

Returning to Protoevangelical Faith: The Theology and Praxis  
of Dr. Dallas Willard

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Abstract:

This thesis describes the theology and praxis of philosopher/theologian Dr. Dallas Willard and its effect on contemporary forms of evangelicalism in America. Willard's works have become increasingly attractive to emerging generations of Christians protesting the perceived excesses and hegemony of mainstream evangelical culture. Willard presents a positive alternative to contemporary versions of evangelicalism seen by many as increasingly devoted to soteriological escapism, modern consumerism, individualism and sectarianism. Alternatively, Willard proposes a return to the original (proto) message of good news (evangel) articulated by Jesus in the New Testament. For increasing numbers of disaffected evangelicals with postmodern sensibilities, this protoevangelical vision offers a more robust doctrine of God, a return to the primacy of discipleship to Christ, and the experience of a holistic and integrated life in the Kingdom of God. Ethnographies of four evangelical organizations applying Willardian theology provide insight into the current evolution within American evangelical theology and praxis.

# INTRODUCTION

This thesis focuses on the changing climate of evangelical Christianity in the western United States. It describes the issues surrounding four groups of evangelicals moving away from mainstream forms of American evangelicalism and their search for and application of a more holistic, authentic and incarnational form of Christian faith. Several theologians and writers are linked to this transition. However, this thesis explores the primary influence of a specific thread of Christian theology presented in the works and teachings of philosopher and theologian Dr. Dallas Willard. Willard's work advocates a Biblically centered, practical theology that seeks to build a holistic ontological vision for the type and quality of life available to disciples of Christ within in the Kingdom of God. Over the past several decades Willard's theological vision has drawn increasing numbers of evangelicals and postevangelicals that seek a more genuine, affective and transformational representation of Christian theology and praxis.

This research describes the essence of Willard's theology. It also provides data on the effects Willard's theology and praxis have made within contemporary evangelical settings. The first chapter reveals the three methodological means of investigation applied in this research and describes the various disciplinary approaches used to gather and present the relevant information from various sources.<sup>1</sup> This thesis is primarily an exercise in practical theology. However, the employments of ethnographic and intellectual historiographic methodologies are also integral to this thesis and its subjects. The justifications for said methodologies in relation to this specific inquiry are also provided. The second chapter highlights the key theological issues within American evangelicalism and situates both Willardian theology and the postevangelical impetus in their historical and contemporary contexts. The third chapter surveys the corpus of Willard's theological work

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<sup>1</sup> Each of the methodological means is discussed in full on pages 31-66.

and provides an interpretive schema which prioritizes the key elements of Willard’s protoevangelical vision. Chapter three also includes an important discussion of how Willard’s application of philosophical realism informs his critique of modern and postmodern epistemology and their corresponding effects on evangelical theology.<sup>2</sup> The fourth chapter describes the contemporary contexts wherein Willardian theology is practiced. Ethnographic research collected in four evangelical organizations—two parachurch and two congregational settings—reveals the unique ways Willardian theology is currently interpreted, applied and to what effect. The concluding chapter summarizes the ethnographic research, suggests areas for further research and discusses the possible implications Willardian theology could have if applied to existing forms of evangelical and postevangelical theology and praxis.

### *Positioning Willardian Theology*

Grounded in earlier traditions of evangelicalism, Willardian theology seeks to capture the visceral qualities emblematic of Christian movements of the past.<sup>3</sup> The term “protoevangelical” is used in this thesis to describe Willard’s overarching desire to recapture the essence of the visioning message Jesus delivered in the gospel accounts.<sup>4</sup> The heart of Willardian theology pursues, articulates and forcefully defends the position that the impact and essence of the original (proto) *euangelion* that Jesus initially imparted to his

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<sup>2</sup> Chapter 3, pages 237-255.

<sup>3</sup> Most notably Willard suggests John Wesley and his theology is perhaps the most complete modern disciple making methodology in American evangelical history. Dallas Willard, “Day 6, Session 3, Topic-Wesleyanism, Recorded Lecture,” *Fuller Seminary Doctoral Seminar*, (6-16-2010).

<sup>4</sup> I am indebted to Dr. Randy Walls for his insights into the history of this concept. This term will be more fully defined and developed in chapter 3 on Willardian theology. See also chapter 2, page 151. However, the original use of the term comes from the discussion regarding the concept of the “Q” source for the New Testament gospels. See Udo Schnelle, *Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2009), 380-398. There is also a common theological reference to the proto-evangel referring to the “first” occurrence in Scripture where the salvific intent of God is described. Often cited is Genesis 3:15-21. See George Cronk, *The Message of the Bible : An Orthodox Christian Perspective* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1982), 45-46.

first century hearers remains a vital, ontological reality that is available, understandable, incarnational and relational. It is the essence and nature of that first message that Willard contends can and should undergird any proper “evangelical” form of Christian faith.

Interest in Willard’s protoevangelical theology arises out of, and responds to, significant shifts occurring within existing forms of American evangelicalism. The variables of these shifts are important in order to understand why Willard has become increasingly attractive to the growing number of disaffected and disillusioned evangelicals or what have been termed “post” evangelicals.<sup>5</sup> Within the past two years, several independent, socio-religious research projects published results pointing to momentous change within the religious environment of the United States. Tracing trends over several decades, the *General Social Survey (GSS)* and *American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS)* conducted in 2008 and published in 2009, both revealed a decrease in American’s identification with Christianity in general and evangelical denominations in particular.<sup>6</sup> GSS provides comparative data over four decades and the 2008 data revealed a rather sudden and dramatic increase in the percentage of respondents with no religion affiliation; from under 7% in the 1970s, to over 16.5% in the 2008. The category of “non-Christians” also moved from under 11% of respondents in the 1970’s, to over 21% of respondents during the same period. Further, the GSS shows “Baptists,” which includes the largest evangelical denomination in the United States, have seen the most rapid decline over the

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<sup>5</sup> This term was perhaps first coined by Dave Tomlinson *The Post Evangelical*, UK edition. (London: Triangle, 1995). Tomlinson’s description is more fully defined on page 14.

<sup>6</sup> See Tom W. Smith, *General Social Survey* (Chicago: National Opinion Research Center, 2009), and Barry Kosmin and Ariela Keysar, *American Religious Identification Survey* (Harford, CT: Trinity College, March 2009). These studies also revealed, when comparing other Christian religions, a higher percentage of evangelicals left their faith than other Christian religions.

past decade.<sup>7</sup> The 2008 ARIS study also revealed a 10.2% drop in Christian identification in the US from 86.2% to 76%. This was the first major slide recorded since the study began in the mid 1950's. Additionally, identification with Protestantism dropped 9.1% from 60.0% to 50.9% during the same period.<sup>8</sup> In total, the GSS and ARIS research revealed significant weakening among American Protestantism in general since their peak in 1990's, with evangelicals as a subgroup representing the steepest decline of all.<sup>9</sup>

George Barna, an evangelical pollster, also reported a dramatic increase in what he calls the “unchurched” over the past decade. Although performed on a smaller scale to the ARIS and GSS reports, The Barna Group studied a 13-year period from 1991-2004 and found a 93% increase in American adults who no longer attended a Christian church.<sup>10</sup> More recently, Barna has also discovered a growing population of young adults and teenagers (ages 18-29) are one of the fastest growing unchurched or “de-churched”

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<sup>7</sup> Specifically Southern Baptists are the largest Baptist denomination in the world and the largest Protestant evangelical denomination in the US. E.W. Lindner, *Yearbook of American & Canadian Churches* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2010), 11.

<sup>8</sup> Both the GSS and the ARIS studies are well-funded studies that review large samples sizes and compare data over several decades. Both are well received in the academic community and are widely used in a plethora of other scholarly articles across many academic disciplines. The GSS is the largest sociology project funded by National Science Foundation and has been described as a national resource. It is second only to the U. S. Census in funding and allocation of resources. Over 16,000 research uses in articles, textbooks, monographs, dissertations, etc. have been documented. See National Opinion Research Center, University of Chicago, <http://www.norc.uchicago.edu/gss/>. The 2008 ARIS is the third in a landmark time series of large, nationally representative surveys that track changes in the religious loyalties of the U.S. adult population within the 48 contiguous states from 1990 to 2008. The 2001 and 2008 surveys are replicas of the 1990 survey, and are led by the same academic research team using an identical methodology. The ARIS 2008 survey was carried out from February through November 2008 and collected answers from 54,461 respondents. See <http://www.americanreligionsurvey-aris.org/reports/methods.html>. In an analysis of the ARIS and GSS studies one report discussed the methodological difficulty with figures and degree of growth or decline due to the range of definitions available for evangelicalism. Hacket and Lindsey validate the credibility of the GSS and ARIS studies and discuss the means of best dealing with issues regarding how to accurately count evangelicals. See Conrad Hacket and Michael D. Lindsey, “*Measuring Evangelicalism: Consequences of Different Operational Strategies*,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (September, 2008): 11-20.

<sup>9</sup> The GSS also revealed one in five Americans rejects religious identification, 20% of Americans believe that the Bible is a book of Fables (up from under 14% in 1984, and that 18% do not believe in a “god” (up from 13% in 1988.) Thus the GSS data suggests rejection of religion is growing in America and Christian hegemony is breaking down in American culture.

<sup>10</sup> See George Barna, “Number of Unchurched Adults Has Nearly Doubled Since 1991,” <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/5-barna-update/140-number-of-unchurched-adults-has-nearly-doubled-since-199> (accessed 10-4, 2010).



demographics.<sup>11</sup> Also, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), the largest evangelical denomination in the US, published an internal 2011 report that reinforces the ARIS, GSS and Barna Group results. The SBC recorded four straight years of declining membership, baptisms and church attendance.<sup>12</sup> Commenting on the overarching trend, the *USA Today*, a nationally circulated newspaper, stated, “The percentage of people who call themselves in some way Christian has dropped more than 11% in a generation. The faithful have scattered out of their traditional bases: The ‘Bible Belt’ is less Baptist. The ‘Rust Belt’ is less Catholic. And everywhere more people are exploring spiritual frontiers-or falling off the faith map completely,”<sup>13</sup>

Prior to the publication of these key 2009 studies, little quantifiable evidence existed to suggest anything but the continuation of evangelical Christianity as a growing and sometimes dominating force in American culture.<sup>14</sup> However, the summation of these recent studies suggests that American Christianity in general, and evangelicalism in

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<sup>11</sup> Barna’s research is published in David Kinnaman and Aly. Hawkins, *You Lost Me : Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church, and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011). Kinnaman and Barna collaborated on a study of teens and young adults based on research conducted for the Faith That Lasts Project, which took place between 2007 and 2011. The research included a series of national public opinion surveys conducted by Barna Group. In addition to extensive quantitative interviewing with adults and faith leaders nationwide, the main research examination for the study was conducted with 18- to 29-year-olds who had been active in a Christian church at some point in their teen years.

<sup>12</sup> In conjunction with their four-year decline in memberships, 2010 was the lowest number of baptisms Southern Baptists recorded since the 1950’s. Bob Smietana, “Southern Baptists Consider New Name to Broaden Appeal,” *USA Today*, September 22, 2011. Lawless and Gibbs appear to attempt a calming influence on the SBC in light of the apparently unforeseen statistics of their rapid decline. See Ed Stetzer, “A Year is Not a Trend,” [http://www.edstetzer.com/2008/04/a\\_year\\_is\\_not\\_a\\_trend\\_decline\\_1.html](http://www.edstetzer.com/2008/04/a_year_is_not_a_trend_decline_1.html) (accessed 10-2, 2010). And Chuck Lawless, *The Great Commission Resurgence: Fulfilling God’s Mandate in Our Time* (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2010),2-23. Also see Ed Stetzer’s most recent description of the four-year downward trend in the Southern Baptist denomination. Bob Allen, “SBC Reports Statistical Decline,” <http://www.abpnews.com/content/view/6478/53/> (accessed June 15, 2011).

<sup>13</sup> Cathy Lynn Grossman, “Most Religious Groups in USA Have Lost Ground Survey Finds,” *USA Today*, 3-17-2009. The Christian Science Monitor also covered the release of this data in March 2009.

<sup>14</sup> These studies marked the first indication of a significant reversal of past trends revealed in both ARIS and GSS data. Previous ARIS and GSS studies conducted from the mid-1970’s through the 1990’s predicted a different outlook. Those results indicated significant measures of evangelical growth was expected to continue nationwide with exponential increases in Middle American and southern states. A good example of this confidence is seen in a Time Magazine article on evangelicalism. See Staff reporter, “100 Most Influential Evangelicals,” *Time* Vol. (February 3, 2005).

particular, is currently in a state of flux and may show signs of a significant decrease in the hegemony it once held in American culture. The data also suggests increasing numbers of self-identified evangelicals are reevaluating and altering previously held opinions regarding the role Christian religion plays in their lives. It is in this theological transition where Willardian theology has grown and is claimed as offering increasing numbers of evangelicals a new platform from which to engage their desire to reimagine and/or recontextualize their Christian theology and praxis.

Specifically within evangelical circles, these research reports, and the flux they describe, have been met with a wide variety of responses from social commentators, evangelical practitioners and scholars alike.<sup>15</sup> Popular as well as scholarly publications investigated, chronicled and editorialized the various issues and challenges American evangelicalism faced theologically, ecclesiologically, politically, and philosophically.<sup>16</sup> Evangelical theologians have attempted to suggest cause and effect relationships in order to describe, understand and perhaps reverse the transitional tide.<sup>17</sup> Such proposals cover a range of explanations and justifications.

However, those with theologically conservative perspectives tended to offer a rather univocal account of the decline of evangelicalism as stemming from the popular rise,

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<sup>15</sup> James Kushiner, "Decline of Christianity Stunning Survey Notes," *Touchstone-A Journal of Mere Christianity* Vol. (March 9, 2009). Kevin Flannely, Kathleen Galek, Jackson Kyle, Nava Stilton, "Religion in America-1972-2006: Religious Affiliation, Attendance and Strength of Faith," *Psychological Reports* Vol. 106, 3, (June, 2010), 875-890. Keith Goetzman, "So Many Gods, So Little Time," *Utne Reader* Vol. 163, (Jan/Feb. 2011), 79. Michael Spencer, "The Coming Evangelical Collapse," *The Christian Science Monitor* (March 10, 2009), Editorial.

<sup>16</sup> Example of these works are Christian Smith and Michael Emerson, *American evangelicalism: Embattled and thriving* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by faith : evangelical religion and the problem of race in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 18. Linda. Woodhead and Paul Heelas, *Religion in modern times : an interpretive anthology*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), Robert Wuthnow, *The crisis in the churches : spiritual malaise, fiscal woe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997),

<sup>17</sup> David T. Olson, *The American church in crisis : groundbreaking research based on a national database of over 200,000 churches* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2008), Christine Wicker, *The fall of the evangelical nation : the surprising crisis inside the church*, (New York: HarperOne, 2008), and WC Smith, *A Lover's Quarrel with the Evangelical Church* (Colorado Springs: Authentic, 2009).

widening influence and effects of secularism and postmodern epistemology. The combined effect of these ideological forces is often pointed to as posing a broad-scaled threat to Christian faith in general and therefore represents the greatest areas of concern for evangelicals.<sup>18</sup> The literature represents a significant collection of conservative authors and scholars offering multiple tangential opinions on this main proposal. Perhaps the most prolific conservatives representing these views are Dr. Albert Mohler, president of Southern Baptist Seminary,<sup>19</sup> systematic theologian Millard Erickson,<sup>20</sup> New Testament theologian D. A. Carson,<sup>21</sup> and author/pastor John Piper.<sup>22</sup>

Furthermore, each of these authors also suggest the surfacing, development and influence of the Emerging Church movement in America (ECM) represents the most poignant example of the theological, philosophical and cultural maelstrom threatening the

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<sup>18</sup> Charles Colson, “The Postmodern Crackup: From Soccer Moms to College Campuses; Signs of the End,” *Christianity Today* Vol. (Dec. 2003). David Dockery, ed., *The Challenge of Postmodernism: An Evangelical Engagement*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1995, 2001), Andreas J Köstenberger, R Albert Mohler, J. P. Moreland, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Whatever Happened to Truth?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Publishers, 2005), CFH Henry, “Postmodernism: The New Specter,” *The challenge of postmodernism* Vol. (1995), 34-52. J. Richard Middleton and Brian J. Walsh, *Truth is Stranger Than it Used to be : Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1995),

<sup>19</sup> R. Albert Mohler, *Culture Shift : Engaging Current Issues With Timeless Truth* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: Multnomah Books, 2008), *The Disappearance of God : Dangerous Beliefs in the New Spiritual Openness*, (Colorado Springs, Colo.: Multnomah Books, 2009), R. Albert Mohler and D. G. Hart, *Theological Education in the Evangelical Tradition* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1996), 320. R Albert Mohler, “Confronting Postmodernism,” *Southern Baptist Theological Journal* Vol. 5/2 summer, (2000).

<sup>20</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Postmodernizing the Faith : Evangelical Responses to the Challenge of Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1998), *The Postmodern World : Discerning the Times and the Spirit of Our Age* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2002), Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth, and Justin Taylor, *Reclaiming the Center : Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2004),

<sup>21</sup> D. A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant With the Emerging Church : Understanding a Movement and Its Implications* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2005), *Telling the Truth : Evangelizing Postmoderns* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2000), *The Gagging of God : Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 1996), *Christ and Culture Revisited* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2008),

<sup>22</sup> John Piper, *Tulip : The Pursuit of God's Glory in Salvation* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2009), *Jesus: The Only Way to God : Must You Hear the Gospel to be Saved* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2010), John Piper and Justin Taylor, *The Supremacy of Christ in a Postmodern World* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2007). *The Future of Justification : A Response to N.T. Wright* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2007).

mainstream evangelical theology and praxis.<sup>23</sup> Ironically, conservative evangelicals initially supported the early manifestations of the ECM, perceiving it as a natural and healthy transitional progression of younger generations attempting to recontextualize their faith into a changing socio-cultural climate.<sup>24</sup> In 2001, a group predominantly comprised of young evangelical pastors formed the Emergent Village, an organization tasked toward that same end.<sup>25</sup> With its own website, popular blogs, podcasts, publishing arm and conference capabilities, the Emergent Village partnered with various evangelical groups such as Youth Specialties to serve as a centralizing hub or networking center for the wider ECM.<sup>26</sup> However, in a relatively short time, a growing number of evangelical leaders shifted their support away from the Emergent Village. Moderate evangelical leaders began to consider the ECM phenomenon as either evidence of the reemergence of theological liberalism or the outcome of the unholy union of postmodern constructivism, relativism and pluralism with the established rationalism of modern systematic theology.<sup>27</sup> More outspoken

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<sup>23</sup> Many of the writers and leaders of the ECM will be discussed throughout this thesis. Perhaps the seminal texts thus far on the ECM remains Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches : Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005). In addition New Testament scholar Scot McKnight has followed the ECM from its inception. See Scot McKnight, “The Five Streams of the Emerging Church,” *Christianity Today* (Feb, 2007). Scot McKnight, Kevin Corcoran, Jason Clark, Pete Rollins, *Church in the Present Tense: A Candid Look At What’s Emerging* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011).

<sup>24</sup> Pagitt and Jones provide an excellent history of the development of the ECM and its original ties to mainstream evangelical progenitors. See Tony Jones, *The New Christians : Dispatches From the Emergent Frontier* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2008), Doug Pagitt, *A Christianity Worth Believing : Hope-Filled, Open-Armed, Alive-and-Well Faith for the Left Out, Left Behind, and Let Down in Us All* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2008). Doug Pagitt and Tony Jones, *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2007),

<sup>25</sup> The Emergent Village website lists its values and purposes as, “a growing, generative friendship among missional Christians seeking to love our world in the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Our dream is to join in the activity of God in the world wherever we are able, partnering with God as God’s dreams for our world come true. In the process, the world can be healed and changed, and so can we.” See <http://www.emergentvillage.com/about/> (accessed 4-13-2011).

<sup>26</sup> Scot McKnight, “The Five Streams of the Emerging Church,” *Christianity Today* Vol. (February, 2007).

<sup>27</sup> Carson, *Becoming Conversant With the Emerging Church*, 2005), Erickson, *Reclaiming the Center*, 2004), Todd D. Hunter, *Christianity Beyond Belief: Following Jesus for the Sake of Others* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2010), Scot McKnight, “Review: A New Kind of Christianity,” *Christianity Today* Vol. 54, 3, (March, 2010), 59-66.

conservative evangelicals went so far as to decry ECM leaders as heretical opponents to the Christian gospel itself.<sup>28</sup>

ECM leaders have attempted to defend themselves against such claims but with mixed results.<sup>29</sup> Perhaps their difficulty is largely due to the fact the organization never anticipated nor intended to engage in vitriolic epistemological or theological battles with conservative institutions and their leaders. Theologically, critics and supporters alike have suggested the ECM's well-intended attempts at fostering of an open, conversational environment for theological, pastoral and ecclesial reflection was more difficult and problematic than initially expected. At times the ECM's inclusiveness and considerations of so many varied opinions and perspectives led to levels of ambiguity which triumphed over the substantive ability to discern a coherent proclamation of Christian theology or praxis. Further compounding this problem, ECM advocates have yet to agree philosophically on an epistemological position which addresses the logocentrism of historic Christianity and the potential conflicts such a position maintains with postmodern hermeneutics, nominalism and philosophical constructivism.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> John S Bohannon, "Preaching and the Emerging Church: An Examination of Four Founding Leaders" PhD. Dissertation, (Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary: Wake Forest, NC, 2010). R Albert Mohler, "Confronting Postmodernism," *Southern Baptist Theological Journal* Vol. 5/2 summer, (2001). R. Scott Smith, *Truth and the New Kind of Christian : The Emerging Effects of Postmodernism in the Church* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2005),

<sup>29</sup> The entrance of several ECM's leaders into the political arena and their advocacy of liberal Democratic political issues heightened these concerns. Some emerging generations of Christians appeared just as reticent to engage the politically polarizing issues on the Liberal Left as they were the issues of the Religious Right. See William Henard and Adam Greenway, *Evangelicals Engaging Emergent: A Discussion of the Emergent Church Movement* (B&H Academic, 2009), 59. Tony Jones, "Is Emergent the New Christian Left? Tony Jones Responds to Critics. Part 1 and Part 2," [http://www.outofur.com/archives/2006/05/is\\_emergent\\_the.html](http://www.outofur.com/archives/2006/05/is_emergent_the.html) (accessed 8-11, 2010). Carson, *Becoming Conversant With the Emerging Church*. Gary L.W Johnson, *Reforming Or Conforming?: Post-Conservative Evangelicals and the Emerging Church*, ed. Gary Johnson and Ronald Gleason (Wheaton, Il.: Crossway, 2008), 76.

