends of Calvin College* (Fall 2003).

systematic theology available from any theological perspective.”)³³⁰

Kuyper and Vos's most fervent admirer at Calvin College, however, was also the school's most famous alumnus: Cornelius Van Til. Born in Holland and raised in Indiana, Van Til looms large in the complicated set of interlocking intellectual circles that helped bring Kuyper's ideas to America. As an undergraduate at Calvin, Van Til fell first under the spell of Louis Berkhof. Like his mentor, Van Til left for New Jersey after graduating from Calvin, where he enrolled at both Princeton Seminary and Princeton University, simultaneously pursuing a Master's degree in theology and a Doctorate in philosophy. (His 1927 dissertation compared Calvinist theology to German Idealism.) Gerhardus Vos was one of the first people Van Til sought out in Princeton, and although Vos did not assist Van Til's education in any official capacity, he became a trusted mentor and friend. (Van Til served as a pall bearer at Vos's funeral in 1949.)³³¹ In 1928, less than a year after Van Til graduated to become a small-town Michigan preacher, Princeton Seminary offered him a teaching job. Van Til accepted, returning just as the swelling controversy over the Auburn Affirmation was threatening to erupt once and for all. Among those who defected with Machen to Westminster was Van Til, whose theological militance was absolutely uncompromising.

Like Clark, Van Til's career was built on the idea that a thinker's first principles were instrumental in understanding the validity of his philosophy. Van Til was suspicious of non-Christian thinkers because he mistrusted their presuppositions. “I hold that belief in God is not merely as reasonable as other beliefs,” Van Til wrote, “or even a little or

³³⁰ Quote from Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), p. 1225.

³³¹ John R. Muether, *Cornelius Van Til: Reformed Apologist and Churchman* (Philipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2008), pp. 50-60.

infinitely more probably true than other beliefs; I hold rather that unless you believe in God you can logically believe in nothing else.”³³² It is no exaggeration to say that Van Til's career was mostly dedicated to explaining the futility, the impossibility even, of reasoning with non-Christians on neutral ground. He hoped, instead, that his students would seek “a head-on collision” with their ideological opponents.³³³ Combined with Kuyper's approach to building a society, this kind of aggressive stance assured that no one who sat through Van Til's lectures could come away with the idea that it was okay for anti-modernists to remain uninvolved in the life of the nation.

The list of people who studied with Clark and Van Til in the 1930s is long and reads like an honor roll of intellectually and politically engaged mid-twentieth-century neo-evangelicals. Unsurprisingly, all of these men shared a belief that the world was facing a terrible crisis, the essential cause of which was widespread secularism. All of them wound up deeply involved in efforts to stop it.

Harold John Ockenga, for example, was one of the couple of dozen students who made the move with Machen and Van Til from Princeton to Westminster in 1929. He went on to become the patrician pastor of Park Street Congregational Church in Boston, long a fundamentalist stronghold. In 1947, Ockenga became the first president of Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, a school paid for with radio evangelist Charles Fuller's considerable fortune. Ockenga agreed to a prominent place on Fuller's marquee only on the condition that the seminary be, from the beginning, an academically serious

³³² See: William White, *Van Til: Defender of the Faith* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishing, 1979) and Cornelius Van Til, *Why I Believe in God* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, n.d.); here as quoted in Wesley A. Roberts's essay in Wells, *Reformed Theology in America*, p. 121.

³³³ Van Til, “Hermann Dooyeweerd (A Personal Tribute)” in *Westminster Theological Journal* 33 (1977), p. 319.

institution, with a renowned faculty, who would be given the time and space necessary to produce rigorous scholarship. Fuller agreed, explaining to Ockenga that he wanted his seminary to become the “Cal Tech of the Evangelical World” and “the new Princeton.” The two men were hopeful that, within a decade, they could have most of the world's best evangelical scholars working together in Southern California. Among those they managed to hire were: Edward J. Carnell, who studied at both Wheaton and Westminster and who held an advanced degree in theology from the Harvard Divinity School; Everett Harrison, a Princeton Seminary graduate with close ties to Machen and Van Til; Harold Lindsell, a Wheaton philosophy undergrad who had recently completed a Ph.D. in history at NYU; and Carl F. H. Henry, another Wheaton alum, on the verge of receiving a Boston University Ph.D. in philosophy.³³⁴

Henry was probably the most intellectually talented of them all. The year before he began teaching at Fuller, he had published *Remaking the Modern Mind*, upbraiding Christian modernists because their belief system left “no room for supernatural revelation” and “no place for an objective, eternal moral order to which man stands in unique relation.” The bulk of the book was dedicated to the deconstruction of what Henry supposed were the three most rickety presuppositions holding up modern philosophy: 1) the inevitability of progress; 2) the inherent goodness of man; and 3) the ultimate reality of nature. For Henry, modern philosophy – stretching in an alliteratively appealing arc from Descartes to Dewey – was “an apostate phase in the history of world thought, a progressive experiment that proved the most costly in the wayward annals of

³³⁴ George Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing House, 1987), pp. 25-27.

man.” Henry concluded the book with the observation that “humanity itself [would] not long survive the ruins of its dying culture” unless it turned its back on what he awkwardly called “the secular philosophy of humanism or naturalism” and embraced the cause of Christ.³³⁵ *Remaking the Modern Mind* was dedicated to Gordon Clark and Cornelius Van Til.

Henry's influence might have been limited to the number of students he would have encountered over the course of a normal teaching career had he not also played an important role in the development of *Christianity Today*, a neo-evangelical periodical founded in 1956 by Billy Graham (another Wheaton alum) and backed by the fortune of oil tycoon J. Howard Pew.³³⁶ Graham hand-picked Henry to serve as the magazine's first editor-in-chief. Henry's inaugural editorial lamented that “a generation [had] grown up unaware of the basic truths of the Christian faith taught in the Scriptures and expressed in the creeds of the historic evangelical churches.” This worried Henry immensely, because, as he saw it, America's “stability and survival” depended upon the country's “enduring spiritual and moral qualities.” Without citing specific examples, Henry claimed to be

³³⁵ In the wake of the Second World War, this conclusion probably seemed less absurdly bombastic than it appears now. See: Henry, *Remaking the Modern Mind*, pp. 18, 19, and 265.

³³⁶ Pew's story is a quintessentially American one. His father, Joseph N. Pew, founded a humble heating company in late-nineteenth-century Pittsburgh. When substantial oil reserves were discovered in neighboring Ohio, Pew and his partners leased a pair of fields. In 1894, they also bought a Toledo refinery, thereby – in the spirit of the age – ensuring their total dominance of the local market. By 1901, these various concerns had been incorporated as the Sun Company, whose main drilling operation had moved to Texas. (This was just after the Spindletop boom.) After graduating from MIT, a young J. Howard Pew first worked for his father as a refinery engineer. He and his brothers finally took over the family company in 1912 when Joseph Pew died, opening a series of automobile service stations in Pennsylvania and Ohio, before branching out into shipbuilding and mining. J. Howard Pew's pockets were very deep, and he cared immensely about the magazine's well-being. “Of all the charities to which I contribute,” he once told a group of potential donors, “I consider *Christianity Today* to have priority.” See: the biographical sketch in John N. Ingham's *Biographical Dictionary of American Business Leaders* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1983), pp. 1081-1084 and the materials concerning Pew's fundraising efforts in the *Christianity Today* collection at the Billy Graham Center Archives, collection 8/box 1/folder 57.

gratified that several of America's leading statesmen had become “increasingly aware that the answer to the many problems of political, industrial, and social life” was “a theological one.” He bragged, further, that the magazine's headquarters were located in a building from which its managers could “look down Pennsylvania Avenue and glimpse the White House and other strategic centers of national life.” *Christianity Today's* location, Henry advised, was “a symbol of the place of the evangelical witness in the life of a republic.”³³⁷

These ideas were integral to the development of a system of evangelical institutions that were meant to promote the anti-modernist worldview, including the National Association of Evangelicals, to which we will next turn our attention. Groups like the NAE attempted to carve out the political space that American fundamentalists would need in order to turn back modernism. The young evangelicals who studied with Clark and Van Til at Wheaton and Westminster realized that their elders' political efforts had been too finely calibrated; they had fought a War of Maneuver even as they were losing a War of Position. Banning alcohol and outlawing evolution would no longer suffice; in order to win the ongoing culture war that had so dominated American life in the 1920s, anti-modernists would have to overturn not just the modernist revolution, but the entire Enlightenment.

³³⁷ Henry, “Why 'Christianity Today'” in *Christianity Today* 1/1 (October 15, 1956), pp. 20-23.

CHAPTER V

Ain't What You Do, It's the Way How You Do It

“Americans of all ages, all conditions, all minds constantly unite. Not only do they have commercial and industrial associations in which all take part, but they also have a thousand other kinds: religious, moral, grave, futile, very general and very particular, immense and very small.”

– Alexis de Tocqueville³³⁸

“This new association is rather a movement than an organization.”

– From an NAE Press Release³³⁹

In spite of the brisk growth of national organizations of all kinds in the early decades of the twentieth century – fraternal, professional, religious – most of America's anti-modernist Protestants remained unaffiliated with any kind of institution larger than their local church. This is noteworthy, but perhaps unsurprising; from the fundamentalist movement's earliest days, a truculent tendency to divide over minor theological differences had seriously hampered efforts to develop anti-modernism into a wholly unified historical bloc. Even the World Christian Fundamentals Association came up far short of its enormous potential. Having boldly staked its reputation on decisively winning the anti-evolution fight, the WCFA drifted off into obscurity toward the end of the 1920s, when it became clear the battle would end in an uneasy tie. The movement's fascination with colorful and charismatic leaders hardly helped. Once William Bell Riley

³³⁸ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*. I quote here from the University of Chicago Press edition, edited by Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago, 2000), p. 489.

³³⁹ From: “A Picture of Dr. Harold J. Ockenga” in the Wheaton College Archives & Special Collections, Collection SC-113, Box 1A, Folder 1 “St. Louis Convention,” henceforth: WCASC, SC-113/1A/1

– fundamentalist warhorse, mentor to Billy Graham, and pastor of a large and influential Minnesota church – resigned his chairmanship of the association in 1929, the WCFA was effectively crippled; by the middle of the century, it had ceased to exist.

