Leaving Grand Rapids: Investigating the Postconservative Turn in Canadian Evangelicalism

by

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Abstract

For sociologist Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), the 'sacred' constitutes all those things "set apart and forbidden." Sacred items or ideas are set in relationship to other sacred things within religious contexts. For Evangelical Christians, and to a lesser degree Protestants in general, the sacred has arguably centred on the individual believer and her/his personal relationship with God and scripture. Recently, however, a growing shift within Evangelical Christianity has emphasized the sacred nature of relationships and community, culminating in the mantra "God is love." This turn has set community above the personal in the hierarchy of sacred Evangelical things—a shift that I describe an example of a postconservative Evangelical theo-politics. In this dissertation, I explore the various socio-historical foundations of this alteration in Canadian Evangelical theo-politics. In particular, I investigate the influence of Evangelical author, pastor, and Oprah Network star Rob Bell who possibly best exemplifies this change and its ramifications. Moreover, I discuss the ways in which postconservatism intersects with various other trends in North American social and religious life, including New Ageism, neoliberalism, and cosmopolitanism. I completed this analysis after collecting over seventeen months of ethnographic data investigating the presence and sources of postconservatism in Evangelical churches in Canada.

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Robin D. Willey. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name "Exploring Evangelical Life in Canada: Discussing Culture, Politics, and Community", No. 00039265, 6/17/2013.

Dedication

"Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for *God is love*."

-1 John 4:7-8

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I would like to thank all those friends and family who have put up with me throughout my time as a graduate student. No doubt, I have passed through any number of intellectual trends that may have resulted in an unquantifiable level of annoyance. More seriously, however, I could

not have finished this doctoral program without the generous emotional and financial assistance of my parents Doreen and Norman Willey. Finally, I would like to thank my partner Carolyn Jervis who, along with dedicating countless hours editing this dissertation, has felt the brunt of my graduate school and dissertation related angst. Carolyn, I am forever grateful for your intellect, patience, and empathy.

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Chapter One

Theo-Political Beginnings: From Theo to Post-Conservative Evangelicalism

In this period of the early twentieth-first century, numerous theorists and philosophers insist that we are in the era of late capitalism. That is to say, capitalism remains the dominant socio-political and economic system on the globe, but environmental and economic crises suggest that it is on the cusp of radical transformation. Social theorists Fredric Jameson and Slavoj Žižek, however, lament the difficulty of achieving, or even imagining, real social change

in late capitalism (Jameson 2007; 2009; 2016; Žižek 1994). As Žižek stated in light of remarks made by Jameson:

> Up to a decade or two ago, the system production-nature (man's productive –exploitive relationship with nature and its resources) was perceived as constant, whereas everyone was busy imagining different forms of the social organization of production and commerce (Fascism or Communism as alternatives to liberal capitalism); today . . . nobody seriously considers possible alternatives to capitalism any longer… (Žižek 1994: 1).

Jameson describes how it has become "easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism" (Jameson 2003).

Moreover, this inability to envision utopia coincides with development of numerous "anti-utopian" discourses (Jameson 2007: 7, 212; 2016: 54). At the core of most anti-utopianisms is "simply the terror of the collective as such, the existential fear of losing our individuality in some vaster collective being" (Jameson 2016: 54). Jameson pointed to the growing dystopian genre as evidence of this fear. The recent reboot of the *Star Trek* (2009; 2013; 2016), *Battlestar Galactica* (2004-2008), *The Hunger Games* (2012; 2013; 2014; 2015), *World War Z* (2013), *28 Days Later* (2002; 2007), *The Walking Dead* (2010-2016), and *Mad Max* (2015) franchises all reflect this growing dystopian influence.[1] At the crux of these anti-utopian and dystopian visions is an effort to convince us that alternatives to our late capitalist social formation are not possible and that any utopian efforts are a threat to our *individual* wellbeing (Jameson 2007: 7). For Jameson, one of the central purposes of the utopian form is to challenge this ideology that no alternative can exist (Jameson 2007, 232).

[1] Jameson would consider the latter example as a "critical dystopia"—a genre to which he seems to give a little more credence (Jameson 2007: 230).

My doctoral research project began as an investigation of the emergence, conditions of existence, and complex social consequences of one of these anti-utopian articulations. In short, I was attempting to investigate the development of an interventionist Evangelical conservatism in Canada while at the same time developing critical sociological tools for doing so. Marci MacDonald's *The Armageddon Factor*, which argued that a new, more interventionist brand of conservative Evangelicalism was gaining influence in Canada (2010), was the primary source of inspiration for this project.

Unlike the United States, Canada never formed any law or policy requiring the separation of church and state. Rather, for years, people and civic leaders in Canada have assumed that this separation existed and have tended to drop their religion at the doors of Parliament (McDonald 2010, 52). As social historian S.D. Clark (1910-2003) pointed out in his seminal work, *Church and Sect in Canada,* religious leaders have involved themselves in Canadian politics long before and after Confederation (1948). For example, religious involvement in Canadian politics has included the Catholic Church in Quebec prior to the Quiet Revolution (c. 1960-1970); the Anglican Church and the Crown in Ontario prior to 1850; William Aberhart (1878-1943) and Ernest Manning (1908-1996) who both were Alberta Premiers and hosts of "Canada's National Back to the Bible Hour" (McDonald 2010, 52-53); and the development of the Co-operative Commonwealth led by Baptist minister T.C. ("Tommy") Douglas (1904-1986) and Stanley Knowles (1908-1987) who was a minister in the United Church of Canada (Harrison 2008, 215; Harrop 1984).

Nonetheless, in the past thirty years, beginning with the founding of the Christian Heritage and Reform Parties in 1987 (Harrison 1995; Vanwoudenberg 2013), a distinct shift has taken place in the relationship between religion and politics in Canada (Malloy 2009). This shift

has occurred because of the development of influential neoconservatives and a politically engaged Christian Right—including elements of Christian nationalism (Gutstein 2005; Malloy 2009; Russell 2006). Moreover, the Conservative Party of Canada under the leadership of Stephen Harper, partly following the example set by former Ontario Premier Mike Harris's "common-sense revolution" beginning in 1995,[2] fused together these two elements of Canadian society to form what journalist Marci McDonald described as "theoconservatism" (McDonald 2006, 2010).

Both of these movements are distinctly anti-utopian for slightly different reasons. Prominent neoconservatives, such as Leo Strauss (1899-1973), argued that it is necessary for a group of philosophical elites, a *conservative vanguard* if you will, to gain the "ear of the powerful," and begin implementing "noble lies" to save the populace from a truth they cannot handle (Drury, 1998).[3] For Strauss, "[m]odernity is a holocaust in which the philosopher is the victim" (Drury, 2004b: 24). These noble lies, such as religion and meritocracy, are necessary to preserve the masses' faith in democracy, justice, and liberty, and vicariously preserve a social solidarity that Strauss felt liberalism had eroded. Members of the Christian Right tend to agree with the neoconservative critique of liberalism, but disagree with its ends. For many of these Christians, the only thing that matters is one's salvation prior to the Second-coming of Christ—an apocalypse that will arrive only after the world becomes much worse.[4] For both

[2] In fact, Harper promoted many of Harris's cabinet members to prominent positions within the Harper government: Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board), Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance), John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs), and Peter Van Loan (Government House Leader).
[3] In short, Plato described "noble lies" as previously accepted falsities retold by rulers (and even believed by some) in order to ensure peace. These lies have a specifically conservative aim, namely to have people accept the status-quo—their position within a social formation—of part of their destiny. For Plato, this acceptance is the key to social harmony (*Republic,* 414c-415a).
[4] For more on this dispensationalist perspective see Chapter Five.

neoconservatives and members of the Christian Right, alternatives to capitalism are not just implausible, but something that one is "morally" obligated to speak against.

Using this Evangelical-neoconservative alliance, some have argued that the Conservatives have launched a full-fledged *war of state*, which ostensibly aims to rework the Canadian socio-political landscape (Flanagan 2007, 274; McDonald 2006; 2010; Russell 2006; Saurette 2010).[5] Conservatives propagate their views as if they represent a broadly based consensus of Canadian opinions, and this practice has had and will continue to have considerable consequences for Canadian life and politics.

McDonald introduced Canadians to the concept of Christian nationalism (McDonald 2006). Most critics claim that McDonald's arguments are dependent on a select few American sources that present an overly simplistic account of Evangelical Christianity (Armstrong 2012; Bagnell 2011; Worthen 2010). One author even likened McDonald to the "boy who called wolf," accusing her of falsely warning about a problem that, in his opinion, does not exist (Armstrong 2012). University of Lethbridge sociologist Reginald Bibby considered McDonald's argument "provocative, but precarious," citing that only 44 percent of Evangelicals support the Conservative Party of Canada (2011, 63). In my own previous experiences in the field, I have only encountered Christian Nationalist theology once, via two American missionaries delivering a guest sermon (Fieldnotes 2010). Nonetheless, journalist Lawrence Martin provided a far more balanced analysis of McDonald's book: "Though knocked for being overstated, [*The*

[5] Even with the Conservative lose in the 2015 federal election, the Harper government's ideological legacy will likely extend long into the future and the changes he has made to Canadian governance will be difficult to reverse (Zhou 2015). The current attempted take-over of the Alberta Progressive Conservative Party and concurrent "unite the right" movement by former Harper cabinet minister Jason Kenney is a great example of this legacy (Canadian Press 2016).

Armageddon Factor] showed clearly that evangelical Christians were gaining influence in the country" (Martin 2010, 247).

Although I suspected the grassroots foundations of this movement were far more nuanced and unstable than adherents and major critics of theoconservatism admit, I still was surprised by the variety of Evangelical theo-political perspectives to which I was exposed during my project. One particularly utopian formation, what I have come to call Postconservative Evangelicalism, was the most noteworthy of these perspectives. Popularized by Rob Bell (b. 1970), who is an Evangelical author, Oprah Network star, and previous pastor of Mars Hill Bible Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan, Postconservative Evangelicalism cropped-up in almost every church environment I visited. From pastors worrying about progressive schisms within their own church to entire Missionary Alliance and Pentecostal congregations premised on postconservative theology, postconservatism has gained a solid foothold within Canadian Evangelical churches (Fieldnotes 2014; Studebaker and Beach 2012).

In this chapter, I move through the nebulous process of defining Evangelical Christianity. Next, I introduce the concept of postconservative Evangelicalism via scholarship completed on progressive Evangelicalism and the Emerging Church Movement. Finally, I provide a summary of the chapters that make up the rest of this dissertation.

Defining Evangelicalism

Defining Evangelicalism is a difficult task. Arguably, the most widely used definition is the "Bebbington Quadrilateral." British historian David W. Bebbington argued that Evangelicalism consisted of four primary characteristics: "*Conversionism*: the belief that lives need to be changed; *Activism*: the expression of the gospel in effort; *Biblicism*: a particular regard for the Bible; and what he called *Crucicentrism*: a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the

cross" (Bebbington 1989, 2-3). More recently, Senior Advisor of the Centre for Research on Canadian Evangelicalism, John G. Stackhouse Jr., has added "*Orthodox[y] and Orthoprax[y]*: Evangelicals subscribe to the main tenets—doctrinal, ethical, and liturgical—of the churches to which they belong," and "*Transdenominational[ism]:*" Evangelicals are willing to partner with other Christians on common causes (2007, 3). Stackhouse Jr. argued that this definition is the best way to pick out Evangelicals in a sample and "not just *conservative* or *orthodox* or *observant* or *enthusiastic* or *evangelistic* or *revivalistic* Christians" (2007, 3).

The problem with this method is that it does exactly what Stackhouse Jr. suggested. It provides a narrow definition that excludes a vast number of people and communities who would consider themselves within the Evangelical fold, including Bell and other postconservatives. Moreover, this exclusion is heavily politicized, as evidenced by Stackhouse Jr's specific exclusion of those groups that do not oppose "homosexual relationships" (2007, 3). It fails to allow for change and innovation.

Notably, prominent scholar of American Evangelicalism, Randell Balmer, reduced this list to three items:

> Evangelicalism in America has evolved and mutated over the centuries . . . but it is still possible to identify some generic characteristics: an embrace of the Holy Bible as inspired and God's revelation to humanity, a belief in the centrality of a conversion or "born again" experience, and the impulse to evangelize or bring others into the faith (Balmer 2010, 2).

Balmer intended for this definition to encompass as many Evangelicals as possible to avoid many of the exclusionary pitfalls in the previous examples.

A second method for defining Evangelicalism is as a particular historical movement made up of a specific number of Christian denominations (Reimer 2010, 2; Stackhouse Jr. 2007, 2). Similarly, Bibby defined Evangelicals along denominational lines as "conservative Protestants" consisting of Baptists, Pentecostals, Mennonites, Missionary Alliance, and the Church of the Nazarene (2002, 37). Stackhouse Jr. suggested that this method of defining Evangelicalism argues that some individuals and groups "(a) descend from those [eighteenth-century Evangelical] revivals *and* (b) have not departed from the characteristic emphasis of those revivals . . . *or* (c) have since identified themselves with this tradition" (2007, 2).

Although this method is far more inclusive and historically bound than the previous examples provided by Stackhouse Jr. and Bebbington, it is difficult to operationalize and fails to bring to light the subtle nuances that make Evangelicalism different from other Protestant groups. Moreover, it is still prone to many of the same exclusionary games as the former method, although to a lesser degree.

Anthropologist James S. Bielo's "dialogic approach" to defining Evangelicalism moves beyond many of the problems mentioned in the previous two examples. This method defines Evangelicals through commonly held "dialogues." Thus, the topics put forward by Balmer, Bebbington, and Stackhouse Jr. become conversations that all Evangelicals have, but about which they do not need to agree (Bielo 2011, 198-202). This perspective converts their ossified characteristics into long-standing historical dialogues. The "dialogic approach" provides an easily operationalized and inclusive definition of Evangelicalism that is a product of a shared Evangelical history.

Naming a Movement

For some time, I struggled to name just what I was observing in the field. This situation is not surprising, since many of my participants struggled to categorize themselves as well (Fieldnotes 2014). This difficulty may stem from prominent Evangelical figures with similar theo-politics, such as Bell, who vehemently refused to pick-up any denominational or theological label. Comparative religion scholar, James K. Wellman Jr., argued that this refusal to pick-up and form a label allowed Bell to maintain a more "liminal" Evangelicalism (2012, 23). Furthermore, Evangelical author and activist, Brian McLaren, explained how many Evangelicals who have grown critical of the tradition continuously place adjectives in front of the noun "Christian" in order to allow for separation from the more conservative forms of the faith (McLaren 2012, 17).

For most of the project, I had settled on describing this group as "Progressive Evangelicals" (Fieldnotes 2014). This label, however, connoted images of Evangelical political lobbyist, Jim Wallis, and Christian Left movement that started in the 1970s during the Carter administration more than it does my participants. Although this movement certainly had influenced the formation I was seeing in the field, the Evangelicals with whom I was speaking were not so "officially" geared towards politics as the Progressive Evangelical label would imply (Bielo 2011, 15; Fieldnotes 2014).

At the suggestion of a colleague, I began to look into the "Emerging / Emergent Church" literature as a means to solve my problem of categorization.[6] The Emerging Church movement

[6] I thank Janine Muster for suggesting that I look into this literature. A lot of discussion surrounds the difference between the "emerging" and "emergent" church movements. From this scholar's perspective, the differences between the two do not appear very significant. Moreover, the definitions change source-to-source anyway. As such, I will use the term "emerging church" to refer to the entire movement throughout this document.

started in the mid-1990s as a postmodern challenge by a number of Generation X preachers who were dissatisfied with Boomer style Evangelicalism (Belcher 2009, 24; Bielo 2011, 8).[7] The movement has come to fruition under the tutelage of McLaren, who was involved in the founding of Terra Nova and later the Emergent Village, which functioned as an online resource network known for its "ecumenical, boundary-pushing theology" (Bielo 2011, 8). For some in fact, McLaren *is* the Emerging Church. Nevertheless, many argue that it has become a much larger, more organic movement that has spread across the Evangelical world (Belcher 2009, 45, Burge and Djupe 2014).

According to scholars Gerarado Marti and Gladys Ganiel, the Emerging Church Movement is defined best through the following five characteristics:

1. Emerging Christians consistently characterize themselves as anti-institutional.
2. Emerging Christians approach issues ranging from salvation, sanctification, and eschatology—especially alongside a great concern for social justice—that encourages a form of ecumenism that transcends many theological and ecclesial boundaries.
3. Emerging Christians actively seek to avoid entrenched power structures by bringing young adults into leadership and decision-making in their local church context.
4. Experimentation and creativity are core dispositions among Emerging Christians.
5. Emerging Christians negotiate potential religious polarization by striving to create a new type of "neutral religious space" that is church-ish without being church-y (2014, 27-29).

In addition, Emerging Christians tend to focus missionary efforts on their own society and maintain the conservative Christian tradition of mobilizing for political issues (Bielo 2011, 11,

[7] Postmodernism is a perspective that has reached across numerous academic disciplines that criticizes a number of modernist discourses, science in particular. In short, postmodernists reject the existence of universals, truths, and common symbols (Scott and Marshall 2009, 584-585)

15). Most importantly, they incorporate an "epistemological" postmodernism into their theology, which allows for the critique of modernism and the very idea that humans can know truth (Bielo 2011, 8,10).

This multi-dimensional perspective encourages Emerging Christians to take the "protest" part of Protestantism very seriously. In short, they are unhappy with contemporary Evangelicalism and the degree to which "Enlightenment Rationalism" has captivated it (Belcher 2009, 38-42). This attention to protest led some critics of this movement, such as an individual I met at the National House of Prayer, to call Emerging Christians "Neo-Protestants" (Fieldnotes 2014).

A number of authors have noted problems, however, with using the concept of the Emerging Church. First, some argue that the label has outlived its usefulness, and few communities continue to identify with it (Bielo 2011, 203; Marti and Ganiel 2014, 9; Studebaker and Beach 2012, 863). Second, the Emerging Church is too diverse and difficult to define to constitute an actual religious movement (Marti and Ganiel 2014, 5). For instance, many authors consider both pastors Bell and Mark Driscoll (b. 1970) to be members of the Emerging Church (Belcher 2009; Bielo 2011; Marti and Ganiel 2014). Although both men were influenced by the Emerging Church's postmodern challenge, Bell aggressively implemented gender-based affirmative action in his church, including allowing women to become elders and pastors. Meanwhile, Driscoll vehemently criticized this move as "unbiblical" and recently received criticism for calling women "penis homes" (Anne 2014; Wellman Jr. 2012, 2-3). Therefore, despite their similarities, these two figures do not fit under the same sociological or empirical label. Finally, the Emerging Church has not taken-off in the same way in Canada (Studebaker

and Beach 2012). In particular, the Canadian variety that I encountered is tied more closely to the works of Bell than to any other Evangelical authors (Fieldnotes 2014).

As such, postconservative Evangelicalism is a far better way to describe the theo-political articulation that I encountered in the field. Theologians have loosely defined "postconservative theology" as an extension of postmodernism that reflects many of the same characteristics as the Emerging Church (Mappes 2012, 104-105). More extensively, theologian Roger E. Olson defined postconservatism through eight characteristics. First, they are "authentically Evangelical" and not "post-Evangelical," and maintain the qualities listed in Bebbington's quadrilateral (2003, 20-21). Second, they embrace a "critical and generous orthodoxy" and thus encourage the use of reason and culture as a guide to understanding scripture (2003, 21). Third, they have a "belief in experience rather than doctrine as the enduring essence of Evangelical Christianity" (2003, 23). Fourth, they have a "discomfort with foundationalism and embrace of critical realism." Therefore, like the previous point, this characteristic is part of the enduring influence of postmodernity on postconservatives and the associated emphasis on "communal knowing as opposed to individually determined knowledge" (2003, 26). Fifth, they have a "strong interest in dialogue between diverse groups of theologians" (2003, 29). Sixth, they are beholden to an "inclusive vision of Evangelicalism," including criticism of existing Evangelical power structures (2003, 30). Seventh, they have a "relational view of reality" and believe God changes over time (2003, 32). Finally, they embrace a more inclusive view of the afterlife (2003, 34).

Following this work, I intend for this term to speak to a particular Evangelical theo-political articulation—a form of Evangelicalism that very well may be a sect, sub-section, or the next stage of the Emerging Church. It speaks to the frustration that many progressive and critical

Evangelicals, including several of those in my study, have with the more conservative and fundamentalist forms of the faith—groups that tend to have more resources and infrastructure, and often are the most visible forms of Evangelicalism (Bell 2004; 2005C; Boyd 2005; McLaren 2012; Young 2007; Zahnd 2014A). Postconservatives struggle with how the mainstream media portrays the Evangelical world and push for a form of Evangelicalism that is beyond conservatism. In short, postconservatives reflect three basic characteristics:

1. A focus on a historical and contextualized interpretation of scripture, often completed in contrast to literal readings of the Bible.
2. A staunch support, or at least tolerance, of *diversity*, in terms of theology, politics, gender, race, and even sexual orientation in some of the more progressive postconservative congregations in order to produce a more *inclusive* Evangelicalism.
3. And the veneration of *church* and *community* culminating in the oft-cited postconservative mantra "God is love."

Postconservatism is more than just an Evangelical adjustment to postmodernism. It is a complex utopian theo-political articulation that has altered drastically the socio-historical trajectories of a large number of Evangelical communities via the alteration and veneration of various sacred objects and ideas, and the practices that surround them within the Evangelical faith.

Chapter Outline

In the succeeding chapter, I lay out the social, political, and historical foundations for postconservative Evangelicalism, including demographic and technological changes, and the influence of neoliberalism on Evangelicalism. In addition, I investigate Bell's development as a charismatic leader, and describe the immediate socio-historical context of this development, including the influence of Dutch Calvinism and the Grand Rapids art scene.

Chapter three lays out the basic methodological framework for this project. I discuss the basics of doing ethnography in a faith community and discuss the difficulties of completing a multi-sited ethnographic study. Moreover, I define and theorize more thoroughly about the concept of theo-politics.

Chapter four builds on the political economy laid out in chapter two. In this chapter, I explicate a theoretical framework for the development of postconservative Evangelicalism. I describe how the alterations of sacred hierarchies can alter the theo-politics of the associated religion. To build this framework, I make particular use of Bell's written work and his development as an Evangelical leader, and my fieldwork at Mars Hill Bible Church in Grandville, Michigan.

Chapter five investigates the voices in this study from which postconservatism diverges. In other words, I look into the complexities that make up the conservative Evangelical voices in my study, and how they relate and influence the development of postconservative Evangelicalism. I explore the particulars of conservative Evangelical theo-politics and conclude by describing the complex relationship that many Evangelicals have with voting and the Conservative Party of Canada.

The next chapter explicates the theo-political characteristics of postconservative Evangelicalism through my ethnographic fieldwork. I describe how the postconservatives in my study altered the Evangelical sacred in a similar fashion to Bell, and move through some of the additional results of this alteration. I conclude by describing the anti-fundamentalist theo-politics developed within these postconservative communities.

In chapter seven I explore how New Age and New Thought discourses have come to pervade many aspects of Canadian Christianity, especially postconservative Evangelicalism. I

look more specifically into the influence of neoliberalism on Bell and other postconservatives. In particular, I investigate Bell's rising stardom and his connection to Oprah Winfrey and Harpo Entertainment—the "Oprahfication" of Rob Bell.

To start, chapter eight more thoroughly explicates neoliberalism and its relationship to Evangelicalism. I approach the concept of cosmopolitanism to provide an additional means of understanding the development of postconservative Evangelicalism. Then I finish this chapter by exploring the connections between neoliberalism and cosmopolitanism.

In my last chapter, I conclude by reflexively examining my time in the field through a song that Alberta radio stations played relentlessly during my research. In particular, I discuss my relationship to my participants and my struggles with conducting a multi-sited ethnography. In addition, I look into the limitations, considerations for future research, and the potential contributions of this study.

Chapter Two

Postconservative Foundations: Charisma, the "Over-Churched," and Grand Rapids, Michigan

For most people, the city of Grand Rapids, Michigan offers very little in terms of notability. My knowledge of the city prior to this project consisted of its location (somewhere between Chicago and Detroit), and its AHL hockey team, the Griffons (the farm team of the NHL's Detroit Red Wings), which likely reflects the average Canadian's knowledge of the city. Situated on the Grand River near the eastern shore of Lake Michigan, Grand Rapids is the second largest city in Michigan and is known mostly for its beer, furniture, and Dutch Reform

inhabitants. Despite this quaint reputation, events in Grand Rapids have come to have serious ramifications on theo-politics of Canadian Evangelicals.

Postconservative Evangelism is the ongoing result of a number of socio-historical changes internal and external to North American Evangelicalism, including (but not limited to) changing patterns in education, demographics, and technology use. Furthermore, the Canadian version of this movement has a very particular set of conditions that enabled its existence, many of which connect to the long history of Social Gospel Evangelicalism in Canada, the Emerging Church Movement more broadly, and to Grand Rapids and Rob Bell specifically.

In this chapter, I first describe the historical, demographic, technological, socio-political, and socio-cultural foundations for the movement. Then I discuss Bell's development as a charismatic leader, and describe the immediate socio-historical context of this development. This context includes the dominance of Dutch Calvinism in Western Michigan, the Christian publication industry in the area, Bell and Mars Hill's use of technology, and the influence of the Grand Rapids art scene on Bell's theo-political perspective.

Historical and Demographic Foundations

In "For Marx," Althusser argued that all historical events are the result of "overdetermination." In other words, historical instances are determined by a "'merge' in a ruptural unity" of factors that on their own could not be enough cause the instance (Althusser 1969, 100-101). For example, following Lenin (1870-1924), he explained that prior to the rise of the Bolshevik regime in 1917, Russia was "pregnant" with two revolutions: bourgeois and proletarian. As such, Russia had accumulated a mass of "contradictions," of which any could have been enough to trigger the revolution on their own (Althusser 1969, 97-100). Similarly, Bourdieu used the concepts of "habitus" and "hexis" to account for the existence of various

socio-historical formations—the formation of *fields* and *capital* (Bourdieu 1989B, 35; Green 2008, 31). Since an agent's habitus is a constant historical production, one's hexis is always *overdetermined* by one's habitus.

Religious foundations

Postconservatism and the Emerging Church are part of a long history of protest and change within Protestant Christianity (Balmer 2010, 76; Belcher 2009, 48). Beginning with the Reformation, which posed one of the most radical changes to the Christian world since the conversion of Constantine (272-337 CE), the Protestant consciousness has internalized the impetus for reform, and probably is best represented by the diversity of Protestant churches that continue to exist today, each one roughly representing a schism resulting from protest.[8]

Not surprisingly, Evangelicals have a long history of involvement with progressive politics. From the very beginnings of the movement in England, Evangelicals found themselves involved in any number of reform movements. The most famous of these efforts is likely that of William Wilberforce (1759-1833) and the Testonites to abolish slavery in the United Kingdom in 1807 and in the colonies in 1833 (Crawford 2011).[9]

That said, English Evangelicalism took its most progressive form within the Christian socialist movement. English Christians had developed an increasing interest in political economy since the early 1800s. In fact, "Christian," and "Evangelical economics" arose in reaction to "the

[8] In short, Martin Luther's (1483–1546) posting of the Ninety-Five Theses to the church door in Wittenberg, and his eventual excommunication from the Catholic Church spawned the Protestant Reformation. Luther argued that the Bible had authority over church, pope, and tradition (González 1985, 31). It is estimated that there are around 41,000 Christian denominations on the planet, the majority of which are Protestant in origin (The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life 2011, 95).

[9] Wilberforce is a figure of great contention in the Evangelical world, claimed by both progressive and conservative members of the movement. For postconservatives, Wilberforce exemplifies the protest element of the faith that looks out for the disadvantaged (for example see Bell and Golden 2008). In contrast, some theoconservative authors hold Wilberforce as the foremost example of how an Evangelical politics can be successful and his efforts are used as a model for how Evangelicals can end abortion and gay marriage legislation (for example see Kryskow 2005; 2009).

great vogue for political economy during the first half of the nineteenth century" (Hilton, 1995: 36). These efforts, however, tended to look at how Christianity fit and could work with the 'free market' rather than criticizing the social and political effects of this development (Hilton, 1995). The Christian socialists diverged from this practice. They disagreed with much of the earlier Evangelical criticisms of socialism. Simply put, this movement challenged:

> [The] consecrated regime of individualism and competition, refusing to accept as final the pessimistic dogmas of an economic science which forgot that in the last resort the problem was not about wealth but about men; how they endeavoured to formulate a social science in which co-operation rather than competition should be the true law of industrial relationships… (Stubbs, 1900: 13).

Therefore, Christian socialists' impetus to actually *change* and criticize the socio-economic situation separated them from the philanthropic efforts prevalent in other forms of English Evangelicalism.

In Canada, Evangelicalism followed much the same pattern. Social Gospel Christians (most of whom were Evangelicals) took great effort to correct the collective ills produced by industrial society from the 1890s to the 1930s. Members of the movement involved themselves in a vast array of progressive political causes, including women's suffrage, poverty, and the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919 (Allen 2006).[10] Most importantly, members of the Social Gospel were integral to the creation of both the United Church of Canada in 1925 and Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (now the New Democratic Party) in 1932. The former has

[10] The Winnipeg General Strike of 1919 is likely Canada's best-known general strike. Approximately 30,000 workers walked off the job: "Public-sector employees, including policemen, firemen, postal workers, telephone operators and employees of waterworks and other utilities, joined the workers of private industry in an impressive display of solidarity" (Reilly 2006). Eventually, the federal government would call in the military and the Royal North-West Mounted Police to put-down the strike. In the ensuing unrest, protesters suffered dozens of casualties and several leaders of the strike were arrested, including Woodsworth, who was a prominent member of the Social Gospel movement (Reilly 2006).

advocated for same-sex marriage, the ordination of women, and the equality rights of LGBTQ individuals. It was also the first church to apologize for the harms done to Aboriginal peoples in the residential schools under its control, in addition to numerous other issues of social justice (United Church of Canada 2013A; 2013B). Meanwhile, the latter remains the closest thing that Canada has to a democratic socialist political option (New Democratic Party of Canada 2016).

The politics of American Evangelicals diverge slightly from those in Canada and the United Kingdom (Clark 1948; Reimer 2003), but they still were involved heavily in various progressive political endeavours. Most notably, Evangelicals, along with the Quakers, were instrumental in the American abolition movement in the 1800s (Wyatt-Brown 2016). Moreover, the Social Gospel movement also was well established in the United States and involved itself in issues ranging from "the abolition movement, public health measures, the settlement house movement, the establishment of adoption agencies, the temperance movement, improvement of schools, enforced education for the poor, women's suffrage, … ,[and] the Civil Rights Movement" (Bennett 2013).