<sup>30</sup> David S. Dockery and Gregory Alan. Thornbury, *Shaping a Christian Worldview : The Foundations of Christian Higher Education* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2002), 85. Each of these issues, separately and in combination, has resulted in the exodus of some early ECM leaders from Emergent Village affiliation and "Emergent/Emerging" church terminology as a whole. In recent years the separation in terms between "emerging" and "emergent" appears to be a separation between postevangelicalism and liberal

Whether the ECM is a representation of postmodern epistemology or a significant threat to evangelical orthodoxy are difficult and diverse questions.<sup>31</sup> However, the data suggests, over the past two decades, increasing numbers of disaffected evangelicals have left mainstream evangelical churches.<sup>32</sup> Additionally, many emerging generations of Christians have been drawn to the increasingly popular, non-denominational, ECM-type churches that specifically avoid the political positions, doctrinal-centric theology, leadership hierarchies and consumeristic ecclesiology indicative of contemporary evangelical institutionalization. Often referred to as “Gen X,” “postmodern,” “recovering”

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theology. Emerging churches are questioning praxis. Emergent churches are questioning key aspects of modern theology and epistemology. This is seen in the public distancing of Dan Kimball, Scot McKnight, Erwin McManus, Leonard Sweet, Rob Bell and Shane Claiborne from direct affiliation with Emergent Village or the ECM. The most vocal ex-ECM leader is Mark Driscoll. There is also a move inside the ECM ethos to create what has been termed the Missional Church movement which takes much of the ECM ecclesiology but retains a much more conservative theology. By 2008 the Emergent Village was significantly restructured and has since diminished in its national organizing role. However, many of the original Emergent Village leaders continue to pursue and advocate for Emergent/Emerging Christian ideals and still hosts’ or sponsor periodic conference events. The evolution of the ECM has been well chronicled. See Mark Driscoll, “The Emerging Church Highway,” *Christian Research Journal* Vol. 31, 4, (2008). John H. Armstrong, *Reforming Pastoral Ministry : Challenges for Ministry in Postmodern Times* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2001), 212. John S Bohannon, *Preaching and the Emerging Church: An Examination of Four Founding Leaders* (John S, Bohannon, 2010), 109-127. Lillian Kwon, “Interview: Brian McLaren on Sin, Hell, New Kind of Christianity,” *The Christian Post*, <http://www.christianpost.com/news/interview-brian-mclaren-on-sin-hell-new-kind-of-christianity-44159/> (accessed 1-5, 2011). Shane Claiborne, “Red Letter Christians: A Blog By Tony Campolo and Friends: The Emerging Church Brand-the Good, the Bad and the Messy,” <http://www.redletterchristians.org/the-emerging-church-brand-the-good-the-bad-and-the-messy/> (accessed 6-20, 2011). Stephen Shields, “Ten Years Out: A Retrospective on the Emerging Church in North America,” *NextWave Church and Culture* Vol. 121, (January, 2009). Steven J. L. Croft, *Mission Shaped Questions: Defining Issues for Today’s Church* (London: Church House Publishing, 2008), 91. Linda Bergquist and Allan Karr, *Church Turned Inside Out : A Guide for Designers, Refiners, and Re-Aligners* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways : Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2006), 17. Tony Jones, “Theoblogy: Which Missional Church,” <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/tonyjones/2011/01/27/which-missional-church/> (accessed Feb, 11, 2011). Brian Obrien, “Emergent’s Divergence,” *Christianity Today* Vol. (December, 18, 2008). And Derek Keffe, “Tony Jones Out as Emergent Village Head,” *Christianity Today* Vol. (November 3, 2008).

<sup>31</sup> Important to note, the Emerging Church movement is a global phenomenon with a significant degree of its original impetus coming from Western European Christians of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, this thesis is concerned specifically with the branch of the ECM centered in the United States. For a description of the European roots of the ECM see Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*. The ECM is described in depth in Chapter 2, pgs. 126-149.

<sup>32</sup> Julia Duin, *Quitting Church : Why the Faithful Are Fleeing and What to Do About it* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2008), Drew Dyck, *Generation Ex-Christian : Why Young Adults Are Leaving the Faith-- and How to Bring Them Back* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2010), Gabe Lyons, *The Next Christians : The Good News About the End of Christian America*, (New York: Doubleday Religion, 2010), David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *Unchristian : What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity-- and Why it Matters* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2007).

or “postevangelical” Christians, this relatively young constituency (aged 18-45) appreciate the more inclusive, ecumenical leanings of the ECM, with its emphasis on equality, social justice, environmentalism, doctrinal humility, mystery and a priority placed on relational living.<sup>33</sup> Dave Tomlinson, perhaps the first to coin the phrase postevangelical, defines postevangelicals as those evangelicals who progressively have found it difficult to reconcile their experience of evangelicalism with their “personal values, instinctive reactions and theological reflections.”<sup>34</sup> This tension often creates a considerable level of relational conflict and interpersonal angst that spawns a search for relief.

Tomlinson makes clear that “post” evangelical is not to be confused with “ex” or “anti” evangelical. Instead the “post” prefix should be considered a type of evangelical that “takes as given many of the assumptions of evangelical faith, while at the same time moves beyond its perceived limitations.”<sup>35</sup> Additionally, Tomlinson suggests postevangelicals tend to relate to their world both culturally and epistemologically from a postmodern perspective. Thus postmodernism and/or postmodernity is the “cultural environment which influences the way they think about the experience their faith, and this is the context in which the integrity and credibility of their faith must be tested.”<sup>36</sup> The deeply felt connections, heritage and experiences of the evangelical culture and theology make this transition difficult.

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<sup>33</sup> Dan Kimball, *They Like Jesus But Not the Church: Insights From Emerging Generations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan/Youth Specialties, 2003), Mark Scandrette, *Soul Graffiti : Making a Life in the Way of Jesus*, (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2007), Tim Celek and Dieter Zander, *Inside the Soul of a New Generation: Insights and Strategies for Reaching Busters* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches : Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005).

<sup>34</sup> Tomlinson, 2.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 9.

Most importantly for this thesis is the level of divisiveness and attention the ECM phenomenon and the emergence of the postevangelical ethos has created within the largest and most powerful of evangelical institutions in America. This conflict serves to illuminate both the instability and tension currently present within evangelical Christianity in America. At the same time the nature and scope of this conflict reveals in part why many welcome Willard's protoevangelical vision as a potential remedy. This brief background establishes both the subject and context of this thesis. Within this volatile and sometimes tumultuous evangelical milieu, Willard's rather unassuming and seemingly pragmatic form of faith has emerged and gained increasing influence in postevangelical circles.

Willardian theology works at two levels. First, Willard seeks to correct contemporary evangelical systematic theology that has too often abused New Testament hermeneutics to satisfy a modern obsession with sectarian divisions, atonement theories and doctrinal correctness. Such overt eisegesis, Willard argues, is far afield from historically orthodox Christian theology and has effectively lost the forest for the trees in relation to the purpose and intent of the Christian gospel. Thus Willard offers a corrective to reestablish the New Testament gospels as the means of introducing the ontological and existential reality Jesus reveals and manifests as life in the Kingdom of God. In the process Willard also reinvigorates past streams of pietistic Christianity that have been more recently overshadowed or forgotten amidst the modernist/fundamentalist dichotomies, culture wars and politicized agendas that plagued the later half of 20<sup>th</sup> century evangelicalism. Simultaneously, Willard has consistently advocated a distinctively apolitical, ecumenically inclusive, culturally engaging, intellectually robust and personally transforming gospel message. Hence this thesis will show that Willardian theology presents a forceful critique and correction to many aspects of mainstream evangelicalism's religious doctrines and institutional accommodation to American culture.



Secondly, it will also be shown that Willardian theology maintains crossover appeal. Willard's works have been widely referenced as inspiring the pursuit of early ECM leaders to recapture a more robust, integrated and authentic Christian expression.<sup>37</sup> Yet he has also maintained broad welcome and acclaim within mainstream evangelicals circles.<sup>38</sup> Therefore the unique ability to blend both stinging critiques with enlivening encouragements for both postevangelicals and evangelical alike places Willard in a rare position to bridge what has often been perceived as an ever widening divide. The pursuit and effect of the "original" or *proto* gospel, represents an equally poignant reprisal to both the modern Enlightenment hubris pervasive inside conservative evangelical theology and to the shortcomings incumbent to an increasingly secular, postmodern, relativist and constructivist worldview frequently advocated by the ECM.

As such, this thesis proposes that Willardian theology articulates a positive alternative to the shortcomings of both conservative and progressive manifestations of contemporary evangelical religion. Unlike many theologians and leaders in the ECM who have thus far offered only helpful insights, assessments or sweeping deconstructive critiques, Willardian theology erects a complete vision of a viable Christian faith which does not leave adherents in a state of either paralyzing doubt, pluralistic relativism or unending equivocations. Yet neither does Willard take the hyper critical, legalist path of evangelical fundamentalism, often anathematized by many postmodern Christians. Instead

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<sup>37</sup> Willard is mentioned widely by many ECM leaders and specifically postevangelical writers. This fact will be widely discussed throughout this thesis. Here two key texts are mentioned. Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches : Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures*, 49. And Dave Tomlinson, *The Post Evangelical*, Rev. North American ed. (El Cajon, CA: Emergent YS/Zondervan, 2003), 11-15.

<sup>38</sup> Willard's most popular work *The Divine Conspiracy* received book of the year awards from conservative evangelical periodical *Christianity Today*. Christine A. Scheller, "A Divine Conspirator," *Christianity Today* Vol. (September 1, 2006). See Bill Hull's discussion of this in "A Reluctant Prophet: How Does Professor Willard Propose to Take Over the World?," *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* Vol. 3,2, (2011), 283-295. And also Keith Meyer, "A Pastor's Lessons in the Kingdom Life From a Master Apprentice of Jesus," *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* Vol. 3, 2, (2011), 296-310.

Willard reestablishes a few core Biblical foundations based on a philosophically rooted critical realism and promotes a gospel centered on the *agape* character of God.<sup>39</sup> Together, his biblically dependent, agape centric, theo-ontological realism appears to effectively bridge the progressive postmodern and conservative modern evangelical constituencies. His protoevangelical perspective marries a de-institutionalized, un-aculturated, un-politicized, non-legalistic and relational postevangelical sentiment with a biblically centered, discipleship funded, historically orthodox, experiential and theologically evangelical core.

It is the opinion of this author that Willardian theology—while proceeding from an evangelical perspective—is in its essence a distinct and concerted effort to transcend the limits and myopia of American evangelical religion. It seems Willard’s long engagement with evangelicalism is not by choice or intent. Rather Willard—as a product of his cultural, chronological and contextual position—speaks to, seeks to correct, admonish and encourage contemporary Christians, many of whom have chosen to be evangelical. Hence this thesis describes Willard’s impact on the evangelical brands of faith it encounters. Yet, despite this connection, there is a palpable sense in which Willardian theology assumes a foundation that rises above or goes beyond contemporary forms of evangelicalism with all its distinctives, interests and proclivities. In many ways, Willardian theology is antithetical to American evangelicalism in specific, and perhaps even large portions of Western Christianity in general.

This point is significant to remember due to the fact that this thesis positions evangelical Christianity in America as a primary form of comparison to Willardian theology. Simply stated, they are not the same, are at times strikingly oppositional and often seek to produce an altogether different end. Willardian theology seeks to surpass the

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<sup>39</sup> This is described in Chapter 3, pages 199-202.

limitations of contemporary evangelical expression and return to a primal gospel that escapes the social adaptations, political trappings and cultural contextualization that have historically devolved into faint resemblances or distant echoes of the original message of Jesus.

Hence, Willardian protoevangelicalism carries both a reproach and reminder. It offers correction to the lingering effects and influence of fundamentalism, individualism, philosophical constructivism, materialism and consumerism that have gained increasing dominion both inside and outside all forms of American Christianity.<sup>40</sup> Yet, Willard's corrective is neither the re-creation of a new evangelicalism nor a new Christianity. Rather the protoevangelical objective is to recapture the first key priorities of the *euangelion* represented in earlier Christian priorities and values of holiness, pietism, character formation, discipleship and a holistic vision of individual and communal life within the realm of God's Kingdom centered on agape love.<sup>41</sup> Willard suggests this is the central

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<sup>40</sup> These issues are outlined specifically in Chapter 3 pages 196-217. Willard's responses and corrections are covered in detail in Chapter 3 pages 217-235.

<sup>41</sup> The term ontotheology (referred to as theo-ontology in this thesis) has a rich and diverse lineage. It is connected to the works of Immanuel Kant, Martin Heidegger, along with more modern writers such as Jean-Lu Marion and Merold Westphal. Classically theology or philosophy is thought to be "ontotheological" if it assumes God to be a being among other beings, even while perhaps maintaining the condition of the Supreme Being. Therefore onto-theology proposes no inherent conflict in attaining knowledge of God, nor to developing language suitable to describing and expressing such knowledge. In this thesis the term is also communicating the idea God is central to all "being" or existence. Therefore Jesus' articulation of the Kingdom of God endeavors to describe to humanity the nature of reality and existence. For Willard there appears to be very little difference separating the pursuit of metaphysics and ontology in his theology. It could also be true Willard articulates a meta-theology. The only significant ontological distinction is found in his proclivity toward pursuing Biblically theological understandings of human teleology. In this regard, what a human being "is" in essence and nature is both a significant theological and ontological pursuit. Willard argues the realm of God's rule and reign is where humanity discovers and achieves its highest and best potential. Thus the nature and type of such an existential condition inside the Kingdom of God is also both an ontological and theological pursuit within the Biblical account. Hence the two disciplines are conjoined in hyphenation. The inversion of the word from ontotheology to theo-ontology is due to Willard's primacy on all existence emanating from God. In *Knowing Christ Today* Willard makes the standard first-cause argument, suggesting there must be a non-physical cause which created the universe. Whatever caused the universe to exist must therefore have been "greater" than that which it created. The ability to initiate activity without oneself having been caused is the nature of the "unmoved mover" proposition. This is precisely the quality Willard ascribes to the God of Christianity. See Merold Westphal, *Overcoming Onto-Theology : Toward a Postmodern Christian Faith* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), and Jeffrey W. Robbins, *Between Faith and Thought : An Essay on the Ontotheological Condition* (Charlottesville, WV: University of Virginia Press, 2003).

message Jesus both advocated and demonstrated in the biblical gospels. The rearticulation of this vision appears to be providing increasing numbers of 21<sup>st</sup> century Christians the ability to recapture key distinctives of a faith presented by earlier generations of Christians while remaining integrous of the contemporary contexts of their increasingly secular, postmodern and post-Christian world.

At its end Willard's protoevangelical vision attempts to move beyond the fettered adaptations centuries of evangelical heredity has wrought. And in this pursuit Willard is poignantly direct in his reprisals of evangelical hubris and its ill effects. Perhaps all integrous Christian religious efforts, including American evangelicalism, ascribe to the attainment of a robust, authentic and "good" form of faith. However, Willard points to the simple fact that attainment of such a vocation continues to elude much of modern evangelical religion and often is never even a viable aim. Willard endeavors to help evangelicals, and all Christians, escape and evade the enduring oxymoronic dilemma that all Christian faith proclaiming a gospel attributed to Jesus, should at its heart epitomize an attainable reality that is very, very good.

### *Methodological Rationale*

To best illuminate and understand Willard's protoevangelical theology, a broad but short history of evangelicalism in America will position Willard's theology within its contemporary contexts. This historiography more clearly defines the term "evangelical" by describing some of the more prevalent evangelical theologies currently representative inside the American evangelical tent. An explanation and analysis of David Bebbington's four evangelical distinctives provides a platform from which to compare and contrast the mainstream evangelical perspective. Bebbington's quadrilateral is further used as a

framework against which Willardian theology can be juxtaposed.<sup>42</sup> Complementing Bebbington's analysis is Randall Balmer's recent work on American evangelicalism.<sup>43</sup> As will be shown, Balmer improves upon Bebbington's analysis by presenting four historically integral transitioning events which both define evangelical progress in American society but also describe the basis from which the postevangelical impetus is formed.<sup>44</sup>

As mentioned earlier, this thesis positions itself as a study in practical theology. Although a relatively recent field of theological inquiry, there are several perspectives that delimit the practical theological arena. Specifically, this thesis applies the practical theological perspectives of Edward Farley, J. W. Fowler, David Tracy, and ironically Willard himself.<sup>45</sup> Farley, Fowler, et. al. have positioned their view of practical theology as a means of engaging the doctrines, beliefs, perspectives, and ideas of Christian theology for the betterment of both the individual and the ecclesial community, while at the same time maintaining an intellectual rigor that resists reducing theology to a pragmatism concerned only with ministerial skills and/or ecclesiastical ends. The practical theological school of thought mentioned here has also been successfully conjoined and applied to ethnographic research of similar subjects and ecclesial groups.<sup>46</sup> This joining of practical theology and ethnography enables this thesis to pursue the key objective of discerning how Willard's theology has been applied within specific evangelical groups.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain : A History From the 1730s to the 1980s* (London ; Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989).

<sup>43</sup> Randall Herbert Balmer, *The Making of Evangelicalism : From Revivalism to Politics, and Beyond* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010),

<sup>44</sup> In addition to Bebbington and Balmer, Chapter 2 which begins describing the history of American evangelicalism, is deeply informed by and appropriately references the works of other noted historians such as Martin Marty, George Marsden, Richard Kyle, Roger Olson, Donald Dayton and others.

<sup>45</sup> This is more fully described in Chapter 1 pages 30-51.

<sup>46</sup> The discussion of practical theology and its use of ethnography are discussed in Chapter 1, pages 51-62.

<sup>47</sup> The discussion of praxis is covered in Chapter 1, pages 48-53.

Understanding how these groups conceptualize their tradition and are wrestling, adapting or forming new responses to their religious heritage are significant pursuits of this thesis. Since these inquiries deal primarily with attaining qualitative information from groups of subjects, an imbedded ethnographic methodology is best suited to this research. Additionally, since each of the four ethnographies are situated in an American evangelical context, understanding the unique religious soils wherein Willardian theology has been planted is crucial for a holistic perspective of each group. Furthermore, the use of ethnography also enables the collect of both quantitative empirical statistics and qualitative observational and interview data. At its end the ethnographies in this thesis combine both qualitative and quantitative means to answer the question if Willardian theology is in fact being applied in each of the four groups studied and then how and why Willard's work has affected each group. Together the qualitative and quantitative data combine to create a "thick" description of each of the four subject groups in their unique contexts.<sup>48</sup>

The third methodological means applied to this thesis was the social scientific method of intellectual historiography. Since many of the theological concepts in Willardian theology either speak directly to or oppose some deeply held, traditional evangelical beliefs, the historiography traces where these key beliefs generate within American evangelical history and to what lingering effect.<sup>49</sup> The historical research in this thesis traces two centuries of key evangelical concepts, their transitions, adaptations and conflagrations with other socio-cultural realities within American life. This historical perspective reveals how and where Willardian theology represents either a corrective or reforming influence to traditional evangelicalism. As a result of applying a multidisciplinary approach, this thesis triangulates the subject at hand, allowing an

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<sup>48</sup> These results are presented in the ethnographic data presented in Chapter 4

<sup>49</sup> The intellectual historiography represents the bulk of Chapter 2 pages 78-143.

investigation of the historical, intellectual, theological, social and philosophical contributions to the development of contemporary evangelicalism, including its contemporary derivatives and protestations.

Finally, since Willard has not received widespread engagement from the theological academy, a brief discussion of what methodology this thesis used to approach Willard's work is necessary. Willard does not consider himself a modern or systematic theologian. Also, to date, no attempt has been made to provide a systematic description of Willardian theological perspectives. By his own admission Willard's works have tended to come from a "pastoral" impetus. By this he means that each theological publication was motivated from considering how to best help those he knew within his social and relational sphere deal with struggles or questions that tended to elude them. Hence, Willard's corpus initially sought to provide aid and guidance to issues and problem as they arose within his unique "congregational" setting.

The result is the production of several detailed and rigorous theological engagements of many key topics. However, Willard's pastoral emphasis positions his approach to theological concepts and ideologies as a means to a functional, utilitarian or pragmatic end. Therefore strictly analyzing his work against existing systematic theological standards risks overlooking a key tenet in Willard's motive and intent. This is not to say Willard advocates the reduction of logic and reasoning in his theological inquiry. Quite the opposite. As a classical philosopher and critical realist, Willard widely applies the rules and standards of logic and rationality in validating the theological claims and actions of Jesus.

Furthermore, Willard is critical of the systematic theological approach. He suggests evangelicalism has been undergirded by the systematic theological approach for over a century and has overseen the development of sectarianism to the point where tens of thousands of different Christian denominations worldwide each apply some degree of

systematic theology to prove competing claims.<sup>50</sup> The growth of competing systematic theologies inside modern evangelicalism has perpetuated guilds of theological interest which divide groups who otherwise might find areas of common agreement and fellowship.<sup>51</sup> Thus, Willard resists the systematic methodology, sensing systemization in theology carries inherent historical limitations that exacerbate incorrect epistemological assumptions due to overly rationalistic and therefore anthropomorphic biases.<sup>52</sup>

Apparently, since Willard is not a systematician nor does he intend to be so, the consequence appears to be that evangelical theologians have largely bypassed Willard's work. Nevertheless, some scholars studying the transition of evangelical theology in recent decades have compared Willard in terms of similar levels of influence to theologians N. T. Wright, George Ladd, Lesslie Newbigin, Stanley Grenz, and Eugene Peterson.<sup>53</sup> To this point Steve Porter has recently provided an excellent analysis of the Willardian corpus.<sup>54</sup> His review provides a well-defined platform justifying exactly the type and measure of

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<sup>50</sup> Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (Grand Rapids: NavPress, 2002), 22. Hereafter referred to as ROH.

<sup>51</sup> An excellent defense on this topic is provided by conservatives David S. Dockery, Neste Van, Ray., Jerry N. Tidwell, R. Albert Mohler, *Southern Baptists, Evangelicals, and the Future of Denominationalism* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2011), and more progressive voices Frank. Viola, *Reimagining Church : Pursuing the Dream of Organic Christianity* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2008),

<sup>52</sup> In the opinion of this author, it is only Willard's resistance in applying a systematic theological method, still the preferred means of evangelical theological inquiry, which keeps his work from wider scholarly engagement. Willard's lack of systematic theological engagement is not an unintended negative consequence of Willard's philosophical training. On the contrary, such a decision appears an intentional, purposeful characteristic of the values inherent to Willard's overall theological objective. He is working from an inherent critique of modern epistemological hubris he perceives to be active within the doctrinal-centric values and interest of modern systematicians. For instance the scope of *Renovation of the Heart* alone proves Willard's breadth of knowledge regarding the integrative necessity of spiritual formation to all aspects of theological inquiry. But when taken in context with the mass of journal, magazine articles, in combination with other book publications, Willard's theological horizon easily covers every corner of the western evangelical horizon, and much of modern Christendom as well.

<sup>53</sup> Gibbs and Bolger, 15. Eric Keck, *Pneumanaut: Demonstrate, Embody, Announce* (Montpelier, VT: Grease Monk's Garage, 2006) 14, 45. Richard W. Flory and Donald E. Miller, *Finding Faith: The Spiritual Quest of the Post-Boomer Generation* (Rutgers, NJ: Rutgers Press, 2008), 32. For the sake of space, this thesis provides no distinguishing comparative analysis of the above-mentioned theologians.

<sup>54</sup> Steven Porter, "The Willardian Corpus," *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* Vol. 3, no. 2 (Winter, 2010), 239-266.



Willardian theological inquiry which would validate the broadening perspective of Willard's work advocated by this author.<sup>55</sup> However, Porter also recognizes that typical theological publishers do not publish his works and he is often not featured in academic theological journals or conferences.<sup>56</sup> Also Willard's terminal degree is not in theology but philosophy. Further, Porter suggests that Willard does not offer the depth of detailed exegetical descriptions and his argumentation rarely engages other established theological scholars and their work.<sup>57</sup> Other reviews of Willard's work represented in the *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* essentially doubled the available scholarly interaction with Willard's work.<sup>58</sup> These scholars, each presenting very skillful and insightful reviews of significant aspects of Willard's work, also appear to recognize the potential of Willard's unique corrective on many aspects of modern evangelical theology. Yet, several reviewers, including some in the *Journal of Spiritual Formation*, limit their perspective of Willard's impact to the areas of discipleship and spiritual formation.