A few anti-modernist Protestant congregations considered associating with the Federal Council of Churches, but the majority of the country's conservative Protestants saw the FCC as a fount of theological and social modernism and were thus understandably hostile. They wanted nothing to do with what historian Martin Marty has called “the liberal social front of [American] Protestantism.”³⁴⁰ Organized in 1908, one of the FCC's first constituent acts was the adoption of a mission statement that spelled out the “duty of all Christian people to concern themselves directly with certain practical industrial problems.” It called for class equality, strong unions, the abolition of child labor and sweat shops, strict regulation of the terms under which women could be employed in factory work, the reduction of workday hours to “the lowest practicable point” with one full day off each week, pensions, a living wage, and an “equitable” distribution of wealth. For good measure, the new organization also sent a “greeting of human brotherhood to the toilers of America” all of whom had the Council's “pledge of sympathy and of help in a cause which belongs to all who follow Christ.”³⁴¹ To fundamentalists and Pentecostals this all sounded suspiciously like Marxism; most, in fact, thought they could detect the telltale scent of a rodent. By boycotting the only umbrella organization for American Protestants that existed, however, militant anti-

³⁴⁰ The story of the FCC's founding is told in considerable detail in volume one of Martin Marty, *Modern American Religion*, pp. 274-279. The quote, however, is on p. 106.

³⁴¹ I quote here from a copy of the FCC's 1908 social creed, which is widely available. I took mine from the website of the National Council of Churches USA, the name that the FCC adopted in 1950: www.ncccusa.org (last accessed September 25, 2012).

modernists doomed themselves into remaining almost wholly unorganized beyond the congregational level. Over the course of the 1930s, this stance became increasingly problematic, as the rise of the New Deal state made clear that only a well-organized group would be able to influence the direction – not to mention access the considerable resources – of a rapidly expanding federal government.

In the middle of the 1930s, one group of anti-modernist Protestants began earnestly grappling with the movement's troublesome tendency toward schism. The result was the National Association of Evangelicals, which, in its organizers' collective imagination, was meant to act as a nation-wide lobbying group for the large number of conservative, evangelical Protestants who were wary of the FCC's unabashed theological and political liberalism, but also increasingly uncomfortable with the strict separatism (and resulting isolation) of the most adamantly doctrinaire members of the fundamentalist coalition. The NAE's founders privately expressed hope that the new group would become “a clearinghouse in all matters of common interest and concern.”³⁴² With such an organization in place, the evangelical impulse to reach out could be made to work in a productive and rewarding manner. By almost any definition of the word, the campaign has been successful; as of 2010, the NAE represented nearly 30 million people in over 45,000 churches.³⁴³

Part of this success is due in no small way to the Cold War, which allowed post-WWII anti-modernists to join a powerful national establishment in ways that earlier

³⁴² See: the minutes of the “Meeting of COMMITTEE FOR UNITED ACTION AMONG EVANGELICALS” (November 10, 1941) in WCASC, SC-113/1A/1.

³⁴³ The NAE's website does not offer statistics on membership, so I have taken these numbers from National Public Radio: <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=128776382> (last accessed September 26, 2011).

incarnations of the movement could not. Rather than coalescing around theological and domestic social issues (as they had in the 1920s) the Cold War served as an opportunity for anti-modernists to join an emerging historical bloc of American anti-communists. What this means is that the differences between Billy Graham and Reinhold Niebuhr – or even Paul Tillich – appeared less profound than the differences between Billy Sunday or J. Gresham Machen and Walter Rauschenbusch, because Graham and Niebuhr and Tillich found themselves more or less on the same side in a conflict much larger than their own sizable theological disagreements.³⁴⁴ A number of scholars have noted the role that the Cold War played in bringing the NAE broader national relevance, but few of them have noted the influence of national and international politics in the organization's founding.³⁴⁵

In spite of fundamentalists' apparent immunity to the organizational fever that gripped the country in the first few decades of the twentieth century, the NAE was actually more than thirty years in the making. Its earliest beginnings can be traced to 1910s, when a freshly married young seminarian named J. Elwin Wright moved with his new bride to the village of West Rumney in New Hampshire.³⁴⁶ Their house and its land – some seventy-five acres – belonged to Wright's father, Joel, and it served as

³⁴⁴ These are no doubt strange bedfellows, but the Cold War made for all kinds of odd sleeping arrangements, and three white Protestants – two of them German – may be one of the least peculiar combinations of all.

³⁴⁵ E. V. Toy, Jr., "The National Lay Committee and the National Council of Churches: A Case Study of Protestants in Conflict," in *American Quarterly* 21/2 (Summer, 1969), pp. 190-209, but especially pp. 192-195; Carol V. R. George, *God's Salesman: Norman Vincent Peale and the Power of Positive Thinking* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), esp. pp. 149, 191; Angela M. Lahr, *Millennial Dreams and Apocalyptic Nightmares: The Cold War Origins of Political Evangelicalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), esp. p. 13; Stephen P. Miller, *Billy Graham and the Rise of the Republican South* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), esp. pp. 22-24 & 84-87; Daniel K. Williams, *God's Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

³⁴⁶ The general outline of the story I tell here is based on Elizabeth Evans's book *The Wright Vision: The Story of the New England Fellowship* (Boston: University Press of America, 1991). She was the New England Fellowship's education director from the early 1930s until 1949.

headquarters for the largely Pentecostal movement that the elder Wright had founded in the late 1890s, the First Fruit Harvesters. Joel Wright was a pastor with a rather protean denominational character; in addition to the Pentecostal, he had preached at one time or another in both the Free Will Baptist and in the Free Methodist traditions. When Joel Wright retired, in 1924, his son took over the Harvesters. The younger Wright's denominational identity would be nearly as flexible as his father's. (He had been trained theologically at the Calvinist Missionary Institute in Nyack, NY and then ordained in 1919 by his (at that point, anyway) Pentecostal father. In 1934, he would become a Congregationalist.) Despite the ideological indecision these changes seem to suggest, the Wrights were less fickle than they first appear; throughout their denominational wanderings, both Wrights remained staunchly anti-modernist. J. Elwin Wright took the modernist threat especially seriously, calling the fundamentalist-modernist controversy “the most portentous battle of the latter days.” But he also wondered whether fundamentalist separatists might have gone overboard, repeating “the age old mistake of forming a new denomination along the same lines as the former ones.” So long as they remained divided over matters of doctrine, Wright realized, anti-modernists would remain ineffective culture warriors. Separatism and stubborn dogmatism were, he suggested in an editorial, “a vast detriment to the cause of Christ.” Musingly, he asked whether or not “the present tendency to insist on our interpretation of the Word regarding many points in which there is an honest difference of opinion [was] doing the cause more harm than all the liberals.” He concluded with the observation that fundamentalists ought to “recognize that a totally new policy must be introduced if a permanent advance [were] to

be made.”³⁴⁷ This was an obvious response to the backbiting that consistently threatened to hobble anti-modernism in the years after the Scopes Trial, and which had indeed nearly destroyed a number of venerable institutions, including Princeton Seminary. Satisfying though it was theologically, separatism was proving to be a mostly self-defeating tactic, a shot in fundamentalism's foot rather than between modernism's eyes. Wright sensed this, and was determined to do something about it.

When he took over the First Fruit Harvesters, Wright decided to act on his ecumenical convictions. Concerned that the Harvesters had become stale and exclusive during his father's last years at the helm, the junior Wright was eager to open the church up to as wide an audience as possible. The group's 1927 constitution and by-laws institutionalized his latitudinarianism.³⁴⁸ “We believe very deeply,” it begins, “in the unity of the body of Christ, the church.” The new Harvesters would insist that “the church of Jesus Christ [was] a unit” and that “the whole denominational system [was] fundamentally wrong in that it [had] split the body of God's people into sections.” The group would be radically open to an unusually wide spectrum of conservative Protestants. “We recognize all believers in the fundamentals expressed in the Apostles Creed as church members,” the constitution continues, “without the formality of 'joining' any organization. All believers in these fundamentals whose Christian conduct conforms with the Word of God are automatically members of the First Fruit Harvesters Association.”

The Harvesters' catholicity only went so far, of course – it did not, for example, extend to actual Catholics – but it was not just lip service, either. Even “automatic”

³⁴⁷ See the copies of two editorials by Wright dated October, 1923 and January, 1930 in BGCA, 565/1/12.

³⁴⁸ There is a copy of this Constitution in the BGC Archives, Collection 565 (Ephemera of James Elwin Wright), Box 1, Folder 16. Henceforth BGCA, 565/1/16.

members of the group had the right to vote on Harvester business; all they had to do was show up at a meeting. “We are neither rightly described as undenominational or interdenominational,” Wright declared, “we are anti-denominational.”³⁴⁹

Confident that he could rally conservative Protestants where others had failed, Wright took to the road in 1928. He met with anti-modernist leaders from Virginia to Maine in an effort to organize a series of summer conferences that he had long envisioned hosting. “Truly these were days of peculiar blessing as I witnessed to God’s leadings,” Wright remembered of his road trip. “God is intending,” he observed, “to draw into close fellowship a group of those who have dared to cut the shore lines of sectism and ecclesiasticism.” As Wright listened to the testimony of the leaders with whom he met, he began to believe that God had given them “a larger vision of the need [to make] inroads into Satan’s kingdom in a much more aggressive way than in the past.”³⁵⁰

Returning to New England, Wright began to enact his long-dreamt-of summer program. Seven thousand people were invited to attend the first set of conferences, and several hundred actually made the arduous journey into rural, north-central New Hampshire.³⁵¹ The first meeting even featured William Bell Riley, who would prove an enduring presence, teaching morning Bible classes and offering each week-long session a special presentation on the evils of evolution. The effect seems to have been great.

³⁴⁹ Wright, “God’s Program for Us,” *The Sheaf of the First Fruits* 22/10 (October 1924), p. 4.

³⁵⁰ Wright, *The Sheaf of the First Fruits* 27/2 (February, 1929), p. 13.

³⁵¹ Apparently, Rumney’s remote location was purposeful. Wright’s father reported in his unpublished memoirs that he had “very definitely” heard the Holy Spirit point out the exact spot where they were to set up the conference grounds. The Spirit explained to him that “those who come here will have to make an extra effort and for no other purpose than to worship Me.” See: Evans, *The Wright Vision*, p. 3.

According to Wright, by the end of the first weeks, the crowds had “their arms around each other” with “tears coursing down their faces.”³⁵² Wright was pleased. “All this,” he wrote in *Sheafs of the First Fruit*, “without the sacrifice of a single important truth.”³⁵³

Out of these summer meetings of the First Fruit Harvesters, there emerged a larger group that began, in 1932, to call itself the New England Fellowship. Its purpose was to unite New England's anti-modernists in the face of the increasingly strong influence of theological liberals, Unitarians, and Catholics in the region.³⁵⁴ A 1933 NEF annual report gives some idea of the organization's frenetic activities: a thousand participants attended three separate summer conferences that year; twenty-one “extended Bible conferences” involving ninety different churches were held; another one-hundred-sixty “special” one-day Bible campaigns included eight-hundred congregations. Twenty-thousand visits were made to “those needing spiritual advice and encouragement.” Additionally, one-hundred-and-fifty radio broadcasts on sixteen separate stations originated at Rumney that summer, a season that saw an NEF-sponsored debate between Charles Smith (of the American Association for the Advancement of Atheism) and William Bell Riley, during which the two battled over the proposition that evolution was a “fake science” and whether its teaching should be permitted in tax-supported schools.³⁵⁵ As an observer later recalled:

Smith often interjected comments that were irrelevant to the topic: “two million years ago this happened,” and “five million years ago this happened.” Finally an old Swedish man called out, “Was you there, Charlie?” and [this] brought down the house. From that point onward, if Smith said anything about “millions of

³⁵² Wright as quoted in Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, p. 143.