Religious Studies scholar Randall Balmer argues that this tradition has transformed into Evangelicalism's ability to adapt across various cultural contexts, and technological changes (Balmer 2010). Postconservatism and the Emerging Church are great examples of this adaptability, and both have openly embraced this part of the Protestant tradition: "It doesn't take long in reading the literature of the Emerging Church to realize that protest is at the heart of their teaching. They are unhappy with the evangelical church" (Belcher 2009, 38). They regularly make use of terms, such as "deconstruct, wholesale change, recalibration, and dismantle," to describe what they need to do to the Christian faith (Belcher 2009, 38). At least in rhetoric, postconservatives are the most "protestant" of contemporary Christian movements.

Demographic foundations

Bibby has monitored Canadian religious trends since 1985. Over time, his analysis of these trends has changed greatly. He clarified this adjustment in his latest book *Beyond the Gods & Back: Religions Demise and Rise and Why It Matters*, where he explained how he moved from arguing for *secularization*—the demise of religion in Canada—in 1985 and 1993, to the *revitalization* of Canadian religion in 2002, to finally suggesting that the Canadian religious climate was best exemplified by polarization—a move to the extremes—in 2011 (2011, 2-3). He argued this polarization is due to the increase of non-belief amongst those born in Canada and relative rise in devout Catholic, Evangelical, and Muslim immigrants (2011). Moreover, in his latest numbers released in the *National Post*, Bibby added yet another caveat to the polarization thesis: that there is a growing number of religiously "ambivalent" people (44% of the Canadian population) taking up the space between those who embrace (30%) and the reject (26%) religion (Boesveld and Rivait 2015). This change has also been noted south of the border where Barna Group, a US-based religion-focused think-tank, found that approximately two in five Americans qualified as "post-Christian" (Barna Group 2013B).[11]

What is most interesting, however, is the generational gap in belief. For instance, in that same Barna study, these researchers found that almost half (48%) of millennials matched the description of post-Christian (Barna Group 2013B).[12] In 1984, 12% of Canadian teens claimed they had "no religion," and in 2008 that number jumped to 32% (Bibby 2011, 32). More importantly, no data supports that this non-belief is temporary and believers simply will come

[11] "Post-Christianity" is an indices designed by the Barna Group to cut through some of the nuances and complexities of non-belief (Barna Group 2013B).
[12] In this study, Barna actually used the term "Mosaics" to describe those between the ages of 18 and 25 as of 2013 (Barna Group 2013B). The term "millennials" usually refers to those people born between the years 1981 and 1991 (University of Iowa School of Social Work 2009, 5).

back when they grow up and have kids—a discourse common amongst many struggling church communities (Penner, et al. 2012, 81). As Bibby suggested, "God" does seem to be "slipping in the polls" (Bibby 2011, 33).

Based on data from several studies, I have compiled five reasons why young people leave or stay in churches and other religious communities (Barna Group 2011; 2013A; Bibby 2011; Penner, et al. 2012).[13] First, and most obviously, youth are more likely to stay in a church when their parents attend and enjoy it (Penner, et al. 2012, 43). As Evangelical authors Kara E. Powell and Chap Clark suggest, "faith is sticky" and is easily passed from one generation to the next (2011). Second, millennials are busier than previous generations and have less free time for activities like church (Penner, et al. 2012, 41). Third, millennials experience an interesting internal conflict that involves an outward desire for individualism (at times bordering on narcissism), and an inward desire for community (Barna Group 2013A; Penner, et al. 2012, 41-42). Young people feel like they can do church at home via a YouTube or a Podcast (Penner, et al. 2012, 41), yet are more likely to stay in a church when they have formed meaningful relationships with older members of the church community (Barna Group 2013A). In fact, one of the reasons why youth avoid churches is because they appear "exclusive" and unwelcoming to outsiders (Barna Group 2011). Forth, millennials are more likely to attend or stay in churches with progressive and relevant theologies. Young people want to talk about the issues that affect them on an everyday basis, such as sexuality, other religions, doubt, race, and ethnicity, topics that churches often avoid. In addition, millennials are also far more tolerant of other religions, gay marriage, and other progressive values than many church communities (Barna Group 2011; 2013A; Bibby 2011; Penner, et al. 2012). Evangelicalism, however, may be changing in ways

[13] Some authors argue that this desertification actually starts with the previous generation, commonly known as "Generation X," and the early founding of the Emerging Church in the 1990s (Belcher 2009, 24; Bielo 2011, 8).

that accommodate millennials. Some authors have argued that, currently, Evangelicalism is at its most intellectually vibrant, and that some aspects of the anti-intellectual climate that has dominated the faith over the past century might be fading (Balmer 2010; Worthen 2014).[14]

Finally, and arguably most importantly, youth (and most other age cohorts) no longer feel obligated to attend church (Bibby 2011, 20). This final factor legitimates all of the previous factors; without the shift from "obligation" to "gratification," none of them would apply. As Bibby states, "If religious leaders still expect people to show up for service because that's what a good _____ does, my message is simple: 'Good luck!'" (Bibby 2011, 22).

This idea relates to what some in my study call the plight of the "over-churched" (Fieldnotes 2014). The term speaks to the considerable number of Evangelicals who are tired of the overly demanding and restrictive aspects of the faith (Belcher 2009; Bielo 2011; Burge and Djupe 2014). Bielo talks about the tendency of Emerging Church members to construct "deconversion narratives" around their respective moves from more conservative and fundamentalist versions of Evangelical Christianity to their new more nuanced and flexible reiterations of the faith—an un-churching in order to be re-churched (Bielo 2011).

Nonetheless, in Canada eight-to-sixteen percent of the population identify as Evangelical (Reimer and Wilkinson 2015, 5). These figures increase to thirty-to-thirty-five percent in the United States (Eskridge 2012). Within these Evangelical congregations about eight percent of Canadian Evangelical pastors describe their church as "emergent" (Reimer and Wilkinson 2015, 131). In the United States, some researchers have estimated that there are over seven hundred Emerging congregations in the United States (Bielo 2011, 25-26).

[14] Jameson too notes how in late capitalism utopianism is more likely amongst the young (Jameson 2016, 42).

Technological foundations

From the invention of the printing press, which facilitated the distribution of Martin Luther's (1482-1546) vernacular Bible, and therefore, helped spread the Reformation, technology has been an important factor in Protestant Christian change and innovation. Balmer argued the television played a similar role in the rise of conservative Evangelicalism, and televangelism in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s (2010, 51-53). Expectedly, the internet and social media are facilitating a new era of change within the religious world. Extreme examples exist of how the internet has corresponded to religious change in other organizations. For example, ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) uses social media for recruitment and distribution of its message (Ajbaili 2014), and Scientology has lost its ability to control its image due to the Internet, which has also delayed the church's decline (Urban 2011).[15]

In terms of North American Christianity, the internet has changed the way people—young people in particular—connect to their church and their "God" (Burge and Djupe 2014, 637-638). For instance, 70% of practicing millennials read scripture on a screen (Barna Group 2013C), although the majority still prefer the old paper version (Barna Group 2014). Over half check out a church online before attending. About 60% make use of the Internet when answering spiritual questions, and a similar number post spiritually related comments and material via social media. Finally, almost two fifths of millennials admit to fact checking sermons while sitting in the pew (Barna Group 2013C).

[15] The Islamic State "is a Salafi militant organization in Syria and Iraq whose goal is the establishment and expansion of a caliphate. The group has its origins in the early 2000s, when Abu Musab al-Zarqawi began training extremist militants" (Stanford University 2015).

Socio-political foundations

Neoliberal policy has dominated the Canadian socio-political climate since the 1980s (Soederberg 2000). Although definitions vary, neoliberalism usually refers to a number of social, political, and economic changes that decentralized and privatized state-run social services, and policies that favoured free-market capitalism, such as free trade agreements (Wacquant 2010, 213). At the crux of this movement, and of particular concern for this project, is the connection between neo-liberalism, and ideologies of individualism and individual responsibility (Bourdieu 1998; Peters 2001; Wacquant 2010, 214). Social theorist Michael A. Peters described this connection as follows:

> In advanced liberal states a form of individualism has become the prevailing ideology behind neoliberal reforms. The individual, in Lockean fashion, is seen as standing separate from and prior to society. The so called 'free' individual is regarded as the basic unit of political order and the safeguarding of the individual's life, liberty, and property as the state's fundamental purpose. . . . Most often the individual is seen as the most important element in promoting welfare, and the well-being of individuals is regarded as the logical starting point for an analysis of social policy. Welfare and well-being are viewed as products of individual choice and contract within a free-market economy (Peters 2001, 124).

Similarly, sociologist Derek Sayer described the modern world as an "atomistic, fissiparous kind of place" where "social identities are abidingly fragmented and contradictory" in a way that prevents the development of "class consciousness" (Sayer 1990, 46).

Faith based organizations (FBOs) such as Evangelical churches play an important role in the implementation of neoliberal ideology. In short, the neoliberal dream is to have charities take over the role of state run social services. As geographer, Jason Hackworth explained:

> In a sense, then, some FBOs—or at least departments within some FBOs—function as extensions of state-based welfare, committed in general to the same principles of universal access as secular government, and largely dependent on state funding. They are, in this view, part of the 'shadow state' that has become increasingly relevant as central governments spin off welfare work in the form of contracts to NGOs (Hackworth 2010A, 86).

Neoliberals tend to favour FBOs for this role because they argue that FBOs are both historically and geographically better positioned than the state to deliver services, and most importantly, are better at sorting the "'deserving' from the 'undeserving,'" thus making them less expensive than welfare state-based institutions (Hackworth 2010A, 86-87). In addition, neoliberal ideology has also found its way into churches and Christian media, which can often speak quite negatively about state run services (Hackworth 2010A, 102).

The Harper government reflected this neoliberal attachment to FBOs. The attachment was most visible through the Prime Minister's relationship with former RockPointe church pastor Brent Trask, his daycare policies, his choice of Ottawa churches, East Gate Alliance, which largely fills in as a community center in its blue-collar neighbourhood (McDonald 2010, 26-27), and through the government's continued financial friendliness towards faith-based initiatives (McDonald 2010).

Socio-cultural foundations

Along with the increased influence of neoliberal governance, a number of authors have observed an increase in *cosmopolitan* attitudes, even suggesting that much of the globe is undergoing a process of "cosmopolitanization" (Beck 2004; Beck and Sznaider 2010; Calhoun 2002; Datta 2013). By cosmopolitanism, I do not mean "normative" cosmopolitan theorizing that focuses on some form of transnational humanity derived "from the idea of the universal membership of all persons, as citizens of the world, in global forms of civic life that transcend and displace the nation-state as the basic sphere of civic life . . . ." (Datta 2013, 83)—a cosmopolitanism that argues for "harmony across national and cultural frontiers" (Beck 2004, 132).

Rather, I use the term to describe a process of "cosmopolitanization" that increases "the interdependence of actors across national boundaries as an unintended or unforeseen *side effect* of actions that have no normative 'cosmopolitan intent'" (Beck 2004, 132). This "banal" and/or "mundane cosmopolitanism" is experienced through increased access to ethnic foods, and moments, through global communication networks, where we become part of a larger cosmopolitan world without explicitly trying to do so (Beck 2004, 134; Beck and Sznaider 2010, 387-388; Datta 2013, 81). Likewise, sociologist Ronjon Paul Datta defined "mundane cosmopolitanism" as those commonalities in mobility that breed a certain from of solidarity, such as riding the bus or commuting to work with thousands of other people (Datta 2013, 96). As such, cosmopolitanization has greatly altered how people, Evangelicals included, understand their subjective place in society.

Charisma, Grand Rapids, and Rob Bell

As mentioned earlier, historical instances have no single cause, and are produced by multiple factors, any of which could be enough to cause the instance on their own (Althusser 1969, 100-101). One of those factors that led to the postconservative turn in Canada is Evangelical pastor and author Rob Bell. No single individual had influenced the theo-political perspectives of the postconservatives in my study more than Bell (Fieldnotes 2014). Along with his importance to my participants, Bell's exposure across media platforms—such as social media, books, television, and most recently Podcasts, and his appeal across generations—make Bell more pertinent as a case than his fellow postconservatives, such as McLaren, Brian Zahnd, and Zachary Boyd.

Bell's rise to prominence is an interesting combination of socio-historical context, charisma, and chance (Wellman Jr. 2012). Social theorist Max Weber (1864-1920) defined charisma "as a certain quality of a[n] individual personality by virtue of which he is considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities" (Weber 1978, 241). In Weber's widely cited definition, charisma is limited to individuals with specific "gifts of grace," such as "magical capabilities, prophesies or heroism, spiritual power and oratorical powers" (Weber 2004, 138-139).

A number of authors have argued that Weber's definition is overly individualistic and fails to account for the contexts from which charismatic individuals arise (Bourdieu 1987; 1991; Engler 2003, 446; Pearce 2001, 31; Willey 2016).[16] For instance, sociologist Frank Pearce argues that we need to understand charisma as a "social relation" (Pearce 2001, 31). Similarly, Bourdieu

[16] To his credit, Weber hints that some of the onus for the development of charismatic authority lied in the individuals who follow to the charismatic person: "The decisive factor for us is whether the charisma is effective and works – that it is acknowledged" (Weber 2004, 141).

suggests that charisma is a component of an agent's habitus, which both influences and is influenced by one's position in the religious field (Bourdieu 1991). As such, we can understand charisma as a form of "liminal capital:"

> Liminal capital is the element of charisma that is not just cultural capital, such as credentials and oratorical ability. It is what allows these individuals to appear *otherworldly*—as a tether to a realm beyond the rational world of work, which the audience of the charismatic inhabit (Willey 2016).

Charisma allows the liminal to continue to exist in the everyday.[17] More importantly, liminal capital and charisma are key aspects of religious change and innovation. In more Bourdieuian language, liminal capital and charisma are key in altering the exchange rates of capital within the religious field.

Bell's charisma

Charisma is an important part of Bell's story. His ability to engage a large audience is notable. Wellman Jr. marked this assessment of Bell's charismatic qualities in his first NOOMA video "Rain."[18] In this particular video Bell eloquently reveals a story about a storm and a walk in the woods with his son. As Wellman Jr. notes:

> It's a remarkable debut of Bell's ability to engage the viewer, the listener, the follower on so many different levels. Artistically, it is noteworthy because the complexity of emotion is communicated in a short film. The visuals and the musical score, along with Bell's voice, tone, and intonation, effortlessly arouse the feelings of the moment in which the

[17] Liminality is a transformative period of time where individual agents are separated from their normal banal lives and can be transformed via rites and rituals (Willey 2016).
[18] NOOMA is a series of short films (twenty-four in total) featuring Bell dealing with various religious and social issues.

> viewer sees a transparent portrayal of what a good father will do in the midst of the reality of life's catastrophes (Wellman Jr. 2012, 47).

Moreover, Bell's delivery has actually drawn the attention of those who study effective preaching strategies (for example see Cathcart 2012).

Bell can make an audience of 10,000 feel as if they all simultaneously are having one-on-one conversations with him (Wellman Jr. 2012, 49). In his study at Mars Hill, Wellman Jr. noted that in "countless interviews" people would "spontaneously" refer to Bell as one of their "'best friends'" (2012, 48). Bell's ability to engender such powerful interpersonal relationships on such large scale reflects an almost *ideal* form of charismatic authority. These interpersonal relationships reflect Bell's ability to convert his charismatic liminal capital into social, cultural, and economic capital.

Grand Rapids and the charismatic context

As I have alluded to previously, "Prophecy exists amongst the laity before it leaves the mouth of the prophet" (Willey 2016, 128). Charismatic individuals rise to prominence because of specific socio-historical conditions (Bourdieu 1987, 130; Willey 2016). Bell exemplifies this pattern.

Conservative Dutch Calvinism dominates most of Western Michigan and the Grand Rapids area, where Bell grew up and later founded Mars Hill. One author describes the Grand Rapids area as a "furnace of Evangelical piety" (Wellman Jr. 2012, 13). In fact, the acronym "TULIP" is used often to describe this form of Christianity. One of Wellman Jr.'s participants describes it as follows:

> The theology has an acronym, TULIP, which is fun for the Dutch people because of the flowers and the Dutch; it stands for total depravity, unconditional election, limited

> atonement, irresistible grace, and the preservation of the saints—once saved always saved (Wellman Jr. 2012, 52).

This Calvinist dominance resulted in what one Mars Hill pastor described as an abundance of "over-churched" people in the Grand Rapids area—people looking for a more optimistic and compassionate version of Christianity (Fieldnotes 2014). Sociologist David A. Palmer suggested, often charisma is founded on the utopian expectations of one's followers: "charismatic relationships cannot come into existence if [utopian] expectations are absent amongst potential followers or if individuals seen as endowed with extraordinary powers do not respond to expectations" (Palmer 2008: 70).

In addition, Bell benefitted from the large number of Christian publishers in the Grand Rapids area, which greatly increased the pastor's ability to disseminate his message. Grand Rapids is home to four major Christian publishers: William B. Erdmans Publishing Company, Kregel Publications, Baker Books, and Zondervan (Crookston 2014), the latter two having been ranked in the top ten Christian publishers in the United States by market share (Hyatt 2010). The previously mentioned Mars Hill pastor noted that it was easier for Christian leaders in the Grand Rapids area to publish because of their proximity to Christian publishers and the large number of mega-churches, which guarantee the publishers a market for the work of their leaders (Fieldnotes 2014). For instance, Bell was able to gain a publication agreement with Zondervan—the largest of the Grand Rapids publishers—quite early in his career, where he published his first five books and the NOOMA series (Ruark 2006, 203; Wellman Jr. 2012).

Bell and Mars Hill's use of technology and social media is also noteworthy. Bell's NOOMA short films, a series of two dozen, ten to fifteen minute sermons, are YouTube videos that predate YouTube (at least in format) and catered to the increasing Evangelical appetite for

short, portable sermon material (Barna Group 2013C).[19] As of 2012 these videos had been downloaded more than three million times (Wellman Jr. 2012, 1), and "99 percent of *Nooma* viewers recommend it to others and more than half of those who watch the films make some kind of 'life-changing decision'" as a result (Wellman Jr. 2012, 60).

Bell's social media presence has only expanded over time. Currently, he has almost 160,000 followers on each of the three prominent social media platforms: Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram (Bell 2015A; 2015B; 2015C). While Bell and Mars Hill's services, website, and social media presence reflect incredible attention to recent technological changes and design, both continue to have critical discussions of technology and contemporary life (Bell 2003B; Bell and Golden 2008).

For instance, in the NOOMA film "Noise," Bell was critical of how "technology" increases the level of distraction in our daily lives and how people should come to embrace "silence" (Bell 2003B).[20] Likewise, in his co-authored book *Jesus Wants to Save Christians: A Manifesto for the Church in Exile* he described ancient Egypt as "a complex web of power and violence and industry and technology that exploits people for its expansion and profit" (Bell and Golden 2008, 26). Thereby, "technology" for Bell is both a tool for effective communication and community building, as well as a tool for exploitation and individualization. This description of technology accurately reflects the tension millennials feel between the isolating effects of technology and their desire for community.

[19] The first NOOMA video "Rain" was released in 2002 (Bell 2002A), while Youtube was founded in 2005 (Dickey 2013).

[20] I have placed quotations around the word "technology" because Bell's use of the word is inconsistent at best and confusing at worst. He never really operationalizes the term and it seems to stand in for any change in communication tools—from the development of the clay tablet in Mesopotamia to the invention of the cell phone.

This discussion of technology continued at Mars Hill long after Bell's departure. During my two weeks attending Mars Hill, the church invited Craig Detweiler, a professor of communication and director of the Center for Entertainment, Media, and Culture at Pepperdine University to speak about his recent work on technology and faith. In his two talks at the church, and in his book *iGods: How Technology Shapes our Spiritual and Social Lives*, Detweiler made use of Biblical stories to describe how humans can use technology. First, he used the story of Noah and his ark to describe how technology can save the world (Gen 5-9)—the ark being an example of life saving technology. Then he used the "Tower of Babylon" (Gen 11: 4-9) narrative to describe how technology can lead to our destruction. It short, he emphasized that technology is a "tool" that we should use carefully (Detweiler 2013; Fieldnotes 2014).

Nonetheless, one of the most interesting influences on the development of Bell and Mars Hill is the Grand Rapids art scene, which exploded at approximately the same time the postconservative turn developed in the area. At the epicentre of this scene is the international art festival and competition, ArtPrize.[21]

Started in 2009, ArtPrize has permanently altered the city of Grand Rapids (Devos 2014). The competition, which hands out $720,000 in grants and awards entirely from private donations, transforms the city into an art gallery for nineteen days every fall (ArtPrize 2015). In 2014, it was ranked as the most visited "Big Ticket" art event on the planet by *The Art Newspaper*, attracting an average of 23,225 people per day (Da Silva 2015).

Some authors attributed the event's success to the way its format levels the power dynamics that usually come with viewing art in more traditional contexts, such as a museum:

[21] Artprize and its effects on the Grand Rapids area, including Mars Hill, is an excellent example of "cosmopolitanization" (Beck 2004). I reproach this topic in Chapter Seven.

> During ArtPrize people have a sense that it's theirs, the art, the event, and that they are OK to have an opinion, that they are allowed to look, and allowed to experience, and to really enter a dialogue with a work of art—even if they don't have a lot of background about where they should begin with that (Buist as cited in Mitchell 2014, 41).

As a direct result of ArtPrize, Grand Rapids is now overflowing with art, and some has found its way into Mars Hill and likely numerous other churches in the area. This situation explains why the woman working at the welcoming booth at Mars Hill responded so matter-of-factly when I asked her why there was so much art in the church: "Because it's Grand Rapids!" (Fieldnotes 2014).

Mars Hill has actually converted most of its well-trafficked church space into a de-facto art gallery. It is hard to find a place in the church where one cannot see a painting or installation of some sort, and considering Mars Hill is an old mall, the structure provides a considerable amount of space.[22] More importantly, Bell's most controversial book begins with a work of art; art that provided the last generative/liminal catalyst to motivate Bell to write the "Love Wins;" art that found its way into the church either as a direct or indirect result of ArtPrize. Bell found the work with a sticky note attached to it from a congregant—a sticky note attached by someone who felt comfortable enough to directly enter into a conversation with it, another likely by-product of the art culture inculcated by ArtPrize.

"Art is dangerous. It is one of the attractions: when it ceases to be dangerous you don't want it." This quote is attributed to both the jazz musician Duke Ellington (1899-1974) and author Anthony Burgess (1917-1993). Nonetheless, the quote points out the relationship between

[22] See appendix two for photos; After it failed to retain it last anchor tenant, the mall was sold to Mars Hill for a dollar leaving the church only having to pay for the property. The church has slowly converted the space into a church complex (Fieldnotes 2014).

art and social change. Musicians, composers, novelists, and artists have influenced a great number of theorists and philosophers, including Bell.[23] For example, French social theorist Michel Foucault (1926-1984), and philosopher Georges Bataille (1897-1962) were influenced by a number of surrealist artists, René Magritte (1898-1967), and Salvador Dali (1904-1989) in particular (Foucault 1983, Batialle 1985). Bourdieu had a long-standing intellectual relationship with performance artist Andrea Fraser (Bourdieu 2005, Fraser 2012). German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) had a tumultuous and sometimes exploitive relationship with composer Richard Wagner (1813-1883 [Nietzsche 1888]).

In addition, art, music, and other forms of cultural production have inspired, directly or indirectly, collective social change. The most recent example of this inspiration is likely the Occupy Wall Street protests that swept across North America in the fall of 2011. The movement, which roughly intended to address issues related to socio-economic disparity and government corruption, was inspired in part by a single photograph of a ballerina dancing on top of the Wall Street Bull published by the Canadian anti-consumerist magazine *Adbusters*. The "visceral" image became a symbolic beacon for the movement, providing the initial push to start the protests (Beeston 2011). As such, we can understand art as a sort of ossified form of liminal capital, capable of generating significant social change.

Historical, demographic, and technological developments, along with specific coinciding events and efforts of certain charismatic individuals in the Grand Rapids area, are having a tremendous impact on Canadian Evangelicalism. Changes, such as the increasing religious ambivalence of Canadians, and the development of social media, have forced churches to

[23] Similar to Bell, the militancy of the Air Force Academy Chapel in Colorado Springs, Colorado, which consists of stylized jets forming the main body of the church and a cross composed of a sword and a propeller, inspired postconservative author Brian Zahnd's (2014A) book *A Farewell to Mars: An Evangelical Pastor's Journey Toward the Biblical Gospel of Peace.*

function in different ways and have even opened up a willingness to approach key doctrines in ways previously not thought possible.

Postconservative Evangelicalism is one of these developments, and it is more than just a sum of historical events and societal influences. Postconservatism is an ongoing theo-political project that threatens to alter permanently the core aspects of North American Evangelicalism. While the intellectual core of this movement is American-based, the prolonged influence of Social Gospel Evangelicalism in Canada provided fertile soil for this movement north of the border. The tertiary effects of postconservatism are as diverse as they are significant. They are effects that one can trace back to a change in the internal dynamic between "sacred" objects within the tradition itself. In other words, Bell and those like him are *shifting the sacred* and vicariously shifting the Evangelicalisms that these sacred objects and ideas define.

Chapter Three

Defining and Exploring Evangelical Theo-politics: Doing a Multi-sited Ethnography

Almost immediately, I regretted my choice of methodology. I made this statement just over a month into my project, after the pastor of my first contacted church had taken several weeks to deliberate about, and eventually reject, my presence in his church:

> So, <*suppressed church name*> has canned my project after taking two months to figure this out. I am beyond frustrated, and am now well behind schedule. If another church cans the project then I may have to rethink my research strategy in the least and my entire methodology at the most. I am just a tad frustrated at the moment (Fieldnotes 2014).

Considering the difficulties I had gaining entrée to churches in my previous two projects (Willey 2010A; 2010B), I still question why I thought it was a good idea to try and gain entrée to five churches in the same project when I previously had so much difficulty gaining access to one. Nonetheless, my multi-sited ethnographic format successfully provided me the breadth of analysis that I wanted. More importantly, it emphasized the greatest benefit of ethnographic research—flexibility (see Ayella 1993; Hamabata 1996; McGuire 1982; Riemer 1977). This flexibility allowed me to alter the direction of my study when I was confronted by the lack of theoconservatism and the presence of postconservative Evangelicalism. Flexibility is at the core of any ethnography, and is even more pertinent in a multi-sited one. This method enabled me to capture the complex relationships between the settings in which my participants existed and there attending theo-politics.

In this chapter, I first lay out my general ethnographic framework for conducting research in a faith community. Next, I discuss my project design and fieldwork. In addition, in this section I lay out the rationale and particulars of the concept of theo-politics. Finally, I describe ethical issues related to the project and discuss my method of data analysis and storage.

A Framework for Ethnographic Research in a Faith Community

Inevitably, researchers ground their methodological practice in some form of theoretical perspective. Similarly, one inevitably puts forth a methodological practice in order to make use of a theoretical perspective, whether the researcher is aware of it or not. Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) and Loïc Wacquant (b. 1960) argued that the separation between theory and methodology was a moot point and, at times, problematic: "The most 'empirical' technical choices cannot be disentangled from the most 'theoretical' choices in the construction of the object" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 225). In the best sense, methodology and theory should be interrelated closely

because both work to develop reasoning about what goes on in the social world; why, how, under what conditions, and how best we can learn about these factors and account for them. Considering my own methodological reservations, poststructural Marxist theory (via Bourdieu and Wacquant) helped me deal with these reservations in a constructive way.

As such, the goal of my ethnographic work was to gain a better understanding of the common habitus of my participants—to understand their material conditions of existence. Central to this relationship between habitus and practice is the connection between *habitus* and *hexis*. *Hexis* is the embodied representation of one's *habitus*; it is the dispositions, appearances, tastes, and practices produced by an agent's *habitus* (Bourdieu 1989b, 35; Green 2008, 31). Thus, *hexis* also is the material manifestation of ideology—the effect of interpellation. Wacquant revealed this connection through combining participant observations with life histories gained through one-on-one interviews (Wacquant 2004A, 5). Observations provides researchers with ready access to their participant's *hexis* while the life histories allow researchers to draw connections to people's *habitus*.

Bourdieu cleverly called this form of research "participant objectivation" (Bourdieu 2003; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 253; Wacquant 2004B, 395). He stated:

> Participant objectivation undertakes to explore not the 'lived experience' of the knowing subject but the social conditions of possibility – and therefore the effects and limits – of that experience and, more precisely, of the act of objectivation itself (Bourdieu 2003, 282).

Researchers must focus on the relations that restrict and enable an agent's activities; they must "think relationally" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 224). Furthermore, researchers need to position themselves within the fields relevant to their studies. Bourdieu described this process as

"the objectivation of the subject of objectivation" (Bourdieu 2003, 282). This process enables researchers to describe reflexively the various forms of capital they possess and the various ways this capital influences the relationships formed while conducting fieldwork.[24]

In a manner similar to participant observation, objectivation is ideal for researching religious groups because it allows the researcher to exhibit a necessary flexibility and adaptability. Although flexibility is vital to virtually all research in the social sciences, it is of particular importance in participant observation (see Ayella 1993; Hamabata 1996; McGuire 1982). Flexibility allows the researcher to create new questions and new frameworks of analysis as the project progresses, and to take advantage of opportunities that may develop while in the field (Riemer 1977).

Researching people in religious groups comes with issues that set them apart from many other subjects of research. Althusser argued that Christian religious practice involves "strange phenomenon" where creating religious subjects requires the existence of a *Subject* that is capable of interpellating Himself—a God (Althusser 1970). The "duplicate mirror-structure of ideology" then ensures:

1. the interpellation of individuals as subjects;
2. their subjection to the Subject;
3. the mutual recognition of subjects and Subject, the subjects' recognition of each other, and finally the subject's recognition of himself;

[24] Capital, for Bourdieu, gives the social world "inertia" and is what changes this world from being a simple game of chance to one altered by "accumulation," "hereditary," and "acquired properties" (Bourdieu 1986). Bourdieu divides capital into three "fundamental guises" from which all forms of capital take their form. First, *Economic* capital is capital in the Marxist sense. People who have a greater degree of the ownership control over the means of production have greater amounts of economic capital (Bourdieu 1986; Marx 1965, 233). Second, *cultural* capital exists in the form of a person's tastes, values, education, and credentials of all sorts. Third, agents derive *social* capital from the personal, intimate, and informal networks and bonds we form with others (Bourdieu 1986).

> 4. the absolute guarantee that everything really is so, and that on condition that the subjects recognize what they are and behave accordingly, everything will be all right: Amen – *'So be it'* (Althusser 1970).

As such, Christians, and many other religious practitioners, are subjected to an incredibly powerful form of subjection via a "Unique, Absolute, *Other Subject,*" which many individuals outside of religious circles do not have to deal with to the same extent. This relationship between subject and Subject can be a difficult one for a researcher to comprehend. Therefore, it is important that researchers observe actual religious *practice*, such as rituals and other institutional practices—material actions that become the foundation of religious belief (Althusser 1970).[25]

In all likelihood, many secular researchers feel incredible frustration with having to analyze something that they themselves struggle to understand. Research from this secular perspective can overlook the interactional aspects of religious activity (Ayella 1993, 109). As such, researchers need to be vigilant about their own *habitus* and how that positions them within and outside the field. A researcher also must observe reflexively how one's capital is being converted and exchanged while one is in the field, which is implied through the process of "participant objectivation" (Bourdieu 2003).