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Porter, 242. The majority of Willard's work comes in book form from popular publishers. However Willard has been published in several academic forums. See Dallas Willard, "Jesus the Logician," *Christian Scholar's Review* Vol. Vol. xxvii, no. 4 (1999), 605-614, "The Craftiness of Christ," in *Mel Gibson's 'Passion' and Philosophy: Challenges in the Trial, Conviction, and Crucifixion of Christ*, ed. Jorge Gracia, (Chicago: Open Court Publishers, 2004), "Beyond Moral Bewilderment : Where is Moral Knowledge?," *Provocations: A Journal from The Trinity Forum* Vol. February, (2007), "The Failure of Evangelical Political Involvement in the Area of Moral Transformation," in *God and Governing: Reflections on Ethics, Virtue and Statesmanship*, ed. Roger Overton, (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2009), 74-91, "Discipleship," in *The Oxford Handbook of Evangelical Theology*, ed. Gerald R McDermott, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 236-246, "Spiritual Disciplines, Spiritual Formation and the Restoration of the Soul," *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* Vol. 26, no. 1 (Spring, 1998), 101-109.

<sup>57</sup> This last point is not necessarily accurate. Willard does engage theologians and practitioners in his works, often quoting works that either support or conflict with his positions.

<sup>58</sup> Steven Porter, "The Willardian Corpus," *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* Vol. 3, no. 2 (Winter, 2010), 239-266. Though attempting to expand the reach of Willard's work the totality of the articles in the *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care's* focus on Willard's work may have actually perpetuated the "spiritual formation bias." With the exception of Porter's article, the majority of the other articles dealt with an investigation of some point of Willard's views on spiritual formation or practical applications thereof. This kind of engagement with Willard's work, although beneficial in its own right, may stand to further validate, not challenge, previous critiques. See John J. Turner, "In Search of Guidance: Developing a Conversational Relationship With God. A Review," *Encounter* Winter, 56, 1, (1995): 109-111. And Klaus Issler, "Review of Renovation of the Heart," *Christian Educators Journal* vol. 1, no. 3 (2004): 158-164.

Porter is accurate in suggesting Willard does not engage the established, on-going theological discussion nearly as prodigiously as is the established habit of professional theologians. Here Willard's pastoral theological approach is vastly different when compared to his more academic professional philosophical writing. Yet Porter also realizes the potential impact Willard's work could have if more broadly engaged by academic theologians. To this point, Porter recognizes many of the components of what would normally classify as a systematic theology are readily available across Willard's published work.<sup>59</sup> His corpus covers nearly all the significant points of doctrine pertinent to 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century evangelical theological inquiry.

However, a detailed investigation of Willard's corpus, which is summarized in this thesis and substantiated by Porter's article, suggests limiting Willard's theology to topical opinions on the subject of spiritual formation represents a significant oversight and naïve reduction. Certainly, Willard handles these subjects. However, the topic of spiritual formation is not the end, primary motive or drive behind Willard's theological examination. In the opinion of this author, Willard's corpus provides a fairly universal theological perspective. His writing and teaching seeks to provide a more rooted understanding of the nature and intent of the gospel of Jesus Christ as a fulfillment of the *Missio Dei* revealed throughout the entirety of Scripture and history. As such, Willard stands as a potential corrective or renewalist voice to American evangelical theological reflection in general and not simply one interested in the nuances or esoteric benefits of spiritual formation.

Yet a problem arises as to how a non-systematic, non-denominational theology is regarded by the overarching majority of systematic theologians in denominational

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<sup>59</sup> For instance his views of Christology, ecclesiology, sanctification, justification, the Trinity, humanity, eschatology, and bibliology are fairly clear and strait forward within his five monographs and many journal articles. Yet these views are often not delineated in a categorical, explicitly doctrinal or propositional manner.

institutions that dominate the theological academy. Certainly, a totalizing theological volume would be helpful and potentially aid in the wider acceptance, engagement and clarity of Willard's work. However, this author agrees with Porter's assessment that a theological treatise currently exists in the total of Willard's corpus, is comprehensive, discernable and increasingly accepted by those reconsidering evangelical theology and practice. Yet as of yet, no single analysis of Willard's theology has been accomplished.

Therefore for this thesis the sum total of Willard's theological work was accumulated and organized. The analysis provided of Willard's overarching perspective was compiled from both public and private resources that were referenced and cross-referenced in order to best clarify the subjects Willard engages.<sup>60</sup> Significantly, to organize and describe Willard's theological insights a considerable contribution of Dr. Willard's personal time and effort was spent in private discussions and written correspondences. His openness to discuss anything and everything "on-the-record" was of utmost importance to this project. His generosity, graciousness, patience, candor and cooperation allowed this author to present his views as accurately and completely as possible. These interviews probed the intellectual, philosophical, epistemological, ontological, psychological and theological frameworks Willard formed to support the conclusions presented in his publications.

Chapter 3 of this thesis represents the culmination of a complete examination of the entirety of Willard's theological corpus and the pertinent aspects of his philosophical work. The chapter does not present either a systematic theological treatment of Willard's theology nor a comparative analysis to other theologians. Instead this thesis offers an overarching

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<sup>60</sup> These resources included over 150 hours of conference lectures and DVD recordings, 58 hours of original classroom lectures and 27 hours of recorded personal interviews and private conversations. These means are used to supplement the written literature to compile the best, most detailed and holistic perspective possible of Willardian thought.

schema and organization of Willardian theology.<sup>61</sup> Consequently, chapter 3 is structured and limited by two priorities. First, precedence was given to those specific works that directly respond to or critique contemporary evangelical theology. Secondly, those topics most related to the development and explication of Willard's protoevangelical vision were prioritized. Unfortunately, this thesis is limited by space from presenting a complete review and comparison of Willard's entire theological corpus. This will be left to future efforts.<sup>62</sup>

### *Contributions to the Field*

Relatively few studies of evangelical groups dealing with similar issues have been published thus far.<sup>63</sup> Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger completed the first and most widely referenced study in their overarching summative review of the Emerging Church phenomenon and was instrumental in this research.<sup>64</sup> Additionally, two detailed studies of transitional evangelical congregations similar to those studied in this thesis are available. Margaret Poloma and Ralph Wood's 2008 publication of their four-year ethnographic study of an emerging Pentecostal congregation represents issues and contexts similar to those

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<sup>61</sup> This schema is described in Chapter 3, most specifically from pages 199-203 with a summary at the end of the chapter. Overall, 138 published and unpublished text were reviewed and thoroughly analyzed. This included many journal and magazine articles offered on Willard's website which have yet to be published and several speeches and papers unavailable on Willard's website but published on private web pages and podcasts. Additionally, Dr. Willard was kind enough to forward to this author many original articles, conference papers, speeches previously unpublished, unavailable or no longer in print.

<sup>62</sup> It is not that Willard has been or is now reticent to reveal or discuss these underlying infrastructures. In fact quite the opposite is true. Yet one senses Willard realizes the requirements and dedication essential to such an inquiry far exceed both the level of interest and devotion evidenced within the preponderance of contemporary Christian readers. Willard's profundity simply demands both a desire for knowledge and a personal discipline that exceed both what the masses are willing to invest and what other popular writers and theologians require of their readerships.

<sup>63</sup> Although there are few research studies of postevangelical groups or evangelical groups in transition, there are a few recent dissertations considering the ECM as a whole. See Johannes Jacobus Joubert, "A Pentecostal Theological Reflection on the Emerging Church Movement" PhD Dissertation, (University of Johannesburg: Johannesburg South Africa, 2010). Loyd Chia, "Emerging Faith Boundaries: Bridge-Building, Inclusion and the Emerging Church Movement in America" PhD Dissertation, (University of Missouri-Columbia: Columbia, MO., 2010) and Tony Jones, "The Church is Flat: The Relational Ecclesiology of the Emerging Church Movement" PhD Dissertation, (Princeton Theological Seminary: New Jersey, 2011).

<sup>64</sup> Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 49.

encountered in this research.<sup>65</sup> Also, Cory Labanow's ethnographic study of an emerging church in London was published in 2010.<sup>66</sup> Additionally, Tony Jones' recent PhD dissertation researches the relational ecclesiology of Jurgen Moltmann and its effect on eight Emerging church congregations.<sup>67</sup> With these noted exceptions, to date, very few other academic studies are available that provide in depth analysis of the transitional impetus, theology and praxis developing within specific evangelical organizations.

Therefore, at its conclusion, this thesis adds to the knowledge of its field by accomplishing three objectives. First, it offers a perspective on how Willard's protoevangelical theology emerged within the historical evolution of American evangelical theology. Secondly, the organization of Willard's theological corpus highlights key doctrines, offers an overarching hermeneutical lens through which Willardian theology can best be understood, and describes Willard's adaptation or correction of key evangelical doctrines. Finally, the ethnographic research of four evangelical groups, two parachurch (Re:Imagine and ACCD) and two congregational groups (Holy Trinity and Oak Hills) presents insights into how postevangelicals are currently adapting and informing existing evangelical theology and praxis with Willard's protoevangelical vision.

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<sup>65</sup> Margaret M. Poloma and Ralph W. Hood, *Blood and Fire : Godly Love in a Pentecostal Emerging Church*, (New York: New York University Press, 2008).

<sup>66</sup> Cory E Labanow, *Evangelicalism and the Emerging Church: A Congregational Study of a Vineyard Church* (London: Ashgate Publishing, 2009).

<sup>67</sup> Jones' discussion of the history of the ECM and its theological impetus proved very helpful and enlightening. However, his research of the congregations is not ethnographic. It is centered more on both theoretical and quantitative research from interviews of Emerging church leaders and participants. However, Jones' unique status as one of the founders of the ECM places him with his own valuable perspective on the history and polity of the ECM. Jones more popular writings were also very helpful in capturing the ECM ethos. Tony Jones, *The Church is Flat: The Relational Ecclesiology of the Emerging Church Movement* (Minneapolis, MN: Anthony Hawthorne Jones/Kindle Edition, 2011),

*Summary*

In conclusion, three points of clarification as to the overarching objective of this research are in order. First, this thesis focuses primarily on describing Willardian theology and the four specific groups applying his protoevangelical vision in their unique circumstances. Therefore only a limited amount of critique and analysis is provided. Additionally, only a partial engagement into the epistemological concepts within philosophical realism and postmodern constructivism are presented. Instead, this thesis seeks to depict how Willard, the four research groups, and specifically their leaders, understand, conceptualize and communicate these issues and ideas within their specific contexts. Where appropriate, some deeper analysis and explanation of the topics under consideration is required for the sake of clarity and description. The concluding chapter offers some analysis, critique, overarching perspectives, and suggestions regarding the current hurdles postevangelicals face in their pursuit of a more vibrant Christian expression and possible ways Willardian theology may be applied to good effect.

Secondly, it is important to note, and Dr. Willard certainly concurs, many, many other crucial voices, working in concert, have combined to effect what this thesis seeks to describe. That this thesis focuses most exclusively on Dr. Willard should in no way be construed as an attempt to ignore or diminish the contribution of the broader community of which he is but one essential member. In many substantial ways, Willard's influence stands on the shoulders of innumerable others.

Finally, in the opinion of this researcher, the subjects this thesis pursues are of paramount importance to contemporary forms of Christianity in America. The impact and influence of evangelicalism is wide spread and has been well established. The vital socio-politico-religious connection to American history and culture will be more deeply pursued

in subsequent chapters. Hence, a vibrant and integrous Christian faith that exemplifies and manifests the good news of God's availability, love and grace carries potential benefits that simply are too momentous to ignore. The fact that increasing numbers of Americans and Christians alike no longer sense the inherent goodness in the evangelical news is therefore a dilemma worthy of pursuit. Perhaps growing but influential minorities of evangelicals are beginning to suggest change is not only needed but essential to recapture any resemblance of an authentic Christian expression within evangelical forms of faith. This conflict, its nature, implications and its characters represent the broader arena wherein this thesis is posited. It is to the depth and breadth of a specific strand of this changing tapestry of American evangelicalism that we now turn.

# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**



For a research project to be both meaningful and effective a valid methodological means must undergird and direct said research in a consistent and rigorous manner. At its core, this particular study is a theological pursuit. However, the manifold demands of this thesis require the application of multiple methodological approaches and therefore an interdisciplinary approach to its subject was employed.<sup>68</sup> Therefore this thesis is an exercise in practical theology, with an ethnographic dimension, which produces both qualitative and quantitative data for analysis, combined with an intellectual historiography. This multi-disciplinary approach triangulates the topic under investigation to provide the essential elements necessary to best understand the unique subjects and contexts within which Willardian theology has developed and is applied. This chapter will provide justification for the employment of each methodology in light of the specific requirements of this research. First, a brief description of each methodological field will be provided. This will be followed by an explanation for its particular use within this thesis. A summary will discuss how these methodologies work together to benefit the overall project and seek to guard against the shortcomings of similar works.

### ***Practical Theology***

As a comparatively new field of academic inquiry the history of practical theology reveals an ongoing evolution and debate regarding the goals and objectives of the discipline. This section articulate which specific school of practical theological thought informs and was applied to this thesis. Finally, this section describes how a practical

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<sup>68</sup> A justification for multiple methodological means and a blending of both qualitative and quantitative research can be found in R. Murray Thomas, *Blending Qualitative & Quantitative Research Methods in Theses and Dissertations* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Corwin Press, 2003), and Scott W. VanderStoep and Deirdre D. Johnston, *Research Methods for Everyday Life : Blending Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*, (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2009).

theological methodology is well suited for enabling this thesis to understanding its subjects, meet the demands of its questions and accomplish its unique objectives.

*Edward Farley and Theologia Habitus*

Although the discipline of practical theology does not have as long or perhaps as illustrious an academic pedigree as other forms of scholarly theological pursuits, the concept that theology could and should be considered for practical purposes and appropriately applied to real states of human affairs is not a new concept.<sup>69</sup> Perhaps the best contemporary description of the historical conception that theological query should, at its end, result in a practical application is detailed in Edward Farley's *Theologia*.<sup>70</sup> Farley provides an illustrious account of the ongoing, historical connection between theology as an interlocking, symbiotic theoretical and practical discipline. Farley argues practical theology as practised in the academy is a rather new endeavor. Yet the pursuits of the concepts inherent in the practical theological discipline have a long and memorable history in the Christian Church.

Integral to Farley's argument are pre-Enlightenment theologians who judged the success of their theological quests by their commensurate ability to be intimately affected by the truths inherent to their subject.<sup>71</sup> Hence, for early Christian theologians, the single end of theological inquiry was the appropriate application of theological principles and realities into their personal and communal lives. Farley argues the presupposition that

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<sup>69</sup> DB Forrester, "Can Theology be Practical?," in *Practical Theology : International Perspectives*, ed. Friedrich. Schweitzer and J. A. van der Ven, (Frankfurt am Main ; New York: P. Lang, 1999),16.

<sup>70</sup> Edward Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1983),

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, 44. 130. For Farley, the ancient and classical concepts of *theologia*, *habitus*, *arête* and *paideia* speak more of virtuous transformation and illumination of the wisdom and ways of God within the entirety of the individual, which specifically and inescapably includes the communities they populate. He contends these virtuous acculturations remain far beyond the scope and intent of the modern, scientifically disciplined theological pursuits of the contemporary academy.

theological inquiry should directly influence the student reveals an epistemological and ontological assumption that Christianity contained a valid and discernable body of knowledge. This body of knowledge was gained not only through intellectual pursuits but also through the application of spiritual activities or disciplines such as fasting, celibacy, silence and solitude, study, prayer, liturgy, and communal living. As such, confronting this body of knowledge carried with it a commensurate responsibility to adapt one life to the realities it represents.

Farley defines this posture of theological pursuit as *theologia habitus* and suggests it represents the preferred manner in which theological reflection and investigation should be engaged. He clearly laments the demise of *theologia habitus* in the modern theological academy and suggests far-ranging consequences resulting from its retreat. Further, Farley proposes the discipline of contemporary practical theology can and should resuscitate the interactive blend of both theory and experience originally found in the *theologia habitus* ethos. He asserts such a refocus will positively affect both the knowledge and experience of theological inquiry as a contemporary academic discipline.

Other theologians such as J. W. Fowler and Thomas Ogletree both echo Farley's historical perspective on practical theological inquiry and his hope for a renewed perspective and direction for practical theological pursuits as a contemplative and transformative exercise.<sup>72</sup> Specifically, Fowler suggests Farley's advocacy of *theologia habitus* would represent a return to the holistic theological perspective presented throughout the New Testament epistles and the history of the early Church.<sup>73</sup> Fowler notes

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<sup>72</sup> Thomas Ogletree, "Christian Social Ethics as a Theological Discipline," in *Shifting Boundaries : Contextual Approaches to the Structure of Theological Education*, ed. Barbara G. Wheeler and Edward Farley, (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991),201.

<sup>73</sup> J. W. Fowler, "Practical Theology and the Social Sciences," in *Practical Theology : International Perspectives*, ed. Friedrich. Schweitzer and J. A. van der Ven, (Frankfurt am Main ; New York: P. Lang, 1999), 78.

the post-Enlightenment focus on dogma, and the scientific or systematic theologies developed and enriched by the Renaissance and the Reformers stands in contrast to both first century theological reflections as well as to early Augustinian perspectives.<sup>74</sup>

Theologian Ray Anderson, picking up Fowler's argument, suggests early Church leaders attempted to do more than create theology or theologize. Instead Anderson suggests theologians such as the apostle Paul and St. Augustine endeavored to incarnate Christ's teaching regarding the reality of the Kingdom of God as a distinctly practical matter.<sup>75</sup>

The nature of this thesis as an investigation into the transformative effects of Willardian theology onto and within contemporary forms of evangelicalism places its impetus directly within Farley's *theologia habitus* conceptualization. In no uncertain terms, Willard places his own work as an exercise in practical theology and assumes the same affect of *theologia habitus* should appropriately proceed from engaging with the reasons associated with God (theo-logia). He posits all theological pursuits equally include the philosophical, historical, social, as well as theoretical or doctrinal. Yet like Farley and Fowler, Willard emphasized the personal transformational aspect of theological inquiry as the ultimate objective above all other potential outcomes. He writes,

Theology is a stuffy word, but it should be an everyday one. That's what practical theology does. It makes theology a practical part of life. A theology is only a way of thinking about and understanding—or misunderstanding—God. Practical theology studies the manner in which our actions interact with God to accomplish his ends in human life. So everyone has a practical theology, even if it is only the purely negative one of the atheist. And everyone's practical theology vitally affects the course of his or her life. We have some measure of choice in what that theology will be in our own individual case, but we will certainly have a theology. An a thoughtless theology or uninformed theology grips and guides our life with just as great a force as does a thoughtful and informed one. Our practical

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<sup>74</sup> See this analysis of Farley by Ray S. Anderson, *The shape of practical theology : empowering ministry with theological praxis* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 30.

<sup>75</sup> Ray S. Anderson, *Theological Foundations for Ministry : Selected Readings for a Theology of the Church in Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI.: T. & T. Clark Eerdmans, 1979), 279-290, 783.

theology then has the task of answering the questions about how one goes about growing spiritually. And if it is successful, it will resolve for us the dilemma we've discussed.<sup>76</sup>

Yet agreement between Willard, Farley, Fowler, Anderson and Ogletree extends beyond a common understanding of classic *theologia*. Each suggests the practical, personal nature of theological pursuit has nearly disappeared in the modern theological academy as both the means and ends of Christian scholarship. Generally speaking, they view *theologia habitus* as having been gradually superseded by an empirically centered, research oriented and systematically minded approach to theology that tends to value the projection of objective distance and description of religious phenomena over engagement and experience. Willard also supports the school of thought surrounding Farley, Fowler, Anderson, and Ogletree and argues the tendency to intellectualize and standardize theological pursuit has reduced the level of affective knowledge that is both applicable and transformational. As a result Willard laments the inability for theologians to demonstrate competence in their field beyond the satisfaction of purely academic measurements.

This author agrees that such approaches to reduce theological inquiry to either doctrinal clarifications or objective descriptions of socio-religious events or phenomena tend to minimize, and can effectively eliminate, learner response, affect and the internalization of the very knowledge originally sought. Therefore, Farley and Fowler's, et. al. desire to recapture *theologia habitus* is a central tenet to this thesis. This research endeavors to assist those ecclesial environs seeking a new path towards a more authentic and affective personal and communal result from theological inquiry. Therefore, there is a three fold synergistic connection between the overarching goals of this research, combined with Farley's rationale for the benefits of *theologia habitus* as a reasonable academic

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<sup>76</sup> Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1991), 14.

objective, and Willard's goal of presenting the vision and means for a more authentic and holistic evangelical faith.

However, a practical theology centered mainly on a pragmatic focus is not without its potential pitfalls. The history of practical theology reveals a continuing tendency to focus too intently on ministerial activities that has maintained a protracted bifurcation within theological education. The lack of appreciation and equal consideration given to both praxis and theory, or the over emphasis and preference of one to the detriment of the other, reveals the enduring tension still evidenced within practical theological work.<sup>77</sup> Many contemporary theological institutions have developed specific degree programs that accentuate practice over theory and intentionally delimit their view of practical theology to the realm of applied skills for pastoral ministry.<sup>78</sup> These skills include the sub-disciplines of homiletics, liturgy, worship, counseling, spiritual formation, etc. Ideally each of these skills remains part and parcel of the profession of the pastorate.<sup>79</sup> The current preference

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<sup>77</sup> The definition of praxis is presented on page 48.

<sup>78</sup> These schools of thought are described well by Allan Hugh. Cole, *From Midterms to Ministry : Practical Theologians on Pastoral Beginnings* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2008), Seward Hiltner, *Preface to pastoral theology*. (New York: Abingdon Press, 1958), Thomas C. Oden, *Pastoral theology : essentials of ministry*, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982), 6-18. Eduard Thurneysen, *A theology of pastoral care*, 1st English ed., (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1962),

<sup>79</sup> Farley notes how Friedrich Schleiermacher attempted to revive the *theologia* ethos by placing practical theology at the head of two other fields of theological inquiry, namely historical and philosophical theology. Farley opines Schleiermacher's intent was to conjoin the historical and philosophical influences of theological inquiry into an "applied theology." Schleiermacher hoped to develop a theological methodology that was as experiential as it was historical and intellectual. Farley sees this as Schleiermacher's attempt to save theology from the same marginalization Enlightenment epistemology brought to the European university system of his day. Unfortunately Schleiermacher's "anti-Enlightenment" understanding of theology worked to develop a pedagogy and curriculum specifically tailored to ministerial clergy and the production of competent professionals to serve the then growing religious European society. Hence a form of "pastoral theology" rose in popularity. This overly pragmatic focus in pastoral theology tended to limit theological inquiry to the pursuit of means and forms of instruction necessary to developing specific skills required in the "trade" of ministerial services. This overemphasis on managerial skills required to effectively run ecclesiastical organizations marginalized Schleiermacher's original vision of a triangulation of theology into historical, philosophical and practical inquiries. Critics of this shift in the field of practical theology suggest a lingering effect remains in contemporary forms of practical theology evidenced in the myopic focus on the day-to-day activities of the ministerial professions in many seminaries and graduate schools. Such overt pragmatism, Farley and Fowler suggest, is detrimental to building foundational intellectual capabilities and historical rootedness in theological pursuits. See Edward Farley, *Practicing Gospel : unconventional thoughts on the church's ministry*, 1st ed. (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 19-23. Ibid. Also James W.

given to what is often termed ‘skills training’ over theoretical knowledge in many seminary educations today represents a continuing resistance to the development of a mutually informed relationship between praxis and theory. The pursuit of ministerial “tools,” and their skills, as valuable and essential as they are in and of themselves, do not represent the focus of this thesis nor illustrate the school of thought that undergirds the primary focus of practical theological inquiry represented by Willard, Farley, Fowler, et. al.