³⁵³ Wright, “The Pastors' Conference” in *The Sheaf of the First Fruit* 27/8 (August, 1929), p. 10.

³⁵⁴ This is according to Elizabeth Evans's recollected assessment in *The Wright Vision*, p. 21.

³⁵⁵ *The New England Fellowship Monthly* 32/1 (January, 1934), pp. 4-5.

years ago” laughter resounded throughout the hall. Dr. Riley stuck to the issues and the rules of debating and won though no vote was taken. The applause was proof enough of the winner.”³⁵⁶

Wright quite agreed; an editorial in the NEF monthly magazine proclaimed the debate an “occasion of great significance.” Smith’s “overwhelming” defeat had left “an indelible impression on the minds of the large audience which heard [it].”³⁵⁷

Wright continued to organize New England anti-modernists successfully throughout the 1930s. His summer conferences drew a broad assortment of highly desirable speakers: Harry Rimmer, a prize-winning boxer and pioneer of what would come to be called “creation science”; Will Houghton, the president of the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago; Howard Taylor of the China Inland Mission; author and editor Curtis Lee Laws (who had coined the term “fundamentalist”); and popular radio evangelist Charles Fuller. Across New England, churches that had been shuttered for lack of a pastor were reopened thanks to Wright’s vigorous efforts to recruit clergymen. In 1935, he filled Boston Garden with 16,000 people, all of whom first paraded across the Common and through downtown. They were greeted at the auditorium by a choir 4,000 strong.³⁵⁸ In 1937, he led the New England Fellowship’s Radio Ensemble – a six-piece instrumental and singing group – on a twenty-nine-state American tour.³⁵⁹ While on the

³⁵⁶ Evans, *The Wright Vision*, p. 82. The American Association for the Advancement of Atheism regularly protested the celebration of Thanksgiving, but in 1931 decided instead to host a counter-celebration, Blamegiving Day, at which it would accuse God of inflicting “widespread and undeserved misery.” *The New Yorker* was classically droll: “It is typical of our topsy-turvy civilization today that the only people who are blaming God for the depression are the atheists.” See the “Notes and Comments” section of *The New Yorker* (August 8, 1931).

³⁵⁷ See drafts for the April 1933 issue of the *Sheafs of the First Fruit* in 565/1/12.

³⁵⁸ These figures are from an article entitled “Bible Demonstration Day” in *The New England Fellowship Monthly* 33/5 (May, 1935), p. 9.

³⁵⁹ Arthur H. Matthews, *Standing Up, Standing Together: The Emergence of the National Association of Evangelicals* (Carol Stream: NAE Press, 1992), p. 6. Matthews book was produced for the 50th anniversary of the founding of the NAE and it is understandably partisan. Another highly partisan

West Coast, Wright met a number of pastors interested in what he had managed to accomplish in New England, and they began to talk about establishing a similarly oriented national organization. These discussions carried over into the NEF's summer meetings in 1939 and 1940.

At approximately the same time, Ralph Davis, of the Africa Inland Mission, was engaged in an analogous project, scouting the country to gauge support for a group that would represent evangelical missionaries in Washington.³⁶⁰ Davis had been made anxious by the idea that missionary candidates might be adversely affected by the coming military draft, every day more likely as the rest of the world plunged heedlessly deeper into the Second World War. Davis's concern was not that potential missionaries would be conscripted and sent to fight; the Burke-Wadsworth Act, which authorized the draft, exempted ministers and even seminary students from military service. Far more threatening to Davis was the idea that anti-modernist trainees would be denied the opportunity to serve as chaplains.

This was not as unreasonable a fear as it might first appear. As the New Deal exponentially expanded the size of the federal bureaucracy, real interaction between Washington and any individual American citizen became very nearly impossible; citizens who wanted to communicate effectively with their government needed the help of some kind of large-scale organization – a union, a lodge, or a professional association. This

account of the organization's development appeared in 1956, James Deforest Murch's *Cooperation Without Compromise* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Press, 1956).

³⁶⁰ The Africa Inland Mission had been founded in 1895 by Peter Scott, a kind of Cecil Rhodes of evangelicalism, who envisioned a string of missionary stations stretching from Cape Town deep into the Congo. Scott, like J. Elwin Wright, had been trained at Nyack College. See: Richard J. D. Anderson, *We Felt Like Grasshoppers: The Story of the Africa Inland Mission* (Nottingham: Crossway Books, 1994), p. 18. Davis's work is discussed on pp. 214-219.

expansion of the state apparatus, along with the development of hundreds of intermediary groups meant to arbitrate between the state and its citizens, had been going on since at least the Civil War, with an especially big growth spurt during the Progressive Era. By the 1940s, the federal government's job was not so much to respond to individual citizens' concerns, but rather to see that no one interest was allowed to too-thoroughly dominate any of the others. The state was to act – as journalist John Chamberlain, writing in 1940, noted – as a “broker” among the nation's various competing factions.³⁶¹

In its dealings with religious groups, Franklin Roosevelt's administration pushed a broad ecumenicism that effectively ignored most of the differences not only between denominations, but also between religions. Under FDR, for example, Protestant chaplains in the U.S. military were expected to conduct Mass for Catholic soldiers if for some reason no priests were readily available. The same was true if the situation were reversed. Both Protestant and Roman Catholic clergy were also expected to be able to perform Jewish religious rituals if the need arose.³⁶² This was a matter of efficiency as much as anything else, but it nevertheless galled theological conservatives of all stripes. It suited the FCC just fine, however, and so, when Roosevelt's government reached out to Protestantism, it reached first for the Federal Council.

Davis was convinced that a conservative Protestant lobbying organization was the only remedy to such a highly distasteful situation. He had seen it work in, of all places, the Belgian-controlled Central African city of Leopoldville. The Congo Protestant

³⁶¹ John Chamberlain, *The American Stakes* (New York: Carrick and Evans, 1940), pp. 26-28.

³⁶² Kurt Piehler, “World War II and America's Religious Communities” in *The Cambridge Volume of Religions in America: Volume II, 1790 to 1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011). Stephen J. Stein, ed.

Council's General Secretary, Davis explained in an open letter to a large number of anti-modernist leaders, was “in close touch with all matters affecting members of the council” – by which he meant the group kept a close eye on policy discussions taking place in (largely Catholic) Brussels and then lobbied accordingly. Davis believed that the time had come for a similar organization in the United States. The group's headquarters, he suggested, should be located in Washington and run by someone “of a legal mind.” Davis was plain about his purpose; anti-modernists needed desperately “to have a bureau of information and of legal representation so as to safeguard [their] interests.”³⁶³

The response was favorable all around. The Dean of the Philadelphia School of the Bible wrote that he “[thanked] God that somebody has been stirred up to raise this question of organization among the Fundamentalist groups in our country.” Something simply had to be done, he continued, in order to offset “the pernicious influence of the FCC.” The President of the Providence Bible Institute, wrote to Davis expressing his belief that “the missionary interests of the church are of paramount importance,” adding his own conviction that anti-modernists should in “some way safeguard the freedom of our missionary candidates.” Will Houghton of Moody Institute wrote that Davis's call for action had caused an “immediate response in [his] heart.” He was cautiously hopeful that, “if they could see the real dangers that threaten this country,” anti-modernists “might rally to such an organization.”³⁶⁴

In 1941, Wright's and Davis's separate interests merged. At the Rumney summer convention, a resolution somewhat awkwardly declared the “unanimous conviction” of

³⁶³ See Davis's letter (December 11, 1940) in BGCA, 81/14/27.

³⁶⁴ See the responses to Davis's letter from Adams (December 13, 1940), Houghton (December 23, 1940), and Ferrin (December 13, 1940) in BGCA, 81/14/27.

the Conference that “immediate steps be taken” to bring into existence “a central and representative organization operating under an appropriate name designating its purpose through which evangelical Christians may become vocal.”³⁶⁵ Wright and Davis, along with the Moody Institute's Houghton, together set about inviting evangelical leaders to a meeting in Chicago where they would discuss how to go about setting up such a group. The response, they noted to one another repeatedly, was “very enthusiastic.”³⁶⁶

The new organization initially took the unwieldy name Temporary Committee for United Action Among Evangelicals. It was made up of Wright, Davis, and Houghton, along with radio evangelist Charles Fuller, William Ward Ayer of Calvary Baptist Church in New York City, Harold John Ockenga of Park Street Church in Boston, Dr. Steven Paine of Houghton College in Western New York, and a few others. They met several times in the autumn of 1941, further convincing themselves of the need for “united action.” Their final recommendation as the Temporary Committee was that conservative evangelicals ought to gather at a conference in St. Louis in the spring of 1942.³⁶⁷ Wright barnstormed the country to stir up support and eventually collected the names of nearly 150 evangelical leaders who agreed to serve as co-conveners. The conference call was blunt, emphasizing the need “to stand unitedly against the forces of unbelief and apostasy which threaten our liberties and our very civilization.”³⁶⁸

In January, 1942, Wright approached Harold John Ockenga about delivering the keynote address in St. Louis. Ockenga was an obvious choice for such an aspirational

³⁶⁵ This resolution was published in *The New England Fellowship Monthly* 39/7 (July/August 1941), p. 11.

³⁶⁶ As described in the minutes to the October 27-28, 1941 meeting in WCASC, SC-113/1/6.

³⁶⁷ See the minutes of the November 10, 1941 meeting in WCASC, SC-113/1/6.