This method has been quite helpful in two of my previous research projects in Evangelical churches along with this current one (see Willey 2010A; 2013A). In particular, in the latter of these two projects, I combined ethnographic observation with sexual histories gained through in-depth interviews. Most importantly, I focused my efforts to gain interviews with the people with whom I had spent the most time, which allowed me to gain a deep understanding of the sexual marketplace in which my participants found themselves embedded (Willey 2013A).

[25] Althusser cleverly explicates the relationship between religious practice and belief through Pascal: "'Kneel down, move your lips in prayer, and you will believe'" (quoted in Althusser 1970).

Project Design and Fieldwork

This project consisted of a multi-site ethnography, intended to explore the political practices and opinions of Evangelicals at the grassroots level. This "mode of ethnographic research" moves beyond traditional single site ethnographies in order to capture the complexities of the "postmodern" world:

> [Multi-site ethnography] moves out from the single sites and local situations of conventional ethnographic research designs to examine the circulation of cultural meanings, objects, and identities in diffuse time-space. This mode defines for itself an object of study that cannot be accounted for ethnographically by remaining focused on a single site of investigation. . . . This mobile ethnography takes unexpected trajectories in tracing a cultural formation across and within multiple sites of activity that destabilize the distinction . . . . (Marcus 1995, 96).

As such, a multi-sited framework enabled me to move across the Evangelical religious field in order to follow particular theo-political articulations—theoconservatism and postconservatism.[26]

In short, I use the term "theo-politics" because most of my participants refused to separate their religious lives from their political ones (Fieldnotes 2014). The most direct reference to this refusal to segregate their religious and political lives came from a member of a rural Missionary Alliance church after I asked him if he supported the separation of church and state:

> Where do I go with that one? . . . See, on a personal level, I don't see the difference. I don't compartmentalize my life. But, then there is a bigger question, do you separate

[26] A field "contains people who dominate and others who are dominated. Constant, permanent relationships of inequality operate inside this space, which at the same time becomes a space, which the various actors struggle for the transformation or preservation of the field" (Bourdieu 1996, 40).

> church and state? … It's almost as though I should say 'No there should not be separation' but history has shown it does not work (Interview-RMAC3-2).

Moreover, if we define politics as a system of inclusion and exclusion, then it would be difficult to find an apolitical theology in the first place.

This study followed previous multi-site ethnographies in Evangelical communities, such as anthropologist James S. Beilo's analysis of the Emerging Church Movement (2011), journalist Lauren Sandler's investigation into Evangelical youth movements (2006), and religious studies scholar Randall Balmer's analysis of the Evangelical sub-culture in the United States (1993). All of these studies investigated a wide variety of Evangelical communities and events in order to gain a broad understanding of their target populations.

Although focused primarily on actual churches, my project did the same. I planned to attend various church communities and events to gain a broad-based understanding of the political dispositions present in these places. By the end of my fieldwork in November 2014, I had over fifty-eight days of observations, sixteen formal interviews, and at least thirteen informal interviews divided between five Pentecostal and Missionary Alliance "sample" churches from across Alberta.[27] I conducted about half-a-dozen "targeted" visits, including several churches in suburban Toronto, The National House of Prayer in Ottawa, Ontario, and Mars Hill Bible Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Finally, I read, watched, and listened to hours of written, visual, and audio material suggested by or otherwise connected to my participants.

[27]Originally, I intended to research two churches, one Pentecostal and one Missionary Alliance, in a large urban population centre (population greater than 100,000), in a small urban centre (population between 10,000 and 99,999), and in rural centres (population under 10,000) within the province of Alberta. I failed, however, to gain access to a rural Pentecostal church. I decided to select a Pentecostal and a Missionary Alliance church so that I could attempt to represent both the charismatic and non-charismatic wings of Evangelicalism respectively. For more details on my sample, see Appendix Four. For my interview outline, see Appendix One.

As mentioned earlier, I originally designed this project to investigate the presence of theoconservatism in Evangelical communities. My plan was to use my sample churches to detect the presence of this articulation among others, while using a series of targeted visits to both follow up on McDonald's work and to gain a better understanding of theoconservative infrastructure beyond the actual churches.

Within the first month of my project, however, I knew it was taking a different course. After an informal interview with a Missionary Alliance pastor in early July 2013, I stated, "[I am] starting to get my first insight into what this project is going to be about. There seems to be a lot of tension between progressive impulses in Evangelicalism and the vicarious conservative reaction" (Fieldnotes 2014). Immediately following this experience, I conducted a second informal interview with the youth pastor at the same church, who was the obvious source of this progressive incursion (Fieldnotes 2014). By the end of the project, I would find progressive elements in virtually every church I visited, including two churches, one Missionary Alliance and the other Pentecostal, dominated by a progressive postconservative theo-politics. Bell and the theological works he authored while he pastored Mars Hill heavily influenced much of this theology. As such, I decided that I needed to visit Grand Rapids, Michigan to account adequately for the political economy of the theo-political articulation I was tracking. Visiting Mars Hill concretely connected my observations in Canada to a very specific movement amongst primarily white middle-class Evangelicals in the United States.

Ethical Considerations

The potential risk of harm for those involved was minimal and followed the guidelines set out in the Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethics and I received ethics approval on June 17, 2013. My research was non-intrusive and casual. For the most part, I attempted to "fit into" my

surroundings by taking up verbal and behavioural cues from the congregation, in order to avoid disrupting anything within the church. I informed participants that they have the right to reject any line of questioning and I was wary of any issue that is making a participant uncomfortable.

Nonetheless, I understand some of the difficulties of conducting research in religious space. Churches exist somewhere between the public and the private. While the church is actually public, many people often view faith and religious activity as private matters. Therefore, it is hard to predict how the parishioners will perceive me as a researcher within the church. My background in religious studies and my previous experiences researching in churches, however, helped me negotiate this situation. Thus, I informed church leaders prior to my arrival in their churches and asked permission to attend, and I gave them the opportunity to inform their congregations of my presence.

I preserved informed and voluntary consent in all cases where knowledge of participation in my project could have compromised an individual participant or participating church community. This consent included all of my sample churches in which I provided the church leaders with a script, and this script acted as a hard copy record of my purposes within the church. They could decide who they thought should know about my purposes in their churches, and they had a chance to refuse my presence outright. For the interviews, the participants signed detailed consent forms prior to the commencement of the interview. This form outlined the purpose of the interview, my intentions for dissemination, and the rights of the participant. For obvious reasons, maintaining anonymity for my targeted churches was not an option. That said, I maintained confidentially and/or the anonymity of individuals in any situation where I thought it was required.

In this study and any work that results from it, I will preserve anonymity and confidentiality by using pseudonyms, for both informants and the churches themselves, including churches' specific locations. I recorded all the interviews digitally and stored them in a password-protected computer with the transcripts and field notes. I stored hard copies in a locked box to preserve confidentiality.

Data Storage and Research Analysis

First, when analyzing the data, I entered and stored all field notes and interview transcriptions in a secure word processing document. This procedure allowed me to return to my observations, adding memos, connections to literature, and reflections as they arose. Second, at the completion of the observation period, I transferred all the interviews and fieldnotes into NVivo where I will analyzed and coded them for any themes, patterns, discourses, and/or ideologies that may be prominent.[28] Once again, flexibility was paramount in the analysis of my data because I was unsure of the exact form my data would take.

In sum, what this project's method emphasizes is the complex relationship between *habitus* and *hexis*. More specifically, it emphasized how an overdetermined Evangelical *habitus* can result in a complex, nuanced, utopian, multivalent, and even contradictory Evangelical *hexis*. The complexity of late capitalist existence makes this complexity possible, and it also makes the future of this theo-political articulation equally difficult to predict.

[28] "A key procedure used by researchers in organizing and processing qualitative data, coding refers to applying labels to strips of data that illustrate ideas and concepts and the continuing process of identifying, modifying, and refining concepts and categories that sustain emerging themes and patterns" (Babbie and Benaquisto, 2002: 490).

Chapter Four

Shifting the Sacred: Rob Bell and the Postconservatism Evangelical Turn

In his 2011 book, "Love Wins: A Book About Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived" Rob Bell questioned foundational Evangelical understandings of the afterlife—the very nature of Heaven, Hell, and God (Bell 2011). He started this book by describing an experience in his church:

> Several years ago we had an art show at our church. I had been giving a series on peacemaking, and we invited artists to display their paintings, poems, and sculptures that reflected their understanding of what it means to be a peacemaker. One woman included

> in her work a quote from Mahatma Gandhi, which a number of people found quite compelling.
>
> But not everyone.
>
> Someone attached a piece of paper to it. On the piece of paper was written: 'Reality check: He's in hell.'
>
> Really?
>
> Gandhi's in hell?
>
> He is?
>
> We have confirmation of this?
>
> Somebody knows this?
>
> Without a doubt?
>
> And that somebody decided to take on the responsibility of letting the rest of us know (Bell 2011, 3-4)?

This move towards a more utopian Universalist soteriology sent a shockwave through American Evangelicalism.[29] While many Evangelicals applauded Bell's move (Wellman Jr. 2012, 17), a far greater number of commentators have labelled him as "dangerous" or even a "heretic" (Wellman Jr. 2012; Mappes 2012). Most notably, megachurch pastor John Piper immediately declared Bell outside of the Evangelical world in a now-infamous "Farewell to Rob Bell" Tweet (Wellman Jr. 2012, 7), and others accused him of "worshipping a different God" (Wellman Jr. 2012, 4). Although the release of "Love Wins" appeared shocking, in reality, it was the culmination of Bell's own theological revision over decades, and followed years of post-conservative

[29] This reaction reflects Jameson's observation of the necessary relationship between utopian thought and social disruption (Jameson 2007: 231).

Evangelical insights starting with the efforts of Evangelical authors and activists, Wallis and Campollo, and the Christian Left (Balmer 2010).

The efforts of Bell and other postconservatives mark a profound shift in the hierarchy of sacred Evangelical things. Sociologist Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) argued the 'sacred' constitutes all those things "set apart and forbidden" (Durkheim 1995, 44). Sacred items or ideas are set in relationship to other sacred things within religious contexts. Within Evangelical Christianity, and to a lesser degree Protestantism in general, the sacred has arguably centred around three things: the *scriptural*, the *individual*, and the *communal*, usually in that order. Bell and the postconservatives have come to emphasize the sacred nature of *relationships* and *community,* culminating in Bell's oft-cited mantra "God is love" (Bell 2005C, 33; 2007C; 2011; Bell and Bell 2014, 106), while also departing from traditional Evangelical emphasis on the inerrancy of scripture (Bell 2005C; Wellman Jr. 2012, 74). The concurrent appreciation of community and depreciation of scripture has profoundly altered the hierarchy of sacred things within Evangelicalism. Bell's work possibly best exemplifies this change and its ramifications, which extends from a post-colonial critique of mission work and evangelism to a more inclusive Church and Universalist soteriology.

In this chapter, I first introduce the "sacred" as a theoretical concept primarily through the theoretical works of Durkheim and Bourdieu. Second, I use this concept to outline an *Evangelical Trinity* of sacred things: the Bible, the individual, and the community. Next, I introduce Bell's theo-political perspective (how he constructs his "God" in particular) and explain how this perspective alters the Trinity. I follow this explanation by describing the additional theo-political changes that resulted both directly and indirectly from this alteration.

Finally, I explore the similarity between Bell's theo-politics and Durkheim's sociology of religion, and the relationship between postconservatism and neo-liberal subjectification.[30]

Religion and the Sacred

For Durkheim, religion is a quintessentially social thing composed of two central elements: "a unified system of beliefs and practices [set] relative to sacred things," and a "moral community" or "church" that abides by this "system" (Durkheim 1995, 44). The distinction between the sacred and the profane is essential for Durkheim's sociology of religion. In the "Elementary Forms of Religious Life," he explained:

> [T]he religious phenomenon is such that it always assumes a bipartite division of the universe, know and knowable, into two genera that include all that exists but radically exclude one another. Sacred things are things protected and isolated by prohibitions; profane things are those things to which the prohibitions are applied and that must keep at a distance from what is sacred (Durkheim 1995, 38).

Moreover, he argues that religious "rites" are the "rules of conduct" for dealing with the sacred and "religious beliefs" represent the relationship between sacred things and the profane (Durkheim 1995, 38).

Furthermore, Durkheim argued that the sacred items within religions are set in relationship to each other. More specifically, he stated:

> [S]acred things have relations of coordination and subordination with one another, so as to form a system that has a certain coherence and does not belong to any other system of the same sort, then the beliefs and rites, taken together, constitute a religion (Durkheim 1995, 38).

[30] I presented an earlier version of this paper as "Shifting the Sacred: Rob Bell and the Progressive Evangelical Turn" on June 2, 2015 and the Congress of Humanities and Social Sciences in Ottawa, ON.

While sacred things and their "cults" can exist "side by side in confederation," often the sacred things within religions are set in hierarchies that define the rituals and beliefs that surround them, which in turn define religious practice. Durkheim suggested that these "cults" surrounding sacred things can be "absorbed" by a more "dominant" cult within the religious tradition or persevere long after the demise of a religion in the form of "folklore" (Durkheim 1995, 38-39). In short, if one changes the relationship between sacred things within a religious tradition then potentially one could change the religious tradition itself.

Bourdieu documented this process of religious change by extending Weber's sociology of religion (Bourdieu 1987, 1991). Bourdieu described a process where *prophets* and *heretics* challenge orthodoxy within the *religious field* and compete for *religious capital*. If the heretics win out, then according to Bourdieu, they win the ability to define orthodoxy (Bourdieu 1991). In addition, "symbolic power," such as the power wielded by religious agents, works as a primary mechanism of group inclusion and exclusion (Bourdieu 1989A).

> [T]he hegemonic status of tribal high gods and the political economy of sacralized collective representations generates 'symbolic violence' in which dominant institutions and groups are able to impose an official point of view on social affairs thus delegitimizing, marginalizing, and demonizing others (Datta and Milbrandt 2014, 501).

For Bourdieu, knowledge of the beliefs and practices relative to sacred things determines the distribution of religious capital within the religious field. Heresy and heretics attempt to change this distribution through the consecration and desecration of sacred things (Rey 2007, 8; Swartz 1997, 47).

These changes are the result of symbolic power that allows for the consecration of sacred things (Rey 2007, 8). Agents generate this power through various forms of capital (i.e., social,

cultural, and economic) that place the agent within the religious field. Liminal capital is of particular importance when one is accounting for religious change. This form of capital is generated within "liminal fields," which "are temporary, erratic, and heterogeneous social spaces, which violently explode into existence at particular socio-historical junctures" (Willey 2016). They are the spaces where new symbols are generated within or between the homogeneous and stable fields described by Bourdieu (Rey 2004, 332). In sum, liminal capital provides the symbolic power that legitimizes the changes in the hierarchy of sacred things within religious fields.

Evangelicalism and the Sacred: The Evangelical Trinity

Following the work of the scholars mentioned in my opening chapter (Bebbington, Balmer, and Beilo in particular), and my own experiences in the field, I have come to see Evangelicalism as defined by dialogues surrounding three key sacred items: 1. the scriptural; 2. the individual; and 3. the communal. These items always exist in relationship with one another, and more importantly, alterations in these relationships change how Evangelicals do religion in any given instance. For example, groups that place the Bible as the most important part of their religious practice tend towards the more fundamentalist varieties of Evangelicalism, while groups who place a "personal relationship" with Christ and scripture as most important tend toward forms that are more charismatic.

The scriptural

Virtually every attempt to define Evangelicalism begins with the centrality of Bible for belief and practice (Balmer 2010, 2; Bebbington 1989, 2-3; Fowler, et al. 2004, 15; Stackhouse Jr. 2007, 3). The Protestant Reformation and the efforts of Martin Luther (1483-1546) are responsible for the hyper-sacralisation of the Bible. Luther's effort to translate the Bible into

vernacular languages and the mass distribution of the said translations through advances in printing technology made the Bible available to massive swaths of the laity for the first time (Olson 2003, 39). Moreover, the Reformation displaced the Catholic Church as the primary source of authority in religious life and left issues of authority up to individual Christians and their own understanding of scripture. This increased accessibility to the Bible led to the early Protestant doctrine of *sola scriptura*, which maintained that Christians could find all of the requirements for salvation within the Bible (Wellman Jr. 2012, 14).

Over the last 200 years, Evangelicals have taken this sacralization even further through doctrines from extreme reverence to Biblical inerrancy and literal interpretation (Bebbington 1989, 13; Wellman Jr. 2012, 14). Bebbington quoted a description of an early nineteenth century Evangelical evangelist to help explain this sacralisation:

> [E]vangelist, Henry Moorhouse, was similarly devoted. 'He would not suffer anything, not even a sheet of paper, to be laid his Bible. There alone, apart, it must lie, unique matchless, wonderful, the very mind and presence of the infinite and eternal God'" (quoted in Bebbington 1989, 13).

Likewise, the prominent Billy Graham Evangelistic Association makes the following statement regarding the sacred nature of the Bible on its website:

> The Bible isn't just a collection of men's ideas about God, nor is it a guidebook for living that people developed over the centuries. It is the Word of God—and that makes all the difference. This means the Bible is our authority in everything it touches. This means the Bible is our guide to show us how to live (Chismar 2006).

To paraphrase Bebbington, Evangelicals have *revered* and continue to *revere* the Bible (Bebbington 1989, 13).

The individual

Durkheim describes the move from "mechanical" to "organic" solidarity as a key aspect of modernity:

> [Organic solidarity] comprises only states that are personal to each one of us, characteristic of us as individuals, whilst [mechanical solidarity] comprises states that are common to the whole of society. The former represents only our individual personality, which it constitutes; the latter represents the collective type and consequently the society without which it would not exist. When it is an element of the latter determining our behaviour, we do not act with an eye to our own personal interest, but are pursuing collective ends (Durkheim 1984, 62).

Perhaps more clearly, social theorist Frank Pearce defined mechanical solidarity as "a form of social unity based upon the similarity of individuals who share a uniform way of life and have an identical belief system" (Pearce 2001, 60). He continued to define organic solidarity as "present when there is extensive social differentiation and the exchange of services leads individuals to recognize that they are mutually interdependent and have shared interests" (Pearce 2001, 60).

Durkheim described this new focus on the individual as the "cult of the individual"—where the individual member of a society becomes a sacred object (Durkheim 1953, 59). He argues that individualism is "a religion which man is at once the worshiper and the god . . . both object and agent" (Durkheim 1973, 275). He went on to explain how Christianity was complicit in this process through the "remarkable development of the individualistic spirit" and that contemporary forms of individualism were derived primarily from this Christian variety of individualism (Durkheim 1973, 278).

History has not excluded Evangelicalism from this process. Although the individualization of Christian belief started with the Reformation and mass access to scripture, Balmer explained that the work of the Presbyterian revivalist Charles Finney (1792-1875), and Second Great Awakening (c. 1795-1840) was the result of Evangelicalism adapting to a particular American brand of "rugged individualism" and "self-determination."[31] Balmer stated:

> The overriding genius of Finney and the theological innovations he introduced to American Evangelicalism is that they suited perfectly the *Zeitgeist* and the emerging self-perception of Americans. Finney's Arminianism comported well with the storied rugged individualism that so shapes American identity, and his insistence that we control our own religious destiny was far more congenial to the American illusion of self-determination than arcane Calvinist doctrines of foreknowledge, predestination, and election (Balmer 2010, 23).

Finney's innovation made conversion a personal decision, rather than an election. As a result, preachers and other believers could now work to "persuade" others to convert (Balmer 2010, 20).

Personal conversion narratives remain one of the most valuable pieces of cultural capital an Evangelical can possess (Bebbington 1989, 6; Fowler, et al. 2004, 15; Willey 2013A). Virtually every Evangelical I have interviewed provided me with a well-honed conversion narrative when asked to give a "short life history" (Fieldnotes 2010; 2014). Each narrative is exaggerated in sections to amplify "personal crisis"—a key part of any good conversion story (Blumenthal 2009; Paloutzian 2005, 336; Strozier, Boyd and Jones 2010).

[31] The Second Great Awakening was a numerically large and diverse revival of North American Christian interest that took place after the American Revolution. Some consider it the most important revival in United States history that set the pattern for the numerous revivals that would follow (Noll 1992, 166).

In addition, Evangelicals emphasize the importance of having a personal relationship with scripture and Jesus Christ (Wellman Jr. 2012, 140). The emphasis on "personal sin" is also further evidence of the how the individual has become the spiritual pivot of Evangelical Christianity (Wellman Jr. 2012, 97). Each individual becomes a battlefield through which God fights for the souls of humanity. Christian theologian C.S. Lewis's (1898-1963) "The Screwtape Letters," which one of my participants insisted I read on several occasions (Fieldnotes 2014), is an excellent example of this battle for human souls and the sacralization of the individual believer. Lewis described this battle quite clearly in his preface to the 1961 edition:

> There, I suggest, the stronger spirit. . . can really and irrevocably suck the weaker into itself and permanently gorge its own being on the weaker's outraged individuality. It is (I feign) for this that the devils desire human souls and the souls of one another. It is for this that Satan desires all his own followers and all the sons of Eve and all the host of heaven. His dream is of the day when all shall be inside him and all that says "I" can say it only through him. Thus, I surmise, is the bloated spider parody, the only imitation he can understand, of that unfathomed bounty whereby God turns into servants and servants into sons, so that they may be at last reunited into Him in the perfect freedom of a love offered from the height of the utter individualities which he has liberated them to be (Lewis 1961, 8-9).

This sanctity of the individual Christian body is particularly evident in Evangelical doctrines surrounding sexual abstinence. For many, even the slightest bit of premarital sexual activity is the defilement of the new embodied Christian temple (Wilkins 2008; Willey 2013A).

The communal

Following Durkheim and his observation of the transition to organic solidarity (Durkheim 1984, 62), community remains important for most Evangelicals, but is usually at the bottom of the Trinity. The Eucharist, a shared meal meant to bind church members together, is a relic of earlier more communal forms of Christianity.[32] For the most part, the churches in my sample usually downplayed and personalized this ritual (Fieldnotes 2014).[33]

Nonetheless, Evangelicals do at times speak to the preservation of the "church family." That said, a church family is hard to preserve in large congregations with large suburban churches that have more in common with shopping malls than the smaller churches of previous generations. In these large churches (1000 or more members) anonymity is all too easy to obtain, and something that this ethnographer has made regular use of in the past. Therefore, despite the familial rhetoric, these churches have very little success in actually encouraging and facilitating the development of church community. This is a fact that virtually every large Evangelical church recognizes, attempts to address, and usually fails to fix in any substantive way (Fieldnotes 2014). This failure should not be all that surprising considering the tidal wave of neo-liberal forces these churches have dealt with over the past several decades (Hackworth 2010A; 2010B; Orwin 2004).

Rob Bell: A Postconservative Theo-Politics

As I outlined in the previous chapter, Bell is the product of a very particular socio-historical situation. As a charismatic leader, filling a particular socio-historical niche, Bell brought forth and made visible a number of theo-political changes that reflect this niche

[32] The Eucharist is a shared meal amongst Christians involving bread (of some form), and wine/water/grape juice to symbolize Jesus' body and blood respectfully. The ritual is a primary sacrament of the Christianity (Marshall 1993).
[33] I will analyze this observation more thoroughly in chapters four and five.

(Wellman Jr. 2012). Moreover, Bell's work reflects several fundamental theo-poltical changes that he shares with several other postconservative Evangelicals who are part of this theo-political project (for example see Boyd 2005; McLaren 2012; Miller 2013; Young 2007; Zahnd 2014A).

God is good

At the centre of Bell's theo-politcs is a God that is both good and just. He believes that Christians need to view all aspects of their Christianity, including scripture, through this assumption. Bell argued that Christians must understand God through the figure of Jesus Christ (Bell 2003A; 2011),[34] a figure who, Bell explains, rejects power and loves unconditionally (Bell 2007A, 92). This point is most evident in "Love Wins," where he uses the parable of the Prodigal Son to argue that God continues to "love" and never abandons humans even after death (Bell 2011, 173). Whereas it is these arguments that have allowed various commentators to label Bell a *Universalist*, probably it is more accurate to label him an *inclusivist*—someone who refuses to limit the bounds of God's "*grace"*, and vicariously refuses to limit who will be included in the afterlife.

> The "grace" of God is key to understanding the goodness of God. For most Christians, [T]he term grace combines ideas in tension that point to profound mystery. Grace names the undeserved gift that creates relationships and the sustaining, responding, forbearing attitude-plus-action that nurtures relationships. Grace concerns the interaction between gracious person and graced recipient, involving the wills of both (Campbell 1993, 259).

Bell argued that Jesus is on the side of every human being living and deceased, and no single group has a monopoly on defining who and what Christ is (Bell 2004; 2005A; 2007A, ix; 2011,

[34] Red Letter Christianity is a movement started by progressive Evangelical activists Jim Wallis and Tony Campolo. The name references how the words of Jesus appear in red in many newer editions of the New Testament (Balmer 2010, 75)

144, 149). As Bell has stated, "Grace isn't fair . . . God isn't fair" (Bell 2009A). This assumption of the goodness of God leads Bell to another conclusion about the nature of God, namely "God is Love."

God is love

On the surface, the statement "God is love" appears a little sentimental and lacking in substance. Bell, however, means something quite radical by this statement. It appears in the Bible (1 John 4:8),[35] and in several of Bell's publications" (Bell 2005C, 33; 2007C; 2011; Bell and Bell 2014, 106). For Bell, love is an energy made real through actions (Bell and Bell 2014; Wellman Jr. 2012). God exists and works through the forces *between* people (Bell 2005C, 76; Bell and Bell 2014, 118). Thus, God does not exist within the walls of a church or only with and around Christians (Bell 2003C; 2004; Wellman Jr. 2012, 38). This understanding is most evident in Bell's description of his experiences at a U2 concert where he excitedly noted the "intuitive connectivity," what Durkheim would call "collective effervescence," that he experienced in the stadium (Wellman Jr. 2012, 29). In his book "Sex God," he more clearly stated:

> Whether it is a concert or a church service or a rally for a just cause, certain communal events draw us into something bigger than the event itself. We feel connected with people we're having the experience with, and not just connected but aware of something bigger than us all that we're brushing up against in the process (Bell 2007A, 29).

He argued that these sort of communal gatherings have a "sexual" aspect to them in how they transcend difference and blend a diverse crowd into a single communal body (Bell 2007A, 29).

For Bell, humans are naturally social animals, and seeking out community with others is part of our God given mandate (Bell 2007A, 21; 2013, 202). For instance, he explains that in

[35] All Biblical citations are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

Eden the only thing that God declares "not good" is that Adam is alone (Bell 2007A, 145). For Bell, humans have an "intuitive awareness" of our own connectivity (Bell 2013, 116). He emphasized this point in his perspective on communion (ie. the Eucharist):

> [Communion] isn't just about our relationship to God as individuals. Often communion is seen as a time to reflect on God's love for us in Jesus's [sic] dying on the cross. Which it is. But it was originally just as much about my desperate need to be reminded of your humanity and the humanity of all the people around us (Bell 2007A, 14).

Bell quite literally sacralizes community in a way that virtually no other Evangelical leader does outside the postconservative movement—citing the Biblical figure of Moses as his inspiration, he actually "consecrates" the people of God (Bell 2007A, 126). "Faith," for Bell, "is a communal experience" (Bell 2005C, 90). As one early observer of the Emerging Church stated, connecting postmodernism to the increased value on community in Emerging Churches, "Postmodernism, then, holds there is no single universal worldview. All truth is not absolute, community is valued over individualism…" (Kimbell 2003, 49).

Many of Bell's actions at Mars Hill were further evidence of this consecration. For example, Bell refused to place large signage on the church property and to put its address on any advertisements related to the church. Ideally, Bell wanted the church to grow through human contact—via word-of-mouth (Bell 2005C, 99; Wellman Jr. 2012, 37) Bell regularly emphasized that a church was not a "building," it was "people" (Wellman Jr. 2012, 38). For this reason, the current members and leaders of Mars Hill continue to keep the church architecturally bare. The lack of sacred architecture attempts to keep the focus on the congregants, not the building.[36]

[36] The sacred aspects of the building are limited to a number of small *mezuzah*, which are tiny encased Hebrew Scriptures attached to the doorposts of the main auditorium or "Shed" as my tour guides called it (Fieldnotes 2014).

God is complex

Furthermore, Bell does not want to create an overly simplistic definition of God and faith. In Bell's early work, he used a trampoline as a metaphor for faith. He explained that this type of faith allows individuals and communities to pull certain "springs" out, like the Trinity for instance, to inspect and criticize them without compromising one's entire belief system (Bell 2005C, 22). He contrasted this belief system with a "brick wall," or what Bell called "brickianity," where pulling out a single brick can crack the entire wall and thus compromise one's entire faith. Moreover, Bell extended this metaphor to suggest that brick walls are meant as a mechanism of inclusion and exclusion, while a trampoline "invites everyone to jump" (Bell 2005C, 28). As such, using the example of the Protestant reformer Martin Luther, he argued that Christians must always be willing to evaluate the core aspects of the faith in order to ensure its continued vibrancy (Bell 2005C, 10-12).

In the NOOMA video "Rhythm," Bell summarized what it is like to believe in a complex God:

> God is beyond anything our minds can comprehend. What's it mean to have a personal relationship with this kind of God? I mean that's like... that's like hard... hard to get your mind around. You know, I believe that God listens and God cares and God's involved, but I find the whole relationship idea hard to comprehend; and then loving this kind of God. What does that look like? What does it mean and how do you do it (Bell 2005B)?

For Bell, the God we construct is always too small (Wellman Jr. 2012, 74, 141). The cosmic God he envisions leaves Evangelical adages of "inviting Jesus Christ into your heart" or having a "personal relationship" with Jesus as scripturally inaccurate at best, or at the worst, dangerously individualistic (Bell 2005C, 109).

Bell stretches his Evangelical audience into thinking about God as transcending gender—existing as both male and female at the same time (Bell 2008). At other points, he described God as music (Bell 2005B), as breath (Bell 2006A), and as wind (Bell 2009B). And most recently, his book, *What We Talk About When We Talk About God*, made use of recent discoveries in physics, mereology, and biology to encourage a science-friendly God that is more nuanced than previous conceptions (Bell 2013).

In addition, this complex notion of God requires a more complex reading of the Bible. Bell has steered away from exegetical methods that imply Biblical inerrancy or literal interpretation (Bell 2005C, 53; Mappes 2012; Wellman Jr. 2012, 14). Through the influence of Messianic Judaism, Bell came to understand the Bible as a "story" in need of constant interpretation (Bell 2005C, 55; Wellman Jr. 2012, 73-74).[37] For Bell, the Bible is a "communal book" that people should read with others to aid in interpretation (Bell 2005C, 51-53). This exegetical method has remained cemented in the first lines of Mars Hill's "Narrative Theology" long after Bell's departure:

> We believe God inspired the authors of Scripture by his Spirit to speak to all generations of believers, including us today. God calls us to immerse ourselves in this authoritative narrative communally and individually to faithfully interpret and live out that story today as we are led by the Spirit of God (Mars Hill Bible Church 2014).