In the same way, this thesis employs Farley, Fowler, Anderson, and Willard's descriptions of the nature and objective of practical theology as an endeavor seeking to discover and develop both theory and praxis behind theological efforts. Therefore this thesis is guided by a definition of the practical theology discipline as those theological pursuits which equally value and conjoin the processes of theoretical theological investigation and reflection, create opportunities for discovery, learning, experience, transformation and adaptation which allow for a more vibrant personal and communal ecclesial life. Combined, praxis and theory are mutually beneficial and codependent features of one holistic practical theological pursuit. This definition matches both Willard's conception of the objective of practical theology and the ideological foundation behind Farley's *theologia habitus*, with the historical depiction Anderson and Fowler represent of the ancient Church.

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Fowler, “Practical Theology and Theological Education: Some Models and Questions,” *Theology Today* Vol. 42, 1, (April, 1985). Ibid. Also James W. Fowler, “Practical Theology and Theological Education: Some Models and Questions,” *Theology Today* Vol. 42, 1, (April, 1985). Erwin Fahlbusch and Geoffrey William Bromiley, *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Brill, 1999), 83-88. Edward Farley, “Theology and Practice Outside the Clerical Paradigm,” in *Practical Theology: The Emerging Field in Theology, Church, and World*, ed. DS Browning and JE Burkhart, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983), 21-42.

*David Tracy-Contextualization*

Adding to the scope of the practical theological pursuit in this thesis is the perspective of practical theologian David Tracy. Adding to the definition stated above, Tracy highlights the reestablishment of a more intellectually robust, codependent, interactive relationship between the practices of religion and the history, theology and philosophy from which an intellectual environment proceeds.<sup>80</sup> Tracy contends all Christian theology and practice is both historical and contextualized.<sup>81</sup> Therefore practical theologians must endeavor to understand where and how Christians gather understandings of their theology and to what degree these current and historic influences form contemporary praxis.

Tracy's argument that theology, if embedded in particular cultures, carries specific and unique philosophical ideologies, historical hermeneutics and experiences passed down from previous generations becomes essential in understanding the entire setting of this research. Tracy's specific emphasis on the degrees of contextualization embedded in the arenas of practical theological research provides this thesis an important platform to investigate and critique the shared, symbiotic mix of both the historical interpretations of evangelical theology and the effect these conceptualizations contribute to the praxis of ongoing, evolving activities and interpretations of activities in contemporary settings where Willardian theology is applied.<sup>82</sup> Tracy's emphasis on contextualization requires a

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<sup>80</sup> David Tracy, "Foundations of Practical Theology," in *Practical Theology: The Emerging Field in Theology, Church, and World*, ed. DS Browning and JE Burkhart, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983),

<sup>81</sup> This is a common thread in Tracy's work. See David Tracy, "Revisionist Practical Theology and the Meaning of Public Discourse," *Pastoral Psychology* Vol. (Winter 1977), 83-94, and *The Analogical Imagination : Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 69ff.

<sup>82</sup> Methodologically, Tracy separates theology into three sub-disciplines; fundamental theology, systematic theology and practical theology. Of practical theology Tracy expects a mutually critical correlation that connects the historical realities of fundamental theology with the theory of systematic theology to understand the resulting praxis in contemporary religious contexts. David. Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order : The New Pluralism in Theology : With a New Preface* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 251-



consideration of the ongoing evangelical theology currently embedded in American culture and secondly, the historical development of this theology. Therefore Tracy's appreciation for historicity further justifies the use of the historiography of evangelicalism in this thesis.

As mentioned in the introduction both the ECM and postevangelical sentiments encountered in the literature reveals a significant amount of dialog regarding questions, concerns, and protests against mainstream or "traditional" forms of evangelical theology and praxis. Building upon Tracy's prioritization of context, practical theologians Lewis Mudge, James Poling and Don Browning suggest practical theology should specifically track the history and progression of belief, tradition, ideology and action, from origin to experience.<sup>83</sup> They argue special attention should also focus on the interplay and dialog found in the questions, concerns and protests inherent to theological or religious contexts. Each of these points of interest creates its own subjectival arena within practical theological inquiry and reflection. When combined and connected to a specific theological context or situation, practical theology should describe the foundations from which theological praxis is established and understood. Likewise this thesis wades into the current evangelical context of America at a time when significant time-honored beliefs and traditions in American evangelicalism are being questioned and reconsidered by a growing constituency. Therefore Mudge, Poling and Browning suggest practical theological

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252ff. Also Heitink, 118. David Tracy, "Foundations of Practical Theology," in *Practical Theology: The Emerging Field in Theology, Church, and World*, ed. DS Browning and JE Burkhart, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983), 62-76. See Gerben Heitink's synopsis of Tracy's theology in *Practical theology : history, theory, action domains : manual for practical theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 1999), 118 Also supporting Tracy's theory is Richard Robert Osmer, *Practical theology : an introduction* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2008), 165-166.

<sup>83</sup> Key text here are Lewis Seymour Mudge and James N. Poling, *Formation and reflection : the promise of practical theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), DS Browning and JE Burkhart, *Practical theology: the emerging field in theology, church, and world* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983), James Woodward, Stephen. Pattison, and John Patton, *The Blackwell reader in pastoral and practical theology* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), John Swinton, *From bedlam to shalom : towards a practical theology of human nature, interpersonal relationships, and mental health care* (New York: P. Lang, 2000),

research such as that pursued in this thesis is beneficial toward cataloging the development and impetus of these movements.

Finally, Tracy's approach values both "hermeneutics and transformation" as key concepts that elevate practical theology beyond the "clericism" advocated by pastoral theology.<sup>84</sup> Hence Tracy develops something of a phenomenological approach to ecclesiological contexts since the degree of influence of one of the three sub-categories of theological development can necessitate multiple means of inquiry. This is a key and consistent component that resonates throughout both the historiography, the description of Willardian theology and the ethnographic research presented in this thesis. Applying Tracy's perspective provides a means to better understand how and why Willardian theology is being applied within the changing milieu of American evangelical contexts.

An example in this thesis is found in the use of "postmodern" versus modern hermeneutics. The concept of postmodernism presents a significant modification to previous interpretative models used by conservative evangelicals.<sup>85</sup> Tracy's valuing of the historical prioritizes understanding how this "shift" from the modern to the postmodern hermeneutics and/or epistemology is conceived and communicated, its role in the intellectual environment of American evangelicalism and the value of Willard's specific response to the same.

Since Willardian theology has received very little scholarly attention, it is important to describe the foundations from which Willard's theology is built in order to adequately describe the resulting praxis found in the organizations intending to apply his perspectives.<sup>86</sup> The ethnographic research of the four groups and their leaders describes and

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<sup>84</sup> James W. Fowler, *Faith development and pastoral care* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 42.

<sup>85</sup> This is discussed at length in the Chapter two pages 144-154.

<sup>86</sup> This is accomplished in Chapter 3.

provides important insight into the traditions, beliefs, ideologies and activities around which each organization is formed.<sup>87</sup> Additionally, how Willard's vision of the Kingdom of God is uniquely interpreted and applied presents another key factor in what Tracy, Browning, Poling et. al. argue is paramount to a practical theological exercise. However, simply assuming Willard is accurate in describing his theological approach as a practical theological endeavor leaves open the possibility of this thesis creating what amounts to a self-fulfilling prophecy. The question of whether Willardian theology actually provides a platform for the type of *theologia habitus* Farley describes was a significant query pursued in the ethnography interviews. As the ethnographic research suggests, Willard has in fact provided a theological foundation from which *theologia habitus* praxis can be both understood and applied.

*John Swinton & Don Browning-Ecclesial Reform*

Practical theologian John Swinton perhaps best defines the final objective of this thesis as a practical theological inquiry. Swinton argues practical theology works in conjunction with theological understanding to illuminate the ultimate goal of edification of the church catholic. Swinton states that theological praxis is discovered in “a dynamic human process of critical reflection carried out by the church community.”<sup>88</sup> Theologians Paul Ballard and John Pritchard pick up this theme stating that practical theology,

...must take on the characteristics of theology as such. It too is descriptive, normative, critical and apologetical activity. It is the means whereby the day to day life of the church in all its dimensions is scrutinized in the light of the gospel and related to the demands and challenges of the present day in a dialogue that both shapes Christian practice and influences the world,

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<sup>87</sup> The ethnographic methodology is described on pages 53-66. The entire ethnographic research is in Chapter 4.

<sup>88</sup> John Swinton, *From bedlam to shalom : towards a practical theology of human nature, interpersonal relationships, and mental health care* (New York: P. Lang, 2000), 12.

however minimally.<sup>89</sup>

On this point Browning asserts every practice, most certainly those religious in nature, have theories or ideologies that support and sustain them.<sup>90</sup> Thus this thesis sees practical theological inquiry as a means to discern the consequential aftereffects of theories colliding with practice, finding the constructed meanings and interpretations developed within changing religious environments and bringing both a reflective and critical perspective to bear.<sup>91</sup> The objective is to achieve Browning's concept of the practical theologian as one "alongside and with the Church mediating the gospel from the center."<sup>92</sup>

Using Browning's perspective, this research reflects on what the Church pursues, values, and rejects in light of, or against, the backdrop of the religious narrative or cultural ethic undergirding the entire enterprise. The situations encountered in the four ethnographies create a means to understand current interpretive paradigms, experiences and historical consciousness within each community's memory. This thesis accepts Browning and Swinton's objective for the practical theologian to assist in mediating these contexts by first explaining then correcting and enlightening the Church catholic on its own progress.<sup>93</sup> Swinton states this objective most clearly in suggesting the goal of practical theology serves as "the reflective process which the Church pursues in its efforts to articulate the theological grounds of practical living in a variety of areas such as work, sexuality,

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<sup>89</sup> Paul Ballard and John Pritchard, *Practical theology in action: Christian thinking in the service of church and society* (London: SPCK, 1996), 12.

<sup>90</sup> D. S. Browning, *A fundamental practical theology: descriptive and strategic proposals* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 6.

<sup>91</sup> Ogletree makes these points expressly in his chapter, "Dimensions of Practical Theology," in *Practical Theology: The Emerging Field in Theology, Church, and World*, ed. DS Browning and JE Burkhart, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983), 85.

<sup>92</sup> Ray S. Anderson, *The shape of practical theology: empowering ministry with theological praxis* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 26

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

marriage, youth, aging and death.”<sup>94</sup> Again, Swinton’s words also describe Willard’s underlying objective. He seeks to resurrect the practical nature of implementing the theological theory into the fabric of daily life and character. Thus the dynamic, situated interaction between theory and praxis becomes the separating distinctive between a limited “pastoral” approach to practical theology and the more intensive formal focus advocated and applied to this thesis.

### *Application*

Cory Labanow, a student of Swinton and the first to publish a complete ethnography of a postevangelical, emerging church in the United Kingdom, also suggests practical theology places a significant requirement on understanding praxis informed by theory.<sup>95</sup> Labanow amends Farley, Tracy and Swinton’s perspectives and defines the aim of practical theology in terms of investigating the,

... tangible, contemporary situations in all their complexity and richness as a necessary prerequisite to the practical theological task. Practical theology begins with and arises from situations, looks to appropriate Christian resources, in formulating responses demanded by those situations, and then returns to the local situation with a view to faithful and effective praxis.<sup>96</sup>

Labanow finishes his definition by suggesting any beneficial critique of a current praxis must be set against the traditions or history that came before in order to properly establish context. This act is paramount since neither the contemporary or the historical “is invincible or without need of the counterpart.”<sup>97</sup> Therefore the works and perspectives of Swinton, Tracy, Labanow, Farley, Fowler, Browning, et. al. form the foundation for practical

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<sup>94</sup> Swinton, *From bedlam to shalom*, 2000.

<sup>95</sup> Also see Cory E Labanow, *Evangelicalism and the Emerging Church: A Congregational Study of a Vineyard Church* (London: Ashgate Publishing, 2009), 15.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.* 20.

<sup>97</sup> This, Labanow suggests represents Gadamer’s understanding of the “effective history.” See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, 2nd, rev. ed. (New York: Continuum, 2004), 198, 300-306.

theological reflection which guide and direct the methodological framework for researching Willardian theology and its current application in contemporary contexts.

As mentioned in the introduction, this thesis seeks as its objective to discern both what Willard's theology describes, how it is applied in contemporary contexts where it is applied and to what effect. To this point, the contemporary status of American evangelicalism, its ecclesiology, and Willard's theological response can each be considered what Farley defines as a theological "situation." Farley argues

A situation is a way various items, powers and events in the environment gather together so as to require response from participants. In this sense, any living, and perhaps actual, entity exists in situations. Situations like reality itself are never static. Living beings we might say live in their environments (contexts) in continuing responses to ever-changing, ever forming situations. . . . it is also a concentration of powers which impinge upon us as individual agents or as communicates. Thus the situation places demands on us.<sup>98</sup>

In other words, Farley suggests an essential goal of a practical theological inquiry is to wade into such situations and pursue a more clear understanding of how and why circumstances have come together which formed either a theological theory, praxis or both.

As such, to investigate the impact or effect of Willardian theology on the situation of American evangelicalism Farley offers a four-step practical theological methodology.<sup>99</sup> First, the research must seek to discover and classify the distinctive yet often hidden or unconscious components of a situation that lie below the surface.<sup>100</sup> Second, a historiography must commence to illuminate the past decisions, traditions, institutions and customs in terms of their effect on the present.<sup>101</sup> Again, Farley notes much of these historic

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<sup>98</sup> Edward Farley, "Interpreting Situations: An Inquiry Into the Nature of Practical Theology," in *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology*, ed. James Woodward and Stephen. Pattison, (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 118-127.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

formations in groups lie under the surface but remain a significant part of the corporate memory which is often appealed to when change is advocated or institutional structures are threatened. Therefore capturing how these historical perceptions and attitudes are constituted and manifested in groups is essential to understanding the current context. Third, the contemporary context or situation must be “located” or revealed in relation to its position within a wider sea of situations, circumstances, beliefs and events whose impacts represent varying degrees of influence.<sup>102</sup> Farley argues that consideration of the intersituational condition of a particular situation must be pursued in order to recognize both the internal and external factors and the roles each plays within the research setting. Finally, the fourth stage is the centre of theological reflection. Here human conceptions of God “shape the demands of the situation according to their idolatries, their self interests, their ethnocentrism, and their participations in structures of power.”<sup>103</sup> Farley argues faith and theology acts as an interpretive lens through which situations are interpreted and responses formed. The discernment of the theological ideas at play in situations lies at the heart of his practical theological inquiry. Finally, Farley suggests practical theological reflection and research of situations should seek to consider the possible ways Christian faith can offer assistance, clarity or wisdom where appropriate.

The application of Farley’s four-step practical theological process for theological interpretation of situations, (situational identification, historiography, contextualization and theological reflection) allows this thesis to demonstrate how the current evangelical “situation” is perceived by each of the four organizations studied through the application of

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

an ethnographic methodology.<sup>104</sup> Further, Farley's model values understanding the unique impact Willard's theology has made on the intersituational contexts within each of the four organizations and what similarities and differences might be discovered.

To best apply Farley's methodology, the ethnographic research of each group enabled the description of the key issues working "under the surface" which eventuated in the application of Willard's protoevangelical vision. To organize Farley's rough methodological outline for situational analysis and contextualization, Nancy Ammerman's congregational frameworks were used in collecting and analyzing the ethnographic data to best "classify" the confluence of history, current contexts and theological effects of Willardian theology on each group.<sup>105</sup> Ammerman adapted Lee Bolman and Terrence Deal's framing methodology for organizational studies in order to develop lenses from which to process, organize and understand key components at work in religious groups.<sup>106</sup> Frames are defined simply as a tool from which research observations are accumulated and classified.

Ammerman's frames and ethnographic research methods coupled with Farley's practical theological model for analyzing situations work together to arrive at Farley's final stage of theological reflection to present an understanding and description of specific contexts where theological evolution is occurring within particularized groups of American

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<sup>104</sup> Labanow also applied an adaptation of Farley's methodology in his ethnographic study as well. Labanow starts with describing the Ecclesial Praxis, moves to Situational Analysis, then Theological Reflection, and finally Response. The Response creates a new or adapted Ecclesial Praxis which then renews the cyclical process. See Cory E Labanow, "The Challenges of Reconstruction: A Congregational Study of an Emerging Church" Ph.D Dissertation, (University of Aberdeen: Aberdeen, UK, September, 2011), 40.

<sup>105</sup> Nancy T. Ammerman, Jackson Carroll, Carl Dudley, William McKinney, *Studying Congregations : A New Handbook* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998). Ammerman's frames are discussed in greater detail on page 59-60.

<sup>106</sup> The concept of framing was introduced to congregational studies by Lee Bolman and Terrance Deal *Reframing Organizations : Artistry, Choice, and Leadership*, 4th ed. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 15-16. See also Nancy T. Ammerman, Jackson Carroll, Carl Dudley, William McKinney, *Studying Congregations : A New Handbook* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), 14-16.



evangelicals. The concluding chapter considers how Willardian theology has affected the current situation in each group studied and offers possible insights into what role Willardian theology might play in effecting the theology and praxis of other evangelical organizations with likeminded goals or in similar situations.<sup>107</sup> As a result this research places significant impetus on discovering both the practical theology and praxis advocated in Willardian theology and the manifestation and interpretation of said praxis in each of the subject organization. It is to the definition of praxis where we will now turn.

### *Discovering Theological Praxis*

Thus far, this section has focused on the foundations, clarifications and contemporary definitions of practical theology and its relevance to this thesis. It has also provided a survey of the literature to justify the application of a practical theological methodology. What this survey reveals is a heightened value and interest in the concept of praxis in theological reflection and analysis. Furthermore, as discussed above, Willardian theology strongly advocates for the integration of intellectual rigor with appropriate action or response. Therefore clearly defining the concept of praxis is both as crucial for Willardian theology as it is to the practical theological method applied to this project.

Fowler describes praxis as “the ways in which a community does its business” or perhaps less colloquially stated, the patterns that constitute group normalcy.<sup>108</sup> This understanding of praxis offers both a present utilitarian benefit along with a transformational hope for the future. Additionally, Fowler suggests a community’s praxis

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<sup>107</sup> Fortunately, this thesis benefits from Labanow’s recent dissertation project. Labanow’s research is an applied example of Farley’s methodology described above. Labanow also references Tracy’s theoretical model of “mutually critical” theological reflection as well, seeking to match the questions raised in specific theological context with deference to the situations from which they arise. Labanow combines these two perspectives in his ethnographic study. The contextual similarities of Labanow’s “Jacobsville Vineyard” congregation are significantly similar to those of the four groups studied in this thesis. Jacobsville Vineyard church is a synonym, as are all the personal names of interviewees in Labanow’s study.

<sup>108</sup> James W. Fowler, *Faith Development and Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 16.

conveys its activities and directed efforts toward transforming communal life and the increased levels of effectiveness in the attainments of its goals and objectives. Fowler describes this goal as the pursuit of greater degrees of alignment or faithfulness toward “its master story and vision.”<sup>109</sup> Praxis is then the observable “actions expressed from beliefs.”<sup>110</sup>

Theologian Robert Schreiter echoes Fowler’s definition in describing praxis. Yet Schreiter recognizes praxis can be seen to have dual meanings in some practical theological settings. First, Schreiter supports a definition of praxis that carries the combination of theory and practice, positing that all practice is theory laden.<sup>111</sup> He argues that every practice has behind it a theoretical justification that informs and guides the activity. Therefore praxis in this sense is understood as ideology in action. The second meaning often assigned to praxis can simply connote a synonymous definition to “practice.”<sup>112</sup> It is the former definition that will be applied in this thesis. The final goal of this research is to uncover what theories and beliefs lie under or within Willardian theology that cause or elicit distinct actions (praxis) in the organizations studied in the ethnographies.

Similarly, Swinton suggests the role of praxis in a practical theological inquiry and research should specifically pursue understanding the expressed actions and beliefs evidenced in Christian communities or ecclesial organizations. Labanow applies Swinton’s perspective and appropriately adapts his definition of practical theology to highlight the notion of improving ecclesial praxis. Swinton and Labanow agree the major thrust of

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> This is also a synopsis of Labanow’s definition which is informed from Fowler, Swinton, Forrester, Browning and Tracy as noted earlier.

<sup>111</sup> Robert Schreiter, “Theology in the Congregation: Discovering and Doing,” in *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook*, ed. Nancy T. Ammerman and others, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), 39ff.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

practical theological inquiry should give guidance to the communities of faith it studies in order to better assist missional alignment and resourcing of the Christian tradition to positively influence the larger context of contemporary society.<sup>113</sup> Similarly Willard's theology equally desires to assist individuals and ecclesiological organizations to better understand, consider and reform, where appropriate, the underlying beliefs that fund or direct current practices and activities. Additionally, a praxis-centric focus is found as a stated goal and within each of the four subject organizations researched in this thesis.<sup>114</sup> Therefore a methodology to uncover what degree of alignment or incongruence exists in current praxis objectives is an appropriate pursuit and key to the objectives of this thesis.

To accomplish the task of praxis discovery in this thesis the four stages of Farley's situational analysis discussed earlier will be used to form a model of tracking the four stages of praxis development. Labanow describes praxis construction as beginning with analysis of each situational context, moves to theological reflection, then to an analysis of the response to both. As a reaction to analysis and reflection praxis is formed. This will by definition alter the previously understood analysis of the current situation. The process becomes a cycle in the renewed act of evaluating and analyzing the newly instituted praxis. Labanow's research uses this adaptation of Farley's model to good effect.<sup>115</sup>

This cycle of praxis development was used as a template for creating the standardized interview questionnaire conducted in the ethnographic research and for ad hoc follow-up interviews with several of the key leaders of each subject groups.<sup>116</sup> Additionally, multiple conversations with Willard regarding his works were guided by

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<sup>113</sup> Labanow, 24.

<sup>114</sup> The mission/values statements of the four organizations can be found on their websites. See [www.ACCD.org](http://www.ACCD.org), [http://oakhills.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=16&Itemid=30](http://oakhills.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=16&Itemid=30), <http://www.reimagine.org/about/history>, <http://www.myholyltrinitychurch.com/who-we-are/>.

<sup>115</sup> Labanow, 24.

<sup>116</sup> See appendix 1 and 1a.

Farley/Labanow's praxis cycle. These interviews attempted to discern his analysis of the current context of evangelicalism where he is most influential and what theological reflections he brings to bear on that analysis. As a result of his analysis and reflection, these interviews also probed how adaptations or invocation in praxis were conveyed in his writings and to what current effect.

Although Labanow's research provides an excellent model in several areas, there are a few additions to this thesis not evidenced in Labanow's work. The first is a more historically informed investigation of the research groups. To best accomplish this task a more robust examination of the developmental and historical contextualization of each group will be provided in the ethnographic research. To assist in this historical investigation Ammerman's use of Ecological, Cultural and Process frames will provide direction in compiling the ethnographic research to provide the contextual background Tracy suggests is essential for a proper practical theological inquiry.<sup>117</sup> A more in depth historical analysis provides a firmer understanding for the situational analysis required to properly apply the Labanow/Fowler praxis development cycle. To accomplish this objective the application of an intellectual historiography focusing on the progression of key issues in evangelical theology is provided in chapter two.<sup>118</sup> A more complete historical investigation will produce a wider base of theological reflection as to why Willardian theology became attractive to these settings, what intellectual progression brought Willardian theology to the forefront of these groups, and what problems and solutions are perceived in American evangelicalism that Willard's theology appears to address.

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<sup>117</sup> These frames are discussed on page 62-64.

<sup>118</sup> For a discussion of intellectual historiography see page 66.

In conclusion, the subject matter of this thesis includes a variety of historical, theoretical, philosophical, cultural, and theological aspects within each subject group studied. Each of these areas, when combined, works to form a unique praxis from which action flows. Therefore the practical theological methodology and emphasis demonstrated within the school of thought advocated by Swinton, Labanow, Farley, Fowler, Tracy, Browning and Ammerman, which is concerned with much more than theological constructs, ministerial skills training or religious rituals and practices of ecclesial groups was the best fit for this thesis. Their appreciation for a multitude of factors, historical, social, relational, political, environmental, etc. all working in concert in the development of contextualized theological praxis that both informs and edifies the Church catholic, substantiates the very essence of this inquiry. Therefore the literature has demonstrated practical theology is not only well suited to both the ethnographic research and the intellectual historiographic methodologies applied in this project, it provides the means to accomplish the primary objectives of this research.