³⁶⁸ A copy of the call can be found in WCACS, SC-113/1/6.

conference. A skilled orator, who held forth weekly from the pulpit of Boston's fortress of fundamentalism, Park Street Church, Ockenga also held a Ph.D. in philosophy from the University of Pittsburgh. He had been at Princeton during the heyday of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy and had joined Machen and Van Til when they defected to Westminster. His anti-modernist bona fides were, in other words, unassailable. The Temporary Committee indicated to Ockenga that it hoped to start the conference with a strong statement and that it had decided that the first speaker's theme ought to be "the need for an evangelical union in relation to government agencies."³⁶⁹ Ockenga was eager. He mused in a letter to Wright that "the 'first section of the address should deal with the unrepresented masses of Christians who need to be mobilized." He closed another letter to Davis in high hopes, with assurances that together they had the power to "save the nation."³⁷⁰ In the weeks leading up to the conference, Ockenga travelled the country speaking to church groups that, he reported, repeatedly "called for someone to launch a movement to which they could cling in an hour like this." They expressed hope that Ockenga's group "would have repercussions in every phase of the life of the nation."³⁷¹

Ockenga was also confident that such a development was possible. "I am thoroughly convinced that our generation is waiting for some movement," Ockenga told the crowd in St. Louis when he finally took the stage, "a movement which will be truly

³⁶⁹ From the February, 1942 minutes of the Committee in WCASC, SC-113/1/6.

³⁷⁰ Ockenga to Wright (March 28, 1942) in WCASC, SC-113/1/10.

³⁷¹ From a draft of Ockenga's address in WCASC, SC-113/1/6. Ockenga's anecdotal evidence is on par with the sources; several invitees commented on this. See, for example: Walter Watson to Ralph Davis (March 15, 1942) in WCASC, SC-113/1/10. Watson wrote that the movement promised "to meet a long-felt need."

adequate to challenge the average layman to action along Christian lines.” He noted that many other countries had recently seen social and political campaigns that had “taken on something of a religious form.” (He was neither shy nor circumspect, mentioning both Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union by name.) American evangelicals, he thundered, were in dire need of “a spiritual movement which will spread over [the] nation.”

Ockenga's call to action was dramatic: “It is time,” he declared, “for us to reach America with a unified evangelistic program.” He thought this could best be accomplished by increased attention to print media – “magazines with a two-million circulation instead of forty or fifty thousand, as the largest evangelical publications have today” – as well as to radio, through which anti-modernists could easily “reach the entire population of the United States with the Gospel.” They should also, Ockenga argued, “have an organization for [their] colleges and Bible schools.” He wanted “a clearing house for missions sufficient to correlate the work of all of our denominational missions” and “an evangelistic committee that [would] be able to carry on evangelism in any area, according to the need.” Finally, Ockenga advised, the NAE should be organized in such a way that it could easily “reach [the] government with a united pronouncement.”³⁷²

This kind of organizational structure, Ockenga told the conference, need not be built from scratch. The necessary pieces had already been constructed; they simply needed to be fit together: “We have at this very meeting, today,” Ockenga observed, “the brain trust of the evangelicals which could put this on.” Already, he continued, there were gospel broadcasters who had “demonstrated that they bring in enough money to support their program over the national hook-ups,” and who could “immediately take

³⁷² From Ockenga's NAE address, WCASC, SC-113/1/6.

over worthwhile broadcasting.” Fundamentalist colleges had produced “educators of no mean ability” who could “do a superb job of propagandizing our nation for evangelical Christianity.” Anti-modernist churches could then send out their evangelists and “bring literally millions of converts into the kingdom of God.” Could the NAE be “the vanguard of such a movement?” Ockenga asked, finally. Indeed, he assured the audience, it “unqualifiedly” could. The delegates apparently agreed. The constitution they adopted lamented not that there had been too little action in the preceding decade or that coordinated action was ill-advised, but rather that evangelicals had “been speaking, acting, and working independently of one another.”³⁷³

What Ockenga and the delegates envisioned was an organization that matched the FCC both in size and in scope. But, there were considerable obstacles standing between Ockenga's clear call for an evangelical counterhegemony and the fruition of this rather expansive vision. Foremost among them was the very real power of the Federal Council of Churches, which had been acquired by way of a concerted and purposeful effort. During the First World War, when fundamentalism was still little more than various scattered objections to theological liberalism, the FCC had put together the General War-Time Commission of the Churches, to which the federal government could make requests – for donations, for example – that it could not easily make to the more than one hundred individual denominations that the Council represented. During the Great Depression, the Federal Council worked with the Roosevelt administration to help provide relief from the widespread suffering that came with mass unemployment and widespread poverty. Much to anti-modernists' dismay, these FCC attempts to insert itself into national affairs

³⁷³ From Ockenga's NAE address, WCASC, SC-113/1/6.

demonstrated how effective a Christian lobbying organization could be. By 1941, *Newsweek* could claim that the group held a “virtual monopoly” on American Protestantism.³⁷⁴

When WWII broke out, the FCC was ready to help fill the army's critical shortage of qualified chaplains, which is what had initially caught Davis's attention. This was a major impetus – perhaps even *the* major impetus – driving the formation of the NAE. Evangelical groups, Wright and Davis urged the St. Louis conference delegates, desperately needed to build “a national committee similar to that of the FCC” or else they would be left without any means of “influencing the great national trends.”³⁷⁵ In fact, they continued, evangelicals' relationship to the government was to be the NAE's “number one field of cooperative endeavor” lest the government “some day recognize only the Federal Council of Churches.” This was possible, Wright and Davis warned, because the federal government had come to “believe that the Federal Council represents all Protestant groups.”³⁷⁶ One of the NAE's first constituent acts was a move to set up a “Department of War Services” that would coordinate conservative evangelistic efforts in the U.S. military's enormous training camps. Then, in 1944, the Executive Committee established a Commission on Chaplaincies that was quickly accepted as the official endorsing agency of the NAE's dozens of constituent denominations. In spite of Wright's and Davis's fear that the federal government was faithfully wed to the FCC, the Roosevelt administration placidly acknowledged the NAE commission's power to certify chaplains for service and then began accepting its nominees into the chaplaincy corps. The problem

³⁷⁴ “Bible Churches' Form Group for Fight on Federal Council” in *Newsweek* (September 29, 1941), p. 56.

³⁷⁵ See Davis's letter of December 11, 1940 in the Africa Inland Mission Records at BGCA, 81/14/27.

³⁷⁶ Undated letter from Wright and Davis to the delegates in BGCA, 81/14/27.

had been an organizational rather than a theological one.³⁷⁷

Conservatives had plenty of objections to the FCC that had nothing to do with its dominance of the chaplaincy, however. (In a letter to Rev. R. J. Bateman of Memphis, J. Elwin Wright swore that “it would take a book of considerable length to cover the ground adequately.”)³⁷⁸ The 1942 NAE constitution had made these concerns official: “We realize that in many areas of Christian endeavor the organizations which now purport to be the representatives of Protestant Christianity have departed from the faith of Jesus Christ.”³⁷⁹ Even Houghton College President Stephen Paine's supposedly non-partisan address to the conference referenced the inadequacies of other ecumenical groups, specifically their “failure to protect the orthodox position.” Paine might have insisted that he was “not talking *against anyone*,” but in context it is quite clear whom he means.³⁸⁰

Of particular concern to the NAE's founders was the FCC's “tendency to carry on a lobby for legislation at Washington and in the various legislative assemblies.”³⁸¹ This was an odd complaint. Not only had Wright and Davis been talking about just such a lobbying effort for years, but in 1943 – with Wright at the helm – the NAE opened an office in Washington, which operated just like any other interest group's, keeping tabs on pending legislation and lobbying when it seemed that this might advance evangelical interests. The Washington office's newsletter, *United Evangelical Action*, published a

³⁷⁷ See the “Report of the Temporary Field Secretary to the Executive Committee” (May 20, 1943) in BGCA, 20/65/19 and Murch, *Cooperation Without Compromise*, p. 141.

³⁷⁸ Wright to Bateman (May 12, 1942) in WCASC, SC-113/1/6.

³⁷⁹ See the NAE Constitution in WCASC, SC-113/162. Martin Marty has astutely pointed out how much “bad history, resentment, and wounded pride went into the choice of the main verb.” See: Marty, *Modern American Religion*, Vol. 3, p. 107.

³⁸⁰ Paine, “The Possibility of United Action” in WCACS, SC-113/1/6. Emphasis in the original.

³⁸¹ Wright to Bateman (May 12, 1942) in WCASC, SC-113/1/6.

regular “Capitol Report” advising readers on the status and stakes of legislation before Congress. Its editor hoped to make the paper “a rallying ground for conservatives of all denominations.”³⁸² When the United Nations' Commission on Human Rights began meetings aimed at establishing a Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the NAE sent Stephen Paine to address a State-Department-sponsored conference on its adoption. Evangelicals opposed the Universal Declaration, Paine told the gathering, because of its “assertion that man has a certain inherent dignity and inalienable rights.” This was “an erroneous point of beginning.” Whatever rights man had, Paine maintained, were certainly not innate; they had been endowed by God. Evangelicals further objected to the Declaration's “statism,” which Paine saw specifically in its support for labor unions and the right to “an adequate standard of living.” These were the principles of socialism, and Paine was sure that his constituency would disapprove.³⁸³ When a group of Texas missionaries were harassed in Italy, the NAE demanded a meeting with Dean Acheson and drafted a strongly-worded letter to the Italian ambassador suggesting that unless the Italian government took steps to protect Protestant evangelists from Catholics upset by their overt proselytizing, the NAE would be forced to attempt to have the treaty that had ended the recent hostilities between the United States and Italy annulled and financial aid to the country turned off.³⁸⁴ There is no evidence to suggest that the NAE possessed anything like that kind of diplomatic clout, but the threat does indicate an eager willingness to use American political power to further evangelical aims.

Perhaps the biggest issue of concern to evangelicals involved the appointment of

³⁸² Murch to R. L. Decker (June 26, 1945) in WCSCA, 113/1/1.

³⁸³ See Paine's speech, lengthily quoted, in Murch, *Cooperation Without Compromise*, p. 142-143.

³⁸⁴ The letter was reprinted in *United Evangelical Action* (February 15, 1950).

an official American representative to the Vatican. In December of 1939, Franklin Roosevelt asked Myron Charles Taylor, retired president of United States Steel, to be his “personal envoy” to the Holy See. War had broken out in Europe the previous fall, and Roosevelt was concerned that it would soon engulf the entire continent. He thought Pope Pius XII the only person liable to be in regular contact with all of the hostile parties and was keen to have a set of eyes and ears in Rome. Roosevelt also hoped, however faintly, that the Pope might be able to keep Mussolini from entering the war on the German side. He had supposed that the fact that Taylor was an Episcopalian might mitigate Protestant uneasiness about such an appointment, but conservative evangelicals were still quite uncomfortable.³⁸⁵ The needs of the war effort kept them from mounting a terribly vigorous campaign to bring Taylor home, but when Harry Truman renewed Taylor's appointment in 1946, evangelicals were incensed. In an open letter to the President, the leaders of the NAE wrote:

Resolved that, since the Protestant forces in America have seen no evidence to indicate that the appointment of Myron Taylor as the President's Special Envoy to the Vatican is either legal or of value to the American Government; but, to the contrary, his complete ignorance of even the religious bodies of Italy that came to light when he confessed to a committee in Rome that he had never heard of the Waldensians, a Protestant body active in Italy for centuries before the Reformation, cause serious question of his personal qualifications; and that, now that his inability to solve or make any effort to solve the problems arising from Roman Catholic persecution of American and Italian Protestants in Italy is evident; we, therefore, again insist on the dissolution of the alleged American legation at the Vatican and the immediate recall of its head, Myron Taylor, Special Envoy of the President.³⁸⁶

Although Taylor resigned the office a few years later (no doubt to the NAE's surprised

³⁸⁵ See W. David Curtiss and C. Evan Stewart's short biography of Taylor, “Myron C. Taylor: Cornell Benefactor, Industrial Czar, and FDR's Ambassador Extraordinary” in the Cornell Law School's *Forum* (Summer/Fall 2006).