The church's "Narrative Theology" institutionally embeds the need for the communal reading of the Bible.

[37] Messianic Judaism is "a Protestant movement that emerged in the last half of the 20th century among believers who were ethnically Jewish but had adopted an Evangelical Christian faith . . . . By the 1960s, a new effort to create a culturally Jewish Protestant Christianity emerged among individuals who began to call themselves Messianic Jews" (Melton 2005, 373). Members of this movement tend to remain culturally Jewish and celebrate Jewish holidays that are not problematized by the New Testament (Melton 2005, 373).

Shifting the Trinity

These theological changes amount to a drastic alteration of the sacred within Evangelicalism. Wellman Jr. argued that Bell "subverts the taken for granted distance between the sacred and profane" (Wellman Jr. 2012, 43). For Bell, "the sacred is in the secular:" his God is everywhere and for everyone (Wellman Jr. 2012, 20, 90).

Bell does more, however, than just decrease the distance between the sacred and profane. In fact, Bell actually alters the previously described hierarchy of Evangelical Sacred things. His theological innovations have altered the Evangelical Trinity from the usual: 1. the scriptural; 2. the individual; 3. the communal to 1. the individual; 2. the communal; 3. the scriptural. In both cases, one is likely to find situations where the "individual" and the "communal" are flipped. The key then is the relative location of the Bible in the Trinity.

More importantly, by changing this hierarchy one changes the associated religion or, more accurately, one legitimizes and consecrates changes that have already taken place (Durkheim 1995, 38). Bell toyed with this process in his first book "Velvet Elvis" (2005C), but he more clearly alluded to this idea in "Love Wins," where he stated that "we shape our God, and then our God shapes us" (Bell 2011, 182). In other words, how a community defines God in turn shapes the community. For instance, he specified that if one constructs a violent God then one likely will lay the foundations for a negative and spiritually violent religion (Bell 2011, 183).

Shifting the Religion

Bell's new postconservative hierarchy has had a drastic effect on his community's and his own Evangelicalism. First, the emphasis on community drastically changes the way Bell approaches *evangelism* and mission work. Faith and conversion are a process and not a single

transcendental moment for Bell (Bell 2002B; Wellman Jr. 2012, 36).[38] Therefore, Bell argued that mission work should focus on social justice more than conversion (Bell 2004; Bell and Golden 2008). Moreover, it should focus on one's own community before looking at sending missionaries abroad. For example, Bell moved his entire family into one of the roughest areas in Grand Rapids in an attempt "live out [his] call to solidarity with the oppressed" folks within his community (Wellman Jr. 2012, 94-95).[39]

A key component to Bell's postconservatism is that God is already everywhere. For him, "missions [are] less about the transportation of God from one place to another and more about the identification of a God who is already there," and "missionaries" are more accurately described as "tour guides" helping to make this God visible (Bell 2005C, 87).

Second, Bell moved towards a postmillennial *eschatology.* Bell argued that Christians should pursue heaven both in life and after death, because heaven will eventually exist on Earth and that this pursuit is important because one's "eschatology shapes [one's] ethics" (Bell 2011, 46). He continued to explain his separation from premillennial views:

> If you believe that you're going to leave and evacuate to *somewhere else*, then why do anything about this world? A proper view of heaven leads not to escape from the world, but to full engagement with it, all with the anticipation of a coming day when things are on earth as they currently are in heaven (emphasis in original Bell 2011, 46-47).

For Bell, the central theme of Jesus' ministry is "not the removal of sin, but the restoration of *shalom*" (as cited in Wellman Jr. 2012, 83). It is about bringing the "new humanity," on Earth, today (Bell and Golden 2008).

[38] In addition, Mars Hill's "narrative theology" has ossified these beliefs (Mars Hill Bible Church, 2014).
[39] This move would not go well for Bell and his family, and would only last two years. Both Bell, and his wife Kristen Bell describe this time as socially, emotionally, and spiritually draining (Bell and Bell 2014, 51-55, 65-66; Wellman Jr. 2012, 95).

Third, Bell's complex, good, and loving God forced him to make a similar adjustment to his soteriology that led to the "Love Wins" controversy. He argued that heaven and hell are realities we create for ourselves here on earth (Bell 2007A, 7). For Bell, hell is anywhere "things aren't according to God's will. Where people aren't treated as fully human" (Bell 2007A, 6).

In "Love Wins," Bell took this argument even further. In short, he attempted to move beyond the traditional conceptualizations of the afterlife: eternal torment, universalism, and annihilationism (Miller 2013).[40] Instead, Bell argued for what I call an *inclusivist* soteriology, which he alluded to in his early work (Bell 2005C, 146), and clarified in "Love Wins":

> And then there is an exclusivity on the other side of inclusivity. This kind insists that Jesus is the way, but holds tightly to the assumption that the all-embracing, saving love of this particular Jesus the Christ will of course include all sorts of unexpected people from across the cultural spectrum (Bell 2011, 155).

He argued that anything less would place limits on God's ability to love and save. The decisive factor for Bell is Jesus' parable of the "Prodigal Son" (Luke 15:11-32), which he argues must continue to apply after death. In short, Bell simply asked his fellow Evangelicals how can one believe in a good and just God and believe in "eternal constant torment" at the same time (Bell 2011, 173, Miller 2013)?

Fourth, like a number of other postconservative Evangelical authors (for example see Boyd 2005; McLaren 2012; Zahnd 2014A), Bell has launched into an extensive critique of Christianity and empire, and other issues of *social justice* (Bell 2006B; 2007B; 2009A; Bell and Golden 2008). As a youth pastor in Grand Rapids, Bell had already started focusing on solidarity

[40] In short, *eternal torment* is the soteriological perspective that "bad" people are punished in Hell for all eternity after death, *annihilationism* suggests that bad people just disappear after death while the "good" go to Heaven, and finally, *universalism* is the belief that everyone eventually reaches Heaven (Miller 2013).

with and empathy for people on the margins (Wellman Jr. 2012, 28). Several years later, in the *NOOMA* video "Rich," Bell criticized the use of the phrase "God bless America" and instead argued it should read, "God *has* blessed America." In this film, he continued to explain that the Bible demands that the rich share their wealth (Bell 2006B).

Bell, however, saved his harshest criticism for his co-authored "manifesto," *Jesus Wants to Save Christians*. At one point, after criticizing former president George W. Bush's use of scripture in his speeches, Bell stated: "A Christian should get very nervous when the flag and the Bible start holding hands" (Bell and Golden 2008, 18). He argued that the Christian God is a God for and of the oppressed, and that the church is a tool with which to confront empire and power (Bell and Golden 2008). In addition, he reinterpreted the Bible, the book of Revelations in particular, as a story of exile and revolution where God's people are in constant contention with various empires, such as Egypt and Rome (Bell and Golden 2008).[41] This interpretation further reflects Bell's understanding of sin, which he described as personal, systemic, and/or corporate—"anything that destroys the order of creation and is a form of rebellion against that order" (Wellman Jr. 2012, 134).

Fifth, Bell's call to "love" has had led him to move away from traditional Evangelical beliefs and practices regarding gender and sexuality. Very early in the founding of Mars Hill, Bell expanded the roles women could take in the church, including allowing and encouraging women to become elders and pastors, a move that would cost his church over 1000 congregants (Wellman Jr. 2012, 39). In the *NOOMA* video "She," after he introduced a number of feminine

[41] The decision to use Revelations as his focal point for his argument is a highly polemic one. Christians most often associate the book of Revelations to more conservative millenarian perspectives, such as Dispensationalism, a theological perspective first popularized by John Nelson Darby (1800-1882) that argues that the world will pass through a violent period of tribulation after "true believers are raptured off the planet and prior to the return of Christ (Noll 1992, 376-377)

descriptions of God found in the Bible, he suggested that Christians often confuse equality with difference, and that women can take on more prominent roles in churches while still remaining different (Bell 2008). Furthermore, Bell refused to take a hard-line stance against abortion. He suggested that it is a "moral choice" that should remain legal, but rare (Wellman Jr. 2012, 141) and defined lust as a problem of "objectification" rather than spiritual corruption (Bell 2007A, 3,7).

Something distinctly utopian underlies Bell's vision of love, peace, and justice. He implies a desire for a more peaceful and cosmopolitan world, often represented through allusion to the scriptural "Kingdom of God." Along with the obvious utopian overtones imbedded in his mantra and book *Love Wins*" (2008), in a recent talk in Grand Rapids, Bell suggested, "What, my brothers and sisters, is pulling the whole thing forward into greater complexity and depth and unity and inclusion? The thing [Jesus] kept talking about was the 'Kingdom of God.' This is what he was talking about" (Bell cited in Vande Bunte 2015).

Nonetheless, Zahnd provided the most directly utopian vision that I encountered. Zahnd finished his book, *A Farewell to Mars*, by describing a future inclusive Christian cosmopolis:

> I know what the cynics will say. I know how the scoffers will sneer. I know the non-dreamers believing only in the brutal ways of force will laugh me off as impossibly naïve. But I don't care. I've grown immune to their strain of unbelief. I've turned a corner…. I've caught a glimpse of the better world that can be—a world that Jesus came to give and continued to offer us. I believe the world of peace is possible in Christ (Zahnd 2014, 193).

Not only does Zahnd provide his vision for a Christian utopia, but he also derides the anti-utopian voices that have come to dominate the Evangelical world.

His latest book, *The Zimzum of Love*, coauthored with his wife Kristen Bell, omits any mention of a heterosexual imperative (Bell and Bell 2014). In a recent interview with Oprah Winfrey, Rob Bell argued:

> One of the oldest aches in the bones of humanity is loneliness. Loneliness is not good for the world. Whoever you are, gay or straight, it is totally normal, natural and healthy to want someone to go through life with. It's central to our humanity. We want someone to go on the journey with. . . I think culture is already there and the church will continue to be even more irrelevant when it quotes letters from 2,000 years ago as their best defense, when you have in front of you flesh-and-blood people who are your brothers and sisters, and aunts and uncles, and co-workers and neighbors, and they love each other and just want to go through life (as cited in Kuruvilla 2015).

This statement has once again attracted a great deal of criticism from conservative Evangelicals. One commenter suggested that Bell has once again "capitulated to culture" (Brown 2015), while others simply offered to pray for the Bells so that they should eventually find the "truth" (Moore 2015).

Finally, Rob Bell has taken a recent theological turn towards *New Ageism.* The New Age Movement emerged primarily out of an effort starting in the 1950s to de-Westernize North American religiosity (Hannegraaff 2005, 6495). In more recent years, New Ageism has "[i]ncreasingly taken the shape of a spiritual supermarket where religious consumers pick and choose the spiritual commodities they fancy and use them to create their own spiritual syntheses, fine-tuned to their strictly personal needs" (Hannegraaff 2005, 6498). As such, New Ageism is geared well for a hyper-individualistic culture (Hannegraaff 2005, 6498).

In *What We Talk About When We Talk About God* Bell married his postconservative Evangelical theo-politics with science arguing that we can see God's work in the structure of atoms and the theories of quantum physics (Bell 2013). While this friendliness towards the scientific world is refreshing in an Evangelical context, his work does bear a striking resemblance to author and spirituality guru Deepak Chopra (b. 1947). This similarity should not be surprising considering Bell and Chopra spent most of 2013-14 touring together on "Oprah's The Life You Want Weekend" (Bunte 2014). This New Age influence is also apparent in both Bells' recent attachment to yoga, meditation, and mind body integration (Bell 2013, 197; Bell and Bell 2014, 81).

Theo-Durkheimianism and Subjectification

When Durkheim made his famous God/society equation, he explained how the forces that people often attribute to the divine are actually the force of the collective:

> [A totem] is a flag of the clan, the sign by which each clan is distinguished from the others, the visible mark of its distinctiveness, and a mark that is borne by everything that in any way belongs to the clan: men, animals, and things. *Thus, if the totem is a symbol of both the god and the society, is this not because the god and the society are one and the same?* How could the emblem of the group have taken the form of that quasi-divinity if the group and the divinity were two distinct realities? Thus the god of the clan transfigured and imagined in the physical form of the plant or animal the serves as totem (emphasis added Durkheim 1995, 208).

In other words, divine forces are actually misattributed social forces, which many scholars of religion cite as support for the secular and atheist study of religion.

More interesting, however, is how Durkheim's equation aligns with Bell's theo-politics. As mentioned earlier, Bell argued that God exists and works primarily in the spaces between people (Bell 2005C, 76, Bell and Bell 2014, 118). He suggested that we communally construct our gods (Bell 2011, 182-183). Thus, while Durkheim assumed that the existence of social forces disproves the existence of divine ones, Bell assumes the opposite, resulting in what I can best describe as a *theo-Durkheimanism.*

Bell, however, does not exactly reject the "cult of the individual" either. Bell's New Age experiment certainly venerates and mystifies the experience of the individual. Historian Gertrude Himmelfarb suggested that Evangelical Americans have become increasingly attracted to "therapeutic," "existential," and "individualistic" forms of Christianity. Meanwhile, more "classical" forms of Evangelical spirituality, based on earlier "Protestant" or "Puritan" traditions, have become less important (Himmelfarb 1999). Following Himmelfarb, political scientist Clifford Orwin described these Christians as "Ev-bos" or Evangelical bohemians; individuals who endeavour to combine the belief and dogmatism of the former with the latter's rejection of conformity (Orwin 2004, 30).

In addition, postconservatives are amongst the most fashionable and technologically savvy Christians I have met (Fieldnotes 2014). Likewise, as their Evangelical critics would say, they are some of the most "worldly" members of the Evangelical fold. While I do not intend to take away from the postconservative appropriation of the Christian call to social justice, this worldliness makes them better neoliberal subjects. Postconservatives are more open in their participation in various markets than their more suspicious Evangelical brethren. For instance, they are more likely to consume alcohol, and are less restrictive in their media consumption (Fieldnotes 2014). This openness leaves the religious field in which they exist more permeable to

outside forces, and thus these outside forces are more capable of shaping the values, practices, and exchange rates within the community.

In conclusion, Bell's work is an excellent example of the changing face of Evangelical Christianity in North America. His refining of the Evangelical God and the simultaneous alteration of the sacred with the tradition profoundly affects the practices and beliefs of both those reacting against and those in agreement with his work. These alterations are visible at the grassroots level in the everyday theo-politics of Canadian (particularly Albertan, in terms of this study's sample) Evangelicals. Some of these changes developed independently or directly because of Bell's efforts. Indeed, his efforts could reflect the much broader cosmopolitanization of North American Evangelicalism.

Chapter Five

From Essentially Conservative to Essentially Nuanced: The Complexities of Conservative Evangelicalism in Canada

Significant analyses exist on conservative Evangelicalism in Canada (for example see (Clark 1948; 2008, McDonald 2010, Reimer 2010; Reimer and Wilkinson 2015; Willey 2010A; 2013A). In other words, while postconservatism was the most interesting and significant finding in my research, I would be amiss to not speak to the more orthodox conservative voices that had a persistent presence in my fieldnotes and interviews (Fieldnotes 2014). These voices varied greatly. Some reflected classic conservative perspectives, including the inerrancy of text, sexual immorality, the importance of family, and an emphasis on evangelism and missiology. Other voices resembled the theo-conservative voices of Evangelical activists Faytene (Kryskow)

Grasseschi and Charles McVety, characterized by anti-intellectualism and Christian involvement in government. Finally, some conservative Evangelicals were more inquisitive and open to nuance in their views, which resembled some of the foundational elements of Postconservatism. Therefore, while conservatives are a predominant voice within the Evangelical community that researchers must take note, they almost as varied and nuanced as their postconservative cousins.

In this chapter, I first discuss the relationship between conservatism and Evangelicalism. Next, I outline the sources of conservatism I encountered in my fieldwork, including both churches in my random and targeted samples. Third, I explicate the areas where conservative theo-politics became most visible, such as evangelism, gender roles, sexuality, abortion, and anti-intellectualism. Finally, I investigate the connection between the conservative Evangelicals in my study and their support of the Conservative Party of Canada.

Arguments for a "conservative" Evangelicalism

Notably, sociologist Reginald Bibby has not used the term Evangelical in most of his research. Instead, he has made use of the term "Conservative Protestants," which is a denominationally based definition that includes Baptist, Pentecostal, Mennonite, Missionary Alliance, and Nazarene churches (Bibby 2002, 37). These are the churches that form the bulwark of Canadian Evangelicalism. Bibby's term, however, also implies that there is something inherently *conservative* about Evangelicalism. This follows the observations theologian Roger E. Olson:

> In some senses *all evangelicals are conservative.* That is true especially vis-à-vis true liberal Protestantism and modernist theology. To be evangelical means, among other things, to have a greater appreciation for the authority of scripture and the Great Tradition

> of Christian teaching than one finds among liberal theologians (emphasis in original Olson 2003, 17).

Furthermore, Stackhouse Jr. included "orthodoxy" and "orthopraxy" in his definition of Evangelicalism. He argued that this definition "must be applied without compromise" adding that "evangelicals do not compromise on *any* of these values: They don't think it's okay to fudge on the atonement or the Bible, or to neglect churchgoing, or avoid evangelism" (Stackhouse Jr. 2007).

Researchers Steven Studebaker and Lee Beach had to encounter this tendency towards conservatism when attempting to research the Emerging church in Canada. In short, they had to perform the difficult task of operationalizing the term "traditional Evangelical Church" in order to examine their primary object of analysis—Emerging Evangelicalism. In the process, they developed a seven-point definition of a "traditional Evangelical church:"

1. Predominantly white, suburban, and middle to upper-middle class.
2. The intentional application of consumer methodology.
3. Designing church programs and messaging to a target demographic.
4. A dependence upon attractional methods of evangelism as opposed to those that encourage the church to 'go' into the world and engage people in their own contexts.
5. A focus on conversion and assimilation to church programs and activities.
6. An 'us' versus 'them' orientation to culture.
7. A patriarchal and hierarchal culture that often marginalizes those who do not conform to the accepted traditional standards of the established church (Studebaker and Beach 2012, 869).

Although they admit that putting together a simple definition of an Evangelical church is difficult and "perhaps impossible," their work is still useful in sorting out how the Emerging church, and postconservatives, have diverged from mainstream Evangelicalism—divergence that we also can track through each movement's respective sacred hierarchy, which I think the above list certainly reflects. In other words, traditional churches reflect as the standard version of the Evangelical Trinity: 1. The scriptural; 2. The individual; 3. The communal.

Encountering conservative Evangelicalism

Conservative churches

Three of the churches in my five-church random sample fit the above description of a conservative Evangelical church. The first of which was Calvary Pentecostal Assembly, a large (approximately 3,000 congregants) urban, and reasonably wealthy (collecting over $2.5 million in tax receipted donations in 2013) church located in a new neighbourhood on the fringe of the city (Canada Revenue Agency 2015, Fieldnotes 2014). This church had the structure and amenities similar to an Evangelical mega-church, although it was technically too small.[42] My contact at the church, Pastor Trent, displayed a great deal of pride in how the church had grown from a small strip mall church into its current church complex, which included a 1,100 seat auditorium, suspended running track, three court gymnasium, library, conference center, coffee shop, and the church was working on plans to build an adjoining ice hockey arena. Trent explained that the church actually predated the surrounding neighbourhood, and that as a result of this early development it acted as a de-facto community centre for the new subdivision

[42] The Hartford Institute for Religion Research defines a mega-church as "any Protestant congregation with a sustained average weekly attendance of 2000 persons or more in its worship services," and suggests that there are currently around 1600 of these congregations currently in the United States (The Hartford Institute for Religion Research 2015).

(Fieldnotes 2014). In short, Calvary was the neoliberal dream—a faith-based organization (FBO) fulfilling the role of the state (Hackworth 2010A).[43]

Stoney Brook Missionary Alliance Church was located in a small suburban centre. During my time at Stoney Brook, the church leaders often spoke of financial issues in the church, and some of the church's struggles with its identity. These issues came to the forefront during discussions about changes to the church's website and newsletter. The Stoney Brook's struggles were classic Evangelical issues of maintaining a caring compassionate community, while still attending to the church's call to grow and the flagrant veneration of the individual. Their lead pastor, Bob, tended towards an aggressive brand of evangelism and missiology. He often spoke of encouraging his congregation to reach the "unreached" and help bring about the Second Coming of Christ. Nonetheless, Stoney Brook was more than a simple conservative church. For instance, one Sunday, Pastor Bob delivered a sermon venomously critical of the hyper-conservative Prosperity Gospel theology, which he called a "heresy," and Stoney Brook was home to Pastor Brian, possibly the most progressive of my postconservative participants (Fieldnotes 2014; Interview-SUMAC7-2).

Finally, Ellington Alliance Church, located in a rural community, had a small yet enthusiastic congregation. I made the following notes within minutes of entering my first Ellington service:

> As I approached the auditorium, which was packed with people, I ran into Adam on my way in and we exchanged greetings. The church was incredibly energetic. There was an

[43] The very first thing I observed while pulling into Calvary's parking lot was a massive advertisement for a city councilor on the side of the van, which certainly struck the attention of an ethnographer researching the political perspectives of Evangelicals. It turns out, this reasonably diverse (considering its geographic position) middle-class church was only slightly more politically connected than the other churches in my sample. They certainly were more likely to view themselves and their church facility as a community service (Fieldnotes 2014).

> authenticity in the room, which most Evangelical churches I visit lack. The church looked to be almost entirely white middle-class folk. The worship band was a little cluttered, and Pastor Alex was on the piano (Fieldnotes 2014).

The church represented an almost ideal example of Studebaker and Beach's "traditional Evangelical church" (Studebaker and Beach 2012). Although I did meet thoughtful people within Ellington's congregation, rarely did these individuals stray from a conservative Evangelical theo-politics. Their rural location likely helped to preserve the energy of traditional Evangelicalism, but it also seemed to prevent the penetration of alternative Christian theo-politics (Fieldnotes 2014).

Targeted conservatism

As I have mentioned previously, the original intent of this project was to investigate the presence of theoconservatism in Evangelical churches. Therefore, my original sample included a number of target churches that I selected through conversations with my committee members, and by following up on some of the locations visited by McDonald in the *Armageddon Factor*. On the first of these targeted visits, I attended Stephen Harper's Calgary church home, RockPointe Church in the suburb of Bearspaw—one outlet in a series of RockPointe franchises that have popped-up around the city. The church presented an incredible form of "sweater-vest Christianity," a term I have come to use to describe forms of Christianity that use a warm and friendly façade to hide a pointed conservative theo-politics. Still, while the church was certainly one of the wealthiest, whitest, and most clubhouse-like I have visited, it was far from the corpo-Christian bastion described by McDonald (Fieldnotes 2014).[44]

[44] Certainly, this clubhouse atmosphere was amplified by the geographic location of the church. RockPointe sits on top of a hill between Cochrane and Bearspaw, Alberta with an incredible view of the Bow River valley, and is surrounded by massive sub-urban acreages (Fieldnotes 2014). In fact, one realtor places the average price of a home in Bearspaw at over $1.6 million (Kirby Cox & Associates 2016).

Several months later, I visited three churches in the Toronto area. First, I visited Evangel Temple—according to McDonald, a key church in the Conservative strategy to attract recent immigrants from largely ethnic churches in suburban Toronto. Second, I ventured to Mississauga to attend Catch the Fire Toronto, formerly the Airport Vineyard Church and home to the Toronto Blessing. Finally, at the suggestion of a colleague, I dropped into the Church on the Queensway where I had the pleasure of hearing an entire sermon dedicated to the end-times, Dispensationalism, and how they align with current global events, such as how Vladimir Putin is the "antichrist," for the first time in my ethnographic career (Fieldnotes 2014).

Most importantly, I visited the National House of Prayer (NHOP), which is a lobbyist/chaplaincy organization located in Ottawa close to Parliament Hill. This organization represented the most assertive brand of theoconservatism I encountered during my research. My host spoke highly of the theoconservative figure Charles Colson (1931-2012), and vehemently rejected the efforts of postconservatives, such as Bell and McLaren, who he called "Neo-Protestants." Nonetheless, again McDonald exaggerated the influence this group has within the Evangelical community and the Harper government. One member of NHOP suggested that McDonald seemed to think they had some form of secret "Bat-phone" directly linking them to the former Prime Minister, and NHOP did not even come close to having that sort of privileged access. Moreover, considering the folksy quaintness of the NHOP operation, I would tend to agree with this member's assessment (Fieldnotes 2014).[45]

[45] My meeting at NHOP almost did not happen. Only at the very last minute, just hours before I was about to leave Ottawa, one of their administrative staff members responded to my email. The building itself, housed in a former Catholic dormitory turned Chinese embassy, has an incredibly officious presence and one could easily mistake it for official government infrastructure. The interior of the building, however, was a little less dignified. While one room was maintained for meeting various members of government, the rest of the building had more of an old church basement feel. It was full of various audio and cooking equipment, many things were left in mild states of disrepair, and many rooms, offices in particular, were arranged in an ad hoc manner (Fieldnotes 2014).

Conservative Evangelicalism in Canada

Evangelism and missions

One of the most poignant differences between postconservative and conservative Evangelicalism is their approach to missiology. The subject of evangelism and missions was often worked directly into these churches' statements of faith. For example, the following from the Missionary Alliance Church's official statement of faith and was cited directly by two of the churches in my sample:

> The universal Church, of which Christ is the Head, consists of all those who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, are redeemed through His blood, regenerated by the Holy Spirit, and commissioned by Christ to go into all the world as a witness, preaching the Gospel to all nations (Christian and Missionary Alliance Church in Canada 2015; Fieldnotes 2014).

Notably, Crossroads Missionary Alliance (the only other church of that denomination in my study) used the Nicene Creed instead of the denomination's official statement of faith. The Council of Nicea in 325 CE marked the first attempt to unify Christianity under a single doctrine, and stamp out a number of supposed heresies through the creation of the creed (González 1984, 162). Therefore, this theo-political move by Crossroads reflects the church's postconservative tendency towards inclusion, and the transcendence of denominational boundaries.

One of the common themes within these conservative churches was their emphasis on reaching the "unreached"—exposing populations to Christianity for the first time. This emphasis was particularly evident at Stoney Brook. In my six visits to the church rarely would a service pass where mission work did not take centre stage at some point. When the church had a special guest sermon from the president of the Missionary Alliance church David Hearn, he too made special mention of reaching the "unreached," and spreading the kingdom of God to every corner

of the planet. The implied understanding in the Missionary Alliance Church is that, in many peoples' views, the second coming of Christ can only happen after every person on the planet has the chance to accept Christ as their personal saviour and convert to Christianity (Fieldnotes 2014).

In addition, many folks implied that evangelism and missions are a form of "spiritual warfare." For instance, one person made this statement during a mission testimonial:

> A member of the worship band who was wearing an 'African' themed shirt did the third testimony. He started by thanking the church for their prayers and support to go on this trip. He talked about how lucky he felt to get to dedicate a church, and to visit people who had never seen a 'white person' before. He continued to talk about a spiritual leader in the community who resisted the efforts of the missionaries. He said this guy was being used by the 'Devil,' and was trying to prevent people from coming to Christ. He then likened this to the technical difficulties they had setting up the 'Jesus movie' that was in their local dialect. He called this all 'spiritual warfare.' He said that they eventually were able to 'bring 40 to 50 young people to the Lord that day.' He then said that the greatest moment is getting to sit down with someone to recite the 'Sinner's Prayer' for the first time (Fieldnotes 2014).

In addition to this testimonial, I listened to stories about or asked to support missions in Uganda, North Korea, Cuba, Thailand, United Kingdom, China, Lithuania, Kuwait, Mexico, Nicaragua, Haiti, South Africa, and the Republic of Congo (Fieldnotes 2014; Interview-RMAC3-2). One guest speaker actually spoke of holding "open air crusades in Muslim countries" (Fieldnotes 2014). As such, this spiritual warfare was truly global in scale.

Reaching the "unchurched"—people who are already exposed to Christianity but not attending a church—also was a common theme in these communities. Most of the time, these discussions consisted of praying for the unchurched or how to invite one's unchurched friends to future church events (Fieldnotes 2014). Quite often conversations about the unchurched focused on children and youth. For instance, one church congregation boasted about the number of "unchurched children" they "brought to Christ" through various church camps, and emphasized that creating new converts would remain the principal goal of these programs. Another church lauded the efforts of its youth pastor in bringing "forty to fifty" kids to Christ while in London, and had previously discussed evangelizing at mixed-martial arts events to gain access to young people outside of traditional Christian circles (Fieldnotes 2014).

Gender and sexuality

Although often Evangelicals are at their most conservative when it comes to issues of gender and sexuality, many researchers, myself included, have overemphasized this tendency in the past (often not intentionally), and have missed the nuances Evangelicals have on these issues as a result (for example see Levine 2002, Valenti 2009, Willey 2013A). As such, I never directly probed for issues surrounding gender roles, homosexuality, and abortion. Questions that specifically probe these issues tend to miss the variance that exists within Evangelical community. Therefore, I asked my participants "What social, political, or cultural issues are the most important to you?"[46] This meant that my participants spoke to issues of gender and sexuality only if these issues were of significance to them. Thus, I avoided the stock opinion statements that Evangelicals feel they often *have* to say when it comes to gender roles, homosexuality, and abortion.

[46] See Appendix One

1. Gender Roles

That said, while I was able to encounter far broader spectrum of opinions, I did still encounter plenty of classic conservative attitudes towards issues of gender and sexuality. Ellington, a rural Missionary Alliance Church, spent a great deal of effort promoting a Promise Keeper meeting. The Promise Keepers is Christian advocacy group for men that developed in the early 1990s as a backlash against second-wave feminism intended to restore masculine dominance in society (Bellant 1995, 81). Over time, however, the movement has quieted and moved away from its original more theocratic intentions. Currently, the groups focus centres on male leadership and spiritual wellbeing (Barratt 2009, 687). The church planned to send a large group of men to the event (Fieldnotes 2014). In an interview that followed this event Allen, one of my male participants, stated:

> Have you heard of Promise Keepers? I came from a conference on this past weekend in [*suppressed*]. And one of the things they challenged is for men to be men. To get angry about things you should get angry about. To place God first in our lives. To take leadership seriously. Our God first then our wives and our children and our jobs. But to take leadership seriously, stand-up, and be real men. Lead like you are supposed to lead. Don't be so whimsical and sit back. So, if I extend that and say 'As Christians, if we took our role serious on this earth, to be real leaders, to stand up and get angry about the things we should get angry about.' Not for the sake of being angry, but to get upset with injustices. To be upset when women get raped. To get upset when men leave their wives and their children behind (Interview-RMAC3-2).

Although still reflecting a dedication to conservative gender roles, this statement reflects the Promise Keepers recent move towards encouraging male involvement and leadership over its original anti-feminist bent.