With these factors in mind, this researcher has chosen the practical theological methodology as the best means possible to pursue the development, observation and experience of Willardian theology and praxis in the four research groups represented in this research. Secondly, the practical theological methodology described above provides the means by which a critique of said praxis can be formed in hopes of enabling a deeper base of knowledge and the potential for more effective praxis in the future. This represents both the goal of this thesis and also the stated aim of Willard's theological vision. As such, both the priorities of the subjects and the aims of this thesis are best positioned within the unique field of practical theology.

As mentioned earlier, in order to provide a well-rounded interpretation of the various aspects and issues within practical theological communities, a dependence on other

academic disciplines are in order. While practical theology represents the primary means of inquiry of this thesis, additional methodological means are required to support the overarching end it pursues. It is to these supporting methodologies and their justifications we now turn.

### *Ethnography*

This section will offer a brief background of the social scientific basis for ethnographic methodologies. It will also discuss the benefits for the use of ethnography in practical theological research in general. More specifically a detailed justification will be offered for how ethnographic methodology was particularly suited to assist this thesis to achieve its practical theological objectives. These justifications are found in the quantitative data collection of ethnographic research, the extended research period, the embedded nature of researcher involvement and participation, and the applicability of ethnography to group settings and theological inquiry. The following section will provide greater detail on each of these essential features.

Ethnography as a qualitative method of social scientific research has been well established in its own right as a reliable means of social scientific research.<sup>119</sup> The overarching goal of ethnography is the production of what has come to be commonly termed a “thick description” of groups and their cultures within a given context by attaining

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<sup>119</sup> For a detailed description of the qualitative research methodology, ethnography and its benefits see Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson, *Ethnography : Principles in Practice*, 3rd. (London: Routledge, 2007), John Swinton and H. Mowat, *Practical theology and qualitative research* (SCM Press, 2006), Paul Atkinson, Amanda Coffey, and Sara Delamont, *Key themes in qualitative research : continuities and changes* (Walnut Creek, Calif.: AltaMira Press, 2003), Ioan M. Lewis, *Arguments with Ethnography: Comparative Approaches to History, Politics and Religion* (Oxford, England: Berg Pub Ltd, 1999), Margaret Diane. Le Compte, Judith. Preissle, and Renata. Tesch, *Ethnography and qualitative design in educational research*, (San Diego: Academic Press, 1993), Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, *Strategies of qualitative inquiry*, 3rd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2008), and Bruce L. Berg, *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*. 7th ed. (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 2009).

an insider's perspective.<sup>120</sup> Early ethnographers such as Bronislaw Malinowski describe ethnography as a means of collecting qualitative data that pays specific attention to the manner in which subjects interpret their own world, focusing specifically on how members of cultures or groups understand, interpret, interact with and articulate their own unique context.<sup>121</sup>

In contrast to qualitative research, quantitative research methods seek more linear cause and effect relationships from differing data points or numerical results.<sup>122</sup> This often requires a predetermined stated objective or opinion that is then measured through a data collection process in order to then suggest possible correlations. Contrarily, qualitative research seeks to explore and engage observable phenomenon without such a fixed or predetermined thesis or bias.<sup>123</sup> Since Willardian theology carries a multitude of important theological concepts, meanings, definitions, characteristics, illustrations, symbols and metaphors to describe the protoevangelical gospel a qualitative methodology was essential to this research.

However, determining if Willardian theology was in fact being applied in the subject organizations, and to what degree, required a standardized quantitative analysis.

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<sup>120</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 3-30.

<sup>121</sup> Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (London: G. Routledge & sons, Ltd., 1922), 25.

<sup>122</sup> Margaret Diane. Le Compte, Judith. Preissle, and Renata. Tesch, *Ethnography and qualitative design in educational research*, (San Diego: Academic Press, 1993), Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, *Strategies of qualitative inquiry*, 3rd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2008),

<sup>123</sup> Here the work of social scientists Glaser and Strauss' development of Grounded Theory as applied to qualitative research is instructive and helpful to this thesis in its analysis of data and pursuit of possible correlations and theories regarding the research. Although not instrumental in the construction of the ethnographic methodology, Glaser and Strauss were helpful in organizing, analyzing and developing theories in relation to the framing data after the ethnographic field research was completed. These theories and analysis are presented within Ammerman's frameworks in Chapter 4 and summarized in the concluding chapter. See Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory; Strategies for Qualitative Research* (Chicago: Aldine Pub. Co., 1967), Juliet M. Corbin and Anselm L. Strauss, *Basics of Qualitative Research : Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*, 3rd. (Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2008), Bruce L. Berg, *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*, 7th. (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 2009), 346-352. And Paul Atkinson, Amanda Coffey, and Sara Delamont, *Key themes in qualitative research: continuities and changes* (Walnut Creek, Calif.: AltaMira Press, 2003),

Thus the ethnographies in this thesis used both qualitative and quantitative research methods effectively. Yet the most pressing interest of this thesis lies in the qualitative abilities of an ethnography that pursue the unquantifiable linkages between various features of cultural life, seeking to compile a holistic, relational perspective on group activity and stressing the combination of social processes, histories, activities, values, beliefs and their interdependency.<sup>124</sup> Discovering how Willardian theology interacts with, relates to, challenges, and adapts in contemporary evangelicals in ecclesial settings is well suited to ethnographic aims and methods.

To accomplish this task the ethnographic research in this thesis required extended engagement with each research group. Time was essential in order to describe and experience, as an observer and participant, the various linkages between histories, group narratives, applications of Willardian theology, connections to traditional evangelicalism, praxis development and multiple other pertinent linkages to the subject. Collecting this qualitative research required partial absorption and acceptance into the culture of each group. Acceptance necessitated extended periods of time spent in developing relationship, having conversation, building trust and observing behaviors and customs in order to best describe the essence of group life and experience. Therefore, each ethnography was conducted over five consecutive weeks of field observation where all the events and activities occurring during that period were attended and recorded.

This allowed for a depth of data gathering which theologian Al Dowie suggests is also essential to connect the objectives of practical theology to the benefits ethnography research can provide.<sup>125</sup> Dowie argues embedded ethnography is essential for elucidating the connection between cultural hermeneutics and praxis. He suggests that the

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<sup>124</sup> Hammersly and Atkinson, 21-22.

<sup>125</sup> Al Dowie, *Interpreting culture in a Scottish congregation* (New York: P. Lang, 2002), 2.



interpretation of events, ideas, history and phenomenon is where ethnography becomes most valuable to the objectives of practical theology.<sup>126</sup> Dowie also understands small group cultures as formative in the construction of meanings about the broader culture in which a certain group finds themselves. Yet Dowie notes these connections take time and can often only be gathered in unstructured events. The level of group participation and membership Dowie advocates in ethnographic research, although a somewhat marginalized and temporary membership, proved essential to this thesis. Acceptance as a group member in each of the four organizations studied, allowed interviewees to reveal a level of emotion that often coincided with intimate revelations, perceptions, feelings and interpretations of events surrounding very personal inner conflicts, relational strife and psychological angst connected to the difficult transition away from mainstream evangelicalism. These individual and communal interpretations and recounting of events became paramount to this research and were invaluable to understanding why Willardian theology was welcomed and applied.

Finally, the group nature of the four evangelical organizations applying Willardian theology discussed in chapter 4 presents an idyllic match for ethnographic research. Ethnographers such as Martyn Denscombe, Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson note ethnography originated in, and remains especially suited to, the investigation of small social groups similar to those represented in this thesis.<sup>127</sup> This becomes more significant when considering the current volatility in contemporary evangelical theology and praxis. As mentioned in the Introduction, the current literature suggests American evangelicalism is presently adapting and transforming itself in a dynamic manner. Yet few evangelical

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Martyn Denscombe, *The Good Research Guide : For Small-Scale Social Research Projects*, 2nd ed. (Berkshire, UK: Open University Press, 2006), 61-74. Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson, *Ethnography : Principles in Practice*, 3rd. (London: Routledge, 2007), 43-53.

communities seeking to adapt, transform or evolve their current praxis currently share agreement on a common vision, intention or means of transition.<sup>128</sup> Many of these communities are not affiliated with a denomination and therefore do not have common doctrinal statements, liturgies, or histories.<sup>129</sup> These communities tend to evolve quickly, are highly individualized and function rather autonomously while at the same time maintaining loosely connected “networks” of relationships.<sup>130</sup> Therefore employing an embedded research approach within each specific contextual provides the best means of capturing the uniqueness of each group and their esoteric dynamic. Since the goal of ethnography is not to understand grand organizational dynamics per se but rather to grasp a culture of particularized groups, ethnographic methodology fits well with the relatively small group nature of this thesis.

Further, Dowie’s methodology recognizes the value ethnographic research plays in discerning the intricacies involved in social and communal hermeneutics. Key to understanding why Willardian theology was chosen in these groups is tied to grasping how these four groups interpret postevangelicalism and its frequent connection to postmodernism juxtaposed or connected to the historical manifestations and interpretations of evangelical cultural and theology. Additionally, Willard’s works are unique and appear to carry something of an esoteric meaning both inside and outside mainstream evangelicalism. To better understand how Willard is interpreted in postevangelical and evangelical groups ethnographic tools provide the best framework for this thesis to capture

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<sup>128</sup> Robert. Webber, John Burke, Dan. Kimball, Doug Pagitt, Karen M. Ward, Mark Driscoll, *Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches : Five Perspectives* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2007), Chapter 3.

<sup>129</sup> Tom Sine, *The New Conspirators : Creating the Future One Mustard Seed At a Time* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Books, 2008), 38.

<sup>130</sup> Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 100. Richard. Rohr, *Falling Upward : A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011), Ch. 12

the underlying web of connections and structures which coalesce into a hermeneutical lens through which Willardian praxis is formed and conveyed.

Labanow refers to James Spadley's insight that at its conclusion, the hope of an ethnographic study is to determine the,

... meaning of actions and events to the people we seek to understand. Some of these meanings are directly expressed in language; many are taken for granted and communicated only indirectly in word and action.<sup>131</sup>

Recently ethnographers and theologians Scharen and Vigen posit ethnographies of theological and ecclesial settings must allow for temporary inclusion of the researcher settings in order to best discern the language, images, and stories and symbols that bridges a communication gap, carrying meaning between and among group members and the broader world.<sup>132</sup> Such intricate knowledge, Dowie, Scharen and Vigen argue, can be attained only in the inclusive nature of ethnographic research occurring over extended periods. Likewise, this research is positioned in what has been termed a “postevangelical” culture that has been accused at times of creating or using postmodern epistemology as a means to create a form of heterodoxy all to themselves.<sup>133</sup> This critique often stems from conservative or traditional evangelicals who seem unwilling or unable to understand or conceptualize many of the postevangelical objectives or goals. Thus ethnographic research of these groups allowed this thesis to approach this potential linguistic, epistemological or cultural divide in order to better understand the nature of the postevangelical impetus and discern the impact such separation or ostracizing has occasioned in postevangelical groups. Further, the ethnographies were able to gauge what affect the application of Willardian

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<sup>131</sup> James P. Spradley, *Participant observation* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1980), 5.

<sup>132</sup> Christian Scharen and Aana Marie Vigen, *Ethnography as Christian Theology and Ethics* (London: Continuum, 2011),

<sup>133</sup> This is well documented in conservative evangelical critiques of the Emerging Church and its authors. See Chapter 2 page 135 and following.

theology has made on the sometimes acerbic, inflammatory or reactionary language that at times has been present in postevangelical literature.

In summary, using Ammerman's congregational frames which highlight Ecological, Cultural and Process frames, to organize the ethnographic data, the ethnographies in this thesis specifically catalogued the overarching contextual settings of each group. This included a consideration of the dominant values, attitudes, awareness, methods, systems, narratives, heritage, leadership qualities, assets, triumphs and failures of each community. All these experiences and more worked together to forge each unique and particular religious expression and interpretation of Willardian theology. First hand participation in group activities allowed this thesis to best understand how Willardian theology is understood and applied at a level beyond the accumulation of statistical data, observation of static behaviors or prepared responses. Instead, the surrounding contexts and environs within which of the subject groups studied were heavily considered and weighted, then combined with the general responses themselves and the quantitative data analysis, to best understand and describe each subject group.<sup>134</sup>

### *Data Collection*

The differences in quantitative and qualitative methodologies have created significant critiques of qualitative research. Questions regarding whether qualitative methodologies were rigorous enough to provide reliable evidence for academic research have lingered to present.<sup>135</sup> This thesis makes no judgment of valuing qualitative over

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<sup>134</sup> John Van Maanen, *Qualitative methodology* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1983), A. M. Huberman and Matthew B. Miles, *The qualitative researcher's companion* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2002),

<sup>135</sup> Arguments for this position are plentiful and tend to come from positivistic or rationalists philosophical or scientific positions. See analysis of these positions in Bruce L. Berg, *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*, 7th. (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 2009), Chapter 1. Benjamin F. Crabtree and William L. Miller, *Doing qualitative research*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1999), Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*, 3 ed. (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage

quantitative data. Both are used effectively in this research. However, many social scientists have argued and demonstrated that ethnographic method properly structured and applied can provide a unique and reliable means of social scientific research.<sup>136</sup> Key to this thesis and its objectives, ethnographers Scharen, Vigen and Keifert have presented cogent arguments for ethnography and its qualitative data as a) providing a viable platform through which to research the intricate details inherent to theological and ethical ideas, values and beliefs and b) engaging unique contexts where quantitative data might routinely miss or overlook more subtle and underlying motives, histories and impetuses.<sup>137</sup> Therefore ethnography's established ability to probe and pursue motives and values behind loose and amorphous observable behaviors, socio/relational structures and their developed practices within groups matches the existing contexts of groups striving to both understand and apply Willardian theology within the evangelical culture in America.

However, the tension between the "soft" nature of qualitative versus quantitative data and the potential conflict inherent to ethnographer influence or bias must be managed appropriately. This thesis guards against these concerns by triangulating the data gathering from multiple sources and applying quantitative measures in conjunction with the

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Publications, 2002), 78. And W. M. Smythe and M. J. Murray, "Owning the Story: Ethical Considerations in Narrative Research," *Ethics and Behavior* Vol. 10, (2000), 311-336.

<sup>136</sup> The list here is plentiful. See Margaret Diane. LeCompte and Jean J. Schensul, *Designing & Conducting Ethnographic Research : An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, Md.: AltaMira Press, 2010), Margaret Diane. LeCompte, Judith. Preissle, and Renata. Tesch, *Ethnography and Qualitative Design in Educational Research*, 2nd.ed.. (San Diego: Academic Press, 1993), Margaret Diane. LeCompte, Judith. Preissle, and Renata. Tesch, *Ethnography and Qualitative Design in Educational Research*, 2nd. (San Diego: Academic Press, 1993), Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson, *Ethnography : Principles in Practice*, 3rd. (London: Routledge, 2007), A. M. Huberman and Matthew B. Miles, *The Qualitative Researcher's Companion* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2002), Michael Quinn. Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, 3rd. ed. (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 2002),

<sup>137</sup> Scharen and Vigen, *Ethnography as Christian Theology*, chapters 1 and 2. Patrick R. Keifert, *Testing the Spirits : How Theology Informs the Study of Congregations* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 2009),

qualitative data analysis collected within the ethnographic process.<sup>138</sup> The four ethnographic studies were conducted on evangelical groups initially selected due to their respective leaders publishing of previous works which stated existing connections and proclivities toward Willard's theology and praxis.<sup>139</sup> After initial conversations with leaders to determine their level of interest in participating in a research project, followed by an analysis of their published literature, a standardized survey was developed to determine if, and to what degree, Willard's theology was present in the larger group.<sup>140</sup> This survey covered several specific terms and topics covered in Willard's published works. Each of these issues (theology of the Kingdom of God, sanctification, soteriology, ecclesiology, bibliology, etc.) carries a unique Willardian definition, characterization or conceptualization presented in several in-depth descriptions throughout his written work. In one-on-one interviews, group participants were asked to offer their own definitions of these terms or ideas.<sup>141</sup> Every interview was digitally recorded and logged to identify the recording with the interviewee. Interviewee's responses were later evaluated to determine

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<sup>138</sup> David A. Buchanan and Alan Bryman, *The Sage Handbook of Organizational Research Methods* (Los Angeles, CA: SAGE, 2009), 613. And R. Murray Thomas, *Blending Qualitative & Quantitative Research Methods in Theses and Dissertations* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Corwin Press, 2003), x, 240. Scott W. VanderStoep and Deirdre D. Johnston, *Research Methods for Everyday Life : Blending Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*, 1st ed. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2009).

<sup>139</sup> See Mark Scandrette, *Soul Graffiti : Making a Life in the Way of Jesus*, 1st ed. ed. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2007), Mark. Scandrette, *Practicing the Way of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press, 2011), Todd D. Hunter, *Christianity Beyond Belief: Following Jesus for the Sake of Others* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2010), Todd D. Hunter, *Giving Church Another Chance : Finding New Meaning in Spiritual Practices* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Books, 2010), 189. Todd D. Hunter, *The Accidental Anglican : The Surprising Appeal of the Liturgical Church* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2010), Daniel Tocchini, *Cult Fiction* (P.Chan and Edward, 2003), and Kent Carlson and Mike Lueken, *Renovation of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Intervarsity, 2011),

<sup>140</sup> See appendix 1 and 1a.

<sup>141</sup> Interviewees were also given an approved disclosure of the nature of the research project and signed a consent form. Before each interview was recorded, a consent form was read and signed which offered each interviewee the ability to choose for their comments to be referred to anonymously and attributed to a synonym of their choice. After cataloging the interviews this author determined that, with the exceptions of the leaders of each group, each interviewee and their comments would be referred to anonymously in the text.

whether responses did or did not contain specific Willardian terminology in combination with conceptualization.<sup>142</sup>

In evaluating these responses an emphasis was placed on determining the use of specific Willardian language for a positive indication of comprehension and awareness of Willard's theology. Statistical analysis then determined to what degree Willard's theology was likely present in the organizations as a whole. The summary of this data is presented in Appendix 6. The quantitative analysis was essential for this thesis due to the requirement to discern if Willardian theology was in fact understood, had matriculated from the leadership teaching, literature and preaching into the broader organization, and was active in the subject groups. Once the presence of an affinity to Willardian theology was established in both the published literature and in the surveys of group participants, the ethnographic research commenced. The ethnographies endeavored to complete an understanding of why Willardian theology was present, how it was being applied and to what effect.

#### *Data Organization-Ethnographic Frames*

As mentioned earlier, Ammerman's Ecological, Cultural and Process frames were used to organize and structure the plethora of ethnographic data. The Ecological frame sees the group in relation to its specific social, political, religious, and economic environment operating in a particular setting. It seeks information on what forces currently "shapes and has shaped this group?"<sup>143</sup> Ecological frames describe what forces external to the group have effected, formed and directed its current state. Nancy Eiesland and R. Stephen Warner argue such influences are often "wide in scope, having several layers and are made up of

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<sup>142</sup> All the interviews were conducted off the same standardized questionnaire. Therefore when referenced throughout this thesis as "interviews" or "interviewees" are responding to the same questions. Certainly on several occasions responses often varied off topic and follow up questions were asked for clarification or explanation as was appropriate. Discussions, observations and conversations outside the formal interview situation were not recoded digitally but recorded in field note.

<sup>143</sup> Ammerman, 41-43.

elements that are relatively invisible as well as visible.”<sup>144</sup> In these ethnographies these layers included the combination of demographic, socio-cultural, political, religious and historical influences that permeated the surrounding environment and often worked dynamically to shape the ground within which groups were embedded. Combined with the Ecological frame, the intellectual historiography of evangelicalism provided in Chapter 2 served two purposes in this thesis. First and foremost it situates Willardian theology. Yet secondly, the historiography describes the shared ecosphere of American evangelicalism wherein each research group is broadly situated. As a result, the description of the Ecological frames of each ethnographic study presented in chapter 4 presumes and presents the results of a common evangelical ancestry. Therefore each ethnography focuses on the distinct ecological realities of the particular group under investigation and not the shared ecology and history presented in the historiography described in Chapter 2.

As Eisland and Warner note, the Ecological frame is intrinsically tied to the Cultural frame.<sup>145</sup> The Cultural frame seeks to understand the unique ways a congregation has created being together in light of the ecological realities of its specific context. This includes rituals, trainings, values, habits and ways of congregating. The Cultural frame asks the question, “What is unique about how the group defines itself in and through its habitations?” It seeks to understand the group’s narratives, symbols, heroes, etc. in order to illuminate an overarching worldview. Thus the Cultural frame works to describe how groups define for themselves who they are and the value structures that inform the decisions and choices involved in creating and recreating their social identity.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Nancy L. Eiesland and R. Stephen Warner, “Ecology: Seeing the Congregation in Context,” in *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook*, ed. Nancy T. Ammerman and others, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), 40-77.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 3-30.



However, Ammerman makes clear, culture is not a fixed concept or normative category. She suggests, “Unlike our usual notions of identity, a culture is neither who we always will be nor who we ought to be. It is who we are and all the ways in which we reinforce and recreate who we are.”<sup>147</sup> As such the Cultural frame serves to both understand the activities, artifacts and narratives groups use to articulate, reinforce and describe their cultural context to themselves and to others.

Finally, the Process frame inquires about the underlying flow and dynamics at work within a group that shape morale and climate. Carl Dudley argues processes reveal the “strong feelings and sustaining forms of life” which are often best viewed through the lens of the Process frame.<sup>148</sup> It seeks information on the question, “How and why are things done here?” Investigating both formal and informal group processes often reveals social dynamics, subtle normative social assumptions as to order and appropriateness, and may give insight into the underlying reasons for flourishing or causes of friction, discord or ineffectiveness. Hence, investigating processes allows researchers the ability to understand both sources of group strength and areas of potential change.

### *Data Analysis*

The application of these three frames (Ecological, Cultural and Process) to the ethnographic research, in combination with the quantitative data collection and analysis, guards against either a positivistic or naturalistic bias in qualitative or quantitative research described earlier and therefore offers a greater likelihood of producing valid results.<sup>149</sup>

Furthermore, each of these ethnographic frames works in concert with Farley’s four-step

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<sup>147</sup> Nancy T Ammerman, “Culture and Identity in the Congregation,” in *Studying Congregations : A New Handbook*, ed. Nancy T. Ammerman and others, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998),78.

<sup>148</sup> Carl Dudley, “Process: Dynamics of Congregational Life,” in *Studying Congregations : A New Handbook*, ed. Nancy T. Ammerman and others, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998),105.

<sup>149</sup> Hammersby and Atkinson, 214, 230-232.

practical theological situational analysis. Together this forms a means from which to best understand each group dynamic, as it presents itself, in light of its history, context and the theological responses which have proceeded as a result. An analysis of these combined factors is presented at the end of each ethnography with a overarching analysis provided in the summary of chapter four.