³⁸⁶ As quoted in Murch, *Cooperation Without Compromise*, p. 147.

delight), he was soon replaced by a permanent ambassador, General Mark W. Clark, who had led the American invasion of the Italian peninsula during the Second World War.

The NAE's objection, then, seems to have been far less to the fact of the FCC's lobbying efforts than to the causes it championed. Internal documents make this relatively clear. According to Wright “the record of the Federal Council on various social issues like birth control,” its espousal of “the doctrine of pacifism,” and its association with “the worst of the political radicalists which have infested the country since the rise of Bolshevism” were particularly vexing. The most important task of the NAE's representative in Washington, he privately wrote to a correspondent, was to guard against the influence of apostates, heretics, and unbelievers – to ensure, in short, that the government knew where conservative Protestantism's God stood on the issues.³⁸⁷

Such overtly partisan and bare-knuckled political lobbying was a role many in the NAE would embrace only tentatively, however, which explains why the organization's leadership was mostly unwilling to appear as if it wanted to fight the FCC head-on. This would have been much too reminiscent of some of the uglier aspects of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy, and since the NAE's organizers were keen to shed fundamentalism's quarrelsome reputation, they built a case for themselves quite carefully. Stephen Paine's opening address in St. Louis reminded conference-goers that “we should always place our emphasis upon positive objectives and shun a spirit of controversy and opposition.”³⁸⁸ The NAE's official motto – “cooperation without compromise” – was meant to convey a kind of tough-minded tolerance, as was the avoidance of poison-tipped

³⁸⁷ Wright to Bateman (May 12, 1942) in WCASC, SC-113/1/6.

³⁸⁸ Paine, “The Possibility of United Action,” p. 9, in WCASC, SC-113/1/6.

signifiers like “fundamentalist” and “modernist.” The preferred terms were now “conservative” and “liberal” and, especially, “evangelical.” This softer approach worked. A large part of the NAE's appeal seems to have been that it explicitly claimed to be more devoted to unifying fundamentalists and other anti-modernist groups than to fighting modernists. A pastor who was invited to the St. Louis meeting wrote to Ralph Davis that he “rejoiced” at the opportunity to be part of a “positive and workable program” instead of “one organized [only] to oppose the Federal Council.”³⁸⁹

But, the move to get away from separatism would come with its own set of complications, mostly in the form of Carl McIntire, who haunts the founding of the NAE like a specter. In 1941, McIntire had founded another organization in opposition to the Federal Council, the American Council of Christian Churches. McIntire proudly called his group both “militantly pro-Gospel” and “anti-modernist.”³⁹⁰ The ACCC was, in all likelihood, a deliberate effort to sabotage the NAE, which McIntire found hopelessly compromised because of the decision to allow affiliated organizations to hold simultaneous membership with the FCC, an organization, McIntire surmised, riddled with “soul-destroying modernism.”³⁹¹ The NAE's frustration with McIntire's acrimonious militance is palpable. One particularly peeved St. Louis conference attendee called McIntire a “parasite on the church” and a “malcontent with an ax to grind.”³⁹² J. Elwin

³⁸⁹ Walter Vail Watson to Davis (March 15, 1942) in WCASC, SC-113/1/6.

³⁹⁰ As quoted in Marty, *Modern American Religion* (Vol. 3), p. 106.

³⁹¹ As quoted in Marty, *Modern American Religion* (Vol. 3), p. 439. See also: Carl McIntire, *Twentieth Century Reformation* (Collingswood: Christian Beacon Press, 1946), p. 182. McIntire's hatred of ecumenism was as deep as Wright's love. The archives at the Princeton Theological Seminary, the holders of McIntire's papers, are in possession of a painting that supposedly hung above McIntire's desk. It depicts Billy Graham and several generic Protestant ministers, the Pope and a few Cardinals, along with a number of Eastern Orthodox Metropolitans and priests all burning together in hell.

³⁹² D. Shelby Corlett to the General Superintendents of the Nazarene Publishing House (May 12, 1943) in

Wright kept a notebook filled with clippings from McIntire's newspaper, *The Christian Beacon*, as well as heated letters that passed between them. Wright once told McIntire that he found the ACCC “very belligerent,” and wondered why McIntire did not hesitate “to make the wildest and most untrue statements.” On another occasion, Wright filled seven typed pages in an effort to refute various articles that he had seen in the *Beacon*, noting that he was only giving a small portion of the “untrue and unkind things which have been said.” To rehash it all, he wrote not without some irritation, “would be to write a book.” Wright concluded his plea to McIntire with the observation that “all the references to the ACCC which have appeared in any NAE publication during the past seven years, if compiled in one statement, would not occupy the space of many of the SINGLE attacks made upon us in the *BEACON*.”³⁹³ For his part, Ralph Davis reported that he found McIntire “pugnacious” and wondered whether he had been wise to agree to invite to the convention “an element that may be there simply to introduce a fight.”³⁹⁴ The level of controversy surrounding McIntire's machinations is surprising given the pint-sized powerlessness of the early ACCC – it was made up of only two rather small denominations, and represented nobody so much as McIntire himself.

McIntire was exploiting a major fault line in the emerging neo-evangelical

BGCA, 20/65/16. Steven Paine's St. Louis speech also included a number of shots at McIntire, including an underlined sentence about organizations built “*upon a polemical and negative basis.*” Paine, “The Possibility of United Action,” p. 5.

³⁹³ Wright to McIntire (July 6, 1948) in BGCA 565/1/1, emphasis in the original. These exchanges could also be surprisingly childish: Wright once bet McIntire a thousand dollars that the ACCC's official membership was exaggerated, snippily suggesting that McIntire submit his records to an independent statistical agency for examination. The response was vintage McIntire. He replied that it would be “wonderful” if Wright “would get as worked up over the attacks made upon our Lord Jesus Christ by the modernists” as he did over “the exposure of the compromisers among the fundamentalists.” Wright to McIntire (June 4, 1948) in 565/1/1 and McIntire to Wright (July 9, 1948) in BGCA, 565/1/1.

³⁹⁴ Davis to Paine (March 27, 1942) in WCASC, SC-113/1/10.

coalition. This gap separated those who had chosen to stay in the mainline denominations and those, like McIntire, who insisted on separation. The conflict was vicious – NAE President Leslie Marston wrote in 1944 that after the St. Louis conference, the ACCC had “gone wild” attacking the NAE – and would go on for decades.³⁹⁵ It was not, we should note, a conflict over whether or not to be involved in trying to influence the direction of the nation. The disagreement was over how much contact to have with groups like the FCC. As far as the NAE was concerned, its members could hold simultaneous membership in the Federal Council. But the NAE's position, McIntire argued, ignored a “real doctrinal issue.” McIntire wanted any national organization of fundamentalists to make a “clean, clear-cut repudiation” of the Federal Council and separate from its “blatant unbelief.”³⁹⁶

Another reason that the NAE may have wanted to avoid seeming like it intended to engage in outright political lobbying was fear of losing its tax-exempt status. NAE director Clyde Taylor was so concerned about this that he employed the services of a public relations firm to investigate the possible effects of the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1946 – which also carried the title “Regulation of Lobbying Act” – on the NAE. The author of the resulting fifteen-page document is unequivocal in his recommendation. A not-for-profit group that wanted to “avoid the burden of registration or [the] filing of financial reports” should “NOT engage in Federal legislative activity so substantial that it may be deemed its principal purpose.”³⁹⁷ This report must have given Taylor pause. In

³⁹⁵ Marston to Taylor (May 24, 1944) in BGCA, 20/66/1.

³⁹⁶ McIntire, *Twentieth Century Reformation*, p. 201.

³⁹⁷ See the confidential report prepared for Taylor by Alexander Ginsberg of Ginsberg & Conklin Public Relations in WCSCA, SC-113/39/32. Emphasis in the original.

the sources related to the NAE's founding, there is considerably less talk about evangelism than about government. In one document, the need for a “united front for evangelical organizations in relation to government” is fifth in a list of potential objectives. The typed “5” is crossed out and a “1” is pencilled in next to it. Evangelism is third.³⁹⁸

At first, the NAE seemed destined to be engaged in the kind of bureaucratic work with which large national organizations inevitably wind up involved or in the kinds of cultural issues that had dominated the early history of fundamentalism. Its Commission on Industrial Chaplaincies, for example, explored the idea of setting up regular religious services in the nation's factories. Another committee was charged with acquiring passports for evangelical missionaries and maintaining good relationships with the countries hosting them. An early pressing concern was the FCC's chummy relationship with the National Broadcasting Corporation. In the 1940s, mainline Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians regularly broadcast religious services on airtime donated as a public service by the major networks. These donations were a licensing requirement of the new Federal Communications Commission, which was charged with regulating the radio with an eye toward the public interest. Members of the Commission were concerned that the dictates of the market might drive religious broadcasters right off the air (to be replaced by god only knew what), and so they required stations seeking a license renewal to submit evidence that their schedules regularly included morally upstanding programming. The Federal Council of Churches' National Religious Radio Committee was ready to step in and lend a hand. In short order the responsibility of organizing, distributing, and

³⁹⁸ See the planning documents and the NAE Constitution in WCASC, SC-113/1/10.

accounting for all of the free slots fell to them.³⁹⁹ Anti-modernist radio preachers, on the other hand, typically had to broadcast on dearly purchased private air time, which became quite scarce after NBC, CBS, and the Mutual Radio network all announced that – in light of the public service requirement – they would no longer sell air time to groups wanting to use it for religious purposes. Worried that this arrangement was untenable, the NAE's National Religious Broadcasters Association set about to wrestle public-service air time away from the FCC.⁴⁰⁰

The Cold War, however, made these kinds of concerns seem inconsequential. The transformation that the Soviet Union underwent over the course of its first twenty-five years in existence was tremendous. A country that barely existed in 1925 – the Russian Civil War ended in 1921, and the first Soviet constitution was not ratified until 1924 – could field the world's largest land army in 1945 – upwards of 12 million soldiers. This was not just raw potential, either; Soviet forces almost single-handedly defeated the Wehrmacht, itself a powerful, overwhelming military force.⁴⁰¹ Imperial Russia – a backward agricultural fiefdom – had been handily defeated in a war with Japan in 1905, then knocked out of the First World War by its own internal instability. The Soviet Union, on the other hand, was an undisputed industrial and military superpower. These developments made Americans nervous, and set in motion the chain of disparate events that made up what eventually came to be known as the Cold War – a war in which evangelical anti-modernists, including the NAE, were as eager to participate as anyone.