Leadership and masculinity came up in all three interviews I conducted at Ellington (Interview-RMAC3-1, 2, 3). Albert spoke of how most of his reading activity dealt with issues of leadership, and included works by theologian C.S. Lewis and American pastor John C. Maxwell. Later he stated that this focus on leadership changed his political perspective, and it helped "land [him] as a Conservative" (Interview-RMAC3-1). Atticus more generally stated that he thought men were better built for leadership positions (Interview-RMAC3-3).[47]

The actions of Fathers (or the lack thereof) were often mentioned as a source of many of society's ills. For instance, my host at NHOP suggested that many social problems were the result of "fatherless homes" and that "fatherless homes" were a by-product of the sexual revolution. Atticus had a similar perspective:

> The roles of fathers are really important for children. Fatherless homes are all over the place and it has a huge impact on family in general. . . . [T]hat is where most of our problems come from. You can address each individual issue, but if you trace it back, it comes to a broken family of some sort all the time (Interview-RMAC3-3).

[47] Both Albert and Allen invited me to their homes for dinner prior to conducting the interview—an impulse that was guided surely in part by small town hospitality and the Evangelical call to fellowship and evangelism. Regardless of the reasons for my invitations, my experiences in both of these homes was remarkably similar. Both families lived in relatively new houses in new developments in the same town. Both visits started with a meal that was followed by conversation surrounding my work and my religious background. Both interviews were some of the longest I conducted while in the field, and led to even lengthier discussions following the interviews. Clear gender and age-based hierarchies defined both of these families. These characteristics were most clearly symbolized by who cooked and cleaned, who primarily spoke to me, and who said the prayer prior to eating (Fieldnotes 2014).

A couple of other participants echoed the importance of fathers in children's development, including one postconservative pastor (Fieldnotes 2014; Interview-RMAC-2, 3; Interview-SUPC1-1).

With the exception of Mars Hill, no church I visited had a woman in a leadership position. That said, only the conservative churches in my sample appeared openly resistant to having women in pastoral positions. One male pastor was critical of the recent ordination of the Missionary Alliance Church's first female minister because he was a "complementarian," and believed that men and women had different roles to fill in the church.

Barbara, a fiery sixty-something year-old widow from Ellington Missionary Alliance Church, maintained an interesting informal position of leadership within the church. From what I can tell, Barbara had entrenched herself on numerous boards in the church community and was a leader of small group of young women. These positions allowed Barbara to influence decisions made within the church indirectly without holding any official position of power. She expressed frustration in the lack of women-centred sermon material, but suggested she still felt men should fill leadership positions in a church (Fieldnotes 2014). A number of researchers have noted this practice of indirect influence by women (Ault Jr. 2005, 318-319; Pevey et al. 1999).

In addition, I encountered two instances where church leaders in my study took issue with "gossip." A leader at Calvary mentioned it in relationship to a women's retreat that he promised would be a "safe place . . . free of gossip." More prominently, Pastor Will dedicated an entire sermon to the dangers of gossip, which he described as a "careless whisper" that "divides and tarnishes." At one point, he likened gossip to a "verbally transmitted disease" (Fieldnotes 2014).

Ethnographer James M. Ault Jr. noted the importance of gossip in the context of a fundamentalist American church. He argued that while men have access to official positions of power and could express their opinions "individually," women "fashioned them collectively" through mechanisms like gossip (Ault Jr. 2005, 318). On this subject, he stated:

> Take gossip, for example, which we have seen is much feared and preached against, often quite strenuously, in fundamentalist churches. While gossip can be recognized, among other things, for its role in forming and nurturing ties of intimacy and community life and in enforcing a community's moral standards, it is most feared for its capacity to affect reputations (Ault Jr. 2005, 318).

Ault Jr. continued to explain that men's dependence on "individual accountability" leaves them vulnerable to the "collective voice" of women in these churches (Ault Jr. 2005, 319; Pevey et al. 1999, 189).

2. Homosexuality and same-sex marriage

In conjunction with this conservative outlook on gender roles, I also encountered some distinctly conservative attitudes relating to homosexuality and gay marriage. In short, many folks I encountered viewed gay marriage as a threat to the traditional family (Fieldnotes 2014; Interview-RMAC3-1, 3; Interview-External-1). NHOP has opposition to gay marriage written in their statement of beliefs: "We believe the Bible defines marriage as a lifelong union between one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others. We believe that marriage is the biblical context for the procreation of children, and that the family is central to the fabric of society" (National House of Prayer 2015).

Participants who made statements against gay marriage often connected this issue to leadership and politics. For instance, one forty-something year-old male from a rural Missionary Alliance church made the following statement:

> What I miss is people just standing up for some true beliefs [*sic*]. Here it is fighting about who is going to win or who is going to be in charge kind of thing and who is going to lead. But, no one is really there to stand up for some true God viewpoints, God-centred standpoints like on same-sex marriage (Interview-RMAC3-3).

In a more conspiratorial tone, another Vancouver-based participant stated:

> They are afraid of being evicted from their party. I remember when Harper got in. I think the gay community said, 'we are not going to vote for you unless you allow gay marriage.' And he agreed with them, he compromised his Christian faith just for power. For me, I think he lost it right there and then. Whereas I would have said 'no, I won't do that. If you don't vote for me that is fine' (Interview-External-1).

Finally, a couple of other leaders I encountered used arguments made against their position as evidence of the "hypocrisy of liberal relativism"—an interesting rhetorical move that uses "liberals" *intolerance* of their opinions to support their *intolerance* of homosexuality (Fieldnotes 2014).

3. Abortion

Like gay marriage, most of my conservative participants and churches were opposed to abortion (Fieldnotes 2014; Interview-RMAC-1, 3; Interview-External-1). At Stoneybrook, the senior pastor used the story of Moses' abandonment in the river by his mother to make an argument against abortion. I made the following observations in my fieldnotes:

> The sermon focused on the story of Moses being saved by his mother and left to float in the reeds. He mentioned how he had changed the sermon to deal with the tragedy in the church. He talked about how women had an instinct for motherhood that men could not understand. How men could not understand what it is like to have life inside them. He suggested that women may 'actually rule the world' because of how readily men repent in their presence. He mentioned how brave it is for women to 'choose life' when there is no hope, and that there is always a way to 'choose life'—that 'mothers get it done' (Fieldnotes 2014).

That said, I was surprised how little this topic came up in my discussions. With the exception of my time at NHOP, and the above-mentioned sermon, abortion was usually reduced to a side note or not brought up at all (Fieldnotes 2014).

Anti-intellectualism

My connection with Calvary Pentecostal started with a long conversation with Pastor Trent, a middle-aged man and one of several pastors who worked at the church. In this conversation, Trent spoke at length about "teleology," which he defined as "The fact or character attributed to nature or natural processes of being directed toward an end or shaped by a purpose" (*citation suppressed*), and he maintains a blog focused on the subject. He went on to lament the scientific community's rejection of the field, and his hopes to carry it on in some form. In addition, he noted how a disagreement with a professor about "evolution" led him to drop out of university (Fieldnotes 2014). Since persecution narratives like these are quite common in Evangelical communities, I did not make much of this conversation at the time.[48]

[48] One of the best examples of this narrative of Christian persecution in the academy is the film *God's Not Dead*, which stars actor Kevin Sorbo. The film tells the story of a philosophy professor (played by Sorbo) who forces his students to disavow the existence of God on the first day of class. The protagonist, a young student then refuses to

After several months and numerous unanswered emails, Pastor Trent finally returned one of my messages. He informed me that my project was approved and that I should attend Calvary the following Sunday, and of course, that is exactly what I did. Here are my fieldnotes from that Sunday:

> Pastor Trent then started his sermon titled 'The Truth about Truth.' [This basically amounted to an anti-academic diatribe, which I can't help but feel was directed at me. I mean this church took months to approve my project, then suddenly get back to me this past week and this is the first service? I can't help but feel targeted, especially since my main contact did the sermon, and I am quite curious of their motives. Or maybe I am just being a little captious.] He said that he was going to talk about facts that we rarely hear in our culture about the inerrancy of the Bible. He suggested that 'liberal academics' have the dominant voice on the Bible and people now assume it is inaccurate, and these academics think 2000 years of church history is wrong. Trent argued that these people have a bias against the Bible. [To their disappointment, most academics could really care less if the Bible is true or not. Maybe this disinterest is what Trent is really upset about? Seems to just be reifying the myth of the anti-theist academic, whom I have yet to meet.] He continued to say the text was written over 1500 years and that the words were 'God breathed.'
>
> He moved on to talk about 'truth,' which he considers has two ways of being understood: 'relative' and 'absolute.' Trent suggested that absolute truth is not popular these days.

reject his God, and is then challenged by an arrogant and irritable Sorbo to produce a paper that proves God's existence and defend said paper in a public debate against his professor. Of course, the student succeeds in his task, and makes his anti-theist professor look foolish (Pure Flix Entertainment 2015).

Having God as the judge of what is truth is what actually makes people feel uncomfortable. He then used an example of how we need standards for weights and measurements to explain how we also need a standard for truth, God being that standard.

He then returned to the Bible, suggesting that the hand of God was preserved in the text. Trent mentioned the problem of transcription and explained that the transcription was good because of Jewish reverence for text. [Probably he should look into the Septuagint.] Suggested that the Dead Sea Scrolls proved just how accurate these texts are. [Doesn't mention the problem of additional books.] He then confused the efforts of epigraphers and archeologists with paleontology. He then moved on to throw out a statement that devalued university education in general and bashed people who suggest that Moses did not write all five books of the Pentateuch. [Dude has a serious axe to grind. Considering his past experiences in academia this isn't too surprising.] Mentioned that liberal academics would love to throw out the book of Daniel, and that he disagrees with this effort.

Finally, Trent moved to state his 'bias,' which is that although the Bible is not science or history it stands up to both. He stated that he will allow the scientific community time to 'catch-up' to the Bible. And last, he stated that the Bible is the only rule for faith and practice. He argued that the Bible should be the standard even though there is going to be disagreement and difficulty in understanding exactly what it is trying to say (Fieldnotes 2014).

I realize this block quote is long, but it is important to communicate not only the content of that sermon, but also my reaction to it. I still think the evidence suggests that that sermon was targeted at me, but do realize I could be reading too deeply into the situation.

I encountered more of this anti-intellectual sentiment, in a far less direct and combative fashion, from Calvary's youth pastor, Tanner. In short, Pastor Tanner just doubted my ability to understand basic Christian doctrine and practices. At one point, after talking about his attachment to Lewis and encouraging me to read his work *The Screwtape Letters,* he worried that I would struggle to understand its contents. Later, during a discussion about my research and my field of study, he mentioned in an interrogating tone that Lewis did not like sociology. I evaded this question saying that Lewis thought it simply the "worst of good options" (Fieldnotes 2014). In reality, Lewis was quite harsh. He makes the following statement early in *The Screwtape Letters*:

> Above all, do not attempt to use science (I mean, the real sciences) as a defense against Christianity. They will positively encourage him to think about realities he can't touch and see. There have been sad cases among the modern physicists. If he must dabble in science, keep him on economics and sociology; don't let him get away from that invaluable 'real life' (Lewis 1961, 21).

For those unfamiliar with the text, Lewis was writing as a "junior demons mentor" named "Screwtape." Therefore, the above text is intended to help the young demon direct a young lad away from Christian salvation, and provide a moralizing message through the inverse interpretation in the process.

Finally, Atticus, from Ellington, sent me videos from three Evangelical apologists: Voddie Baucham, Ravi Zacharius, and Paul Washer (Fieldnotes 2014). Baucham's message

focused on the evidence for the inerrancy of the Bible, and how various arguments made against the Bible are incorrect (Baucham 2013).[49] Zacharius dove more specifically into the logic of Christian belief and the dangers posed by other religions, especially atheism and nihilism (Zacharius 2013). Finally, Washer's message was that most Christians are going to Hell. He focused on the wrath of God and the dangers of false teaching (which included academics and other intellectuals), which he used to set up the legitimacy of his message. He repeatedly stated that he only "preaches places once" because his message that God will allow so few into heaven is so "radical" (Washer 2002).

Conservative politics

For the most part, the conservative folks in my study were more willing to state their actual political affiliations, all of which were for federal or provincial Conservative parties (Fieldnotes 2014; Interview-RMAC3-1, 3; Inverview-SUMAC7-1). For instance, Betty, a middle-aged congregant from Stoney Brook stated, "I like the fact that Stephen Harper is a Christian. I like his decisiveness and his protection of Canada. He always has an intelligent answer. He's a patriot and works hard for Canada" (Interview-SUMAC7-1).[50]

Pastor Trent worked with Wildrose candidate, Allan Hunsperger who infamously blogged that homosexuals would "suffer the rest of eternity in the lake of fire, hell" (Warnica 2012). Furthermore, Trent swooned over how Prime Minister Harper recognized him at an event, while at the same time worrying about how he heard both Laureen and Stephen Harper had

[49] I am quite suspicious that Trent may have lifted most of his anti-academic sermon from Baucham (Fieldnotes 2014).
[50] Betty asked to complete her interview via email because she suffers from chronic pain issues and struggles with mobility (Fieldnotes 2014). She also stated that she relies on her husband for most of her political views because of his "intuitive" knowledge of "world systems" (Interview-SUMAC7-1).

stopped attending their Ottawa church (Fieldnotes 2014).[51] Zayne reiterated this concern for the Prime Minister's religiosity. He questioned whether Harper was a believer at all, citing his acceptance of gay marriage and abortion as examples of lack of religious commitment (Interview-External-1).[52]

Many of my participants, postconservative and conservative alike, hoped for the increased involvement of Christians in politics (Fieldnotes 2014; Interview-External-1; Interview-RMAC3-1, 2, 3; Interview-SUMAC7-2; Interview-SUPC1-3, 4, 5, 6; Interview-UMAC2-4). For the most part, this involvement focused on general civics. In a conversation with Allen, he eventually answered the question about Christian involvement in politics through a question about the separation of church and state:

> I don't know of an example [where Christian government works]. I am struggling to find an example of where it works. . . But, on an official level, if I say there should be a separation between church and state. But, if every believer who belongs to the church, and by definition every believer does belong to a church, takes seriously their role on this earth and is involved in government, then unofficially there is no separation of church and state (Interview-RMAC3-2).

Betty put it more succinctly: "I believe the church should pray for government and committed Christians should run for office" (Interview-SUMAC7-2). Therefore, most of my participants at least tried to avoid the language of theoconservatism.

[51] I do not know where Trent received this information, and thus cannot confirm the accuracy of his statement. I include it because his concern for the Prime Minister and his wife's spiritual well-being is important for the subject of this study.

[52] Zayne had an interesting path into my project. In short, one of the postconservative churches in my study had posted my call for interviews on its Facebook page (which to be clear, I did not ask anyone to do) where Zayne encountered and responded to it while he was trolling (ie. criticizing) some of the church's posts (Fieldnotes 2014).

There were only a handful of instances where I encountered what theo-political articulations resembled theoconservatism. First, NHOP is an Evangelical lobbyist/chaplaincy group that *unofficially* influences politicians and thus has a number of theoconservative goals. Specifically, however, my host did try to separate the efforts of NHOP from those of Dominionists and others who wish to officially convert governments into Christian theocracies (Fieldnotes 2014). Second, Atticus emphasized the need for Christian leadership:

> Robin: So, for you, should governments then be scripturally based? What is the relationship between church and state?
>
> Atticus: [*sic*] Leaders, if there would be a Christian leader he should be. I just don't know if there really is. . . . One that really . . . stands up for it for what's really [important]. The morals in this world are just way out there. That is a scary thing. That's a really broad topic but it's really [scary]. What is true? What is right and wrong? Who's the authority is based on what? Is it based on us analyzing things or it's scriptural what God says? Then there is no debate. You can say 'well this is right' (Interview-RMAC3-3).

Still, Atticus did not believe that we should actually institute a Christian government. Instead, he just hoped for increased involvement from "true believers" (Interview-RMAC3-3). Third, compared to the rest of my participants, Zayne had a theo-politics that most closely resembled theoconservatism. He had met and attended events put on by Faytene Grassechi, a prominent Canadian theoconservative. Nonetheless, his political opinions were inconsistent. In one breath he would call for the need for spiritual "intercession" and "prophets" in government, stating that he would hold worship in the Parliament buildings, and condemn Islam as an ultimate evil to advocating for free education, the disbanding of the Canadian military, and suggesting that you cannot legalize morality (Interview-External-1).

Finally, Calvary bore some resemblance to Mark Driscoll's Seattle-based hip-hyper-masculine emerging church—it was focused on flashy "seeker-based" services and aggressive evangelism. Leaders in the church would often crack jokes that brought other men's masculinity into question. For instance, one pastor mocked another's inability to grow facial hair—calling him a woman in the process (Fieldnotes 2014). This same pastor would also directly make use of Christian Nationalist rhetoric, a key component of theoconservatism:

> He suggested that places in the world 'are dark' because Christians don't go there and that we need to build more than a 'Christian empire:' we need to build an 'army.' He derided Christians for being lazy in the summer. That Christianity should not be put away based on a time of year or a time in one's life (Fieldnotes 2014).

This point helps elucidate why terms like the "Emerging Church" are not useful. Researchers would likely classify both Crossroads Missionary Alliance (the postconservative church I describe in a later chapter), and Calvary as Emerging Churches, even though their underlying theo-politics are decidedly different. As Pastor George might say, their "packaging" is similar (for instance, both hold seeker-focused services), but their "contents" (their theo-politics) could not be more different (Fieldnotes 2014).

Nevertheless, it is important to note the lack of ultra-conservative theo-politics in the churches I worked in—theo-politics that MacDonald made appear so prominent in this country (McDonald 2010). Individuals like Allen and Barbara possibly reveal the long-term effects of education, and the increased socio-economic status of women on diversifying Evangelical theo-politics (Gallagher 2003, 134), and potentially represent the development of postconservative theo-politics in new and more unlikely places.

Chapter Six

Postconservatism in Canada: An Altered Trinity to a Progressive Theo-politics

During my time in the field, I met postconservatives, often heavily influenced by Bell, virtually every place I visited. More significantly, two of the five selected churches in my study certainly met the criteria, as I laid out in the first chapter, of a postconservative congregation. These churches had a more nuanced and historically accountable understanding of scripture, were more willing to embrace diversity, had a more inclusive definition of Christianity, and had a prevalent focus on community. Postconservatism has the potential to alter drastically the theo-political climate of Canadian Evangelicalism (if it has not done so already).

In this chapter, I first summarize and contextualize the postconservatism theo-politics I found within the churches part of my study. Second, I describe how these postconservatives altered the Evangelical sacred in a similar fashion to Bell. Next, I move through some of the additional results of this alteration of the sacred. Finally, I describe the anti-fundamentalist theo-politics developed within these postconservative communities.

Encountering Postconservative Evangelicalism

Postconservative churches

Crossroads Missionary Alliance Church is located on the edge of a large urban centre. Like Mars Hill, Crossroads's senior pastor has greatly influenced his church's theo-political trajectory. Pastor George, who arrived at the church in 2009 and often describes himself as a "recovered fundamentalist," is a passionate and incredibly charismatic individual (Fieldnotes 2014).[53] As one member of the church stated when I asked him if he thought Crossroads was "part of a movement:"

> Yes, God's movement. Cause, I know why George is really here. I know where he got called from. I know how he got called. And I really believe that if there was someone to sponsor [a] television broadcast [*sic*] that George, he is the guy who should be in front of the world. Cause he's the energy. He is a little unassuming non-offensive guy. He can say "bitch" three times in a service and not offend anyone. . . . George needs to be in front of a camera. If I had the opportunity to sponsor him across the world to be on a Discovery Channel program on freedom, I would definitely (Interview-UMAC2-1).

[53] Crossroads Missionary Alliance is a newer facility located on the edge of the city next to a railway track. The building itself resembles a sailing vessel, which is interesting when cast against the prairie landscape that surrounds it. I did not know it at the time, but the progressive elements of the church were apparent within moments of my arrival. While the basic demographics of the congregation was quite similar to Calvary's, the cotton candy machine outside the door, the man on the unicycle, and the Michael Jackson's "Man in the Mirror" theme were evidence of a church whose members had revaluated the sacred within its walls (Fieldnotes 2014).

Like Bell, George has a magnetic, energetic, and friendly personality that drives the spirit of the church. Nonetheless, George knew prior to arrival (via the job description at the church) that Crossroads had a "contemporary" and "theologically complex" Evangelical environment, and was thus fertile ground for his brand of postconservative Evangelicalism (Interview-UMAC2-1).

Unlike Crossroads, Pastor Waylon and his sons have led New Hope Pentecostal Church, a church of about 250 members located in the core of a small Albertan city, for over two decades. Thus, as their pastors changed their theo-politics, the congregation followed suit, both losing and gaining members along the way. The interior of the church reflects this process. The walls of the church are still lined with various national flags that are reminiscent of a former more evangelistically focused Christianity. A brochure for The "Women on the Frontlines," which is a Grasseschi-founded theoconservative conference for women, brochure sat on a table in the church foyer, which further exemplifies the complexity of theo-politics that exist at New Hope.

Nonetheless, Waylon suggested that these changes all started as a result of a "grace-based" Christianity that the church always possessed. As such, he explained that this focus on grace is what led the church towards, what I would call, postconservatism (Fieldnotes 2014). Waylon describes this process as follows:

> I think because I have been in this church for twenty-three years, it forces me to continue to learn and to shift. And I would say that I have shifted significantly actually [in] my thinking and my theology. I would say especially over the last fifteen years. So, there would probably be quite a few things that I used to believe that I no longer believe. . . . I think a lot of Christianity is very works-based, and founded on the point of the law,

> whereas the New Covenant is about grace. And I think I have shifted significantly that way towards grace (Interview-SUPC1-2).

New Hope's focus on grace is quite similar to Bell's focus on love, which is not surprising since both pastors I interviewed at the church admitted they had been greatly influenced by Bell, and the "Love Wins" controversy, in particular (Interview-SUPC1-1, 2).[54]

Postconservatism in waiting

I encountered postconservative elements and individuals in more traditionally conservative Evangelical churches as well. Most of these individuals were Gen X youth, and assistant or associate pastors who worked underneath more conservative senior pastors.[55] One of these pastors, Brian, actually came to his theo-politics independently of Bell and other postconservative influences. Raised in the United States in a conservative Evangelical home, Brian resembled the "over-churched" folks that originally started to arrive at Mars Hill. He explains how he came to his current perspectives while attending college in the southern United States, which he described as a "Christian theocracy:"

> I was never as conservative as my dad right? I still had, kind of, a right leaning ideology. So, going to the South converted it all. All those social pressures. Kentucky is a red state. So, it is very conservative on a lot of social issues. Low taxes, small government, that sort of thing. Even in Kentucky, my wife and I started questioning. Cause, in Kentucky there is tremendous structural inequality. I remember thinking "if you are born and raised in these sorts of places you are hooped." Right? Here is this funny thing. I would regularly

[54] At their request, I interviewed Will and Waylon on the same day in the church's foyer lounge. While having two interviewees able to hear each other's responses was not ideal, this situation did produce an interesting dynamic that allowed the two men to continue what appeared to me as a long standing soteriological disagreement via the two interviews (Fieldnotes 2014; Interview-SUMAC7-1, 2).

[55] Generation X, or Gen X, usually refers to those individuals born between 1965 and 1980 (University of Iowa School of Social Work 2009, 5).

> not understand what people were saying to me in Kentucky, and we were there for seven years! Cause, the accent was just so thick. You take these people, they look like you or me and they are from the hills and they come in. Well, right away they are kind of shut out from a more cosmopolitan discourse with people who are more educated (Interview-SUMAC7-2).

In other words, Pastor Brian arrived at his current theo-politics via advanced education and the acknowledgment of social contradiction.[56]

Similarly, another assistant pastor I met, from a church that eventually rejected my study, had a philosophy rather than a theology degree. He was actively setting up inter-faith dialogues through a speaker series in his church in which he invited members of various denominations and religions to speak about their spirituality. Later this pastor informed me that he was glad of his church's current transformation from a "wealthy white congregation" to a largely immigrant based church, and that this transformation was forcing it to confront issues of openness and diversity (Fieldnotes 2014).

In addition, in both of these pastors' respective churches, they or others within their church acknowledged tensions between progressive and conservative factions within their congregations (Fieldnotes 2014). For instance, Brian explained that while he and his senior pastor had an amicable relationship, they maintained very different views on pluralism and diversity (Interview-SUMAC7-2). Meanwhile, two other senior pastors seemed more interested in maintaining the cohesion of the flock than in adopting a position on contentious issues in the church, and worried about an actual progressive "schism" forming within the Missionary

[56] Like Pastor George, Pastor Brian really revealed his life-experience in his interview. Postconservatism was a long road for both of these men. The fact that Brian does most of his work in his suburban coffee shop office, also the location of this interview, probably verifies the mild ostracism that Brian experiences within his own church because of his theo-politics (Fieldnotes 2014).

Alliance Church. One of these pastors cited the growing divide between younger and older Evangelicals, and the Missionary Alliance Church's recent move to ordain woman as partial sources of these tensions (Fieldnotes 2014).

Nevertheless, the most telling information I received while in the field, relating to the prevalence of postconservative theo-politics in Canadian Evangelicalism, came from an individual working for the National House of Prayer (NHOP), which is a conservative Evangelical chaplaincy/lobby group located in Ottawa (National House of Prayer 2015). This person spoke of how "neo-Protestants," as he called them, like Bell and McLaren, were corrupting and compromising the faith. He described how NHOP would receive groups of young Christians who were more likely to have read Bell or McLaren than numerous books in the Bible, or other more traditional Evangelical sources. He worried that these authors were leading youth to fill voids in understanding with their "feelings" rather than scripture, and criticized them for avoiding statements that implied "absolute truth" (Fieldnotes 2014). This description of postconservatism or "neo-Protestantism" as a threat to traditional Evangelicalism confirmed the extent of this movement's influence and its importance as an object of study.

Canadian Postconservatism: Evidence for an Altered Trinity

As I described in the previous chapter, postconservatives, including those in my sample, have altered the traditional hierarchy of Evangelical sacred things. In short, this alteration consists of a continued veneration of the *individual*, an increased attention to the *communal*, and the demotion of the *textual.*

The individual

The Postconservative Evangelicals in my study continued to place importance on the sacred nature of the individual spiritual experience. In several sermons, Pastor George

emphasized that the Bible was a personal therapeutic device, and meant to change individual believers. To this effect, he stated in his interview:

> [Originally] the Scriptures were used like more of a personal devotional. . . . And [some authors] are talking about the different levels of enlightenment or personal growth, or something like that, and all of a sudden I realize this is exactly what the Bible is talking about when it talks about spiritual growth! When it is talking about 'spiritual infants' and 'spiritual youth' and 'spiritual parents' (Interview-UMAC2-4).

In a sermon, he suggested that readers can use the story of Ahab and Jezebel as a lesson on bullying, and that Jezebel was an "attitude" that we all have at different points in time. In another instance, he described the Bible as a mirror through which one can see themselves and his/her relationship with Christ (Fieldnotes 2014). This therapeutic approach can have serious New Age overtones as well, which is something I look into more thoroughly in the following chapter.

In his co-authored book, George argues that one should even take the Biblical passages relating to Armageddon as personal allegory:

> We all have an Armageddon. It is the battle that we all face. It is the war that every human being must wage in his or her personal life. It is the war of light versus darkness, righteousness versus unrighteousness, right versus wrong, the kingdom of God versus the works of the enemy (*citation suppressed*).

George's understanding of Armageddon is quite similar to Bell's understanding of hell (Bell 2007A, 7). Both argue that both of these places/events do not or will not exist/happen. Instead, these theological concepts become therapeutic and meditative tools meant to help one understand their own emotional and spiritual issues.

Another member of Crossroads emphasized the importance of personal choice when committing to a religion and that this "freedom" of choice will engender a more fruitful relationship with God (Interview-UMAC2-1). Other interviewees cited the importance of individuality and difference within church communities (Interview-SUMAC7-2; Interview-UMAC2-3, 4). Pastor George explains this importance through a story about an older gentleman who attends Crossroads:

> 'You are gonna [*sic*] slob your guts out for God and you shouldn't expect anything in return, that is selfish.' And he had been in this church for years! But, once he was given the liberty to 'let's celebrate diversity! Everybody can be different! Everyone is at a different place in their life. A different place in their faith. A different personality. Everyone is different.' And he decided that is who he was (Interview-UMAC2-4).

In another interview with a postconservative assistant pastor working in a more conservative congregation, this pastor lauded the importance of pluralism and diversity as part of the beauty of God's creation (Interview-SUMAC7-2).

In sum, although my Postconservative participants did appear to move away from some traditional forms of venerating the individual, such as speaking about having a personal relationship with Jesus, this veneration continued through the importance they placed on therapeutics, diversity, and personal choice.

The communal

The postconservative reverence of the communal was most often expressed through the importance they placed on "love" or "grace." One pastor of a postconservative congregation described loving people as the essential "business of the church" (Interview-SUPC1-2). More clearly, Garner, a personal trainer in his mid-forties stated:

> One of the craziest things is one of my Muslim friends. . . held in his eyes a love for family and a love for friends so deep. And a scripture kept echoing in my mind. And it was "you will know my people by their love." Well, that opened [salvation] up to everybody that loves! And certain people will exercise their love and extend their love sure. Maybe somewhat prohibited or handicapped. But everybody understands love. We can't live without love (Interview-UMAC2-1)!

For Garner, like Bell, love is the quintessential force that bonds Christians, and all other humans for that matter, together. This "love-centrism" was not as prevalent in the more conservative congregations in my sample (Fieldnotes 2014).

In addition, my postconservative participants expressed that a "church" was defined by its people. Once again, Garner stated this fact most emphatically: "Because the church is an example of what Christ was trying to be; the church is a body of people not a building. Screw the building! It is a body of people!" (Interview-UMAC2-1). More interestingly, however, was an instance during a sermon at Mars Hill where the pastor attempted to argue for communal involvement against the tide of postmodern individualism. I described the instance as follows:

> One of the pastors, a bald white guy in his late thirties or so, opened by talking about how he had been inspired by a conversation he had earlier in the week about the purpose of the 'church enterprise.' The person he was speaking with argued that he doesn't need a church for prayer and that he can pray just as well at home. Thus, he could not come up with a reason for having church at all [certainly a struggle with postmodern Christianity]. He then mentioned that he wished he would have told this guy that church is important because it is a place where someone might pray for 'you.' He then moved on to lead the church in a prayer where he asked folks to focus on a single individual if they could.

> First, he had people pray for the church itself. Second, they prayed for the leaders and elders of the church. Third, they prayed for the single moms and the people struggling to get pregnant. Forth, they prayed for those who did not have work or were struggling financially. Fifth, they prayed for those in pain. Sixth, they prayed for those "unable to pray." And finally, they prayed for those who were lost and needing direction (Fieldnotes 2014).

This situation helps illustrate the tension between the postmodern and communal values within postconservative Christianity. I have been aware of this tension since my Masters work where a pastor emphasized he could "do church" on his bed in the morning if he wanted to (Fieldnotes 2010).