The analysis of the ethnographic data revealed several reoccurring themes or what ethnographers refer to as “codes” or “categories” inside the three frames.<sup>150</sup> Themes were both present in each specific group and between groups. Additionally, the quantitative data revealed several statistically significant trans-group findings. Since the intentional application of Willardian theology in group settings appears to be a rather new phenomenon, the ethnographic method also provided the opportunity to determine if any consistency exists between the four subject groups as perceived through the lenses of Ammerman’s organizing frameworks.<sup>151</sup>

Thus the qualitative nature of ethnography allowed this research to add more than only numerical percentages or report the predominance of attitudes and behaviors. Conjoining qualitative and quantitative data allowed an investigation into those situations, histories, behaviors, opinions and beliefs in order to provide the best possible, well-rounded perspective on potential causes or effects relationships to Willardian theology and its application.<sup>152</sup> The survey data determined Willardian theology was present in each group. The ethnographic research describes how and why each group developed environments from which Willardian theology and praxis was applied. Finally, collectively, the trans-

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<sup>150</sup> Anselm L. Strauss, *Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), Mike Crang and Ian Cook, *Doing Ethnographies* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2007), 143. See Conclusion.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 42-43.

<sup>152</sup> Margaret Diane. LeCompte, Judith. Preissle, and Renata. Tesch, *Ethnography and Qualitative Design in Educational Research*, 2nd ed. (San Diego: Academic Press, 1993), 42.

group themes provided valuable information as to the potential effect this research could have on larger postevangelical contexts.

As Farley, Fowler, and Taylor describe, the role of history is a key consideration to determine the origin and implementation of praxis in theological settings. Ammerman also argues the Ecological, Cultural and Process frames all require uncovering the historical dynamics still active in groups. However, more than simply the effect of a group history is at play in this thesis. Several key ideas, theological doctrines, their evolution and effect on and within evangelical theology are in play as well. Therefore Ammerman's frames, in concert with the practical theological objectives of Farley, Fowler, Browning and Taylor, require a significant investigation into the historical development of key ideas impacting contemporary evangelical theology in both the analysis of Willardian theology and in each of the four research groups. To best accomplish this task a review of the intellectual historiographic method applied in this thesis is in order.

### *Intellectual Historiography*

Historians describe the subject or endeavor of intellectual history as a sub-discipline within the overall academic pursuit of history that specifically focuses the development of the very types of systems and frameworks of ideas, interpretations and their meanings inherent to this thesis.<sup>153</sup> Religions are often examples of very intricate frameworks of ideas, beliefs or assumptions working in concert to form the various social,

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<sup>153</sup> George Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century. From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press), 11. Other works in this arena that make the points discussed here include Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margarete Jacob, *Telling the truth about history* (New York: WW Norton & Company, 1995), Robert Berkhofer, *Beyond the great story: History as text and discourse* (Boston: Belknap Pr, 1997), William Bouwsma, "Intellectual History in the 1980s: From History of Ideas to History of Meaning," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 12, (1981): 279-291. Paul Conkin and John Higham, *New Directions in American Intellectual History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979).

political, ethical and interpersonal environs they inhabit.<sup>154</sup> The subjects of this thesis, namely Willardian theology and the organizations applying the same, are deeply embedded and affected by a long line of such theological and ideological frameworks.<sup>155</sup> Intellectual historians, similar to philosophers, spotlight the progression and evolution of ideas and symbols used in cultures to communicate a worldview or ideological framework.<sup>156</sup> The guiding assumption in the study of intellectual history places meaning and coherence of human experience as articulated and maintained in the use of language forms, narratives and cultural norms. These forms may appear as art and literature, common everyday conversations, institutional organizations and systems of beliefs.<sup>157</sup>

When forms of communication are either created or adapted over time, as is the case in the evolution of American evangelical theology encountered in this thesis, both individuals and societies draw, either consciously or unconsciously, on embedded intellectual histories or historical perspectives from within previously held ideas. Whether these ‘older’ ideas stem from great works of literature, art—or are found only in casual conversations—intellectual historians understand human beings as applying existing ideas within a given context to give structure to human experience in order to conceptualize,

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<sup>154</sup> This concept is perhaps best seen in Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology : An Introduction to Christian Doctrine : A Companion to Wayne Grudem’s Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2011), Jack O. Balswick, Pamela Ebstyn King, and Kevin S. Reimer, *The reciprocating self : human development in theological perspective* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 280-285.

<sup>155</sup> Chapter two describes the historical theological issues related to American evangelicalism. See pages 83-154 .

<sup>156</sup> A. L. Macfie, *The philosophy of history : talks given at the Institute of Historical Research*, London, 2000-2006 (Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006). R. M. Burns and Hugh Rayment-Pickard, *Philosophies of history : from enlightenment to post-modernity* (Oxford, UK ; Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), R. M. Burns, *Historiography : critical concepts in historical studies* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2006),

<sup>157</sup> This thesis is not engaging in the specific argument within both modern philosophy and intellectual history regarding the use of language and its effect on consciousness as a means by which constructivist phenomenological arguments of philosophers Martin Heidegger, Jacques Derrida, Paul Sartre and Frederic Nietzsche. et. al. are based. This thesis limits its focus on the evolution of ideas and their impacts on social intelligence and intellectual imaginary. This emphasis is best described by Charles Taylor. See Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004),

understand and explain reality as it is encountered. As a discipline, intellectual history analyzes how the meaning of reality itself or the theoretical assumptions of reality changes in individual and corporate contexts across time, culture and context.

These foci are critical to understanding the context from which, and into which, Willardian theology is currently being understood and applied. Therefore the intellectual historiography provided in chapter two engages and describes what prior intellectual ideologies and embedded histories these ideologies created, are continually generating cause and effect relations within contemporary evangelical environs. Further, a historiography is essential to build a foundational understanding for what cause and effect Willardian theology has made within the historical context of evangelicalism and why it is perceived as attractive by those applying it.

Another key rationale for the employment of intellectual historiography comes from a critique of some of the current research on the ECM. Labanow and Jones provide a relatively limited perspectival appreciation of the contextual history from which their subject congregation and the EC phenomenon as a whole arises. Jones' public work has produced an excellent first person account of the development of the Emergent Village and its impetus. However his dissertation provides little intellectual historiographic material on his subject congregations.<sup>158</sup>

Labanow and Jones do present review and brief analysis of key texts on the ECM. Jones has written some of these key texts himself. Labanow provides a detailed analysis of Robert Webber's work *The Younger Evangelicals* and in so doing provides an overview of

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<sup>158</sup> Jones opening literature review addresses most if not all the key texts on the ECM and the theoretical engagement of those interested in the movement. The issue here is the progression of intellectual history played out in the congregations that is widely absent.

one perspective on the ECM paradigm and its history.<sup>159</sup> Yet Webber’s handling of the historical issues at play in the development of “younger evangelicals” can be considered limited as well. Labanow also provides a brief but very accurate summative review of Brian McLaren’s theology. However, throughout the work, Labanow resists critically engaging McLaren’s work providing only a summative guide of McLaren’s corpus. Both Labanow, as the researcher, and Matt Lawton, the leader of his subject congregation, seem to widely assume McLaren’s views and advice on where evangelical theology and praxis should proceed.<sup>160</sup>

Yet neither Webber and McLaren’s more popular works, nor Labanow and Jones’ academic dissertations which research ECM congregations, cover the spectrum of ideological and theological history from which many of the previously mentioned perspectives surface. McLaren’s work does engage the subject of transitional angst he and others describe as a result of a changing evangelical culture. Yet Labanow does not offer a critique or compare McLaren to other voices on the subject and thus does not situate the context of his congregation or his leaders as clearly as possible. If evangelicals are “emerging” out of a previous context, a question often asked from both conservative and non-traditional camps, it must become more clear what exactly these postevangelicals are transitioning from and why. Labanow, and specifically Jones seem quite aware of this quandary, as do many of their research subjects. Yet, as far as their academic work is concerned, there seems to be a willingness or oversight in leaving the phenomenon somewhat vague. Jones’ academic work appears to assume both knowledge and acceptance of the arguments made in his previous publications and moves forward to advocate Jurgen

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<sup>159</sup> Robert. Webber, *The younger evangelicals : facing the challenges of the new world* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Books, 2002),

<sup>160</sup> Matt Lawton is a pseudonym. Most, if not all the names in Labanow’s work are pseudonyms, even the name of the congregation.

Moltmann's theology and relational ecclesiology as a helpful guide for emerging congregations to consider. Labanow's research tends to over-represent Webber and McLaren's views on the transitions within evangelical faith and therefore tends to limit theological reflection overall and consequently narrows the impact of his research to other contexts.<sup>161</sup>

As an example of this critique, Labanow recognizes the surface structures of his subject congregation, such as their connection to the Vineyard Churches. The Vineyard movement, started originally in California as an evangelical movement that presented a theologically fundamental yet ecclesologically innovative and pneumatologically progressive front. However, Labanow omits the fact the Vineyard was a significant counter-cultural expression of evangelicalism at the time.<sup>162</sup> Although making the connection at the surface, Labanow does not pursue in depth how the Vineyard culture originated, why it grew in the UK, or how Vineyard ecclesiology and theology differed or was similar to other brands of evangelicalism in the UK. Nor is it clear in Labanow's ethnographic narrative why leaders and members of the Jacobsfield congregation were originally attracted to the Vineyard ecclesiology and theology.

The above critiques can also be applied to the subject congregations in Jones' research with regards to the role evangelicalism has played in these congregations as a whole. Of the eight congregations referenced in Jones' dissertation, all appear to have significant historical connections to evangelicalism. Some remain decidedly evangelical while others have demonstrated significant transition over time. Understanding the

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<sup>161</sup> It may be possible Labanow's subject congregation and its leadership had largely self-limited their understanding or investigation of the EC movement to McLaren's views. Or perhaps McLaren was the author who best articulated their concerns. Such a situation would not be unusual. Many individuals encountered in the process of this research had only investigated single opinions from which their perspectives on evangelicalism were developed.

<sup>162</sup> Donald E. Miller, *Reinventing American Protestantism : Christianity in the new millennium* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1997), 126.

historical and continuing effect evangelical religion has made on these groups would seem to only further Jones' project. One is left unclear if the congregations in Jones and Labanow's research desired to change, adapt, protest or abort a specific evangelical ethos, practice or doctrine and their effects, whether the overall intent was to leave evangelicalism altogether, or something in between. Nor is it clear whether the form or vision of the EC the subject congregations are currently pursuing intends to be anti-evangelical/anti-Vineyard, post-evangelical, non-evangelical, ex-evangelical or again a mixture of none or all. All of these questions could come into increasing relief had a deeper understanding of the historical ideologies from which the subject congregations arose was more vigorously pursued.<sup>163</sup>

For studies in practical theology, which largely seek to understand what, and then how, ideological, philosophical, political, theological, cultural and historical realities apply their corresponding influences on current religious praxis and doctrine, such omissions leaves key questions undetermined on the subject. In the opinion of this researcher, methodologically, Labanow and Jones' subject would benefit from a more in depth understanding of the historical situatedness before contemporary expressions of theology can claim the degree of originality or newness the term "emerging" would either elicit or require.

### *Critiques of Intellectual History*

In the past, the emphasis on the role of changing ideas, symbols and language has at times created an environment where the pursuit of intellectual history became somewhat

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<sup>163</sup> It may be the case for Jones that his study was never intended to be ethnographic in nature, or a presentation of congregational studies as understood and defined in this thesis. Therefore the above critique would only apply to the lack of prioritizing intellectual historiography and not for the limited amount provided.



marginalized among classical historians.<sup>164</sup> The mainline or traditional focus of historians has preferred to engage the facticity and tactility of historical events in the hopes of grasping and communicating only the “cold hard facts” of history.<sup>165</sup> As such, some more traditional historians critique the study of intellectual history as too vague and ambiguous an endeavor.<sup>166</sup> Instead of providing quantitative data or factual reports of events, their circumstances and consequences, intellectual historians rely again on more qualitative information.<sup>167</sup> Intellectual historians pursue opportunities for integration across historical eras, focus on hermeneutics, and maintain an interest in teleology and ontology. This is in stark contrast to limiting their inquiry to researching and recording relationships to actions, raw events and their discernable facts.<sup>168</sup>

Historian Maurice Mandelbaum argues the goal of the qualitative means of intellectual history is in discerning the teleological, epistemological and ontological claims to reality behind the assumption of facts. Including the facts, Mandelbaum sees value in the way descriptions and definitions are presented, along with the means of describing the experiences of those within the events themselves.<sup>169</sup> Thus the perceived or proclaimed interpretation and meaning of historical events as experienced by those within these same contexts, in combination with those affected by the hermeneutical legacy passed down from

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<sup>164</sup> David Harlan, “Intellectual History and the Return of Literature,” *American Historical Review* 94, no. 3 (1989): 581-609.

<sup>165</sup> Franklin Baumer, “Intellectual History and Its Problems,” *Journal of Modern History* Vol. 21, (1949), 191-203. Gene Wise, “The Contemporary Crisis in Intellectual History Studies,” *CLIO* 5 Vol. (February 1975).

<sup>166</sup> Llyod Kramer, “Martin Jay and the Critical Insights of Synthetic Intellectual History,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* Vol. 38, (1996), 370-375.

<sup>167</sup> An excellent example of this dilemma is captured in Martin Jay, *Force Fields : Between Intellectual History and Cultural Critique* (New York: Routledge, 1993),

<sup>168</sup> Harlan, 581-609.

<sup>169</sup> Maurice Mandelbaum, “The History of Ideas, Intellectual History and the History of Philosophy,” in *Historiography : Critical Concepts in Historical Studies*, ed. R. M. Burns, (New York: Routledge, 2006), 29-64.

preceding generations, rises as a prominent focus in the intellectual historical method.

Ultimately, Mandelbaum argues intellectual history considers how and what kind of social memory was created and left for future generations. It then pursues the ways an ideological memory or philosophy is treated in a given context then adapted or re-interpreted over time.

Mandelbaum's premise proves especially helpful on several issues encountered in this thesis. First, Mandelbaum's recognition of the historical effect of changing perspectives on metaphysics coincides with Willard's critique of phenomenological constructivism stemming from modern philosophers such as Kant, Heidegger, Hegel, Nietzsche and Derrida.<sup>170</sup> Willard contends philosophical constructivism has remained a steadily progressive and pervasive influence on both the American academy and evangelical theology. Where this ideology comes from, what it entails and what effect it has brought to American evangelicalism and its postevangelical prodigy is a key insight Willard's offers and therefore important to this thesis.

Secondly, Mandelbaum's critique of A. O. Lovejoy's historiographic method suggests intellectual history is more than the pursuit of the influence of singular ideas.<sup>171</sup> Mandelbaum questions Lovejoy's position that intellectual history should refrain from pursuing larger "systems" of thought and instead seek only to understand smaller "units" of thought. As powerful and effectual as single ideas can become, intellectual historians such as Franklin Le Van Baumer argues that effective intellectual history must focus on the cluster of ideas that surround smaller phenomena to form what he terms the "climate of opinions."<sup>172</sup> Gregg Allison's recent work on historical theology picks up this theme and

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<sup>170</sup> This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3 pages 237-255.

<sup>171</sup> Maurice Mandelbaum, "On Lovejoy's Historiography," in *The History of Ideas : An Introduction to Method*, ed. Preston T. King, (London: Croom Helm Barnes & Noble Books, 1983), 193-199.

<sup>172</sup> Franklin Le Van Baumer, *Main Currents of Western Thought : Readings in Western European Intellectual History From the Middle Ages to the Present*, 4th ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1978), 4.

applies it to the development of Christian doctrine.<sup>173</sup> The literature suggests such a “climate” currently exist in contemporary evangelical theology encountered in this research. Further, the development of Willard’s theology both creates its own climate of ideas while simultaneously being influenced by and then critiquing a larger climate of evangelical ideological and theological frameworks. Both of which suits the application of an intellectual historical methodology to better understand the evolution and impact of these continuous and often competing “climates of opinion.” Therefore this writer understands the methodology described by Mandelbaum and Le Van Braumer as a reliable means to more fully understand the evangelical notions of the past, Willard’s attempt to redirect these conversations and historical interpretations, and the practical theological implications of these events within present contexts.

A third critique of intellectual history contends the discipline can too easily devolve into a work comprising nothing but the interpretation of interpretations.<sup>174</sup> Historian John Towes argues intellectual history loses touch with the fact and realities within events and becomes equally unable to maintain the particularity and objectivity of anything it seeks to describe.<sup>175</sup> Therefore intellectual historical methods can tend to allow anything to be potentially related and connected to something else and leans toward a constructivist or reconstructionist’s reading of history.<sup>176</sup> Such a concern presents a viable hurdle and therefore something to be guarded against in this thesis. Intellectual historians such as Le

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<sup>173</sup> Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology : An Introduction to Christian Doctrine : A Companion to Wayne Grudem’s Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2011),

<sup>174</sup> This is the position of historians such as Llyod Kramer, “Martin Jay and the Critical Insights of Synthetic Intellectual History,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* Vol. 38, (1996), 370-375. And

<sup>175</sup> John E. Toews, "Intellectual History after the Linguistic Turn. The Autonomy of Meaning and the Irreducibility of Experience", in *The American Historical Review*, 92/4 (1987), 879-907.

<sup>176</sup> Christian Reus-Smit, “Reading History Through Constructivist Eyes,” *Journal of International Studies* Vol. 37, 2, (2008), 395-414. This thesis will not apply an intellectual historical methodology likened to the works of Quentin Skinner and the so called Cambridge School of history.

Van Braumer, while admitting to the relative youth of intellectual history, suggest their methods have been adequately vetted and proved reliable.

In guarding against Towes constructivist concerns, Le Van Braumer posits his intellectual historiographic methodology analyzes and compares “climates of opinions” within fixed, not fluid, categories of focus. These categories consist of key texts or words, symbols, and traceable methods of attaining views of God, nature, humanity, and society. Each of these foci is then assembled to produce what historiographers, like ethnographers, view as a “thick” description of an era or period. This thesis’ investigation into contemporary evangelicalism pursues existing interpretations or assumptive overlays about real states of affairs that consciously or unconsciously have combined to forge a worldview largely based upon ideas and symbols created in the past. In concert with Le Van Braumer’s and Mandelbaum’s ideological foundation this thesis can endeavor to perceive and describe the progression and impact of Willardian theology as a climate of ideas, situated in a larger evolving history of evangelical thought and theology, and its corresponding directive influence on contemporary evangelical thought and praxis.

In conclusion, to better track the distinctives of postevangelical conceptualizations this research will attempt to bolster the intellectual historical research other academic works have tended to either minimize or overlook. Investigating the broader underlying foundational, intellectual and theological issues undergirding Willardian theology, as a whole, will also offer insight into the postevangelical choice of his work in general. As such this historiography establishes a basis for determining whether contemporary expressions of evangelicalism encountered in this research can and should be considered continuations of previous, often contentious, controversial, yet faithful ideological wings of evangelical Christianity or if these contemporary movements are in fact notably non-evangelical and possibly alternative manifestations of Christian faith in America. To this

point, a proper intellectual historiography may be able to offer insight on the question if postevangelicalism can or should be considered the most recent evolution within a long line of evangelical movements. Lastly, each of the four groups applying Willardian theology are situated in environments steeped in American evangelical religion. Understanding the intellectual progression of American evangelicalism is therefore paramount to the ethnographic research as well. Hence all these factors together are essential for understanding the quintessential events and characters that together have formed and are proffering evangelical thought and practice in the contemporary era.

### *Summary*

This thesis is uniquely positioned to benefit from each of the three methodological means discussed in this chapter. The desire to develop or reform existing religious praxis which springs from specific theological beliefs and theories, the sociological nature of shared cultures and group dynamics, symbols, relations and values, and the historical evolution of deeply embedded epistemologies, theologies and ideologies form the scope and substance of this research. The overlap of these key aspects demonstrate the need for employing multiple means of inquiry and justify the selection and application of the specific perspectives within the disciplines of practical theology, ethnography and intellectual historiography described above.

Furthermore, each of the disciplines used in this thesis recognize and support the other. Each methodology recognizes the importance of language, history, context, symbols, ideas and the influence of the wider culture on theological contexts and their relationship to the development and expression of theory in praxis.<sup>177</sup> Further, each supports pursuing the

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<sup>177</sup> Kurt Rudolph, "We Learn What Religion is From History: On the Relation Between the Study of History and the Study of Religion," in *Historiography: Critical Concepts in Historical Studies*, ed. R. M. Burns, (New York: Routledge, 2006), 328-345.

historical development and progression of key ideas and their influence on contemporary contexts. Finally, each methodology supports both the qualitative and quantitative means of gathering research data. All of these factors are central components of this thesis since American evangelicalism and the development and influence of Willardian theology are replete a multitude of theological, philosophical, cultural, sociological, historical and political currents.

Finally, as was mentioned earlier, few ethnographic studies have, as of this writing, been published on postevangelical congregations in the United States. The literature to date is very limited to either theological critiques of EC theology and/or practice by way of anecdotal evidence and journalistic reporting. Neither has a detailed analysis of Willardian theology in postevangelicalism been accomplished. Therefore, a systematic theological inquiry alone will not suffice to describe the nature of postevangelicalism. Nor will a historical survey provide adequate insight due to the relative youth of postevangelicalism and the ECM in general. Therefore this thesis seeks to apply the three fold methodological means described above to better understand what changes are occurring in contemporary evangelical groups, within their own contexts and culture and as a result, discover the specific issues and insights currently effecting American evangelical religion.

# CHAPTER TWO

## AMERICAN EVANGELICALISM

### *American Evangelicalism: Contextualizing Willardian Theology*

One of the main objectives of this thesis is to describe the nature and effect of Willardian theology on contemporary forms of evangelicalism in American. Thus defining the term “evangelical,” and qualifying the prefixes “post” or “proto” must be clarified. The intellectual historiography of American evangelicalism in this chapter defines, contextualizes and traces the development and evolution of distinct themes within the movement. Tracking this intellectual lineage better contextualizes the pertinent issues currently active in contemporary settings wherein Willardian theology is understood and applied. To accomplish this, first a selective and summative review of American evangelicalism frames the historicity of these themes. After which chapter three will discuss these themes in light of Willard’s unique perspective and critique. Together, chapters two and three form a foundational understanding from which current manifestations of evangelical, postevangelical and protoevangelical theology and praxis can be properly compared and contrasted.

#### *Defining Evangelicalism*

Throughout the past two centuries the terms “evangelical” and “evangelicalism” have carried various meanings and connotations. Even today these terms can be used and defined in various ways given different theological and ecclesiological contexts. In some settings the words can be used as synonyms for “conservative,” “revivalist,” “fundamentalist” “born-again” or even “reformed.”<sup>178</sup> For others, especially those in Western European contexts, the words can connote “liberal,” “ecumenical,” or

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<sup>178</sup> Barry Hankins, *American Evangelicals: A Contemporary History of a Mainstream Religious Movement* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Pub Inc, 2009), 13, 98, 185.



“progressive.”<sup>179</sup> Ironically, depending on the situation and context, “evangelical” can carry in one environment the exact opposite meaning one might expect or intend in another.<sup>180</sup> In the American context, where this research is centered, the ideas and images associated with the terminology are loaded with a plethora of intended, unintended or hidden meanings and agendas.<sup>181</sup>

Theologically “evangelicalism” also covers a broad range of dissonant or divergent definitions.<sup>182</sup> This is exacerbated by denominational affiliations across a wide spectrum of inconsistent beliefs and practices. Evangelical denominations with theologies as varied as the Assemblies of God, Missouri Synod Lutherans, Southern Baptists, Wesleyan and United Methodists, Church of the Nazarenes, Church of Christ, the Presbyterian Church in America, and thousands in between, all consider themselves in some measure or form “evangelical.”<sup>183</sup> Yet evangelical Christians can also be found in Roman Catholicism,

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<sup>179</sup> Christopher. Catherwood, *The Evangelicals : What They Believe, Where They Are, and Their Politics* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2010), 98. In recent years media outlets ascribing contentious and even malevolent attributes to the terms “evangelical” and “evangelicalism” have exacerbated this confusion.