³⁹⁹ Tona Hangen, *Redeeming the Dial: Radio, Religion, and Popular Culture in America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

⁴⁰⁰ See Ayer's "Report of Special Committee on Religious Broadcasting" in WCASC, SC-113/1/6.

⁴⁰¹ John Keegan, *The Second World War* (New York: Penguin, 1990).

At the 1953 NAE national convention, for example, the group's leaders began planning a Fourth-of-July rally to be held on the National Mall. The idea was to “convert the Fourth of July from a celebration of fireworks into a spiritual revival.” A wildly optimistic invitation predicted that the gathering would be “the greatest thing in America – past, present, and future.”⁴⁰² This Fourth of July event was but a small part of a much larger NAE-organized movement called the March of Freedom, which was meant “to sponsor and promote a nationwide, non-sectarian religious and educational campaign to reemphasize the fact that good citizenship and freedom depend upon faith in God” as well as “to attract the attention of the American people to focal points of American history in which religious experience played a leading role.” A desire “to change the pattern of thinking about the nature of our nation from the present prevailing socialistic, collectivist, secularist, agnostic pattern to the original God-centered freedom ideal as expressed in the Declaration of Independence and the Preamble to the United States Constitution” underlay the development of the March. It was “conservative in position, constructive in design, aggressive in action,” and meant to take advantage of “President Eisenhower's spark of faith, [which] set the fires of hope burning in the hearts of Christian people throughout the country.”⁴⁰³ The campaign was to culminate in a 1954 “pilgrimage” to the Washington monument, where – once again on the Fourth of July –

⁴⁰² Decker to NAE members, March 3, 1953 in WCSCA, 113/1/1.

⁴⁰³ See the news release of Feb 10, 1953 in WCSCA, 113/1/1. The first few months of the Eisenhower administration had been particularly inspirational to evangelicals. “Millions of believers,” reads another 1953 NAE press release, “were deeply moved when President Eisenhower chose to pray for divine guidance as his first official act.” The press release noted that the President had “quietly joined an evangelical church on the first Sunday he was able to be away from the White House” and also “accepted the invitation of Abraham Vereide to breakfast with the International Committee for Christian Leadership” where he had given “a good testimony to his faith.” The press release also noted that Eisenhower had “counseled with Billy Graham several times before the inaugural.” The NAE was pleased to report that “Mrs. Eisenhower has borne testimony to her personal, vital faith in Christ.”

Christians could “kneel with Bible in hand to ask God's guidance and direction for our President and the government of our Country.”⁴⁰⁴

The March for Freedom's proponents hoped to build public support for their cause by having national leaders sign a document that listed “the seven divine freedoms” (which are curiously reminiscent of FDR's “four freedoms”): freedom from want, freedom from hunger, freedom from thirst, freedom from sin, freedom from fear, freedom from enemies, and freedom to live abundantly. Rep. Walter Judd (a House of Representatives prayer breakfast regular) explained from the Congressional floor that “because the forces of evil are bent on destroying the very foundations of our democracy, whose Constitution owes its continued existence to the faith of the people in Almighty God, we do therefore affirm that the heritage of freedom which we cherish as Americans is from God, who is the author of the seven freedoms in the 23rd psalm of the Bible.”⁴⁰⁵ In addition to President Eisenhower, the NAE hoped to convince Vice President Nixon, the secretary of state, the nine justices of the Supreme Court, the “heads of all significant government departments,” the country's governors and mayors, along with every member of Congress to sign. They wanted to recruit “all of the people who [occupied] any place of leadership” in the United States. After the leaders had been hooked, then “all the rank and file people” who wanted to could sign on as well.⁴⁰⁶

The NAE even developed its own (highly quixotic) plan to help defeat communism. The plan's organizers reasoned that communists were people with “a sense

⁴⁰⁴ See the document entitled “A Description of March of Freedom” in WCSCA, SC-113/1/1.

⁴⁰⁵ See the August 1, 1953 *Congressional Record*, a copy of which is to be found in WCSCA 113/1/1.

⁴⁰⁶ See “A Description of March of Freedom” and photos of Eisenhower and Nixon with Clyde Taylor, Rep. Walter Judd, and Sen. Frank Carlson in WCSCA, 113/1/1.

of responsibility for the welfare of humanity” and so supposed that, properly approached, communists might be “quite susceptible to the Gospel.” The core of the program involved attempts to “beam and slant” [sic] evangelistic messages at communists by way of “special methods.”⁴⁰⁷ The Washington office encouraged local chapters to “notify communist cell members who are beginning to be dissatisfied or disillusioned that there is a way to really serve the cause of Peace, right wrong social conditions, and save their own souls without selling out to Stalin.” No mention was made of how disaffected communists might be identified, although tips could be sent to NAE offices by way of an extremely complicated plan that involved multiple anonymous mailings to various PO Boxes. The plan's overarching goals were three: “A) Furnish much absolutely authentic information to the FBI without jeopardizing the safety, time, and lives of either FBI operators or Communist cell members. B) Get the true, saving gospel of Jesus Christ directly to the individual communists who need it most. C) Offer disillusioned communists a practical means of escape from communist cell domination and influence when the time comes for them to escape.” Operations were always to be carried out in secret. Unsigned letters sent to communists by NAE members had “a certain number written on them known only to the writer, [who] should write the same number in the corner of the letter and tear off the corner with a jagged tear [keeping] the corner piece, or [depositing] it in a safe place.” After the initial contact, specially-trained NAE anti-communist groups communicated with the disillusioned communist(s) through special magazine ads coded so that only the defector could read them.⁴⁰⁸ There is no indication

⁴⁰⁷ An untitled description of this plan is to be found in WCSCA, 113/99/13.

⁴⁰⁸ I am still quoting here from the untitled document in WCSCA, 113/99/13.

that any of this worked very well, but the records do contain a long, strange, rambling letter that a pencilled-in note from an NAE secretary suggests was turned in by a would-be informant.⁴⁰⁹

In order to encourage members to debate intelligently with communists, the NAE developed a study guide, “The Christian Answer to Communism,” written by Thomas O. Kay, a young professor of history at Wheaton. Marx, Kay advised his charges, was “mistaken in his basic concepts” and had “failed to understand the true nature of contemporary economic developments.” Marx's work offered its readers “a rationale that is non-existent in actuality,” which had led his followers to “some faulty conclusions.” One such conclusion was that there was no such thing as “eternal verities or fixed truth or goodness.” The result, Kay concluded, was “totalitarianism.” Kay asked his readers to compare the life of Karl Marx with that of nineteenth century British conservative Lord Shaftesbury. While Marx “criticized society and fomented revolutions,” Shaftesbury – who Kay claimed as an evangelical – “worked for the betterment of conditions, often at great personal sacrifice.” He also thought it a good idea to read the *Communist Manifesto* – which contained “the core of Marx's program without too much of the philosophy” – alongside the Bible. The careful student, he was sure, would notice “the parallelism of Communism and the program of Satan.”⁴¹⁰

The fortress mentality that current historiography would lead us to expect from anti-modernists in this period is manifestly absent here, as is the language of retreat. One pastor described the New England Fellowship as “an association of men and women, of

⁴⁰⁹ This letter, too, is in WCSA, 113/99/13.

⁴¹⁰ See Kay's study guide in WCSA, SC-113/99/1.

ministers and of churches, who are convinced that historic Christianity is true, and that it is the hope of the world.” He had quite clearly not given up or turned away in despair from an irredeemably sinful, fallen planet; he was also not simply waiting hopefully for Christ's return, but felt rather that “to share [in the NEF's] activities is to be heartened in life's most real task. To labor for its objectives is to build in union with that increasing purpose which fills the ages.”⁴¹¹ Evangelical groups are almost incapable of the kind of retreat we have been convinced they undertook. Evangelism necessarily involves reaching out; its impetus is a desire to connect with others and to share the radical and life-altering experience of conversion. The spiritual transformation that evangelical Protestants expect upon conversion changes how people behave in the world, and it seems strange to think that Wright, Davis, and the other founders of the NAE might have thought otherwise. Wright hoped, after all, that the Fellowship's efforts would ignite another Great Awakening, an ambition he shared with his congregation in 1931: “We daily expect that it will burst forth in all the intensity and power of the days of Finney.”⁴¹²

⁴¹¹ See *The Sheaf of the First Fruits* 29/12 (December, 1931).

⁴¹² See “Revival is Coming” in *The Sheaf of the First Fruits* 29/11 (November 1931), p. 12.

CONCLUSION

“Next to each religion is a political opinion that is joined to it by affinity.”

– Alexis de Tocqueville⁴¹³

“A new moral life ... cannot but be intimately connected to a new intuition of life ... a new way of feeling and seeing reality...”

– Antonio Gramsci⁴¹⁴

Why have scholars been held so captive by the quietist narrative that has dominated the historiography of mid-century evangelicalism for the past, now, nearly three generations? One obvious answer is a modernist victory in the war of position we now know as the fundamentalist-modernist controversy. We believe that fundamentalists “retreated” from public life because modernists believed that they had; and because modernists controlled the narrative, the story stuck. This is exactly what Gramsci would have predicted. Another place to look for a clue, however, is in the fact that so many of the most productive scholars to tackle the subject have been evangelicals themselves, the great majority of them still practicing. And while these scholars' interpretations of the recent evangelical past are by no means uniform, all of them have promoted in one way or another the idea of a mid-century evangelical “subculture.” Within this overarching analytical unity, two distinctive patterns are apparent.

One group of evangelical scholars takes a certain pride in fundamentalists' efforts to separate themselves from the wickedness of an American culture enthralled by

⁴¹³ De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, p. 275.

⁴¹⁴ Gramsci, *Selections from Cultural Writings* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 98.