The scriptural

Although I do not mean to discount the importance postconservatives place on the Bible, they do avoid the literal and inerrant interpretations of scripture that pervade many other Evangelical traditions. Of my postconservative participants, Pastor George made the move away from what he called "religious" readings of the Bible more than anyone did. In one sermon, he criticized those "'extreme religious folks who memorize Bible verses and go around criticizing others." Several weeks later, he stated he would rather have "sinners" in his church than "legalists." After the presentation of the *Hellbound* documentary, George emphatically stated "the Bible should be read *seriously*, not *literally,*" continued to accuse Mark Driscoll of being "straight-up wrong" on many of his Biblical conclusions, and stated that a pastor with Biblical scholarship that bad "should not be a pastor" (Fieldnotes 2014).

In short, one of the pillars of George's theo-politics is the need for thorough, contextualized, and even critical readings of scripture. This theo-politics is most evident in his

co-authored book where he used historical and scholarly material to criticize more "pessimistic" Evangelical eschatological perspectives, such as Darbyian Dispensationalism (*citation suppressed*).[57] This perspective was reiterated by one of George's congregants who argued that Evangelicals needed to start thinking about what they hear from their pastors and what they read in the Bible, and that this situation was a problem for many raised in the church and raised "not to question" the words of their leaders (Interview-UMAC2-3).

At New Hope Pentecostal, Pastor Waylon argued that the Bible should be read through the figure of Jesus: "So, to me, my lens, my lens is Jesus. My lens is Jesus is what God looks like and that has to filter everything else I read in the Bible" (Interview-SUPC1-2). He reiterated this perspective as part of the "grace" focused "New Covenant," which he argues allows Christians to move past the more vengeful and violent God of the Hebrew Bible or "Old Covenant" (Interview-SUPC1-2). Similarly, Pastor Will emphasized that his theo-politics always starts with the fact that "God is good," and everything must follow from that conceptualization of God. As such, both pastors move decidedly away from literalist and inerrant interpretations of text.

Postconservatives in my study were also more willing to take inspiration from external sources when describing their spirituality. Garner described how the extra-biblical texts of the Essenes and the Quran, and the Japanese Christian-inspired alternative therapy Reiki inspired his current spiritual practices (Interview-UMAC2-1).[58] Pastor George emphasized the importance of external influences to elucidate the meaning of various scriptures:

[57] Dispensationalism is a brand of Christian millenarianism first developed by John Nelson Darby [1800-1882] that argues that God will remove 'saved' Christians from the earth through an event called the "rapture." This event is prior to the "tribulation," where God will purge the earth of the forces of evil. After the period of tribulation, Christian dispensationalists believe that Christ will return and set up his kingdom on earth from the Temple Mount in Jerusalem (Sawyer 2005).

[58] The Essenes (100 BCE – 68 CE) were "a communalistic Jewish sect that set up a desert commune in Qumran and were eventually destroyed by a Roman Legion," and some scholars argue that they were the authors of the Dead Sea Scrolls (Willey 2013B, 45); Reiki is an alternative healing system "traced back to the Usui Makao who was a Christian minister in Kyoto, Japan, in the late nineteenth century" (Clarke 2004, 528).

> I have done a number of these personality profiles. And there are a few of them that have said, and it is really true of me, 'you have the ability to see connections between completely different disciplines.' And I had never realized until I read that, I actually do that all the time. So, if I am like speaking about a passage from the Bible I might use an illustration from neuroscience or something like that. Because I have suddenly seen a connection (Interview-UMAC2-4).

Later, he continued describing the variety of influences on his spirituality:

> I will study Peak Achievement people like Tony Robbins, or somebody like that. And they are talking about the different levels of enlightenment, or personal growth, or something like that, and all of a sudden I realize this is exactly what the Bible is talking about when it talks about spiritual growth. . . . And all of a sudden I am thinking 'so because of that personality quark [sic] that I have got, I just see connections between things.'. . . I am like, 'I like that and I like that. And I like that thing that Benny Hinn's got. And there is something from secular psychology and there is something from the New Age Movement we will take that too, and we will just mix it all together.' As long as it actually does fit together, as long as the pieces fit together, I am happy with them (Interview-UMAC2-4).

This openness to external resources departs from the Protestant practice of *sola scriptura*, to which the bulk of Evangelical communities still adhere. As an unintended result, postconservatives dilute the centrality of scripture in the construction of their theo-politics.

The Theo-politics of Canadian Postconservatism

Eschatology

One of the most common theo-political shifts amongst my participants was to their eschatology. Most described a transition from "negative," "futurist," "Darbyian," and/or "rapture" oriented views of the end of the world to "positive," "grace-based," and/or "partial preterist" views (*citation suppressed*; Fieldnotes 2014; Interview-SUPC1-1; Interview-SUPC1-2; Interview-UMAC2-1; Interview-UMAC2-4). Pastor Waylon describes this shift in some detail:

> I shifted my eschatology, I don't believe in a Rapture primarily because it is not found anywhere in the New Testament at all period. I don't believe in a Rapture; I don't believe in a seven year tribulation; I believe all of that stuff was fulfilled prior to the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD. I believe in what Isiah said of the increase in [God's] government there will be no end [*sic*]. I believe the world would get better. I believe a day will come when swords will be beaten into plows and that kind of thing. Of course, that is figurative language. I believe the world will get better, and I believe more and more people will get to know Jesus (Interview-SUPC1-2).

Pastor Will described a similar change:

> And so it is kind of the domino effect over the last five years. There are a lot of things you are raised with and the church teaches you that you don't question. You know? There are things like our eschatology. You have questions in Bible College or our youth group covered it in a Bible study. 'Well ok. It doesn't make sense to me, but I am not a Biblical scholar.' But, I started looking into it and all this rapture stuff and *Left Behind* stuff just isn't supported in the Bible. Like I just don't see it there (Interview-SUPC1-1).

Both Will and Waylon argue that the world will become better through the missionary and service efforts of Christians. As such, both pastors use their eschatology to help promote community work and volunteerism (Inverview-SUPC1-1; Interview-SUPC1-2). Furthermore, the way in which they understand their eschatology as the first "domino" to fall, reflects Jameson's assertion that utopians necessarily have to oversimplify their arguments and produce "single-shot solutions to all our ills" (Jameson 2007: 11).

In his co-authored book mentioned earlier, George too describes having a previous attachment to a "futurist" eschatology (*citation suppressed*). For George, futurists are those Christians who:

> came to believe that the world is gradually slipping under the influence of wicked leaders and eventually Satan will take control of the economic and religious systems of the world. Preachers who embraced that pessimistic view began to teach that an antichrist figure will soon rise to prominence and then deceive most of humanity. They then taught about a coming great tribulation during which God will pour out His wrath, judging and destroying the earth (*citation suppressed*).

George then argues for a "victorious eschatology" that "teaches that Jesus Christ and His Church are going to reign over this world, not Satan" (*citation suppressed*).

Soteriology

Like Bell (and often following him), many Canadian postconservatives have opened up salvation to a larger number of people. To this effect, Pastor Waylon stated:

> And I am not talking about all paths lead to God, Jesus Christ is the way, but I think he is good, and I think the doorway that he gives is a lot broader than we think. Cause he knows the heart, and there is some people who don't have a complete understanding of

> him. But, he knows the inclination of the heart, and I just think we are going to be surprised at how wide that door was for people to get in. That is where I am at (Interview-SUPC1-2).

Although Waylon still attends an annihilationist soteriology, meaning that those who do not qualify for heaven are *annihilated* from existence (thus there is no Hell), others, including his son, subscribed to a more Bellian Universalist soteriology (Fieldnotes 2014; Interview-SUPC1-1; Interview-SUPC1-6; Interview-UMAC2-1).

Will used the following example to explain why he has come to adhere to this perspective: "[I]t is hard to reconcile the victims of Auschwitz being gassed and then ending up in Hell for [*sic*] billions and billions of years and on and on and on forever" (Interview-SUPC1-2). Another participant suggested that he was "thankful" for his time spent with people of different religious backgrounds, and that this time had led him to believe that Christianity does not have a monopoly on heaven (Interview-SUPC1-6).

Finally, some postconservatives were open to, and even hoped for, the possibility of ultimate reconciliation or universalism (Fieldnotes 2014; Interview-SUMAC7-2; Interview-SUPC1-2; Interview-SUPC1-3; Interview-SUPC1-4). One woman framed this hope around her husband's salvation: "Yeah, and having an unsaved husband, I certainly hope that [Bell's soteriology] is the case. But I don't want to base eternity on that hope right" (Interview-SUPC1-4). This statement reflects the fear that many postconservatives have with universalism. They are afraid to be wrong and are thus forced into a Pascalian wager. When it comes to one's eternal salvation, many Evangelicals think it is safer to subscribe to a more traditional soteriology and be wrong than subscribe to universalism and be wrong (Miller 2013).

Evangelism and missiology

The postconservative churches and individuals in my sample de-emphasised seeking converts and mission work, and focused on localized service work instead. In a particularly revealing moment, Pastor Brian describes this move away from evangelism through the friendship he shares with a Muslim and an atheist:

> In Canada, one of the things I value is diversity. Just yesterday, I was having a conversation and they were two fellows I am friends with. One of them is a Muslim, he is born in <*inaudible*> and the other guy lived in Fort Mac and [*sic*] a complete atheist right? And we will have this conversation and I realize the value that I have to hold room for all of that. [To] have room for that dialogue is very important for me. . . And I have come down to the conclusion that no, it's a good thing to open society. It is a great thing to open society [to] the freedom and dignity [to allow people] to be who they are. So, would I want everyone in <*suppressed*> to come to *Stoneybrook Alliance* and be just like me? Well, on the one hand, yes, and, on the other hand, I think that would be the worst thing in world. Right? Like we are made by God [in] the diversity that we are. I have come to value that much more (Interview-SUMAC7-2).

Several other individuals made similar statements in regards to their attachment to a less evangelistic mission-based Evangelicalism (Interview-SUPC1-5; Interview-UMAC2-1; Interview-UMAC2-2; Interview-UMAC2-4).

Willy, a retired broadcaster, described holding a benefit concert for a local charity that his church founded that supports "women & children who are trafficked & sexually exploited" (*citation suppressed*). He argued that these Christian charities are great "As long as the organization doesn't hit you with a Bible when you walk in the door" (Interview-SUPC1-5).

Willy referenced the de-emphasis of evangelism while at the same time supporting local social justice work. Moreover, both Crossroads and New Hope regularly spoke about their local charity work in both sermons and in conversation (Fieldnotes 2014).

Many postconservatives possess a postcolonial bent that prevents them from supporting overseas missionary work with the same fervour as their more conservative cousins (Fieldnotes 2014). In this regard, Gail described how awful the Crusades were and how easily the early church flipped from being persecuted to being persecutors after the conversion of Constantine, and how Christians need to be made aware of this impulse (Interview-UMAC2-3). Moreover, George described the Bible as an Eastern text that we need to decolonize:

> Some Western readers may hate us using these numbers in a nonliteral sense and accuse us of 'spiritualizing' Scripture. We would respond by saying that they are 'Westernizing' Scripture. It is the Western mind that insists on taking such numbers in their strictest sense. If we are going to understand Scripture from the framework in which the authors wrote it, we must acknowledge the poetic, symbolic, and apocalyptic language they used (*citation suppressed*).

This perspective follows Bell's work to re-approach Christianity as an Eastern religion (Wellman Jr. 2012, 75).

This bent effects their perspective on the state of Israel, and the almost blind support most Evangelicals give to the state. Both Waylon and Will argued that Evangelicals should start viewing them as they view any other nation state (Fieldnotes 2014; Interview-SUPC1-1). In a sermon, Waylon actually challenged his congregants to give the same "love" to the Palestinians as they do to Israel. He then "half apologized for meddling with people's politics, but continued

to state that the Kingdom knows no politics" (Fieldnotes 2014). Pastor George takes this perspective on Israel even further:

> Usually the same people that are horrified [*sic*] of ISIS will support Israel whatever Israel does. . . . I mean in my opinion anyone who can't see the Israeli state as just as big of terrorists as Hamas, I just don't know what they are reading? I mean, if they can't see that (Interview-UMAC2-4).

George and many other postconservatives are critical of any state's use of violence, which leads them to be more open to investigating the external factors that allow this violence to continue. Moreover, these postconservatives would argue that parachuting missionaries to attempt to convert the populace of these countries would likely only intensify the problems they face, and would proliferate the more "imperial" parts of Christian mission work that most postconservatives hope to eradicate (Bell and Golden 2008; Boyd 2005; McLaren 2012; Zahnd 2014A).[59]

Gender and sexuality

Many of my participants displayed a great deal of flexibility on issues of gender and sexuality, such as the position of women in the church, gay marriage, comprehensive sex education, and abortion. In fact, the Missionary Alliance Church had just ordained its first female minister, Eunice Smith, just prior to my entrance into the field (Ambrose University College 2013, 6). As such, female ordination was on the top of many people's minds. A couple pastors worried that the ordination of women may fracture the church (Fieldnotes 2014). Others, such as

[59] Notably, according to their T3010 information, Calvary Christian Assembly, an urban Pentecostal church in my sample, donated fifty-five percent of their charitable donations to local organizations over the last three years (2011-2013). In comparison, the church with the next highest proportion of charitable donations dedicated to local organizations, Crossroads Missionary Alliance, only sent fifteen percent of the church's charitable donations to these sources (Canada Revenue Agengy 2015). This activity is in spite of the fact that this church reflected almost no additional postconservative characteristics (Fieldnotes 2014).

Pastor George, criticized many of the arguments meant to keep women out of leadership positions as "stereotypes" (Interview-UMAC2-4). George emphasized that the "submission of women to men happens after the fall" and is thus not an ideal social formation (Fieldnotes 2014). In addition, another older postconservative I interviewed would light up with glee with the slightest mention of women gaining access to positons of leadership, political office in particular (Interview-SUPC1-5).

Postconservatives were similarly flexible on the subject of gay marriage and homosexuality in general. George downplayed the importance of the issue and suggested he could really care less either way. Furthermore, he hypothesized that the way polls and surveys ask Evangelicals about homosexuality and other issues, such as abortion, forces them into dichotomous situations where they are forced to answer questions without nuance, vicariously hiding the complexity of many Evangelicals' feelings about these issues (Interview-UMAC2-4). Another member of Crossroads, Georgina, who went through a divorce after her husband came out as gay, described the need for more tolerance within Christian communities (Interview-UMAC2-2).

In one of my more complex moments in the field, I sat through a guest-sermon by a missionary. The sermon started with a description of his missionary exploits in Africa with his sons, and their efforts to convert a large number of "previously unreached" people. He described a number of miracles and spiritual experiences he shared with his sons and how he assumed his eldest would take up the torch and continue his practice as a missionary. The message of this sermon and its focus on overseas mission work struck me immediately as a practice from which I thought Crossroads was attempting to distance itself.

The message of the sermon soon changed, however. I described the experience in my fieldnotes as follows:

> He continued to speak about his oldest son. How he moved to Portland to go to University. How he eventually would leave with one of his roommates to get a place in New York, and continue to become a psychotherapist. After a number of years, his son told the speaker that he was gay, and was married to his roommate. He continued to speak of his struggles with this relationship. He suggested that his understanding of scripture would not enable him to support the lifestyle. But still, he decided he has to love and hold his son in his heart regardless; he does not want to pass judgment. He had to 'drop the stone' [an allusion to the stoning of Mary Magdalen and Jesus' intervention (John 8:1-11)]. He has now started to preach to the gay community or more often gay Christian communities that ask him to preach to them. He mentioned that God is at work in all of this and will perfect everything. Also, he mentioned that this is not about being 'liberal' it is about being 'like Jesus.' He again suggested that his understanding of scripture would not enable him to support the lifestyle. But continued to state that that was just 'where he is now' (Fieldnotes 2014).

This missionary was a very conservative fellow until he found out he had a gay son whom he loved, and continues to love. I think this *love* in spite of theo-politics is the message that Pastor George is attempting to take to the more conservative members of his church, his denomination, and the Evangelical community at large.

Pastor Brian, however, made a more direct argument for sexual diversity and gay marriage:

> I have a severely disabled child and one of his caregivers is, I mean, I have never asked her, but it is clear to me that she is not on the straight end of the spectrum. And she provides tremendously compassionate care to [my child]. So, I have had to think. . . is this such a bad thing? And, I have come down to the conclusion that no, it's a good thing to [have an] open society. It is a great thing to [have an] open society [that allows for] the freedom and dignity [for people] to be who they are (Interview-SUMAC7-2).

Brian continued to make additional statements supporting gay marriage, common-law, and even emphatically supported the sex education curriculum. In terms of the latter, he stated:

> [M]y daughter is doing the whole sex-ed curriculum thing now. Is that so bad? Well the reality is teenagers have sex. Is that what I want as a pastor? Is that what I want for my kids? I don't know what my kids are doing. . . . But, really the reality is they are going to do these things anyway. So, let's acknowledge it and say ok 'here is some information' (Interview-SUMAC7-2).

Sexual abstinence is one of the most venerated practices in Evangelical Christianity, something that Evangelicals rarely question (Wilkins 2008, Willey 2013A). Thus, Brian's perspective on the issue is one of the most radical I have encountered (Fieldnotes 2010, 2014).

Even more surprising is the flexibility of some of the postconservatives in my study towards the subject of abortion. Gail, Georgina, George, and Will all refused to take a hardline stance on the issue (Interview-SUPC1-1; Interview-UMAC2-2,3,4). As Pastor Will stated:

> Like abortion is a huge issue for Evangelicals. My take on that is two-fold. First, I would say it is more complicated than either side is willing to admit. Okay? I would definitely be on the pro-life side of things, but the pro-life side of things is so unwilling to compromise and the pro-choice side is so unwilling to compromise. [*sic*] Where I believe

> we could find common ground and at least drastically reduce how many abortions are happening (Interview-SUPC1-1).

Will continued to argue that dealing with "poverty" and helping to foster "healthy families" would be a far more efficient way for Evangelicals to reduce the number of abortions (Interview-SUPC1-1). Similarly, Gail suggested that abortion is just not the "black and white" issue many people think it is. She went on to describe a number of situations, such as rape, where even the most conservative of Evangelicals may consider abortion an option (Interview-UMAC2-2). Gail is another great example of how a complex theo-political *habitus* can lead to a postconservative theo-political *hexis*. For example, while she describes herself as having fairly conservative political values (mostly in terms of economic policy), her parents actually met at a New Democratic Party rally and her father was an avid socialist (Interview-UMAC2-2).

In a slightly different vein, Georgina, who is a nurse by profession, argued that we should consider the economic and medical impacts of banning abortion:

> I spent a weekend over at the Stollery taking care of [*sic*] twenty-two week babies, and just knowing the incredible amount of money that goes into keeping this child alive that is going to have incredible disabilities is huge. Most people out there don't realize the kind of millions of dollars that can be poured into these itty-bitty babies. And I don't know that it's a huge service to them and to the families [and] to society in general. And that is huge! If you think of the kind of money it would take to provide very basic health care for people in third world countries whose children die from lack of very basic [things]—antibiotics and immunizations. And here we can spend literally millions of dollars on one little baby that will then go on to be huge, burden sounds awful bad. A

> huge liability, if you look at it from a financial point of view. I think that is something that we are going to have to debate (Interview-UMAC2-2).

Georgina's contact with the medical field trumps the general Evangelical theo-politics surrounding abortion, and postconservatism provides her, and my aforementioned participants, the means to hold such values and remain a member of the community.

Postconservative Anti-Fundamentalism

During my time at Mars Hill, my hosts regularly noted how "over-churched" Evangelicals made up most of the congregation—folks who have grown tired of stricter and more conservative forms of Christianity, such as the Dutch Calvinism that dominates the Grand Rapids area (Fieldnotes 2014; Wellman Jr. 2012). Although I had originally expected the *under-churched*, that is folks from Mainline denominations looking for a more substantial form of Christianity, to populate the postconservative congregations in my study, instead I found that, for the most part, the these churches followed the same pattern as Mars Hill and were full of the "over-churched" (Fieldnotes 2014).

Bielo noted this pattern in his research on the Emerging Church through the predominance of "deconversion narratives," which follow the structure and patter of conversion narratives that are so important in the Evangelical sub-culture, in his interviews (Bielo 2011). I received several of these deconversion accounts as well (Interview-SUPC1-1, 2; Interview-SUMAC7-2; Interview-UMAC2-1, 4). Both Waylon and Will framed their deconversion through changing theo-political structures, such as a move from a traditional soteriology to a more Universalist one (Interview-SUPC1-1, 2). Pastor Brian described the theo-political changes in life as resulting from his experiences living in a "theocracy" in the southern states, and the exclusivity and inequality that certain theo-politics helped legitimize in this setting (Interview-

SUPC7-2). Both Garner and George, however, explained their deconversions as a more general move away from fundamentalism—George actually referred to himself as a "recovering fundamentalist" (*citation suppressed*; Interview-UMAC2-1, 4).

More specifically, these deconversion narratives dovetail with an anti-fundamentalist theo-politics. Pastor George made a poignant statement in this regard:

> I have come to the conclusion that Fundamentalism (in any religion, branch of science, or discipline) is actually a mental disorder brought about by the person's inability to cope with a complex world, and need to see everything as black & white/right & wrong/dualistically, and always have an enemy that you are waging a culture war against. It is a sickness which is destroying western Christianity. It has nothing to do with the character of Jesus. Talking to Fundamentalists and trying to help them see a bigger, fuller, more inclusive and fully rounded view of God is a total waste of time. As a former, and now fully recovered Fundamentalist, I know this to be true. When you have to reject the proven findings of every branch of science and archaeology in order to hold to your beliefs, then something is seriously wrong with what you believe. If you think that God wants you to believe something which can be clearly proven to be completely untrue – you are worshipping a false god. There is no way to reason with an unreasonable person. Their only hope is to eventually become so sickened by the un-Christ-like fruit that Fundamentalism produces and by accidentally stumbling upon information that they cannot refute which contradicts their comic-book-version of faith…. then they may be open to talk. Try to talk to them before that and they will attack you and accuse you. Let's remember – it was Fundamentalists who crucified Jesus (*citation suppressed*).

In another instance, he argued that Fundamentalists, Darbyian dispensationalists in particular, are the people who will likely bring on World War III (Interview-UMAC2-4). Likewise, Brian derided the "religious wackos" who deny climate change and think "Obama is the anti-Christ" (Interview-SUMAC7-2). Gail made use of Bell's metaphor of "brickianity" to explain the problems embedded in more conservative forms of Evangelicalism (Interview-UMAC2-3). And Garner regularly referenced and criticized the conservative religion that legitimized his father's behaviour: "[My Dad] played the role that I think he was taught in church. Which [was] 'God is an angry God; so, Dad is an angry Dad'" (Interview-UMAC2-1).

One reason for this anti-fundamentalism is the public image of Evangelicalism, and to a lesser degree, Christianity as a whole. Pastor George stated how any number of conservative theo-political perspectives, including young earth creationism, homophobia, Darbyianism, and Christian Zionism, are "embarrassing to the Christian church" (Interview-UMAC2-4). For George, Brian, and many other postconservatives, the legitimacy of the Evangelical perspective is what is at stake in these theo-political discussions.

Postconservatism poses a drastic shift in how Evangelicals see themselves, their God, and where they sit in the world. This shift in made manifest primarily through changes to the hierarchy of sacred Evangelical things, and a litany of tertiary theo-poltical beliefs and practices, including a more nuanced reading of scripture, and a more inclusive understanding of Christianity. The participants in my study reiterated these changes. One of the most notable and significant of these changes is the postconservative drift towards New Ageism, flexidoxy, and cosmopolitanism.

Chapter Seven

The "Oprahfication" of Rob Bell: New Ageism, New Thought, and Postconservative Evangelicalism

In a world that includes "flexitarians," vegetarians who eat meat on occasion (Rinaldi 2015), and "flexisexuals," hetro/homosexuals who temporarily alter their sexual orientation (Eccles 2010), it is not surprising that "flexidoxy" is a common practice even amongst Evangelicals (Brooks 2000, 224; Lofton 2011, 209). In his now famous analysis of the American upper class *Bobos in Paradise: The New Upper Class and How They Got There*, journalist David Brooks defined flexidoxy as "the hybrid mixture of freedom and flexibility on the one hand and the longing for rigor and orthodoxy on the other" (Brooks 2000, 224). Brooks haphazardly

connected this term to a rugged Montanan conservatism in contrast to the New Ageism of his Bobos, forgetting that some classic New Age inspired movements developed in Montana alongside his Montanan flexidox Jews.[60]

This New Age connection to flexidoxy is further strengthened by the massive influence that media mogul Oprah Winfrey has on the American religious scene (Lofton 2011). Winfrey has displayed an open attachment to many aspects of New Ageism, including aspects of the New Thought Movement—an important influence on American New Ageism (Melton 2004; Travis 2007). Over the years, Winfrey has extended her influence through a group of spiritual elites she has assembled, including New Age and alternative medicine guru Deepak Chopra, influential spirituality author Eckhart Tolle, and of course, Rob Bell. New Ageism and New Thought are two of the primary influences on the flexidoxy of North American Evangelicals. I explicate this Evangelical move to the flexidox though the New Age influences expressed by my participants, and the continued "Oprahfication" of Rob Bell.

In this chapter, I first provide a brief history and definition of New Ageism. I then describe some New Age influences on Christianity in general and speak about an experience I had in a New Age inspired United Church. Next, I investigate the New Age influences on Postconservative Evangelicalism, including those in my study and Rob Bell. Following my look into Bell's New Ageism, I explore Winfrey and Harpo Entertainment's influence on the American religious scene and consider how Bell fits into Winfrey's corpo-spiritual agenda.

[60] The Church Universal and Triumphant (C.U.T.) is the most notable example of Montanan New Ageism. The Church, which moved around the country before eventually settling in Livingston, Montana, was started by Nathan Prophet in 1958, and kept alive by his wife Elizabeth Claire Prophet after his death (Starrs and Wright 2005, 106) One article describes C.U.T. as "a miasmic blend of New Age mysticism, astrology, Christianity, reincarnation, Confucianism, kundalini yoga, sun worship, and anticommunism" (Starrs and Wright 2005, 108)

Finally, I look once again into the way New Ageism, Winfrey, and postconservatism meet within neoliberal capitalism.

Defining New Ageism

Although New Ageism has its original roots in post-World War II UFO cults, the movement has diversified significantly since the 1980s (Hannegraaff 2005, 6495). In its current form, practitioners can derive their New Ageism from any number of beliefs and practices, including:

> Esoteric or mystical Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Taoism . . . elements from 'pagan' teachings including Celtic, Druidic, Mayan and Native American Indian. . . Zen meditations, Wiccan rituals, enlightenment intensive seminars, management trainings, shamanic activities, wilderness events, spiritual therapies, forms of positive thinking… (Heelas 1996, 1).

At the centre of this "hodge-podge" of beliefs and practices is an intense sacralization of the individual and personal experience (Hannegraaff 2005, Heelas 1996). New Agers reject traditional and formal forms of religion and instead embrace numerous "detraditionalizing" practices that privilege individuation (Heelas 1996, 205). Religious studies scholar Paul Heelas describes this emphasis on human transformation as the "*lingua franca*" of New Ageism, and states that in New Ageism "the self itself is sacred" (Heelas 1996).

This sacralization of the self has developed alongside the consumerization of the movement leading one researcher to describe New Ageism as "a manifestation par excellence of postmodern consumer society" (Hannegraaff 2005, 6495). This hyper-individualization moves away from earlier forms of the movement that emphasized a more communal ethic to improve and spiritualize one's surroundings (Hannegraaff 2005, 6496). Heelas described these early New

Agers as "purists" who understood capitalism as "fundamentally flawed," and the latter as "empowerers" who argued that humans could make capitalism "work properly" (Heelas 1996, 32). Over time, New Ageism is becoming synonymous with the term "spirituality," which allows the religion to adapt more easily to the cultural changes, and to resemble more of a "spiritual marketplace" where practitioners can more easily pick and consume various New Age "goods" (Hannegraaff 2005, 6497). In short, like postconservative Evangelicalism, New Ageism underwent a similar rearrangement of the hierarchy of sacred things that transformed the movement from one focused on the transformation of *humanity* to one focused on the transformation of the individual *human.*

The New Age and Christianity

New Ageism has influenced a great number of Christians since its move to the mainstream in the 1980s. As mentioned earlier, several authors have described this influence as an increased emphasis on the "therapeutic," and "existential"—the creation of a Christianity more focused on self-help than the well-being of the communities they inhabit (Himmelfarb 1999; Orwin 2004, 30). Orwin goes on to describe these Christians as "Evbos" (Orwin 2004, 20).

When I came across this New Age trend amongst my participants, a colleague suggested I visit a successful "non-theistic" United Church. This church still made use of the Bible as a key text, but not a sacred one. The minister of this congregation did everything possible to avoid any mention of a monotheistic god, instead using words like "universe" and "spirit" to speak to divine things. During a baptism, this minister referred to the child involved as a "child of the universe," which reflects an active rejection of the history of Christian baptism, and a concurrent move towards New Age pantheism. By the end of the service, I could not understand how this

church could reject monotheism, a key component of all three Abrahamic religions, and still consider itself part of the Christian fold (Fieldnotes 2014).

Looking back, however, this church definitely resembles Heelas's community and "planetary" focused "purists" more than his capitalist focused "empowerers" (Heelas 1996, 32). I made the following assessment in my fieldnotes:

> That said, the new ageism in McTaggert United Church is more of a 1960s baby boomer variety, while the [postconservatives] are more involved with the new-new ageism of Deepak Chopra and the like. I guess this shouldn't be too surprising considering that baby-boomers are now becoming the dominant generation of seniors, and where a growing number of people define themselves as 'spiritual but not religious'. . . . In terms of the United Church, as successful as McTaggert has been, it is still almost completely void of people in their twenties and thirties. Thus, it seems that even successful [*sic*] UCs are just gearing up for the next generation of seniors (Fieldnotes 2014).

As such, this church still managed to maintain the more community-oriented aspects of the United Church along with more cosmic and planetary activism of early New Ageism in order to cater to aging and primarily baby boomer congregants.

New Age and Postconservatism

The New Age influences in postconservative Evangelicalism are subtler. First, as I described in the previous two chapters, some postconservatives have come to view the Bible as more of a therapeutic device than a source of divine knowledge (Fieldnotes 2014; Interview-UMAC2-3, 4). Second, they readily venerate the individual and personal experience (Fieldnotes 2014; Interview-SUMAC7-2; Interview-UMAC2-1, 3, 4). Third, they are willing to incorporate materials from outside Evangelicalism, and even Christianity (Interview-SUMAC7-2; Interviw-

UMAC2-1, 4). In a candid moment, one pastor noted that he came to Evangelicalism through a bad acid trip, and described how psychedelic drugs can potentially to tap into the sub-conscious (Interview-UMAC2-4). [61]

Finally, Bell's later works, *What We Talk About When We Talk About God* in particular, certainly reflect the New Age tendency to attempt blending science with spirituality, making use of what some New Agers call the "new physics" or "new science" (Heelas 1996, 5). For example, Bell uses particle physics to explicate the spiritual nature of our surroundings:

> I talk about all this because when people object to the idea of God, the idea that there is more beyond our tangible, provable-with-hard-evidence observations and experiences of the world, **they aren't taking the *entire* world into account.** A brief reading of modern science quite quickly takes us into all sorts of interesting and compelling places where the most intelligent, up-to-date, and informed scientists are constantly surprised by just how much *more* there is to the universe (emphasis in original Bell 2013, 49).