<sup>180</sup> An example of this can be discerned by comparing and contrasting these definitions of evangelicalism discussed in the works of David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *What is an Evangelical?* (London: Banner of Truth, 1992), Victor Shepherd, *Our Evangelical Faith* (Toronto, ON: Clements Publishing, 2006), Kelvin Randall, *Evangelicals Etcetera : Conflict and Conviction in the Church of England’s Parties* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Pub., 2005), and John R. W. Stott, *Evangelical Truth : A Personal Plea for Unity, Integrity, and Faithfulness* (Downers Grove, IL.: InterVarsity Press, 1999).

<sup>181</sup> This is seen most pervasively when considering the political and sexual controversies regarding evangelicals. There is something of a cottage industry specifically targeted to investigate and reveal the worst of evangelical hypocrisy. See *Religulous*, Directed by Larry Charles, Lions Gate Entertainment, 2008. *The Trials of Ted Haggard*, Directed by Alexandra Pelosi, HBO Entertainment, 2008. And *Lord Save Us From Your Followers*, Directed by Dan Merchant, Big Finish Media, 2008. For a broader analysis of the terms evangelical and evangelicalism see Randall Herbert. Balmer, *Encyclopedia of Evangelicalism*, (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2004), Edith Waldvogel. Blumhofer and Joel A. Carpenter, *Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism : A Guide to the Sources* (New York: Garland Pub., 1990), Steven G. Brint and Jean Reith Schroedel, *Evangelicals and Democracy in America* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2009), Os Guinness, *American Evangelicalism: Conservative Religion and the Quandary of Modernity* (Chapel Hill, NC: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1983), Dan. Merchant, *Lord, Save Us From Your Followers : Why is the Gospel of Love Dividing America* (Nashville, TN.: Thomas Nelson, 2008).

<sup>182</sup> Ron Seller, *America’s Definition: What is an Evangelical Christian?* (Phoenix, AZ: Grey Matter Research and Consulting, 2008),

<sup>183</sup> Ron Seller, *Defining Evangelical in Polling and Research: Are We Speaking the Same Language* (Phoenix, AZ: Grey Matter Research and Consulting, 2008). This study suggests even evangelicals have trouble self-defining their own faith.

Eastern Orthodox faiths and various other sub-groups within mainline Protestant denominations.<sup>184</sup> Timothy L. Smith likens evangelicalism to a mosaic; while each individual stone remains unique and distinctly separate, joined together, each evangelical group becomes part of the same overarching evangelical objective.<sup>185</sup>

Yet a significant question in this thesis arises when attempting to determine exactly what the “evangelical objectives” are. Some theologians suggest the high levels of diversity within evangelicalism, the plurality of its distinctives and the divergence of its groups, has convoluted the term to the point of irrelevance for providing clarity or consensus on evangelical claims, purposes or objectives. Donald Dayton writes,

I try to avoid the use of the word “evangelical” as much as possible. It is, in the words of British analytic philosophy, an “essentially contested concept” in which the basic meaning of the word is so at dispute that it is impossible to use it with precision or without participating in an ideological warfare that empowers one group over another.<sup>186</sup>

Dayton suggests a moratorium on the word could allow theologians and scholars to better reengage the phenomenon of American Christianity more coherently and precisely. To that end Dayton argues for three very different but irreducible ways of using “evangelical” in contemporary contexts. He recognizes these definitions conflict and as such well represents the theological struggle inherent across American evangelical religions.

The first meaning Dayton offers harkens back to a specific Lutheran theological advocacy. Evangelicals in this sense of the word tend to advocate for a Jesus centered, New Testament/gospel-centric theology and ecclesiology focused on the Reformational *sola*'s.<sup>187</sup> Hence “evangelicals” in this view position traditional Lutheran Protestantism over and

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<sup>184</sup> Randal, 35-44.

<sup>185</sup> Timothy L. Smith, “The Evangelical Kaleidoscope and the Call to Christian Unity,” *Christian Scholar's Review* Vol. 15, 2, (1986), 125-140.

<sup>186</sup> Donald W. Dayton, “Are Charismatic-Inclined Pietists the True Evangelicals?,” *Modern Reformation* Vol. 10, 2, (March/April 2001), 40-49.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

against traditional Catholic or Greek Orthodox theology and ecclesiology.<sup>188</sup> Secondly, Dayton suggests the definition of evangelicalism can also include the Wesleyan theological view.<sup>189</sup> This position is founded on 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century revivalism. As a corrective movement Wesleyans reacted against the forms of nominal or civil forms of Christianity in Europe and sought to establish a more personal “religion of the heart.”<sup>190</sup> The results came in Great Awakenings and a more robust focus on discipleship or sanctification that was deemed inseparable from salvific faith.<sup>191</sup> Third, Dayton describes the evangelical faction of “neo-evangelicalism” rising from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century reaction to the extremist views of fundamentalism.<sup>192</sup> Led by evangelist Billy Graham theologian Carl Henry and others, neo-evangelicalism rejected the separatism advocated by fundamentalists and instead sought a more culturally engaged, socially active role in American society.

Dayton argues each of these distinct factions within evangelicalism can be accurately used to describe some active form of American evangelicalism today. However, he recognizes these definitions often conflict radically in terms of theological preferences and priorities. Often these conflicts have risen to the point of creating stark opposition, division and warring factions. The significant point to be made of Dayton’s insights here is that American evangelicalism has carried forward over two centuries of adaptation and mutation. Therefore contemporary evangelical religion in America currently represents the collective result of multiple streams of theological, cultural and sociological thought and

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<sup>188</sup> Martin Luther’s use of the five “sola’s” became theological touchstones for the Protestant Reformation. In Latin they are understood as sola: *fida*, *gracia*, *scriptura*, *Christus*, and *gloria*. That there is more than one “sola” is an infamous theological oxymoron. Contemporary theologian Alistair McGrath is an example who advocates for such an understanding. See Alistair E. McGrath, *Christianity’s Dangerous Idea : The Protestant Revolution; a History From the Sixteenth Century to the Twenty-First* (New York: HarperOne, 2007), and Martin Luther, *Luther’s Ninety-Five Theses* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1957),

<sup>189</sup> Dayton, 40-49.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

experience which now coexist simultaneously. Dayton recognizes that each of the definitions he proposes, although carrying severe distinctions and differentiations, also contains dominant similarities that tie each sub-group to a common and distinctive “evangelical” thread. The proverbial evangelical family tree has thousands of various branches. Yet each branch claims some degree of allegiance to a common root system. Scholars George Marsden, David Bebbington and Randall Blamer each help more clearly define and describe these theological roots. It is to these scholars and these roots we now turn.

As a historian specifically interested in American evangelical religion, Marsden modifies and deepens Dayton’s overarching proposal.<sup>193</sup> Marsden supports Dayton’s view that evangelicals are groups of Protestant Christians sharing common theological presuppositions regarding the “gospel of Jesus.”<sup>194</sup> The focus on the New Testament revelations of the person, mission and purpose of Jesus, above all other religious or Scriptural priorities, is what Marsden suggests has historically remained the preeminent focus for American evangelicals. Secondly, Marsden argues evangelicalism can be understood to describe a distinctly Protestant ecclesiological movement, one that has maintained significant cultural and theological disparity. Nevertheless, Marsden notes evangelicals have retained many mutual traditions, influences, and experiences with other forms of non-Protestant Christianity that allow for evangelicals to participate in a shared and unifying Christian worldview. Third, Marsden senses a more recent generalizing trend that has created what he calls a “trans-denominational” effect within evangelicalism.<sup>195</sup> These trans-denominational groups demonstrate more fluid infrastructures than traditional

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<sup>193</sup> George Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1995), 2-5.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, Ibid.

evangelical denominations while remaining formidable enough to create coalitions and common fellowship.<sup>196</sup> Marsden uses evangelist Billy Graham, and his parachurch organization as an example. Although Graham is a lifelong member of the Southern Baptist denomination, his career as an evangelist demonstrates more commitment to the broader arena of evangelical theology and practice than the more limited perspectives or advocacies of Southern Baptists.<sup>197</sup>

### *Bebbington's Evangelical Distinctives*

Marsden's reflections and typology of evangelicalism becomes a lens through which to better perceive Bebbington and Balmer's classifications of evangelicalism. First, Bebbington's analysis of evangelical theological distinctives has perhaps remained one of the most commonly cited works on the subject.<sup>198</sup> Bebbington identifies the four key evangelical distinctives in their theological prioritizations of conversionism, activism, crucicentrism and biblicism.<sup>199</sup> This quadrilateral, first published in 1989, has maintained wide acceptance in both scholarly and popular evangelicals circles.<sup>200</sup> While Bebbington's

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<sup>196</sup> Marsden suggests members or participants of trans-denominational groups often remain active in non-evangelical churches while remaining committed to an overarching evangelical ethos. *Ibid.*

<sup>197</sup> Along with Marsden, see Bill Adler, *Ask Billy Graham* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2007), viii. Grant Wacker, "Billy Graham's America," *Church History: Studies in Christianity and Culture* Vol. 78, 3, (2009), 489-511. Farley P. Butler Jr., "*Billy Graham and the End of Evangelical Unity*" Ph.D. Dissertation, (University of Florida: Gainesville, FL, 1976).

<sup>198</sup> D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain : A History From the 1730s to the 1980s* (London ; Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989),

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>200</sup> See Barry Hankins, *American Evangelicals: A Contemporary History of a Mainstream Religious Movement* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Pub Inc, 2009), 1. Collin Hansen, "How Old is the Old-Time Religion? Review of the Advent of Evangelicalism" Exploring Historical Continuities," *Christianity Today* Vol. June, (2009). Michael A. G. Haykin, Kenneth J. Stewart, and Timothy. George, *The Advent of Evangelicalism : Exploring Historical Continuities* (Nashville, Tenn.: B & H Academic, 2008), David S. Dockery, Ray Van Nesle, and Jerry Tidwell, *Southern Baptists, Evangelicals and the Future of Denominationalism* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2011), David Wells, *No Place for Truth, Or, Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1993), James Emery White, *Christ Among the Dragons : Finding Our Way Through Cultural Challenges* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Books, 2010), intro.

analysis has been added to and challenged over the past several decades, the quadrilateral has remained a worthy standard from which to measure compliance or deviation from traditional, historical evangelical distinctives.<sup>201</sup> Likewise the Bebbington evangelical quadrilateral will serve this thesis as a standard against which contemporary forms of evangelical and postevangelical theology and practice are gauged. Each of Bebbington's distinctives will be considered individually. Finally, Bebbington's characterizations of evangelical theological values carry meaningful significance for clarifying Willardian theology, how it is perceived within contemporary evangelical circles and where it corrects or adapts evangelical ideals and distinctives. Therefore, chapter three of this thesis will compare and contrast Willard's theological critique and reform against the same four distinctives.

### *Conversionism*

Bebbington suggests the classical or traditional evangelical understanding of Christian conversion refers to the life-changing event whereby a person receives or achieves a confidence (faith) in the deity, sanctity, and salvific capacity of Jesus Christ. Other evangelical theologians describe conversionism as a "new birth" experience that often radically alters a convert's life.<sup>202</sup> Frequently, evangelicals contend conversion is

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<sup>201</sup> For agreement with Bebbington see Alister E. McGrath, *A Passion for Truth: The Intellectual Coherence of Evangelicalism* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 22. For additions to Bebbington see Brian Harris, "Beyond Bebbington: The Quest for and Evangelical Identity," *Churchman* Vol. 12, 23, (Autumn, 2008), 201-218. For a limited critique see Mark Sweetnam, "Defining Dispensationalism; a Cultural Studies Perspective," *Journal of Religious History* Vol. 34, 2, (June, 2010), 191-212. T. Larsen, "Defining and Locating Evangelicalism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2007), Kenneth Stewart, *Continuities in Evangelical History: Interactions With David Bebbington* (Downer's Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity, 2007). An excellent summary of Bebbington's distinctions is made by Erwin Fahlbusch and Geoffrey William Bromiley, vol. 2, *The Encyclopedia of Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.; Leiden, Netherlands: Wm. B. Eerdmans; Brill, 1999-2003), 216-19.

<sup>202</sup> McGrath, *Passion for Truth*, 22. Dayton agrees with Bebbington's prioritization of conversionism and suggests evangelicalism is primarily concerned with "convertive piety." Donald W. Dayton, "The Limits of Evangelicalism," in *The Variety of American Evangelicalism*, ed. Donald W. Dayton and Robert K.

occasioned in a moment of existential crisis whereby an individual comes to the awareness of their “lost” condition and is therefore motivated to pursue a remedy for their sin through the atoning work of Christ.<sup>203</sup> Hence for the evangelical, family of origin, nationality or ethnicity has nothing to do with Christian identification. One must become a Christian either by a predetermined act of God’s grace, a personal choice, or perhaps both acting in concert. Hence, one is not born Christian, one becomes a Christian through conversion.

Evangelical conversion also carries eternal and supernatural properties affecting one’s destiny in the afterlife. Yet Christian conversion also includes the assumption of temporal changes that shift the teleological and ontological paradigm of a convert towards that of a Christian worldview. Evangelical theologians describe conversion in totalizing terms. Conversion affects a volitional shift resulting in,

...actual turning of the sinner in repentance and faith in Christ. Passive conversion is also termed ‘regeneration’ because it involves the renewal of the sinner’s will. Active conversion, or the actual turning of the sinner to Christ, is often termed simply ‘conversion.’<sup>204</sup>

As noted in the quote above, conversion and salvation are often related in evangelical theology since the converted are considered saved and the saved are believed to have converted.<sup>205</sup> Whether by means of predestination or the result of an act of the human will,

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Johnston, (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1991),48 Also see Barry Hankins, *American Evangelicals: A Contemporary History of a Mainstream Religious Movement* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Pub Inc, 2009), 45.

<sup>203</sup> Mark A. Shibley, *Resurgent Evangelicalism in the United States : Mapping Cultural Change Since 1970* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1996), 21.

<sup>204</sup> William Greenough Thayer Shedd and Alan W. Gomes, *Dogmatic Theology*, 3rd ed. (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R Pub., 2003), 953.

<sup>205</sup> There is debate in evangelical circles as to the durability of conversion. This debate traces its roots to the theological conflicts between John Calvin and Jacob Arminius. This discussion remains an issue in evangelicalism into the First and Second Great Awakenings, the significance of which will be discussed later in this chapter regarding the effect it has produced in evangelical theology and practice. Also see Roger Olson, *A-Z of Evangelical Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2005), 430. Peter Johannes Thuesen, *Predestination : The American Career of a Contentious Doctrine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009). John S. Feinberg, David Basinger, and Randall Basinger, *Predestination & Free Will : Four Views of Divine Sovereignty & Human Freedom* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1986),

conversion remains strongly emphasized in the evangelical enterprise.<sup>206</sup> Gathering conversions became the primary focus of the revivalism of the second Great Awakening and continues to the present as a primary focus of much evangelical missiology around the globe.

### *Activism*

Evangelicalism has also remained historically tied to the proselytizing act of “evangelism.” Both terms come from the root *euangelion*.<sup>207</sup> Evangelical theologians interpret this Greek word used in the New Testament as, “that which is proper to an *euangelos*, or messenger of good news.”<sup>208</sup> *Euangelion* is often translated in the New Testament “gospel.”<sup>209</sup> In a wider sense the term “evangelical” has been applied since the Protestant Reformation to those churches or individuals placing preeminence on the activities involved in preaching and teaching the properties of the “gospel” specific to salvation.<sup>210</sup> The active, purposeful proliferation of this “news” as an inherently “good” opportunity has traditionally remained a primary evangelistic and missionary activity.

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<sup>206</sup> Balmer, *The Making of Evangelicalism*, Chapter 1.

<sup>207</sup> Most of the 76 occurrences in the NT are in the Pauline letters (48 in the genuine letters, 8 in the deutero-Paulines). Only 12 are in the Gospels (Matthew has 4, Mark has 8). The word does not appear in Luke’s Gospel, the Johannine literature, Titus, Hebrews, 2 Peter, James, or Jude. In the Gospels *εὐαγγέλιον* is used both absolutely (Mark 1:15, etc.) and with a genitive. (Matt 4:23, ex. τῆς βασιλείας.) Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider, vol. 2, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990), 70.

<sup>208</sup> Erwin Fahlbusch and Geoffrey William Bromiley, vol. 2, *The Encyclopedia of Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.; Leiden, Netherlands: Wm. B. Eerdmans; Brill, 1999-2003), 446.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

<sup>210</sup> Yet as we shall see later in this chapter, the history of evangelicalism reveals a continuously evolving debate regarding a) exactly what the gospel is, b) which qualities of the gospel (good news) are in fact “good,” and c) to what degree such qualities should or must be emphasized within the essence and content of evangelical theology and doctrine. Hence, the evangelical understanding of the gospel as a representation of the Christian metanarrative remains an evolving and changing subject of varied opinion and emphasis over the centuries. This despite more contemporary claims of the gospel’s inviolate, singular and eternally constant nature. This has been a continuing claim from conservative evangelicals regarding the passage in Jude 1:3. Conservatives interpret this to mean the gospel has only one valid or orthodox meaning and interpretation. See Richard J. Bauckham, vol. 50, *Word Biblical Commentary : 2 Peter, Jude*, (Dallas, TX: Word Incorporated, 2002), 34. Also see John Piper, *Jesus : The Only Way to God : Must You Hear the Gospel to be Saved* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2010),



Evangelicals place the mandate of this activism on the Great Commission; a declaration of Jesus described in Matthew 28:16-20 for his followers to go into the entire world, spreading his teachings and making Christ following disciples.<sup>211</sup>

Bebbington suggests evangelical activism represents a key distinctive which separates evangelicalism from other forms of Christian Protestantism.<sup>212</sup> Further, the desire to fulfill the Great Commission has remained a significant pillar in evangelical priorities and is a predominating value in the Southern Baptist denominational Faith and Mission Statement as well as the Assemblies of God's "16 Fundamental Truths."<sup>213</sup> The former represents the largest evangelical denomination in the United States. The latter is the fastest growing evangelical denomination in the world.<sup>214</sup>

### *Biblicism*

Bebbington describes evangelical biblicism as the priority placed on the efficacy and reliability of the Bible as the solitary, authoritative source for all theological and ecclesiological formation.<sup>215</sup> What is key for evangelical biblicism is the holiness of Scripture and its unique representation as the divine revelation of God. Therefore, Scripture plays a supreme, totalizing and absolutist role in evangelical theology and practice. Held as inspired by God's Holy Spirit, evangelicals consider the Bible as containing the normative

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<sup>211</sup> See Martin I. Klauber and Scott M. Manetsch, *The Great Commission : Evangelicals & the History of World Missions* (Nashville, Tenn.: B & H Pub., 2008),

<sup>212</sup> Using a generalization, Bebbington suggests mainline Protestant faiths tend to prioritize the satisfaction of more eminent, physical needs such as hunger, shelter and social justice issues. In contrast, Bebbington notes evangelicals tend to focus on the transcendent, spiritual needs of eternal salvation of the soul. This emphasis dictates an activism of proselytizing the unsaved. Bebbington, 74.

<sup>213</sup> See the Southern Baptist Faith and Message doctrinal statement at <http://www.sbc.net/BFM/bfm2000.asp> (accessed 1-10-2010). The Assemblies of God 16 Fundamental truths can be accessed at [http://www.ag.org/top/beliefs/statement\\_of\\_fundamental\\_truths/sft\\_full.cfm](http://www.ag.org/top/beliefs/statement_of_fundamental_truths/sft_full.cfm). (accessed 1-10-2011).

<sup>214</sup> E. W. Lindner, *Yearbook of American & Canadian Churches* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2010),

<sup>215</sup> Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 12.

instructions for all of human endeavors while also establishing divine doctrines for the organization and purposes of the Church catholic. Evangelicals often differ significantly regarding particular views of biblical inspiration or between esoteric understanding of inerrancy or infallibility.<sup>216</sup> However, there exists overarching agreement between evangelicals that Scripture, in cooperation with the interpretive guidance provided by the Holy Spirit, carries an authoritative function to direct human life and living. Typically, evangelical debates regarding Scripture surround how and what measurement or degree of authority, inerrancy, infallibility or accuracy should be applied, not if such a standard is necessary or appropriate.<sup>217</sup>

### *Crucicentrism*

Evangelicals contend the first century crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth represents both a historical event and a manifestation of the penultimate act of divine grace, love, and atonement leading to eternal salvation.<sup>218</sup> Generally, evangelical theology holds God's overarching mission (*missio Dei*) in human history, and perhaps Jesus' single objective in his earthly ministry, was the triumph of good over evil accomplished through an atoning blood sacrifice and subsequent resurrection.<sup>219</sup> Additionally, many evangelicals contend the

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<sup>216</sup> This is seen during the period called the 'Bible Wars' where fundamentalist and liberal factions debated the viability of Scriptural accuracy and authority. See N. T. Wright, *The Last Word : Beyond the Bible Wars to a New Understanding of the Authority of Scripture*, (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005), Harold Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1976).

<sup>217</sup> Brian Malley, *How the Bible Works : An Anthropological Study of Evangelical Biblicism*, (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2004),

<sup>218</sup> Anthony W. Bartlett, *Cross Purposes : The Violent Grammar of Christian Atonement* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 2001), Mark Driscoll and Gerry Breshears, *Death By Love : Letters From the Cross* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2008), Joel B. Green and Mark D. Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross : Atonement in New Testament & Contemporary Contexts* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2000), John MacArthur, *Ashamed of the Gospel : When the Church Becomes Like the World*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2010), John Piper, *The Future of Justification : A Response to N.T. Wright* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2007),

<sup>219</sup> A history of the development of the theology behind the confluence of *missio Dei* with salvation itself is found in Erwin Fahlbusch and Geoffrey William Bromiley, vol. 3, *The Encyclopedia of Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.; Leiden, Netherlands: Wm. B. Eerdmans; Brill, 1999-2003), 563. As H. H. Rosin has

overarching narrative of the Scriptures is a long foreshadowing or prophetic illustration of the atonement Christ accomplishes through the crucifixion.<sup>220</sup> Thus, for evangelicals, the power and credibility of Christianity as a whole hinges upon the metaphysical events leading up to, surrounding and proceeding from his death on the cross.

Additionally, evangelicalism metaphorically positions personal piety in terms of accepting the death of one's carnal, disobedient willfulness through the idea of "picking up of ones cross daily" or becoming "crucified with Christ."<sup>221</sup> Here the symbol of the cross represents an existential reality of a life dedicated to obedience and submission to Christ's example. Furthermore, the suffering, sacrifice and ultimate victory of good implicit in the resurrection are considered emblematic of the same or similar types of demonstrations of God's sovereignty and love in the personal life of the believer.<sup>222</sup> Hence, evangelicals place a significant level of representative meaning on the cross that includes, but also transcends, the physical act of Jesus' execution.

Again, Bebbington argues that the way crucicentrism is prioritized in evangelicalism is unique when compared to other forms of Protestant Christianity. Doctrinally, some mainline Protestants, depending upon how literal their interpretation of Scripture, may tend to accentuate the moral or ethical witness of Jesus' teachings or focus on a symbolic meaning to the death and resurrection of Christ.<sup>223</sup> Therefore, the crucifixion

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shown, not only did *missio Dei* serve to identify God as the genuine subject of Christian mission, but the phrase became a means to enlarge substantially the horizon of salvation itself. H. H. Rosin, *Missio Dei: An Examination of the Origin, Contents and Function of the Term in Protestant Missiological Discussion* (Leiden, Netherlands: Interuniversity Institute for Missiological and Ecumenical Research, 1972).

<sup>220</sup> Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest, *Integrative Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1996), 432-445.

<sup>221</sup> John R. W. Stott and Alister McGrath, *The Cross of Christ*, 20th anniversary ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2006), 271.

<sup>222</sup> Henry T. Blackaby, *Experiencing the Cross* (Sisters, Or.: Multnomah Publishers, 2005).