“modernism.” Many of these scholars are members of theologically conservative denominations who see fundamentalism's subculture status as a badge of honor, an indication that the movement is right with its God. These scholars often hold academic appointments at schools with a strong attachment to a denominational identity; they are the intellectual descendents of the “come-outers” of the 1920s and 1930s. Widespread popularity or acceptance, in this scheme of things, would be either an indication of the movement's phenomenal success (an argument for which there seem to be no proponents) or of something having gone badly wrong, of a cowardly sellout to theological liberals.⁴¹⁵ This point of view represents a rejection of the Gramscian framework I have laid out here.⁴¹⁶

A second group is composed primarily of scholars whose ardor for theological conservatism is considerably cooler. Many of them still consider themselves “evangelical,” but they begin to feel decidedly uncomfortable when they are lumped together with the so-called “Religious Right.” These scholars are mostly employed at more mainstream American colleges and universities; a surprising number of them work, or have worked, at Catholic Notre Dame. This second group also has reason to push the outsider narrative, although theirs is rather more oblique than the first group's. They are no less a part of their faith tradition than their more conservative brethren, but they are, frankly, both embarrassed by what they perceive as the anti-intellectualism of the churches in which they were raised and, at the same time, insulted by the arch treatment

⁴¹⁵ The best example is probably D. G. Hart. See: Hart, *The Lost Soul of American Protestantism* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002).

⁴¹⁶ Uninterested in the subtleties and compromises that the war of position requires, this group of fundamentalists takes what we might call a Leninist position, distilling itself again and again until all that remains is a vanguard party of true believers.

these churches have received from scholars. Their scholarship seems to be, as one critic has perceptively noted, a kind of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* – one of those complex German phrase-words that means “[to come] to terms with and [to overcome] the past by recognizing oneself as a product of the past and by mastering the history of one's own past.”⁴¹⁷ Many of these scholars have written sharply intelligent accounts of the evangelical past that also have proven to be indispensable additions to our knowledge of, especially, the American eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁴¹⁸ Their adherence to the story of fundamentalist political and intellectual abeyance in the years after the Scopes Trial is, therefore, all the more surprising and difficult to account for.

One clue can be found in the last chapter of Joel Carpenter's excellent history of the fundamentalist movement in the 1930s and 1940s – one of the few such accounts that exist. Carpenter subscribes wholeheartedly to the “subculture” thesis, noting on the first page of his introduction that fundamentalists chose this route in order “to sustain [their] doctrinal distinctives.”⁴¹⁹ But he also concludes that while the movement's “frontal attacks on the secularizers had failed in the 1920s,” less than a decade later “fundamentalists were beginning to mobilize again, this time for another Great

⁴¹⁷ For an outstanding example of this sort of approach, see the introduction to Randall Balmer's *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory: A Journey into the Evangelical Subculture in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989) or Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994). For an interesting discussion of the role *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* plays in evangelical historiography, see Leonard I. Sweet, “Wise as Serpents, Innocent as Doves” in *The Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 56/3 (Autumn 1988), p. 402.

⁴¹⁸ See, for example: Nathan Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Mark Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Harry Stout, *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: William D. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991).

⁴¹⁹ Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, p. 3.

Awakening.” The preparations for this revival, Carpenter shrewdly observes, “had a subtext that was deeply cultural and implicitly political.”⁴²⁰ What he is describing, of course, is the neo-evangelicals' war of position without the Gramscian vocabulary. What is curious is that this assessment comes at the end of the book. It seems, indeed, like an afterthought, and Carpenter makes little use of it. This suggests that he has himself been won over by the modernists' war of position, a major goal of which was to make fundamentalists seem like outsiders and upstarts whose objections to modernist ideas were beyond the pale.

Because evangelical historiography has been so dominated by insiders, and because insider knowledge is often intimidating to the uninitiated, secular scholars in our own time have mostly followed the lead of one of these camps – most often the latter, whose views have been seen as more moderate, more impartial, perhaps even (understandably, if not exactly fairly) more reasonable. Secular scholars tend to have a kind of intellectual blind spot when it comes to religion, especially a religion as opposed to the liberal sentiments typical of academics as anti-modernist Protestantism has long been. Most of us understand fundamentalist theology poorly, and many of us find it difficult to take seriously. This is partially the result of a small group of loud philistines (like Billy Sunday, for example), but secular obstinacy – i.e., an *unwillingness* to take anti-modernism seriously – also plays a distinct, not to mention shameful, role.

But this latter position becomes much harder to hold if we actually begin to investigate the nature of the questions that early twentieth-century anti-modernists were asking. If we imagine that modernists and anti-modernists came up, essentially, with

⁴²⁰ Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, p. 245.

different answers to the same existential questions that the conditions surrounding America's rapid and brutal post-Civil War industrialization so loudly raised, then we can begin to see the post-Scopes history of anti-modernism much more clearly and fairly. It will keep us from writing anti-modernists off, supposing that they have nothing in common with modernists, who are, in important ways that I have tried to indicate here, modern scholars' intellectual forebears.

It is essential that we get over this hang up, because a similar blind spot once kept us from recognizing the power of another kind of conservatism in the same period. In 1945, historian Godfrey Hodgson tells us, American political conservatism was “a defeated, proscribed, and unpopular set of beliefs.”⁴²¹ At the conclusion of the Second World War, it seemed destined to join the Jeffersonian small-holder, the Whig, the Bourbon, and the frontier on the past's famous pile of old cinders. Half a century later it was triumphant, perhaps the single most popular political label in the country.⁴²² America's political conservatives may have been buried amidst the rubble of economic catastrophe and total war, but they had been buried alive.

It was the country's liberal establishment who had happily pronounced its rivals dead. “Summing up the situation at the present moment,” Richard Rovere wrote in *American Scholar* in 1962, “it can be said that the Establishment maintains effective control over the Executive and Judicial branches of government; that it dominates most of American education and intellectual life; that it has very nearly unchallenged power in deciding what is and what is not respectable opinion in this country. Its authority is

⁴²¹ Hodgson, *The World Turned Right Side Up*, p. 8.

⁴²² For an interesting perspective on how total the transformation was, see: Rick Perlstein's op-ed piece, “America's Forgotten Liberal” in *The New York Times* (May 26, 2011).

enormous in organized religion, [...] in science, and, indeed, in all the learned professions except medicine.”⁴²³

This was quite a serious observation, but Rovere insisted that he was only kidding – lampooning the positions of both the conspiratorially minded (Senator McCarthy or the John Birch Society) and the self-consciously separate (the Beats, say).⁴²⁴ On closer examination, however, there is something both convinced and convincing in Rovere's story; it comes across – to borrow a particularly rich phrase from the writer David Foster Wallace – as a “half-pretend pretension.”⁴²⁵ It seems difficult to deny seriously the existence, at least in mid-twentieth-century America, of a group of people with exactly the kind of power that Rovere suggests an Establishment would be expected to have (i.e., the “nearly unchallenged power [to decide] what is and what is not respectable opinion”). Dwight Macdonald's lambasting of “mass culture” – viz. “the demands of the audience, which has changed from a small body of connoisseurs into a large body of ignoramuses, have become the chief criteria of success” – and Walter Cronkite's iconic, stentorian sign-off are perhaps the most obvious, convincing, and oft-cited bits of anecdotal evidence, but there is plenty more.⁴²⁶ On the occasion of Arthur Schlesinger Jr.'s death in 2007, *New York Times Book Review* editor Sam Tanenhaus noted the “broad cultural authority”

⁴²³ Richard Rovere, “The American Establishment” in *The American Establishment and Other Reports, Opinions, and Speculations* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1962), p. 9.

⁴²⁴ Those in on the joke include journalist Nicholas Confessore and the editors of *The Wilson Quarterly*. See Confessore's “Powered Down: The Vanishing Establishment” in *The New York Times* (February 10, 2008) along with the introductory comments to a reprint of Rovere's essay in the Summer 1978 issue of *The Wilson Quarterly* (pp. 170-181).

⁴²⁵ David Foster Wallace, “Host” in *Consider the Lobster And Other Essays* (New York and Boston: Back Bay Books, 2006), p. 279.

⁴²⁶ The Macdonald quote is from John Summers (ed.) *Masscult & Midcult: Essays Against the American Grain* (New York: NYRB Classics, 2011), p. 18.

that Schlesinger had commanded in the 1950s and 1960s. Schlesinger, Tanenhaus observed, “wrote classic works that reanimated the past even as they rummaged in it for clues to understanding, if not solving, the most pressing political questions of the present.” Consequently, Tanenhaus concluded, Schlesinger's books “often generated excitement and conveyed an urgency felt not only by other scholars but also by the broader population of informed readers.”⁴²⁷ Rovere's Establishment was liberal and democratic in almost every sense of those words, and it corresponded rather neatly with Schlesinger's “vital center,” which itself was a bit left of center, much like the Democratic liberals that Schlesinger spent so much of his career chronicling.⁴²⁸ (Schlesinger's connection to Democratic liberalism was so unabashed that he has been called its “court historian.”) Only two years after Rovere's article appeared in *Esquire*, *Harper's* published Richard Hofstadter's pivotal essay “The Paranoid Style in American Politics,” which made it irrepressibly easy for readers to dismiss wide swaths to either side of the vital center as certifiably crazy. In a 2007 look back at the article, *Harper's* contributing editor Scott Horton called Hofstadter's essay “one of the most important and most influential articles published in the 155 year history of the magazine.” Hofstadter noted the “heated exaggeration, suspiciousness, and conspiratorial fantasies” of the politically paranoid, and it is not hard to understand how effortless it must have been to see all of these

⁴²⁷ Sam Tanenhaus, “History, Written in the Present Tense” in *The New York Times* (March 4, 2007). Rovere winkingly suggested in his essay that Schlesinger was “connected” to the Establishment.

⁴²⁸ Schlesinger notes in the foreword to the 1998 edition of *The Vital Center*, that he meant for the phrase to refer to “the contest *between* democracy and totalitarianism, not to contests *within* democracy between liberalism and conservatism, [and] not at all to the so-called 'middle of the road' preferred by cautious politicians of our own time.” See: Schlesinger, *The Vital Center* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1998), p. xiii.

characteristics in the right-wing opposition that mid-century liberalism engendered.⁴²⁹ A moment's thought about this dissertation's second chapter illustrates the point fairly well.

Among those who took the concept of the Establishment seriously – despite Rovere's repeated requests that he please not – was William F. Buckley.⁴³⁰ “Rovere has limned the outlines of a great force in American affairs,” Buckley wrote in *Harper's* in 1962. “What is all the more galling,” he continued,

is that the people have their own scholars; [although] precious few of them, to be sure. But is this because the people's point of view is, *sub specie aeternitatis* indefensible? Not altogether. There are other reasons, [Wilmoore] Kendall and others have been suggesting, and these other reasons have been coming forward armed with imposing credentials. Anti-Establishment scholars are not given true equality, a true opportunity to set up their stands, unencumbered by the censors of the Establishment, in the academic marketplace. The Establishment loves dissent as a theoretical proposition. In practice, it is not easy to get a hearing, in high circles of the Establishment, for heretical doctrine. In our time, the Wilmoore Kendalls, not the Robert Oppenheimers, are the Galileos.