In this book, Bell challenges the anti-intellectual and anti-science rhetoric (which I will explore more thoroughly in the succeeding chapter) that pervades the Evangelical mainstream. In the process, however, he also opens the door for ambiguity through the legitimation of scientific and New Age discourses. One Evangelical critic of Bell, of which there are many, had this to say after the publication of *Velvet Elvis*:

> *Velvet Elvis* and Bell's [*sic*] *Noomas* are a [*sic*] trojan horse that will deliver to young unsuspecting kids from Christian homes a hearty helping of the New Age (i.e., mysticism

[61] The pseudo-experiments conducted by psychologist Timothy Leary (1920-1996), and many other curious members of 1960s counter-cultural movements, including many New Agers, first brought the use of drugs to trigger "spiritual experiences" into the limelight. Interestingly, because of changing social attitudes around drug use, only recently have psychologists have this research fifty years after Leary conducted the original investigations. While Leary and counter-cultural counterparts popularized the use of psychedelics for spiritual purposes, other religious groups have used drugs in this manner for hundreds of years (Bokma 2015).

> and [*sic*] panentheism). And if they are introduced to the New Age under the guise of Christian literature, many of them will be seduced by 'doctrines of devils' (Lighthouse Trails Editors 2014).

Nonetheless, flexidox is probably a far better word to describe Bell's work. Bell remains committed to various aspects of Christian orthodoxy. For instance, he still supports the centrality and sacredness of scripture, as well as the importance of Christian rituals such as baptism and the Eucharist. Bell's metaphor of the trampoline, which one participant cited almost verbatim during an interview (Interview-UMAC2-3), is probably the best example of Bell's flexidoxy (Bell 2005C).[62]

It is important to reiterate that for Bell, the social is also sacred. As such, even when he is making use of New Age-like language, his perspective is different. In the *ZimZum of Love* the Bells state*:*

> Something powerful and profound happens in marriage—something involving energy, love, and the deepest forces of the universe. We believe that you can grow in your awareness of these realities, learning how to better see what's going on in the space between you, how it works, and how the love can flow more freely between you (Bell and Bell 2014, vii).

Thus, although Bell makes use of New Age tropes like "energy" and "the universe," there is something almost sociological about his argument for where God works and how we relate to God. For Bell, as much as the self is still sacred, the social is sacred too. Nonetheless, Bell's flexidoxy has landed him amongst an interesting group of spiritual elites set up by one of the world's most important distributers of spiritual goods—Oprah Winfrey (b. 1954).

[62] For more on this metaphor, see chapter three.

The "Oprahfication" of Rob Bell

Undoubtedly, Winfrey is one of the most influential people in the United States. During its airing, her TV show functioned like a "didactic community" (Lofton 2011, 2) where "the guests . . . serve as confessors to priest-like spiritual counsellors, who in turn defer to the divinity (Oprah) for affirmation and the occasional confirming ('oh, that happened to me') anecdote" (Lofton 2006, 612). It attracted more than forty-two million viewers a week and was distributed to 147 countries in 2009 just prior to its cancellation in 2011 (Lofton 2011, 3). "Oprah's Book Club," which ended with her TV show and consisted of seventy books, twenty-two of which reached number one on *USA Today's* bestseller list (Cadden 2011), worked to "[enhance the] message of brand Oprah" and spread the principles of Harpo Entertainment, Winfrey's parent company (Travis 2007).

Religious studies scholar Kathryn Lofton argues that Winfrey cancelled her show to preserve this brand and allow it to "transcend" her materiality through her continued work on the *Oprah Winfrey Network* (OWN) and *O, The Oprah Winfrey Magazine*:

> The recent announcement that she would cancel her show in 2011 inaugurates her public incorporation of her charisma, her own consciousness that the person of Oprah must diminish if the Oprah product is to endure. This transience of the subject is not unheralded in the history of industry; charisma and corporations have always had a codependency, with the generations following the founder struggling to keep, for example, Wal-Mart without Sam Walton, Kentucky Fried Chicken without the epicurean approval of Colonel Sanders, or the Church of Scientology without the steering hand of L. Ron Hubbard (Lofton 2011, 8).

As such, Winfrey has found a way to maintain considerable influence through a series of principles propagated by Harpo Entertainment entities despite decreasing her public visibility. Forbes Magazine has ranked Winfrey as the world's most influential celebrity in three of the four years since her show went off the aid. She finished second to Stephen Spielberg in 2014 (Forbes 2015; Pomerantz 2012; 2013; 2014).

In short, Winfrey sells her taste—"her consumption is her commodity" (Lofton 2011, 21). Furthermore, her spirituality is one of the most important "tastes" she has to sell. Winfrey's faith is an eclectic mix with roots in southern Evangelicalism, but an outward faith resembling New Thought religiosity, which developed through a general interest in more esoteric forms of spirituality (Travis 2007, 1025). New Thought developed in the late ninetieth and early twentieth centuries, and largely focuses on "mysticism, universalism, idealism, and the belief in the power of thought to alter material reality" (Travis 2007, 1018). New Thought spread alongside Christian Science, a religious group focused on healing through prayer founded by the prophet Mary Baker Eddy (1821-1910), through the efforts of Emma Curtis Hopkins (1853-1925). Eddy and Hopkins eventually had a falling-out as Hopkins wished to diverge from Eddy's "rigid" methods and practices (Melton 2004, 458). New Thought was an important influence on Western varieties of New Ageism (Hannegraaff 2005, 6496). This movement's emphasis on one's ability to alter material reality via your thoughts provided the ideological tools for Winfrey to complete Harpo's subtle blend of spirituality, and consumerism.

To complete this fusion of capitalism and faith, Winfrey had to embrace spirituality, while at the same time divorcing any attachment to *religious* practice and orthodoxy, in order to supplant religious practice with carefully guided consumerism:

> Thus, Oprah's disavowal of religion and religious doctrine is a slight of hand: she endorses some modes of theological existence, but dislikes many more. For her, religion belies control and oppression and the inability to catalogue shop. The only way religion or religious belief works for Oprah is if it is carefully coordinated with capitalist pleasure (Lofton 2006, 616).

Winfrey's corpo-spirituality certainly comes to resemble forms of the Prosperity Gospel, where one's "purchasing power is connected to their moral merit" (Lofton 2011, 35).[63] Moreover, in recent years Winfrey has assembled a group of spiritual elites to spread her corpo-spiritual principles. Her latest assembly of elites that toured together on *Oprah's The Life You Want Weekend* included motivational speaker Iyanla Vanzant, *Eat, Pray, Love* author Elizabeth Gilbert, "spiritual guide" Mark Nepo, Chopra, and Bell (Harpo 2015).

In her book, *Oprah: The Gospel of an Icon,* Loften describes the "Oprahfication" of President Barack Obama:

> Oprahfication describes a type of commodification in which the personal is commercialized and spiritualized through confessions, conversions, and popular showcases of pluralism. Any subject, once Oprahfied, does not talk about structures and systems. Instead, he or she tells stories and solicits yours and, from those particulars, distills generic slogans for change, of spirit, of the now (Lofton 2011, 216).

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[63] Scholar Simon Coleman defines the prosperity Gospel as a form of Evangelicalism that:

> parallels classic Pentecostalism in its emphasis on the second baptism of the Spirit and charismatic gifts, but it is distinctive in the degree to which it focuses on three specific areas of Christian life: divine healing, material prosperity, and so-called positive confession'. In each of these areas, believers emphasize the goodness of God, alongside the idea that the faith of the born-again person can activate divine favour in predictable and tangible ways" (Coleman 2004, 499-501)

Propagators of Prosperity Theology operate some of the largest churches in North America, including Joel Osteen in Houston, T.D. Jakes in Dallas, and Creflo Dollar in Atlanta (Lofton 2011, 46). Many academics, journalists, and pastors have criticized these churches and their leaders for exploiting their members financially, and for finding loopholes in the American tax code (Williams 2014).

The Oprahfication process exemplifies what a number of authors have come to call the "commodification of charisma." In short, these authors argue that in late capitalism, charisma no longer just goes through a "routinization" process as Weber explained, but is more likely to end up fetishized and commodified (see Campos 2014; Palmer 2008; Urban 1996). Alternative religion scholar Hugh B. Urban argued that:

> In the context of late twentieth century Western capitalist society, it would seem, this kind of 'commodification' of religious charisma has not only persisted, but in many ways has become more widespread. In the pluralistic and commercialized world of late capitalism, there is a general tendency for religions to become regulated by the logic of the consumer marketplace—what the Dalai Lama once called the 'smorgasbord' or 'supermarket' of religions (Urban 1996, 164).

Brazilian scholar Roberta Bivar C Campos argued that the commodification of charisma within Brazilian Pentecostalism has allowed charismatic movements to more easily spread across various geographic, institutional, and denominational boundaries through the distribution of charismatic merchandize, such as "CDs, DVDs, books and commented Bibles" (Campos 2014, 282). Thus, Urban suggested that we need to re-evaluate Weber's understanding of charisma as a "radically anti-economic force" in order to account for its contemporary effects (Urban 1996, 164).

Bell is an almost perfect example of Oprahfication and the way in which it converts charisma into a commodity. Bell, prior to his time on Oprah's tour, and before receiving his OWN television show, completed two televised interviews with Winfrey. The first interview is confessional by design and does a lot to reveal the extent of Bell's Oprahfication. Winfrey asks Bell a number of questions about his views on God, the soul, and other innocuous religious

subjects. In his response to Winfrey's question about religion and spirituality, he stated, "Well you know, some say that religion is for people who don't want to go to Hell and spirituality is for people who have been to Hell already" (Harpo 2013). Although Bell continued to try and qualify that statement by stating that religion should consist of the rituals and objects one uses to aid oneself spiritually, his move away from organized religion at that moment, and move towards defining religion as an Oprahfied tool for self-improvement is clear.

Gone is the Bell who once railed against the socio-economic disparity in his native Michigan as an Evangelical pastor (see Bell and Golden 2008). In his stead, we are left with a Bell who has dropped many aspects of organized religion, and whose current work leaves us with little more than banal spiritual guidance and relationship advice (see Bell 2013; Bell and Bell 2014). In other words, Winfrey has converted Bell's activities and message into a Harpo commodity.

While not officially Oprahfied, Pastor George exhibited some of the same aversion to dealing with social and structural issues. He made this aversion apparent in a discussion of the uprising in Ferguson, and protest in general:

> Honestly, I am not really like a campaigner or a protestor type of person. Some people are great at that, you know? I am not. I am more of a kind of . . . 'don't focus on the problem; find out/' You know that saying, 'do not ask what the world needs, ask what makes you come alive.' Because what the world needs is people who have come alive! That would be more of my philosophy. It doesn't matter what the world needs so much (Interview-UMAC2-4).

Later, he continued to state:

> I can get like a protestor. Like I was watching videos of Ferguson and the police going about like mercenaries, like a private army and thinking 'What the? I am going to take the whole church down there, and we are going to link arms and sit there right in front of the police!' You know? But, that would last for five minutes, and then I would be off on something else. I am not really a single-issue person at all (interview-UMAC2-4).

In other words, George steers away from encouraging actual structural change to focus on self-improvement, and spiritual growth.

Moreover, in a recent podcast of previous sermon at Crossroads titled "Visualize to Materialize," Pastor George made postconservatism's New Thought influence incredibly visible. In this sermon, he argued using various pop-psychologies, physics, and Biblical verses that through our thoughts and subconscious we can create good and bad things—that the events in our lives are "generated within us." He then made use of this New Thought perspective to take an underhanded shot at more conservative forms of the faith stating, "True spiritual warfare is taking control of your thoughts." In short, George suggested that God's blessing is only available to those who can "believe" in it (*citation suppressed*).

Winfrey and the Neoliberal Bell

Evangelicalism, New Ageism, Winfrey, and neoliberal capitalism converge at the individual (Hackworth 2010A; Hannegraaff 2005; Heelas 1996; Lofton 2011). Lofton illustrates this convergence through Winfrey's similarities with Pentecostalism: "Cleansing the spirit, sanctifying your individuality, and solidifying your relationship with the creator describe both the Oprah Winfrey message and the historical message of American Pentecostals" (Lofton 2011, 134). Winfrey then operates as a form of Evangelical super-pastor without a church (Lofton 2011, 134). She promotes ideologies of personal choice while carefully cultivating her viewers'

"choices" at the same time (Lofton 2011, 125). Evangelical pastors, including postconservatives, work in much the same way. They regularly preach on the idea of "free will," but then not-so-carefully encourage one to commit to Christ—to become one of the "saved" or "born again"— a series of beliefs and practices consistent with their church's theo-poltics (Fieldnotes 2014). Winfrey and the various Evangelical pastors of the world are able to interpellate individuals across religious boundaries through the neoliberal dogma of personal choice.

Another thing Winfrey's, and certain Evangelical pastors', efforts have in common is the way they attempt to make better neoliberal subjects. Winfrey's description of a "modern Muslim woman" in an episode of the *Oprah Winfrey Show* immediately following *9/11* is a great example of this subjectification:

> 'Take a look at how Noreen incorporates Islamic traditions into her modern life.' The audience then followed a day in Noreen's life, observing her affinity for rock music and commitment to family, her observance of hijab and careful application of make-up. Noreen used the phrase 'just like any other American' four times in her video monologue (Lofton 2006, 615).

Loften then breaks down this situation well:

> These women were not ordinary Muslims, they were modern Muslims, Muslims who worked and raised children and bought Victoria's Secret lingerie. Religious yet accessible, faithful yet earthly, moral yet hip: modern Muslim women! . . . Thus, the modern Muslim woman is not merely a Muslim who wouldn't hijack a plane or toss a pipe bomb, but she is also a religious believer who does not allow religion to interfere with her love of country or consumption (Lofton 2006, 616).

The word "modern" stands in for "Oprahfied," and through this example, Winfrey's relationship with Bell and the promotion of his "flexidoxy" begin to make more sense. Bell stands in for the *modern Evangelical*—an Evangelical who *wouldn't* shoot an abortion doctor or burn a Quran,[64] but *he* is also a religious believer who does not allow religion to interfere with *his* love of country or consumption.

Oprahfication is then both a process in itself and a symptom of much larger ideological processes within late capitalism that separate human agents from their material circumstances—converting *political* stances into *ethical* ones. According to French Marxist Guy Debord (1931-1994), capitalism converts "concrete life" into "spectacle" (Debord 1977, 19); it can convert radical Evangelical pastors into Oprah network stars.

To conclude, on the one hand, the postconservative move to the New Age is notable, but not necessarily a foregone conclusion. Instead, I think it best to consider New Ageism as just one direction a postconservative theo-politics can go. Within Evangelicalism, New Ageism will always encounter a great deal of resistance from this community's attachment to text and community. Moreover, there is still a substantial population of conservative Evangelicalism where New Age discourses have made almost no inroads—where congregants consider it cult-like, and where Oprah takes on an almost demonic status. On the other hand, the commodification of charismatic leadership and the conversion of their cosmopolitan utopias into neoliberal self-help resources within postconservative and other Evangelical churches is a process that will not stop any time soon.

[64] Not all aspects of Oprafication are negative, after all.

Chapter Eight

Oprahfied and Cosmopolitanized: Neoliberalism and Evangelicalism in the Cosmopolis

In his clever analysis of the Walmart phenomenon, Jameson points out the fact that it is possible to conceptualize developments that may appear entirely negative in a more positive manner, or in the least, that one might find positive uses for negative developments. Jameson argued that, while Walmart currently uses its enormous purchasing power to force its suppliers "into outsourcing, into a reduction of quality materials and products, or event to drive them out of business altogether," it is equally possible that one could use this purchasing power to raise the standard of living for its customers, suppliers, and employees (Jameson 2009, 424). For

Jameson, this acknowledgment of the multiple valences of current social formations is a quintessential utopian moment. By acknowledging its underlying potential to undermine capitalism, one can imagine Walmart as utopia (Jameson 2009, 423).

For most of this document, I have focused on postconservative Evangelicalism as a positive cosmopolitan utopia. It is important to emphasize, as I have in the last several chapters, that any number of negative valences of postconservatism have taken place alongside these positive aspects. Just as Jameson argued that negative developments have positive valences, so do positive developments have negative ones. For postconservatives, this negative valence usually takes the form of their increased complicity with consumer capitalism and therapeutic neoliberal religious discourses.

Neoliberal governance and Evangelicalism have a lengthy and complex relationship. On the one hand, neoliberals have made use of churches and other faith-based organizations to erode the Keynesian welfare state (Hackworth 2010A). On the other, neoliberals have encouraged the mass consumerization and subjectification of North American Evangelicalism through figures like Winfrey (Lofton 2011). Nonetheless, many of my participants and their communities also exhibited forms of cosmopolitanism, which have produced a certain ecumenicalism and permeability within the Evangelical community. Both of these concepts—neoliberalism and cosmopolitanism—help connect postconservative and conservative forms of Evangelicalism to the same social trends and processes.

In this chapter, I first define and explicate left and right neoliberalism and describe their relationship with Evangelical Christianity. Next, I discuss some of the recent theoretical work completed on cosmopolitanism to provide an additional means of understanding the development of postconservative Evangelicalism. Finally, I explore the connections between neoliberalism

and cosmopolitanism and how this connection is made visible through postconservatism. Throughout these sections, I use my ethnographic data to elucidate further the relationship Evangelicals have with elements of neoliberalism and cosmopolitanism.

Neoliberalisms and Evangelicalisms left and right

Winfrey is the queen of "Second-wave" or "left neoliberalism." This form of neoliberalism is usually associated with the policies of American President Bill Clinton (b. 1946) and British Prime Minister Tony Blair (b. 1953) in the 1990s and early 2000s. Left neoliberalism still emphasized the need for free-market capitalism, but argued that governments could and should provide social policies that help buttress capitalist development (Steger and Roy 2010). Moreover, it steered away from the early neoliberalism's neoconservative influences, and instead focused on "globalism," which emphasized multilateral foreign policy agreements and the growth of global markets, otherwise known as "soft power" (Steger and Roy 2010, 54). Political scientist, Adolph Reed Jr. defined this version of "left neoliberalism" as dominated by identity politics and the "rigorous pursuit of the equality of opportunity exclusively within the terms of given patterns of capitalist class relations . . . [that have] been fully legitimized within the rubric of 'diversity'" (Reed Jr. 2013, 53). For Reed Jr., the key to a politics of the neoliberal left is the neglect of any issues related to class and the systemic inequalities that result from free-market capitalism (Reed Jr. 2013).

In contrast, "First-wave neoliberalism" or right neoliberalism is associated with the social and economic policies implemented in the 1980s by political leaders, such as American President Ronald Regan (1911-2004) and British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher (1925-2013). First-wave neoliberalism tended to focus on individual responsibility and property, and was influenced

heavily by neoconservatism, especially in terms of the support for unilateralist military action and foreign policy or "hard power" (Steger and Roy 2010).

Neoliberal Evangelicalism

Following the observations made in the previous chapters, both conservative and postconservative varieties of Evangelicalism represent responses to these two brands of neoliberalism. Conservative Evangelicals have come to reflect many of the characteristics of right neoliberalism. In particular, they reflect right neoliberalism's emphasis on personal responsibility and hard power through their emphasis on personal salvation, and *hard* evangelism characterized by aggressive unilateral missions in foreign countries (Fieldnotes 2014).

Individual responsibility is an important part of conservative Evangelicalism. Individualism is most evident in televangelism and the Christian self-help industry. In particular, *Focus on the Family* founder James Dobson and Prosperity Gospel pastor, Joel Osteen (the former focusing primarily on family issues while the latter has focused on financial guidance) reflect the extent to which discourses of neoliberal individual responsibility have penetrated everyday Evangelicalism (Willey 2016).

My participants described much of the same attachment to personal responsibility. Albert, a male in his mid-forties from a rural Missionary Alliance church placed great importance on a quote he attributed to his late high-school basketball coach: "'Think like a person of action; act like a person of thought'" (interview-RMAC3-1). In fact, Albert's attachment to this ode to neoliberal individuality was so great that he had it stenciled onto his family's kitchen wall (Fieldnotes 2014). This "Little Engine That Could" sort of theme was reinforced during a sermon at Albert's church where Pastor Adam described how his application to trades school was rejected and how this failure helped him become the person and pastor he is

today. Albert reiterated this sentiment through his support of a leadership philosophy he attributed to C.S. Lewis called "failing forward" (Fieldnotes 2014).

Postconservatism's emphasis on Christianity as identity and equality of opportunity without compromising consumption plays well within a socio-political culture dominated by left neoliberalism. Postconservatives are less likely to endorse aggressive foreign missions and instead focus on local service-based mission projects or *soft* evangelism. These churches function as an ad hoc extension of the welfare state (Hackworth 2010A).

Pastor George emphasized the need for a church space that provides an opportunity for every person to do what they do best rather than forcing people to do what the community needs (Fieldnotes 2014). In addition, in a sermon George argued that people can buy into a narrative that one is a "victim" of "circumstance" and that people create barriers that prevent one from achieving what they want. Thus, for George, one can simply believe their way out of systematic inequality because the blessings of God are available to everyone. In other words, "what you believe is what you get" (*citation suppressed*).

As such, despite their differences, both versions of Evangelicalism do not compromise on the veneration of the individual. In other words, while these two traditions are willing to shift the relative position of the communal and textual in the hierarchy of sacred Evangelical things, the sacred nature of the individual remains uncompromised. In short, following Sayer and Durkheim's observations of the rise of hyper-individualism, Evangelicals have come to venerate the individual to the same extent as those outside the movement (Durkheim 1953, 59; Sayer 1990, 49); whether on the left or right, like most citizens of Western capitalist societies Evangelicals are generally good neoliberal subjects.

Towards a Cosmopolitan Evangelicalism

As I have mentioned previously, I did not find the theoconservatives that I set out investigate. In their stead, I discovered a diversity of theo-political articulations, including postconservatism. As postconservatives move away from some of the more fundamentalist, literalist, and conservative aspects of Evangelicalism, the religious and denominational boundaries that define the community become more permeable. In his book, *Why Did Jesus, Moses, the Buddha, and Mohammed Cross the Road?* postconservative author Brian McLaren focused on the problem of practicing Evangelicalism in a multi-faith world:

> I feel two opposing realities churning within me. On the one hand, I feel the pull of Jesus' words 'Blessed are the peacemakers'. . . But on the other hand, I keep noticing how my religion has, over its first 2000 years of history, spent too little energy making peace, and too much erecting and perfecting walls of separation, suspicion, and hostility. . . In a wide array of forms, the message comes to me from the centers of religious power: I can't belong to our *us* unless I am against our *them* (emphasis in original McLaren 2012, 14).

For postconservatives, God is *for* everyone, and therefore, those who exist in the *world* are far less threatening to (or are even included as part of) the Evangelical community (Bell 2004; Fieldnotes 2014; Interview-SUMAC7-1; SUPC1-2, 3; UMAC2-4; McLaren 2012).

For the Evangelicals who take up this perspective, Jesus' call to "love your neighbour" and "your enemies" is instrumental (for example see Bell 2013, 202; McLaren 2012, 15; Zahnd 2014B).[65] Bell described this call as follows:

[65] The relevant line for the former example reads, "The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these" (Mark 12:31). In terms of the latter, there are a number of verses that call Christians to love their enemy (for example see Luke 6:27; 35-36; Matthew 5:44).

> So when Jesus calls us to love our neighbor, this is more than just a command or an ethical statement or a rule of life; it's a truth about the very nature of reality. We are deeply connected with everybody around us, and our intentions and words and thoughts and inclinations toward them matter more than we can begin to comprehend (Bell 2013, 202).

Following my earlier arguments, this statement reveals Bell at his most theo-Durkheimian, and his most radically inclusive.

Pastor Waylon made this point even more clearly during a sermon that discussed the parable of the Good Samaritan (Fieldnotes 2014). This parable tells the story of a Samaritan man, a member of a group that the ancient Israelites would normally describe as heretics and enemies. He helped an Israelite man who was injured by robbers, and ignored by the Israelites who passed by his injured body on the side of the road (Luke 10:25-37). Waylon then made use of this story to point out the problematic and non-biblical ways in which Evangelicals view their enemies. I made the following observations in my fieldnotes:

> Waylon then went back to the parable [of the Good Samaritan] and got people to think about the people they hate the most and the need to love them as you love yourself. He suggested that Christians are "bound to this." He then brought up the executions of Christians by ISIS in Iraq and asked his congregation if they could love them. He then moved on to say something that he thought would get him in "trouble." He suggested that it is easy for a Christian to love Israel, but can a Christian extend that love to the Palestinians? He then half-apologized for meddling with peoples' politics, but continued to state "the Kingdom knows no politics."

> He then asked people to think more locally about the people in their immediate lives that they may hate. He even joked about the Evangelical tendency to dance around the word "hate." He explained that the entire process starts with forgiveness (Fieldnotes 2014).

In short, Waylon, Bell, McLaren, Zahnd, and numerous other postconservative authors and pastors have turned Jesus' call to "love your neighbour" and "enemy" into a radical call for a new more inclusive and therefore permeable Evangelical theo-politics.

More recently, I encountered a blog entry made by an Alberta-based Evangelical pastor. This pastor follows the above authors' messages regarding Jesus' call to "love your enemy," but makes this argument while deriding the rhetoric of what he calls "a smaller subset of Christians that tend to make a disproportionate amount of noise" (Dueck 2015). He stated:

> No, my concern is very precise, and it is very specifically directed to *Christians*. If you're a mostly secular person who couldn't care much less what a dusty Jewish rabbi taught on a Palestinian hillside once upon a time, I'm not particularly concerned with what you post or say. If your worldview is unencumbered by any particular convictions about God or duty to neighbour, I'm not talking to you here. If self-interest is the main consideration that informs your views about life, then, fine, you can throw around whatever reactionary, fear-based propaganda you can find to prop up your cause. I don't *agree* with you, but I can, I suppose, understand the protective logic that undergirds your desire to speak and share in these ways.

> In sum, if you have no interest in Jesus or his teachings, then you can splash around the hysteria, the fear, and, all the anti-[insert threatening people group/category here] rhetoric you want.
>
> But if you name *Jesus* as king? Well, then I'm sorry, Christian, but you don't get to make that move (Dueck 2015).

The author explicates the postconservatives' desire to separate themselves from the more conservative members of the Evangelical community—the desire for a faith that can more peacefully co-exist in a multi-faith world. As McLaren points out, it is difficult to reconcile Jesus' call to "love" with a "dehumanizing" missiology (a core component of many Evangelicals theo-politics) that turns members of other religions into opponents or "evangelistic targets" (McLaren 2012, 31).

This postconservative desire for ecumenicalism and coexistence with other religions reflects a certain *cosmopolitan* worldview and the possibility that postconservatism is part of a much broader "cosmopolitanization" of North American Evangelicalism brought on by the increased theo-political permeability of Evangelical communities through the alteration of their sacred hierarchy (Beck 2004).

To reiterate my earlier definition, I use the term cosmopolitanism to describe a process of "cosmopolitanization" that increases "the interdependence of actors across national boundaries as an unintended or unforeseen *side effect* of actions that have no normative 'cosmopolitan intent'" (Beck 2004, 132). As such, this conceptualization of the term speaks of "banal" and/or "mundane" variations of cosmopolitanism. We experience banal forms through *exposure* to global culture (Beck 2004, 134; Beck and Sznaider 2010, 387-388; Datta 2013, 81), while

mundane cosmopolitanism is derived from *shared experiences* that breed solidarity (Datta 2013, 96).[66]

Both banal and mundane forms of cosmopolitanism have greatly altered the theo-political orientations of Canadian Evangelicals. A number of my participants spoke of the commonalities of the "human" experience. For instance, Pastor George spoke of these commonalities through a comparison of Christian misinterpretations of Armageddon and Muslim misinterpretations of Jihad (*citation suppressed*). In another instance, when speaking about the practicality of a "Christian state," another member of Crossroads stated,

> I think it is naïve to think that this idea that 'well, we have a Christian nation, a Christian government, that it would inherently be good because you got the term Christian in it.' I think [that] is a lie. We are humans and we have that constant struggle between pursuing good, pursuing the things of God, and pursuing your own human humanness [*sic*], your own human desires (Interview-UMAC2-1).

Allen, a member of a much more conservative rural Missionary Alliance church described how his travels around the globe, which he had done both as a missionary and as a representative for the Canada Food Grains Bank, changed the way he understood his faith and his place in the world (Interview-RMAC3-2).[67] After some struggles trying to put words to this experience, I mentioned the "overview effect," the massive paradigm shift that astronauts experience when

[66] Mundane cosmopolitanism roughly aligns with Jameson's more utopian conceptualization of "social promiscuity" (Jameson 2016: 62).

[67] The Canada Food Grains Bank is a non-denominational agency supported by a long list of Evangelical and mainline Protestant churches that provides "food in times of crisis for hungry people in the developing world; [helps] people grow more food to better feed themselves and their families; . . . [provides] nutritional support to malnourished people with a focus on pregnant and breastfeeding mothers and young children;" advocates for public policies that enable people to "better feed themselves;" and promote education programs that encourage engagement with issues of global hunger (Canada Food Grains Bank 2015).

they first look down on the Earth, to which he responded "What a neat example! That is how I feel!" (Interview-RMAC3-2).[68]

Furthermore, in *What We Talk About When We Talk About* God, Bell described the following cosmopolitan experience at an inter-faith event:

> In the spring of 2008 I was in Seattle, speaking at an event with the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Tutu and a number of other spiritual leaders. The purpose of the gathering was to talk about how we can teach compassion to the younger generations so that the world will be more and more peaceful, less violent place (Bell 2013, 154).

Bell continued, referencing a group of Christians showed up to protest the event:

> I tell you about that event because God was there, at that event, as God has always been, present with all of humanity into greater and greater love and joy and justice and equality and peace. It is possible, then to be very religious and very committed, as I'm sure those protesters were, and yet be working against the new thing that God is doing (Bell 2013, 155).

For Bell, these protesters resembled the "anti-cosmopolitan" and/or "neo-nationalist" groups mentioned by Datta—groups that exist in reaction to networks and events that threaten and generate "a nostalgia for a unitary communal culture that never actually existed except perhaps as phantasm" (Datta 2013, 81).

Even Winfrey's diluted New Age reproduction of the religious world contributes to the cosmopolitanization of Evangelicalism. For Winfrey, we are all made the same in our ability to

[68] One summary of an astronaut's experience with the Overview Effect reads: "He described the sensation gave him a profound sense of connectedness, with a feeling of bliss and timelessness. He was overwhelmed by the experience. He became profoundly aware that each and every atom in the Universe was connected in some way, and on seeing Earth from space he had an understanding that all the humans, animals and systems were a part of the same thing, a synergistic whole. It was an *interconnected euphoria*" (O'Neill 2008).

consume; in other words, shopping is one of the banal cosmopolitan experiences that inadvertently change how Evangelicals see themselves in the world.