The Establishment, Buckley concluded, “seeks to set the bounds of permissible opinion, and on this it speaks *ex cathedra*.”⁴³¹ One can quibble, of course, with Buckley's contention that Wilmoore Kendall – of all people – is America's Galileo, but it seems reasonable to grant him the fact that mid-century America was peculiarly possessed (at least by American standards) of a tightly connected, comfortably ensconced, and slightly self-satisfied clique of intellectual taste- and opinion-makers. From a perch on Morningside Heights, a den in New Haven, or a Cambridge warren, the prophets of

⁴²⁹ Hofstadter, too, warned against painting with too broad a brush, but to no avail. See: Richard Hofstadter, “The Paranoid Style in American Politics” in *Harper's* (November, 1964), pp. 77-86 as well as Horton's comments at: <http://www.harpers.org/archive/2007/08/hbc-90000908> (accessed December 6, 2010).

⁴³⁰ It might be difficult to believe that Rovere had his tongue firmly planted in his cheek if one were to count the number of people who have taken the essay quite seriously. Among them: David Brooks, who quotes Rovere without raising so much as an eyebrow in *Bobos in Paradise: The New Upper Class and How They Got There* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), p. 45.

⁴³¹ William F. Buckley, “The Genteel Nightmare of Richard Rovere” in *Harper's* (August, 1962), pp. 51-55. The quote is taken from p. 53.

consensus viewed the “people's scholars” with considerable disdain and more than a touch of condescension. They gave the general public's intellectual champions the wide berth that one is inclined to give the mad, and when forced to confront them on an unusually narrow intellectual sidewalk, dismissed them cheerily as so many nuts and crackpots. As usual, Buckley had a good point in spite of himself. There was an Establishment. And it both dismissed people and set the terms of the debate. And this is precisely how cultural hegemony works.

George Gallup was famously quoted in *Newsweek* dubbing 1976 “the year of the evangelical,” and the explosion of interest in evangelicals that began in that year suggests that something curious was happening. It was, of course, an election year and the Democratic candidate, former Georgia governor Jimmy Carter, was a self-proclaimed, “born-again” Christian – a label that most of the national media did not understand very well at all and that made quite a wide variety of people uncharacteristically nervous.⁴³² Carter's victory was nevertheless seen as an important political milestone for “evangelicals.”⁴³³ As far as anyone knew, very few of them had taken an active role in politics since the days of W. J. Bryan and none had ever held the office of the presidency.⁴³⁴ The year also saw the release of a reformed Chuck Colson’s autobiography, *Born Again*, a book in which the former White House counsel discusses

⁴³² For a glimpse of what I mean here, see any of the various reactions to Bob Dylan's 1979 “born-again” album *Slow Train Coming*.

⁴³³ Although few commentators recognized it then, Carter was a terrible example from which to draw conclusions about the country's evangelicals; many of his political views were out of step not only with the broader population of evangelical Christians, but also with his own denomination, the Southern Baptists. This became clear in 1980, when evangelicals, including the Baptists of Carter's home region, overwhelmingly supported Ronald Reagan.

⁴³⁴ In fact, a number of 19th century presidents could probably be classified as evangelical, a fact that further illustrates the depth of the confusion.

his conversion to Christianity while on trial for his role in the Watergate scandal. Campus Crusade for Christ's "Here's Life America" campaign was also in full swing, its "I Found It!" stickers and t-shirts a ubiquitous summer signifier of evangelicalism's newfound cultural cachet. In Charleston, West Virginia, Alice Moore once again was reelected overwhelmingly to her seat on the Kanawha County Board of Education, which she had won in 1970 after leading fights to reject sex education curriculum developed by the Department of Education and to ban textbooks that she claimed promoted an "atheistic and relativistic view of morality."⁴³⁵

None of this occurred *sui generis*, however. Alice Moore was the wife of a fundamentalist pastor and also part of a growing network of school-textbook-critical parents loosely affiliated with Mel and Norma Gabler, an evangelical Texas couple who managed to make themselves – astonishingly, considering their lack of any real credentials – an indispensable part of the textbook adoption process not only in their home state, but nationwide. The Gablers had been working since 1961 to rid high school textbooks of material that they thought might encourage a critical attitude toward American history, the free market, or Christianity. They were especially disdainful of modern educational philosophies – like John Dewey's, for example – that promoted conceptual learning at the expense of rote memorization. "A concept will never do anyone as much good as a fact," Mel Gabler once told an interviewer. The Gablers'

⁴³⁵ Moore as quoted in William Martin, *With God on Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America* (New York: Broadway Books, 1996), p. 119. For a detailed description of Moore's efforts in West Virginia in the early 1970s, see: James Moffett, *Storm in the Mountains: A Case Study of Censorship, Conflict, and Consciousness* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988) and American Radio Works' 2010 documentary "The Great Textbook Wars," available online at: <http://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/textbooks/index.html> (last accessed September 13, 2012).

objections were rooted in their suspicion of a secular public education system whose curriculum was set by experts rather than by tradition or community consensus. Mel Gabler often referred to public schools as “government seminaries.” Rather than value-neutral or unbiased sites of inquiry, he claimed that they were actually proponents of their own religion. (He called this religion “secular humanism.”)⁴³⁶ It is an argument that dates back at least to the fundamentalist-modernist controversy, and Gabler's presentation of it is remarkably akin to – and obviously owes at least some indirect debt to – J.

Gresham Machen's thesis in *Christianity and Liberalism*. Campus Crusade founder Bill Bright's religious upbringing was seeped in fundamentalism. He grew up attending a rural Oklahoma Methodist church under the watchful eye of a pious mother who, after suffering a stillbirth, had preemptively dedicated her next child's life – i.e. an infant Bill Bright's life – to Jesus. After fleeing to California during the Dust Bowl years, Bright began attending the Hollywood Presbyterian Church, where Henrietta Mears – an important influence on Bright's future direction – directed the Sunday School program. He eventually studied under Carl Henry at Fuller Seminary in the 1940s, and although his academic performance left much to be desired, his new organization represented just the kind of cultural and political intervention that Henry had envisioned his students undertaking.⁴³⁷ Chuck Colson converted to Christianity under the tutelage of none other than Doug Coe, Abraham Vereide's successor at NCCL, whom Colson had first met

⁴³⁶ For more on the Gablers, see: Dena Kleiman's untitled article on the couple in the “Education” section of *The New York Times* (July 14, 1981); Joe Holly's obituary for Norma Gabler, “Conservative Texan Influenced Textbooks Nationwide,” in *The Washington Post* (August 2, 2007); and Melissa M. Deckman's *School Board Battles: The Christian Right in Local Politics* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2004). The Mel Gabler quote is on p. 13.

⁴³⁷ Campus Crusade's story is told in John G. Turner, *Bill Bright and Campus Crusade for Christ: The Renewal of Evangelicalism in Postwar America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

through Tom Phillips, the CEO of weapons manufacturer Raytheon and a prominent member of the Boston prayer breakfast group. Phillips had himself been recently converted at a Billy Graham crusade in New York City.⁴³⁸ Graham, of course, was a Wheaton College alum, who, like Bright, studied under Carl Henry. In fact, it seems impossible to imagine the majority of Graham's subsequent career as an evangelist without his stay in suburban Chicago. His early post-secondary education had been undertaken at unaccredited, segregated schools in the South, and it seems unlikely that Graham would have lent his support to any resolution of the region's "race problem" (as Graham and other moderates so delicately put it) solely under the influence of whatever education they had provided him. (The support Graham lent even after Wheaton was, at best, lukewarm.) We should avoid the understandable temptation to shrug off such a counterfactual; it was arguably only his willingness to back the Civil Rights Movement – no matter how stilted the embrace – that allowed Graham to continue credibly a national ministry in the aftermath of the 1960s.⁴³⁹ Wheaton not only cured Graham of his paternalistic, mildly racist views of African-Americans, it also introduced him to the vast network of northern fundamentalists that would make his steady rise to fame possible. It was another Wheaton alum, Torrey Johnson, who gave Graham his first job, preaching with an organization called Youth for Christ. At a YFC event in Minneapolis, Graham caught the attention of former World Christian Fundamentals Association founder William Bell Riley, who tapped the young North Carolinian to take over one of the tillers in his Minnesota armada, a fleet that consisted of a large urban congregation at the First

⁴³⁸ Charles W. Colson, *Born Again* (Grand Rapids: Chosen Books, 1976), pp. 120-130.

⁴³⁹ A good discussion of Graham's tormented relationship with Civil Rights can be found in: Miller, *Billy Graham and the Rise of the Republican South*, pp. 13-38.

Baptist Church of Minneapolis, the Minnesota Baptist State Convention, and the thriving Northwestern Bible School. In 1947, the young Graham – only four years out of college himself – became a college president. One of his first official acts as helmsman was to grant the Christian Businessmen's Committee of Minneapolis permission to start a campus radio station. In 1948, a conference invitation from Henrietta Mears brought Graham to Los Angeles, home of the brand new Fuller Theological Seminary, the intellectual center of the emerging neo-evangelical movement; by the next year, California media mogul William Randolph Hearst's famous order to his editors to “puff Graham” had made the greenhorn evangelist a national celebrity. The rest, as the saying goes, is history.

We have been able to recognize the power that cultural hegemony has had (even when we have not called it by its name) in the marginalization of the histories of ethnic, gender, racial, and sexual minorities, but we have had a harder time understanding how the Vital Center's cultural hegemony has worked to make what often feels like the country's religious majority effectively disappear for half a century. We have learned in the past decade that the American right was not sitting idly by from 1930 to 1980, but, until now, we have not enjoyed a full picture of what anti-modernist, conservative, evangelical Protestants were up to in these years. Rather than letting them remain hidden, blending in on their respective sides of the Mason-Dixon line as George Marsden suggests they did or retreating into isolation as Randall Balmer proposes, we need to tell their story. For most of their history in America, evangelical Protestants have been a cultural and political force too powerful to be ignored, and we do ourselves a great

disservice if we continue to allow their moment of relative weakness to remain a historical blind spot. I have tried here to provide a set of lenses through which we can begin to see the depth and sophistication of evangelical fundamentalists' mid-century political ambitions. My hope is that this effort will provoke other scholars to reexamine the details of the narrative as we have been telling it and then fill in whatever gaps remain.

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