In sum, postconservatives not only place a greater value on community, what Durkheim would call "church," but they have also changed the very definition of that community or church. They have developed a much more inclusive, broader, permeable, and cosmopolitan definition of an Evangelical faith community.

Theo-politics and Politics

As I write this chapter, the Liberal Party of Canada has just received a decisive majority from the Canadian electorate, but left the Conservative Party with a healthy portion of the popular vote (Schwartz 2015). Grasseschi's theoconservative lobby groups, *MY Canada* and *The Keep Our Land Initiative,* along with *The National House of Prayer* (NHOP) launched their usual campaign to influence the electorate and rally their supporters. On *My Canada's* webpage, Grasseschi released a number of "prophecies" that suggested Canada was on an "economic tipping point" and that the country's era of prosperity could end if the wrong party was elected. She added that one "prophetic voice" suggested that if the election goes the way of the "enemy" then this result would cause a collapse of the Canadian Dollar and the housing market (My Canada Association 2015B).

The day before the election, Rob Parker of NHOP reminded voters to think about the three major parties' positions on "abortion" and "euthanasia." He suggested that people need to remember that Harper did not include abortion in the maternal health policy a decade ago and that this policy could become compromised under another party's rule (My Canada Association 2015A). As per usual, Grasseschi and her fellow theocons made these statements under a poorly

constructed façade of non-partisanship, hiding obvious support for the Conservative Party of Canada.

This theoconservative message, however, does not play as well in postconservative circles. Theoconservatism relies on an assertively exclusive form of Evangelicalism that promotes *evangelism* over *ecumenicalism*, such as I found at the three conservative churches in my sample, NHOP, and most of the targeted churches I visited (Fieldnotes 2014). Some "prophetic words" listed on Evangel Temple's webpage makes this assertiveness quite apparent:

> I am instructed by the Holy Spirit to tell the Church that we must become aggressive in our approach to God. The Scriptures direct us to come boldly.
>
> The enemy of our souls is winning battles because of our passivity and hesitancy. The Lord says that we have misunderstood what it means to 'wait on the Lord.' To 'wait on the Lord' has nothing to do with passive patience and everything to do with passionate pursuit. The Kingdom of God is available to the aggressive ones who take it with energy. . . We must take the initiative and declare that, with or without the assistance and agreement of others, we are going to gain and maintain our victory! . . . Let's passionately pursue our personal path into the place of Power and Victory! Let's declare the things that are yet to be manifested to be clearly seen. Let's take hold of what has been unreachable and not let go until it is ours (Evangel Temple Church 2012).

Postconservatism has eroded much of this "aggressiveness," which feeds the theoconservative movement.

Nonetheless, this erosion is far from absolute. As Pastor George (who has a PhD in theology and is an expert in Evangelicalism in his own right) pointed out when asked direct

questions about typical hot-button issues, such as abortion, gay marriage, or divorce, Evangelicals will often provide knee-jerk answers in order to maintain their Evangelical "identity." According to George, they respond as good Evangelicals *should* respond even though they might have quite nuanced perspectives on these issues (Interview-UMAC2-4).

Voting worked very much the same way. Willow, who was a postconservative participant, lived in a small apartment complex with her two children and her husband who worked away in the oil patch and was certainly the most working class of my participants (Fieldnotes 2014). She described herself as "socialist:"

> Willow: So, as far as political, I like to think I am a socialist, but I identify with socialism a lot more than the current Alberta standard [*sic*]. But, I definitely have Alberta redneck roots. My dad works still forty years later in the oil patch [*sic*]. So, my husband works in the industry that drives the oil patch. I am a mom of two small babies that keep me up all night.
>
> Robin: How would you define socialism?
>
> Willow: Socialism? Definitely the [equal] availability of education and health care . . . for all (Interview-SUPC1-4).

She complicated this socialist identification further, however, with ardent support for the Harper government:

> I am very impressed with Stephen Harper. I probably voted for him I don't remember right now. Maybe, I didn't. I don't like the lady in this riding. I probably didn't vote for her. Yeah, but very stable, I am very impressed. When there is so much criticism, they forget that he brought us through the economic crash of 2007. Him and his party and his

> team with a very small fluctuation. And so, they can criticize all they want but he has done an excellent job for our country (Interview-SUPC1-4).

This complication caught me off guard. The discrepancy in Willow's political support and identification was overdetermined by a number of factors.

Considering her emphasis on things such as "stability" and the "oil patch," we can see the success of Conservative Party rhetoric in her perspective. Second, she later explained that as an "Albertan" she could not bring herself to support a "Liberal," or worse, a "Trudeau" (Interview-SUPC1-4). And third, her identification as an Evangelical could have even furthered this attachment to the Conservative party. Attachment to Conservative politics is often just assumed in some Evangelical communities (McDonald 2010). That said, Willow described her Evangelicalism as the primary source of her socialism:

> You take, like Biblically, the morality I guess from Jesus, not from the Bible necessarily [*sic*]. But the morality of Jesus and look to it politically in who is taking care of the weak in our society. So yeah, who are benefiting the orphans and the widows, and . . . the homeless? Who is going to work for the justice for them I guess? So that equals healthcare and welfare and education [*sic*] for everybody (Interview-SUPC1-4).

In short, Willow provides a great window into the complexity of Evangelical voting behaviour, and how Evangelicalism was connected to political movements on both the left (New Democratic Party), and the Right (Reform Party) in this country.

Another participant from a postconservative congregation, Wally argued that we should throw-out our current electoral and governance systems entirely in favour of "technocracy":

> I believe in less democracy, a more scientific form of government such as Technocracy with some elected officials and some state appointed officials (not like our useless

> Senate). This form of government would allow for the people to have some power in electing officials. It would also allow for some MP's/MLA's to be appointed and carry on for longer than those in an elected capacity (Interview-SUPC1-5).

In addition, Wally both suggested that governments are "susceptible to the influence of the rich and big business" and that he is "gravely concerned about the potential impact of Islamic citizens becoming increasingly populace in our society. Perhaps I am a bigot but I am not a fan of what I hear about this religion when it becomes a significant component of any countries population" (Interview-SUPC1-5). In other words, Wally took positions that one connect to both the extreme left and right. While this participant's perspective certainly diverges from that of most Evangelicals I have encountered, his views do help elucidate the multiple political valences that are made possible within a postconservative environment and the complexities of the Evangelical *habitus* in late capitalism.

Some authors have doubted, however, whether a "religious right" of any sort has ever existed in Canada (Bibby 2011, 63; Hutchinson and Hiemstra 2009; Reimer and Wilkinson 2015, 90-91). Rather, Evangelicals are more likely to be interpellated by political parties and lobbies through several issues, such as abortion, gay marriage, and euthanasia (Hutchinson and Hiemstra 2009). Moreover, postconservatism has the potential to decrease the importance of the above issues, and vicariously alter the relationship between Evangelicals and conservative political parties. Researchers have noted this alteration in the United States where pastors in Emerging Churches have measured more "left-leaning" than non-emergent Evangelicals (Burge and Djupe 2014).

Connecting Neoliberalism and Cosmopolitanism

One can define the connection between neoliberalism and cosmopolitanism in a number of different ways. One author reduced cosmopolitanism to a skill set required for participation in the neoliberal market (Mitchell 2003, 387-388), while others describe how the solidarity produced through banal and mundane forms of cosmopolitanism can help us to resist neoliberal governance (Kurasawa 2004). Sociologist Craig Calhoun suggested that while cosmopolitanism is capable of advancing global democracy and solidarity, its rhetoric can "be adopted by and become support for neoliberal visions of global capitalism" (Calhoun 2002, 890). Furthermore, Calhoun argued that:

> The affinity of cosmopolitanism to rationalist liberal individualism has blinded many cosmopolitans to some of the destructions neoliberalism—the cosmopolitanism of capital—has wrought and the damage it portends to hard-won social achievements (Calhoun 2002, 891).

Therefore, he explained the need to develop a cosmopolitanism that can adjust to our "fragmented solidarities" and "layered citizenship"—the idea that humans belong to more than one community at any one time (Calhoun 2002).

Notably, Calhoun made particular note of nationalism and religion when giving examples of the multiple solidarities with which people identify:

> But not all nationalism is ugly ethnonationalism; not all religion is fundamentalism. Both can be sources of solidarity and care for strangers as well as xenophobia or persecution of heretics. . . . But if cosmopolitan democracy is to be more than a good ethical orientation for those privileged to inhabit the frequent-flyer lounges, it must put down roots in the

> solidarities that organize most people's sense of identity and location in the world (Calhoun 2002, 893).

Bell and his postconservatives are evidence of new cosmopolitan roots in a part of Christianity that was previously far more likely to tend towards Fundamentalism. In particular, Bell's move towards a theo-Durkheimian veneration of the social has potential as a framework for doing cosmopolitanism within religious communities.

Nonetheless, Bell's Oprahfication and the hyper-individualization of my participants reflects several authors' worries that cosmopolitanism can become a means of supporting neoliberalism through the creation of better neoliberal subjects (see Calhoun 2002; Johansen 2015; Mitchell 2003). As such, like Winfrey, Postconservatives are both good cosmopolitans and good neoliberals. In other words, they both resist and reproduce neoliberal values.

Chapter Nine

"Take Me to Church:" A Reflexive Conclusion

During the course of this project, I spent a great deal of time in my car listening to the radio, an obvious by-product of doing research across the large prairie expanse of Alberta. Coincidently, the song "Take Me to Church" by the Irish singer/song writer Hozier, born Andrew Hozier-Byrne (b. 1990), was on high rotation through the duration of my project (Hozier 2014).[69] This song's explosion onto the world scene was aided by a timely retweet by actor and activist Stephen Fry prior to the Sochi Olympics. One columnist has referred to "Take Me to Church" as a "rare case of substance winning out over style" (Messitte 2014). In other words, the

[69] To see the lyrics for "Take Me to Church" in their entirety see Appendix Three.

song has far more in common with Hozier's background in blues and gospel then it does with a typical hot pop single (Greene 2015).

Hozier, who has previous connections to Catholicism and Quakerism, intended for the song to have several layers of meaning. First, superficially, the song's protagonist uses the language of religion to describe his sexual experiences with his lover (Hozier 2014). Second, and just barely obscured by the previous point, Hozier intended the song to work as a critique of various "institutions," especially the Catholic Church and its policies dealing with gender and sexuality. In an interview with *The Cut*, Hozier stated:

> 'Take Me to Church' is essentially about sex, but it's a tongue-in-cheek attack at organizations that would … well, it's about sex and it's about humanity, and obviously sex and humanity are incredibly tied. Sexuality, and sexual orientation — regardless of orientation — is just natural. An act of sex is one of the most human things. But an organization like the church, say, through its doctrine, would undermine humanity by successfully teaching shame about sexual orientation — that it is sinful, or that it offends God. The song is about asserting yourself and reclaiming your humanity through an act of love. Turning your back on the theoretical thing, something that's not tangible, and choosing to worship or love something that is tangible and real — something that can be experienced (as cited in Shepherd 2014).

Lyrics such as "My church offers no absolutes; She tells me, 'Worship in the bedroom;' The only heaven I'll be sent to; Is when I'm alone with you" (Hozier 2014) make this connection religion, sexuality, and sex rather apparent.

Third, Hozier used the song and its subsequent video, which features tells the story of a young gay couple and the mob beating of one member of this couple, to directly criticize the

Russian anti-LGBT laws prior to the Sochi Winter Olympics. Hozier explained that with the introduction of the anti-LGBT laws in Russia "there came a rise in attacks of ultra right-wing gangs, who would lure young vulnerable members of the LGBT community into places and ambush them and torture them and attack them - and film them. So that's what the video references" (as cited in Pollard 2015). In addition, the song is a veritable lament for the over-churched Christian. It helped me elucidate the emotionally and socially extracting nature of fieldwork in churches, and the effects this work was having on my participants and me.

In this concluding chapter I first use the song "Take Me to Church" to help summarize the central arguments of this dissertation and to work through some of the methodological issues I encountered. I follow this summary by looking into the limitations, the possibilities for future research, and the theoretical, sociological, and practical contributions of this study.

"I'll worship like a dog at the shrine of your lies"

Hozier has commented on his ongoing frustration with Catholicism and has stated that the recent lip service the Church has paid to homophobia is "is something that should have been said one-hundred years ago" (as cited in Haskoor 2015). Still, he has not completely separated himself from religion (Smyth 2014), and thus his relationship to faith, especially as revealed in "Take Me to Church," resembles the frustration that many of my postconservative participants have with more conservative forms of Evangelicalism and their desire for change (Fieldnotes 2014).

My over-churched postconservative participants had grown tired of the literalist, conservative, and fundamentalist theo-politics that has come to dominate North American Evangelicalism. Postconservatives reflect this desire for change through theo-politcal moves

toward more *localized* and *service-based* evangelism and missiology, a more *inclusive* soteriology, and an acceptance of *diversity* in terms of theology, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality.

More fundamentally, postconservatism reflected a change in the hierarchy of Evangelical sacred things: from 1. the scriptural; 2. the individual; and 3. the communal to 1. individual; 2. the communal; and 3. the scriptural. In short, postconservatives have elevated the importance of the communal while simultaneously desacralizing the scriptural through a move away from literalist and fundamentalist interpretations of the Bible. Moreover, elements of postconservatism existed in almost every church I visited to the point at which one could suspect that much larger theo-political changes are on the horizon (Fieldnotes 2014).

"No masters or kings; When the ritual begins; There is no sweeter innocence than our gentle sin"

There is no doubt that Hozier believes that historically Christianity has made life difficult for a lot of people, such as women and LGBTQ folks, and has used the pain of other to for its own benefit (Shepherd 2014). This history is not lost on many postconservatives. Despite the importance postconservatives place on the acceptance of theological diversity, one of the key components of their theo-politics is the active polemic they engage in with more conservative and fundamentalist versions of the faith. Some postconservatives extend this critique to religious institutions of all sorts, a perspective that appears to lead to various forms of New Ageism and New Thought.

In addition, this new theo-politics has opened up a new space for theological critique and deconstruction of the sacred. This space is exemplified best by McLaren's "theological chemo," which includes a postcolonial critique of Evangelicalism that could both save and fundamentally compromise the faith (McLaren 2012). At its core, postconservatism is incompatible with

fundamentalism, which forces an anti-fundamentalist politics to exist within a theo-political articulation that is supposedly above politics.

"Every Sunday's getting more bleak; A fresh poison each week"

The church is the last place Hozier is looking for positive social change, despite his appreciation for religious excess. Moreover, Jameson is likely correct when he argues that religion is likely the most dangerous candidate for the development of a new utopian future because of its tendency of "mistaking superstructure for base" (Jameson 2016, 18). The belief in a supernatural power, a *'S'ubject* as Althusser would say, makes it difficult for religious folks to fully understand their own material conditions. That said, religion is also one of the most plausible places for a utopian politics to develop (see Engels 1895; Foucault 1979: Willey 2013; 2016). In fact, one can argue that the very proclivity towards liminal madness, in the forms of charisma and collective effervescence that Jameson is using to throw-out religion as a candidate, is the very reason it may likely be the best candidate for some of the changes he seeks.

Thus, religious rival can lead to anything from socialism to fascism, and all things in between. The multiple valences that an Evangelical theo-politics can take help us explain how articulations as divergent as theoconservatism and postconservatism can exist side-by-side even within the same church—how individuals can describe themselves as Biblically-founded socialists, yet vote for Stephen Harper (Fieldnotes 2014).

"I'll tell you my sins so you can sharpen your knife"

In the above line, taken from the chorus of "Take Me to Church," Hozier appears to draw attention to the extracting confessional nature of Christianity: where everything you confess can come back to haunt you. I always struggle to put into words just how emotionally and psychologically extracting it is to conduct ethnographic work in Evangelical churches. In

addition to the usual effects of Wacquantian "carnal sociology" (Wacquant 2004A, viii), one regularly has to engage with folks who are desperate to convert you to the fold. And while these efforts do provide opportunity for research, it is exhausting to have to subtly and politely reject the evangelistic efforts of people who are often the most charismatic and intellectually skilled members of the congregation. In other words, when posed with a relatively under-churched academic within their ranks, some churches will commit what I have come to call their "crack evangelists" in order to bring you into the fold (Ault Jr. 2005; Fieldnotes 2010; 2014; Willey 2010A). Moreover, the multi-sited framework for this project meant that I had to go through this evangelistic process far more often than a traditional single-site ethnographer would have.

After the difficult situation I encountered at Calvary Pentecostal, namely their simultaneous acceptance and disregard of my project, I started to think about what kinds of churches would accept my project in the first place and the potential effect of my presence in these spaces (Fieldnotes 2014). In particular, since I would eventually start asking questions relating to postconservatism in interviews, including those with conservatives who had not had contact with the movement, was I spreading the movement? Was I feeding the "cosmopolitanization" process? After all, I had concluded that any church that would accept my presence probably would have bought into the cosmopolis enough to allow an outsider to wander around their church community. Moreover, there were plenty of churches who were quite willing to bluntly and sometimes harshly reject my project, which, at a stretch, one could understand as an outright rejection of cosmopolitanism.

Nevertheless, I treaded far closer to activism than I would have liked.[70] As a progressive Christian member of the United Church of Canada, I was glad to see these progressive elements growing within Evangelicalism—a group that many on the left have previously written-off as a home for progressive politics of any sort (Ault Jr. 2005). As a matter of fact, I converted some of my research on postconservatism into a talk geared for members of the United Church. I intended for this talk, titled "The Sacred Bathwater: The Rise of Postconservative Evangelicalism and What it Means for the United Church of Canada," which I have now presented several times, to both help members of the United Church find ways to radically rejuvenate and reinvent their congregations and to remind them that *progressive* Christianity is not the source of their declining membership (Willey 2015).

Therefore, I made a number of commitments in order to account for my *interest* in the subject matter. First, I carefully tracked my own theo-political thoughts in my fieldnotes throughout this project to help me bracket these opinions and separate them from the rest of my findings. Second, I included the fourth chapter of this dissertation, which focuses on the conservative varieties of Evangelical theo-politics I encountered, to ensure that I was attending to as many theo-political voices as possible.

Limitations

Within the first few months of my project, I was already becoming frustrated with my selected methodology—multi-sited ethnography. Recruiting churches for any ethnographic project is a difficult task let alone convincing five churches to sign on to a single project. Although I knew that this method would require me to give up depth of analysis in order to gain

[70] I noted a similar situation in my previous fieldwork looking into abstinence discourses in an Evangelical young adults group and actually described myself as a potential "heresiarch," which in hindsight was probably a bit of an overstatement (Willey 2010B, 132-133).

breadth of analysis, this compromise felt more restricting than I originally anticipated. There were a number of situations where my method forced me to deny my ethnographic instincts in order to main methodological rigour and consistency.

This denial was most evident during my time at Crossroads where I knew I had encountered something interesting and the congregation was happy to participate in my project, yet my methodology demanded that I leave after about six weeks. In fact, I constantly felt like I was leaving churches just as I had successfully gained *entrée* (Fieldnotes 2014). Thus, from an ethnographic perspective, I could have structured this project differently and gained some richer and thicker ethnographic insights. Most importantly, however, I now realize that the successful multi-site ethnographies that inspired this project had access to more time and likely more funds then I did, which forced some of the compromises I had to make (for example see Balmer 1993; Bielo 2011; Sandler 2006).

This lack of funds and time contributed to several other limitations. First, I was unable to gain as many interviews as I would have liked and struggled to gain interviews from younger members of my participating churches. Second, late in my fieldwork I realized that in order to gain an appropriate breadth of denominational voices in my project I should have included a Baptist church in my study. Third, and possibly most time consuming, I would have liked to include a second rural church for my sample. I suspect that the rural/urban divide is one of the most stark and under-researched in Canadian Evangelicalism. Finally, this study quite obviously requires another trip to Grand Rapids to investigate the relationship between postconservative religious innovation and art in more depth. In particular, I need to look into how the Artprize festival has affected churches and culture in the Grand Rapids area.

Future Research

With the completion of this project, there are several lines of inquiry that require additional attention. Building directly from the limitations I stated above, there is certainly room for a more thorough investigation of the relationship between Evangelical religious innovation and art. This future project could build directly on my theoretical work completed in this paper and in my article "Liminal Practice: Pierre Bourdieu, Religion, and Madness," which looks into the theoretical and socio-historical connections between madness, both collective and individual, and religious innovation (Willey 2016). This focus in this project would centre on the relationship between the Grand Rapids art scene, the ArtPrize festival, and the development of postconservative Evangelicalism in the area.

In addition, this project reveals a need for a future project that looks specifically into the differences in content and development between postconservatism in the United States and Canada. Along with this project, this future investigation would build directly on sociologist Sam Riemer's early work on the differences and similarities between American and Canadian brands of Evangelicalism (Reimer 2003).

Lastly, this project presents the need for a much larger quantitative project that properly investigates the nuances in Evangelical political beliefs, practices, and voting behaviour. Most importantly, the researcher must structure this survey to avoid the scripted responses that Evangelicals often provide when asked questions related to politics and social policy (Fieldnotes 2014). Moreover, this particular progressive rupture emerged from within a community that many scholars and commentators have traditionally described as primarily conservative or orthodox (for example see Olson 2003; Stackhouse Jr. 2007). This emergence may help develop future projects to help us understand other progressive ruptures in previously conservative

environments, such as the election of Rachel Notley's democratic socialist New Democrats in Alberta in 2015, and to a lesser degree, Justin Trudeau and his Liberal's victory in the Canadian federal election later that same year.

Contribution of this Study

I expect this study of Evangelical theo-political practice to contribute to current academic, political, and religious discussions in a number of ways. First, I added additional support to Bibby's observation that Canadian Evangelicals are not as conservative politically as many within and outside the community think (Bibby 2011, 63). MacDonald's argument that Canada is on the brink of a theoconservative takeover is a little overstated (see McDonald 2006; 2010). Although I did encounter a certain amount of theoconservative infrastructure, such as NHOP, and discourse in isolated moments in some of the churches I visited, it was far from a dominant theo-political articulation. In its stead, I encountered numerous examples of a thriving progressive and cosmopolitan postconservative theo-politics in all sorts of unexpected places. This theo-politics certainly threatens the idea of a "religious right" or even any sort an Evangelical voting bloc in Canada.

This situation has implications for virtually every political party in this country. For parties on the right, Evangelical votes cannot be considered a given: although many vote for conservative parties for reasons of identity, their values do not match up well with those of the Conservative Party of Canada. Parties on the left need to consider Evangelical votes as something they can attract, and that many Evangelicals are smart, critical, and caring people. In short, leftists need to end the bigoted assertion that Evangelicals are ultra-conservative luddites, and treat them like any other population in this country.

Second, this study makes visible the challenge that postconservatism poses for mainline churches in Canada, and the United Church of Canada in particular. Postconservative Evangelicalism could become the *de facto* religion of many of Canada's under-churched ex-members of mainline congregations—people looking for progressive theology in a contemporary service setting. My "Sacred Bathwater" talks mentioned earlier are an attempt to explain this situation and to help churches revaluate what they consider sacred and what they *should* consider sacred (Willey 2015).

Finally and most importantly, this research helps develop a neo-Durkheimian perspective on religious change. In sum, it points to how the alteration of what a church (a group of people who come to together to worship the same thing or person) conceives as sacred can change its theo-politics. The development of postconservative Evangelicalism is an excellent example of this alteration of the sacred and a resulting change in religious practice and belief. Furthermore, future researchers can use this relationship between altered sacred hierarchies and religious change to explain innovations in religious practice in any number of sectarian situations, such as the Protestant Reformation or the sectarian movements within Anabaptism and the Church of Latter Day Saints, just to name a couple examples.[71]

[71] Anabaptism is a sectarian religious movement that developed during the Protestant Reformation, and would eventually develop into a number of pacifist religious groups, such as the Quakers, the Brethren, and the Amish (Willey 2013B).

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Appendices

Appendix One: Sample Interview Questions

The interview format I used was casual and guided heavily by the participant. I did this to help the participants feel more comfortable divulging their own experiences. Nonetheless, here is a list of some of the interview questions I made regular use of throughout this study (in no particular order):

- Could you provide me with a general background of yourself, a life history if you will? Paying particular attention to your political beliefs, opinions, and perspectives.
- What particular events/persons/groups etc. have influenced your political perspective?
    - How so?
    - Any religious leaders? Which ones? And how so?
- In your view, what role *does* the church play in civic life?
    - How should this relationship be implemented?
    - Does this relationship extend to other religious groups?
    - What are your religious priorities?
- What social or political issues are the most important/relevant to you?
    - Why?
- How do you feel about the current political situation in Canada?
    - What would you change?
    - What might be done to create this kind of change?
    - What is your view of multiculturalism?
        - Gay marriage?

- What impact do governments have on people's morality?
    - How do you feel about the moral health of Canadian society?
- Are you familiar with Restorationist and Dominionist theologies?
    - What role do you think these theologies have in the church?
    - In Canada?
- Are you familiar with the Emerging Church or the works of Rob Bell, Brian McLaren etc.?
- Do you think that God intervenes in human affairs?
    - How do you think God and His [sic] church in Canada are shaping history?
    - Are some nations elevated above others? Exalted?
    - Do you think that God intervenes in human affairs?
    - Is Canada necessarily a Christian nation?
- Do you agree with the statement "the father of the family must be master in his own house"?
    - How so? What are the implications of such as statement?
- Which statement do you agree with more "I am my brother's keeper" vs. "The Lord takes care of him who helps himself"?
    - How so? What are the implications of such as statement?
- What books, movies, radio programmes, and television programmes do you read/watch/ listen to?
    - How do these items affect your religious priorities?
        - Political priorities?

Appendix Two: Mars Hill Bible Church Photos

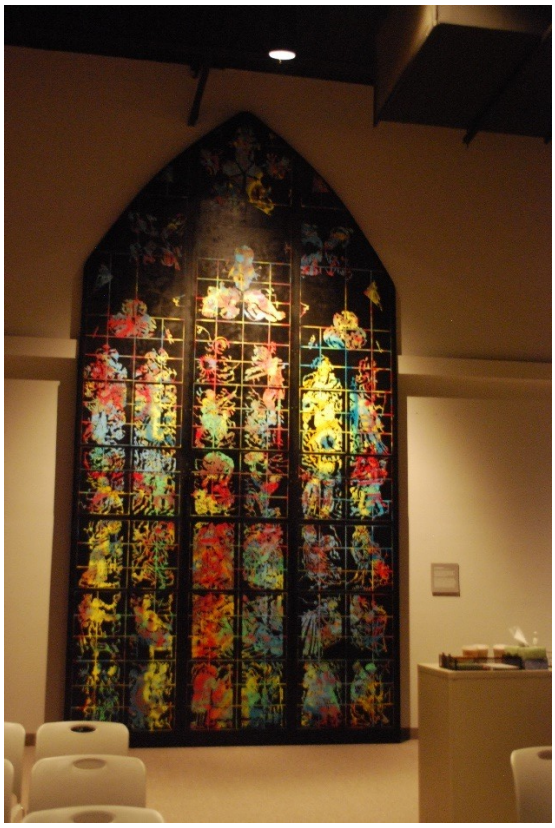

Figure 1: "No is Welcome Here" by the Mars Hill Community and Johnny Clauson (Photo: Janine Muster)

Figure 2: "Fraternal Codependence" by Nicholas Napoletano (Photo: Janine Muster)

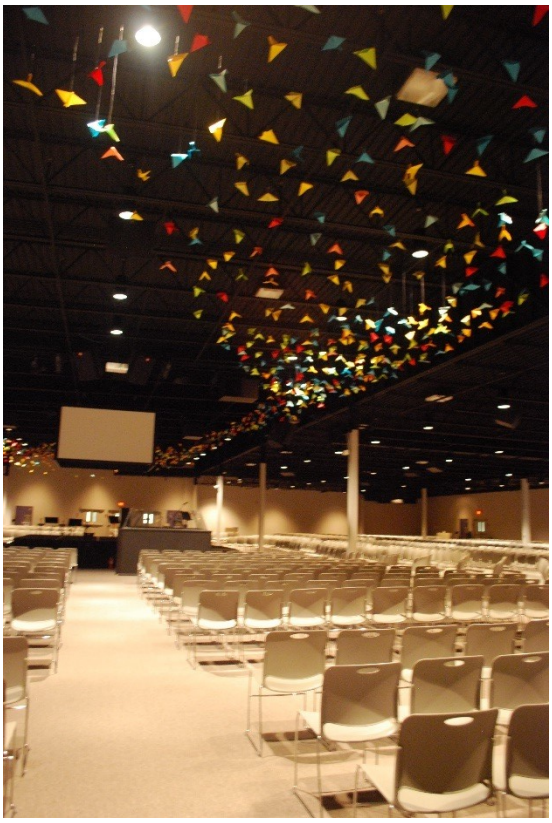

Figure 3: Hanging Cranes in "the Shed" (Photo: Janine Muster)

Appendix Three: “Take Me to Church” by Hozier: Lyrics

My lover's got humour

She's the giggle at a funeral

Knows everybody's disapproval

I should've worshipped her sooner

If the heavens ever did speak

She's the last true mouthpiece

Every Sunday's getting more bleak

A fresh poison each week

"We were born sick," you heard them say it

My church offers no absolutes

She tells me, "Worship in the bedroom."

The only heaven I'll be sent to

Is when I'm alone with you

I was born sick

But I love it

Command me to be well

Aaay. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[Chorus 2x:]

Take me to church

I'll worship like a dog at the shrine of your lies

I'll tell you my sins and you can sharpen your knife

Offer me that deathless death

Good God, let me give you my life

If I'm a pagan of the good times

My lover's the sunlight

To keep the Goddess on my side

She demands a sacrifice

Drain the whole sea

Get something shiny

Something meaty for the main course

That's a fine-looking high horse

What you got in the stable?

We've a lot of starving faithful

That looks tasty

That looks plenty

This is hungry work

[Chorus 2x:]

Take me to church

I'll worship like a dog at the shrine of your lies

I'll tell you my sins so you can sharpen your knife

Offer me my deathless death

Good God, let me give you my life

No Masters or Kings

When the Ritual begins

There is no sweeter innocence than our gentle sin

In the madness and soil of that sad earthly scene

Only then I am human

Only then I am clean

Ooh oh. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[Chorus 2x:]

Take me to church

I'll worship like a dog at the shrine of your lies

I'll tell you my sins and you can sharpen your knife

Offer me that deathless death

Good God, let me give you my life (Hozier 2014).

Appendix Four: Ethnographic Sample

Church	Observation Days	Formal Interviews	Informal Interviews
Crossroads Alliance (UMAC2)	7	4	0
Calvary Pentecostal (UPC2)	10	0	1
Ellington Alliance (RMAC3)	8	3	3
Stoneybrook Alliance (SUMAC7)	6	2	0
New Hope Pentecostal (SUPC1)	6	6	1
EXTERNAL	9	1	4
TARGETED	12	0	4
Total	**58**	**16**	**13**