<sup>223</sup> Here Bebbington makes fleeting reference to the Bultmann debates. See Bebbington, 253. Also see Marcus J. Borg and N. T. Wright, *The Meaning of Jesus : Two Visions* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1999), Stephen T. Davis, Daniel. Kendall, and Gerald. O'Collins, *The Resurrection : An*

becomes not a literal but a representative, transcendent symbol of a divine type of love humans should attempt to emulate as an ultimate model. Conversely, evangelical doctrine holds to literal, historical, physical, bodily resurrection described in the gospel accounts. They contend this event legitimizes Jesus of Nazareth's teachings and therefore by implication Christian doctrine which proceeds from the same.

Further, the good news evangelicals are tasked to actively spread is objectively centered on the atoning sacrifice Jesus provided. The crucifixion made available God's merciful forgiveness of all sin, effectively rescuing humanity from the consequences and penalty of their transgressions.<sup>224</sup> For evangelicals, the crucifixion and resurrection are tangible evidences, not symbolic representations, which prove God's existence, the divinity and authority of Jesus, the necessity of defending biblical authority and the efficacy of Jesus' overarching salvific mission the Scriptures describe.<sup>225</sup> The four theological distinctives are mutually dependent, each reinforcing of the other.<sup>226</sup> Crucicentrist priority funds conversionism, the activist impetus and vice versa.

However, Bebbington perhaps fails to recognize or elucidate the impact biblicism tends to make on the entire enterprise. Traditionally, evangelical theology has held that Scripture positions itself as the premier authority over all subsequent doctrinal interpretations and evaluations.<sup>227</sup> Consequently, the existence of the four evangelical tenets

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*Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Resurrection of Jesus* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 1997),

<sup>224</sup> Again, the nature of the penalty of sin and hell is a matter of some debate in evangelical circles. Most wading into this quagmire was popular evangelical pastor and writer Rob Bell in his book *Love Wins : A Book About Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2011). Bell introduced many evangelicals for the first time to the long standing theological debates regarding the nature of hell and the afterlife. Bell drew significant condemnation from many conservatives for his views.

<sup>225</sup> See N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (London: SPCK, 2003), John R. W. Stott and Alister McGrath, *The Cross of Christ*, 20th anniversary ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2006),

<sup>226</sup> Bebbington, 17-19.

<sup>227</sup> This is what Clark and Feinberg track as the reformational edict of sola scriptura within contemporary evangelical theology. See David K. Clark and John S. Feinberg, *To Know and Love God :*

Bebbington describes each stem from, what evangelicals believe, is a prioritization revealed by the Holy Spirit within the Scripture itself. Therefore, despite whatever diverging interpretations may come from Scripture, evangelicalism has tended to elevate biblicism above the other three distinctives. Sometimes this prioritization has led to claims of a myopic over-prioritization of Scripture and even assertions of “bibliolatry.”<sup>228</sup> Placing the Bible on such a lofty perch has required evangelicals to vehemently defend the Bible against any real or perceived attacks on its authority since the Bible represents the lynch pin which stabilizes the entire evangelical vision of Christianity.<sup>229</sup>

### *Key Historical Transitions*

Randall Balmer’s more recent history of American evangelicalism adds more texture and a contemporary perspective to Bebbington’s quadrilateral.<sup>230</sup> Balmer sees four imperative, transitional events in American evangelicalism he believes altered key theological and doctrinal positions highlighted in Bebbington’s distinctives. The first transition centers on the soteriological shift between the first and second Great Awakenings. The second key shift is tied to the influence of premillennial/postmillennial eschatology resulting from the dispensational theology of John Darby. Third, Balmer

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*Method for Theology*, (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2003), 221-223. Also see David Wells, *No Place for Truth, Or, Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1993), 128

<sup>228</sup> Timothy George, *Pilgrims on the Sawdust Trail : Evangelical Ecumenism and the Quest for Christian Identity* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Academic, 2004), 176. Also see Jeffrey W. Robbins, *Between Faith and Thought : An Essay on the Ontotheological Condition* (Charlottesville, WV: University of Virginia Press, 2003), 135. Randall Herbert Balmer, *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory : A Journey Into the Evangelical Subculture in America*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 195.

<sup>229</sup> This will become of increasing importance when discussing the effect of postmodern hermeneutics in more contemporary representations of evangelical faith, specifically the Emerging Church movement, as well as its effect on Willardian theology as a whole. See Chapter three pages 237-255. See also Barry Hankins, *American Evangelicals: A Contemporary History of a Mainstream Religious Movement* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Pub Inc, 2009), 109-132.

<sup>230</sup> Randall Herbert Balmer, *The Making of Evangelicalism : From Revivalism to Politics, and Beyond* (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2010).

connects the development of sectarian separatism and a fundamentalist subculture to the rise of theological liberalism and scientific empiricism. Finally, Balmer highlights the attempt to re-acculturate evangelicalism into American socio/political arenas through the affiliations and agendas of the Religious Right. Conjoined to and supportive of the growth of the Religious Right is the popularity and acceptance of the seeker-driven, Church Growth Movement ecclesiology.<sup>231</sup> Each of these evolutionary events plays a key role in the development of the contexts wherein Willardian theology has emerged and is currently applied. Therefore a brief investigation into each of these events will better illuminate the unique issues, clarifications, critiques or adaptations found in both Willardian theology and the protoevangelicalism it pursues. We will now turn to these key transitional events, their features and the effects made on evangelicalism's historical tapestry.

*The Evolution of Evangelical Soteriology—Calvinism vs. Arminianism*

Balmer begins his analysis with a discussion of the evolving nature of evangelical soteriology. Historically, Balmer points to soteriology as representing perhaps the most essential, divisive and yet consistently evolving aspect of American evangelicalism. For centuries Christian theology has attempted to identify what one is “saved” from, what one is “saved” to, and the existential or ontological nature of the “saved” condition itself. Balmer's argues that of the evangelical transitional events he investigates, each revolves around a prioritization of one soteriological ideal or belief over another. This suggests soteriology lies at the heart of what evangelicals believe the entirety of the Christian gospel represents. Further, Balmer and Bebbington agree that soteriology is a core thread that conjoins biblicism, conversionism, activism, and crucicentrism inside the evangelical

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<sup>231</sup> D. M. Oldfield, *Right and the Righteous* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1996), 195.

theological tapestry. Therefore the evangelical debate on the nature and essence of salvation involves theological constructs at the quintessential heart of the Christian gospel. Perhaps one of the most consistent and penultimate goals of evangelical theology, including Willardian theology, is to clearly articulate a biblically valid soteriology. Therefore, understanding the evangelical soteriological debates will clarify both the nature of the postevangelical protest and why Willard is seen as offering an attractive alternative.

Balmer agrees with Bebbington, Marsden and Martin Marty's assertions that evangelicalism in the United States traces its origin primarily to the forms of Protestantism evident in the first (1730-1750) and second (1800-1835)<sup>232</sup> Great Awakenings.<sup>233</sup> Centered largely on the revivalist preaching of Jonathan Edwards, Charles Finney, John Wesley and George Whitefield, evangelicalism spread quickly throughout the American colonies. So pervasive was its growth, Marty calls the period from 1776 through 1877 the century of the "Evangelical Empire."<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>232</sup> The dates of the second Great Awakening are disputed among historians. The arguments tend to rest on whether one considers the second Awakening as simply the results of the Yale College and Cane Ridge revivals which began in 1801 and ended a few years later. See Roger Olson, *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2006), 27ff. There is also debate as to whether evangelicalism predates the Great Awakenings. Prominent evangelicals John Stott and J. I. Packer argue that evangelicalism is in essence nothing but first century Christianity, recovered by the Reformation reinstated by the Puritans and popularized by the Awakenings. See R. Kent. Hughes and John H. Armstrong, *The Coming Evangelical Crisis: Current Challenges to the Authority of Scripture and the Gospel* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1996), 45. ME Marty, *Martin Luther: A Life* (New York: Penguin, 2004), Ch. 4. Alister E. McGrath, *Christianity's Dangerous Idea: The Protestant Revolution-- a History From the Sixteenth Century to the Twenty-First* (New York: HarperOne, 2007), 37-61. Kenneth Stewart, "Did Evangelicalism Predate the Eighteenth Century? An Examination of David Bebbington's Thesis," *Evangelical Quarterly* Vol. 77, 2, (2005), 152.

<sup>233</sup> Marty, Marsden, Olson and Balmer all suggests the early American evangelicals were a mix of what Balmer describes as the three P's-New England Puritanism, Continental Pietism and Scottish-Irish Presbyterianism. Some might add a fourth P for Scottish Pragmatism. See Balmer, 11, George Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1991), 86. ME Marty and Merle Peek, *Christianity in the New World: From 1500 to 1800* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Winston Press, 1984), Roger Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition & Reform* (Grand Rapids: Intervarsity Press, 1999), 491.

<sup>234</sup> ME Marty, *Righteous Empire: The Protestant Experience in America* (New York: Dial Press, 1970), It is well understood that other key figures contributed to both the First and Second Great Awakenings other than Edwards, Wesley and Finney. However, for the theologically illustrative purposes of this dissertation, a limited perspective on these three figures is sufficient.

The “Awakenings” left a permanent soteriological impact on American religion. Edward and Wesley’s evangelical understandings of both the process and effect of Christian salvation significantly altered previous articulations of Protestant theology. These itinerant missionaries presented vast audiences with a Christian gospel emphasizing an increased sense of personal responsibility for individual holiness and the desperate need for a rescuing forgiveness from the consequences of sin.<sup>235</sup> The crucicentrist focus on the need for forgiveness, provided through the atoning work of Christ’s allowed an escape from an eternal destiny in Hell.<sup>236</sup> The evangelical emphasis on personal conversion and individual forgiveness increasingly pulled evangelical converts away from prior Christian reliance on sacred rituals, priestly rites, creedal statements and church liturgies significant in more traditional, “higher church” forms of Protestant ecclesiology.<sup>237</sup>

The evangelistic messages were frequently delivered in outdoor settings, in a flowing rhetorical style to large revival meetings which often evoked impassioned “awakenings” or conversions within their hearers. Revival homiletics fostered intensely personal feelings of spiritual guilt, emotional anxiety and the need for salvific relief. As a result, the “revived” Christian was expected to lead a more introspective, contemplative,

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<sup>235</sup> Thomas S. Kidd, *The Great Awakening : The Roots of Evangelical Christianity in Colonial America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards : A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003). Steve. Harper, *The Way to Heaven : The Gospel According to John Wesley*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003),

<sup>236</sup> This salvific message remains largely unchanged in mainstream evangelical theology today. See John Piper, *Jesus: The Only Way to God : Must You Hear the Gospel to be Saved* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2010), R. Albert Mohler, *The Disappearance of God : Dangerous Beliefs in the New Spiritual Openness*, 1st ed. ed. (Colorado Springs, Colo.: Multnomah Books, 2009), John MacArthur, *Experiencing the Passion of Christ* (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, 2004), Mark Driscoll and Gerry Breshears, *Doctrine : What Christians Should Believe* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2010), Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Book House, 1998),

<sup>237</sup> George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards : A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 353. Roger Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition & Reform* (Grand Rapids: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 432.



morally upstanding life, devoted to developing a Christlike character.<sup>238</sup> Marty states the revivalist message of personal piety, combined with an emphasis on conversionism, was so successful “from 1780 to 1860 evangelical Protestants had a greater impact on American culture than at any time before or since.”<sup>239</sup>

Balmer brings to light several important soteriological changes occurring during the Awakenings which produced long-lasting effects in American evangelical theology.

Jonathan Edwards’ soteriology, presented during the first Awakening, consisted of a fairly straightforward Calvinistic or Reformed view of divine election and predestination.<sup>240</sup>

Balmer suggests Edward’s Calvinistic, predestination soteriology had worked well with a more “permeable” or un-buffered and therefore volitionally passive, pre-Enlightenment audiences of the first Awakening. Calvinists expected a spiritual force (the Holy Spirit in this case) to actively pursue and work to convert the soul.<sup>241</sup> This left the recipient rather passive in the conversion process.<sup>242</sup> Consequently, Edward’s preaching did not endeavor to persuade non-believers to a conversional decision. Rather Edward’s sermons tended to focus on calling pre-existing believers to a more devoted Christian life.<sup>243</sup>

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<sup>238</sup> Marsden, *Evangelicalism and Modern America*, ME Marty and Merle Peek, *Christianity in the New World : From 1500 to 1800*, (Minneapolis, Minn.: Winston Press, 1984), WG McLoughlin, *The American Evangelicals, 1800-1900; an Anthology*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), Richard L. Bushman, *The Great Awakening: Documents on the Revival of Religion, 1740-1745*.(New York: Atheneum, 1970).

<sup>239</sup> ME Marty, *Righteous Empire: The Protestant Experience in America* (New York: Dial Press), 3.

<sup>240</sup> Balmer, 20. Also see Peter Johannes Thuesen, *Predestination : The American Career of a Contentious Doctrine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), and Lindsay Jones, Mircea Eliade, and Charles J. Adams, *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2nd ed., vol. 5 (Detroit, MI: Macmillan Reference, 2005), 3204-3208.

<sup>241</sup> Conrad Cherry, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards : A Reappraisal* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), 55-61.

<sup>242</sup> Balmer, 21.

<sup>243</sup> Paul Helm, “Calvin, A. M. Toplady and the Bebbington Thesis,” in *The Advent of Evangelicalism : Exploring Historical Continuities*, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin, Kenneth J. Stewart, and Timothy. George, (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2008),199-220. George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards : A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), ch. 17.

By the start of the second Awakening, however, the progressive advancement of Enlightenment humanism was gaining increased traction in both Western Europe and the American colonies.<sup>244</sup> As a result, early evangelicals began to recognize, accept and apply Enlightenment epistemology. Philosopher Charles Taylor describes this paradigmatic change as the introduction of the “buffered self.”<sup>245</sup> Enlightenment humanism, Taylor argues, allowed 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century Western civilizations to increasingly apply a newfound volitional capacity to act as independent agents, on their own behalf, and from their own resources. This allowed human beings to become progressively aware of their “buffered” personhood, one no longer permeable and controllable by outside “spiritual” forces of good or evil.<sup>246</sup>

In this changing philosophical and epistemological environment the more individualistic and empowering Wesleyan/Arminian theology advocated and encouraged the engagement of the personal will in the salvific process.<sup>247</sup> Hence Wesleyan soteriology aligned with the more democratic humanism already working its way through American socio-political consciousness. As Wesleyan Arminianism gained ground in the American colonies, and the new sense of empowerment found its way into the soteriology of

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<sup>244</sup> Richard F. Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life : An Evangelical Theology of Renewal* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1979), 44-49. R. K. McGregor Wright, *No Place for Sovereignty : What's Wrong With Freewill Theism* (Downers Grove, IL.: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 17-43.

<sup>245</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2007), 38.

<sup>246</sup> This is a very abbreviated synopsis of the humanistic progression. See Peter Gay, *Age of Enlightenment* (New York: Time, Inc., 1966), Kenneth J. Gergen, *The Saturated Self : Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life* (New York, N.Y.: Basic Books, c1991.), Paul Heelas, David Martin, and Paul Morris, *Religion, Modernity, and Postmodernity*, (Oxford, UK ; Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), Paul Heelas, Scott. Lash, and Paul Morris, *Detraditionalization : Critical Reflections on Authority and Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), Jonathan I Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), James C. Livingston, Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, and Sarah Coakley, *Modern Christian Thought; the Twentieth Century*, Rev. 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought: The Age of Reformation*, vol. II (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ Press, 1978), Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self : The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989),

<sup>247</sup> Balmer, 22. Also see Barry Bryant, “Original Sin,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies*, ed. William J. Abraham and James E. Kirby, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 536-538.

Wesleyan revivalist Charles Finney, evangelical soteriology moved toward incorporating the “manifest destiny” ideology inside the still pliable American political landscape.<sup>248</sup>

Edward’s Calvinism was in stark contrast to the Wesleyan/Arminian theology expressed in Finney’s sermons. Finney endeavored to spur non-believing listeners to voluntarily choose God’s gift of repentance.<sup>249</sup> He preached that sanctification was the completing, or second act of conversion, evidenced by the display of a disciplined, pious life.<sup>250</sup> Edwardian/Calvinistic soteriology argued conversion was exclusively an act of predetermined grace on which human will had no effect. Wesleyan/Finneyan Arminian soteriology held salvation itself was an act of divine grace as well, but conjoined the attainment of grace with an act of human volition.

The second Awakening’s recognition and proliferation of individual freewill also carried with it the accompanying potential, and obligation, to persuade or evangelize. Combined with the development of the industrial revolution which sought to attain higher degrees of efficiency and effectiveness, Finney and other evangelists comingled their evangelistic call of persuasion with a pragmatism to achieve the greatest numbers of conversions as expeditiously as possible.<sup>251</sup> To wit, both Finney and Wesley wrote extensive methodological treatises on how to most effectively convince revivalists to make

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<sup>248</sup> Helmut K. Anheier and David C. Hammack, *American Foundations : Roles and Contributions* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2010), Steven G. Brint and Jean Reith Schroedel, *Evangelicals and Democracy in America* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2009), Michael Corbett and Julia Corbett Hemeyer, *Politics and Religion in the United States*, (New York: Garland Pub., 1999), Charles H. Lippy, *Being Religious, American Style : A History of Popular Religiosity in the United States*, (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1994), MA Noll and Luke E. Harlow, *Religion and American Politics : From the Colonial Period to the Present*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), James Davison Hunter, *American Evangelicalism : Conservative Religion and the Quandary of Modernity* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1983),

<sup>249</sup> D. G. Hart, *The Lost Soul of American Protestantism*, vol. American intellectual culture (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002), 12.

<sup>250</sup> Charles Finney, *Sanctification*, ed. W. E. Allen (Cleveland, OH: Christian Literature Crusade, 1989),

<sup>251</sup> Robert A. Wauzzinski, *Between God and Gold : Protestant Evangelicalism and the Industrial Revolution, 1820-1914* (Rutherford, N.J.: Associated University Presses, 1993), 120-124.

choices they felt were eternally beneficial in light of the evangelical gospel they advocated.<sup>252</sup>

This passive vs. active soteriological conflict produced many substantial consequences. Three are key to this thesis. First, the Calvinist/Arminian debate within evangelicalism became a genesis for two very different characterizations of the personhood of God and his relationship to humanity.<sup>253</sup> Secondly, humanity's ability, or lack thereof, to respond to God created two vastly different interpretations and responses to the teleological view of the Christian life. The combinations of these two previous points build the third result. Evangelicalism now had two widely endorsed, biblically valid, yet conflicting gospel messages. This lack of cohesion would cause bitter and enduring splits, sectarian denominationalism and centuries of competition for authority and orthodoxy between warring factions inside the evangelical ranks.

However, despite this division, Edwardian Calvinists and Wesleyan Arminians widely concurred on one key evangelical tenet. Both agreed any revival deemed a success should produce the conversion of both lost souls *and* the transformation of human lives into more obedient disciples pursuing Christlike virtues.<sup>254</sup> Regardless of the bitter free will/determinist conflict, the first century of evangelical theology maintained a soteriological position that conjoined the two priorities of soul conversion with an increasingly transformed pious lifestyle. Justification and sanctification remained of equal value in the Calvinist, Edwardian, Finneyan, and Wesleyan evangelical theologies of the

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<sup>252</sup> Working off Wesley and Finney's revivalist agendas B. W. Gorham's 1854 publication of the *Camp Meeting Manual* provided detailed blueprints on how to most effectively and efficiently conduct a successful revival meeting. See Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776-2005: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy*, 2nd ed. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 98.

<sup>253</sup> This will be developed in Willard's *essentia dei* theological perspective. See Chapter 3 pages 199-207.

<sup>254</sup> Joseph Tracy, *The Great Awakening. A History of the Revival of Religion in the Time of Edwards and Whitefield.*, 3rd. (New York: Tappan & Dennet Dayton & Newman; 1842), 422-431.

Great Awakenings.<sup>255</sup> Collectively their works reveal an early evangelical priority for the converted to progressively demonstrate a noticeable effect of their salvific condition. Both Calvinist and Arminian soteriology conjoined the redemptive state with a life of disciplined obedience to the commands and teachings of Christ.<sup>256</sup> The pursuit of these two aspects was often termed “holiness.” The soteriological result of the Great Awakenings, Balmer argues, placed the objectives of evangelical theology and praxis very similar to the goals espoused in Willard’s theo-ontological view of the Kingdom of God and one of the key aspects the protoevangelical vision he articulates.

### *Millennial vs. Dispensational Eschatology*

The second transitional event in American evangelicalism Balmer discusses is the rise of millennial eschatology and John Darby’s esoteric, yet influential, dispensation theology.<sup>257</sup> Gaining popularity in evangelical circles roughly in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, millennial eschatology became a key theological and sociological phenomenon.<sup>258</sup> The conflicts between post-millennial, a-millennial or pre-millennial dispensationalism still maintain wide influence in contemporary theological discussions.<sup>259</sup> Yet the power of a- or post-millennial eschatology in the 19<sup>th</sup> century stems widely from its confluence with the pious, “perfectionist” theology inside Wesleyan Methodism after the second Great

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<sup>255</sup> See John Calvin, *Golden Booklet of the True Christian Life*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1955), Jonathan Edwards and T. M. Moore, *Pursuing Holiness in the Lord* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R Pub., 2005), Charles Grandison Finney and Louis Gifford Parkhurst, *Principles of Holiness : Selected Messages on Biblical Holiness* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Bethany House, 1984), John Wesley and Clare G. Weakley, *The Nature of Holiness* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Bethany House, 1988),

<sup>256</sup> Chris Armstrong, “How John Wesley Changed America,” *Christian History and Biography*, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ch/news/2003/jun20.html> (accessed April 14, 2010).

<sup>257</sup> Balmer, 34.

<sup>258</sup> Crawford Gribben, *Writing the Rapture : Prophecy Fiction in Evangelical America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 19-22.

<sup>259</sup> The widely popular “Left Behind” series or theo-novels are evidence of Darby’s long legacy. See Gordon L. Isaac, *Left Behind Or Left Befuddled : The Subtle Dangers of Popularizing the End Times* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008), Amy Johnson Frykholm, *Rapture Culture : Left Behind in Evangelical America* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2004),

Awakening.<sup>260</sup> During this era, Methodism hinted at the potentiality of such widespread personal piety that larger systemic societal ills could progressively be overcome.<sup>261</sup> The development of “perfectionist” theology combined with millennial eschatology to fuel a zealous desire for widespread social reform.<sup>262</sup> Built largely on the Old Testament apocalyptic imagery, prophecy and visions within the writings of Isaiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, combined with the New Testament writings in Revelation, a new form of socio-religious activism came to the forefront. Following a desire to usher in or assist God’s Kingdom progression into broader society, postmillennial and amillennial evangelicals sought to implement a Christian ethic they believed could and should lead to a progressively better state of human affairs.<sup>263</sup>

Furthermore, many 19<sup>th</sup> century evangelicals believed the American nation-state, and even the world at large, would become progressively and positively affected by the acceptance and application of Christian piety.<sup>264</sup> This societal-focused gospel included all the soteriological, biblicist, conversional and crucicentrist features previously asserted. Yet it also added this new, post-conversion, divine edict to participate and contribute to an ever expanding, improving period of socio-religious activism resulting in the progressive

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<sup>260</sup> William Kostlevy, *Holiness Manuscripts : A Guide to Sources Documenting the Wesleyan Holiness Movement in the United States and Canada* (Philadelphia, PA: Scarecrow Press, 1994), 9-20.

<sup>261</sup> Emory Stevens Bucke, *The History of American Methodism*. (New York: Abingdon Press, 1964), 337-401.

<sup>262</sup> Ronald C. White and Charles Howard Hopkins, *The Social Gospel : Religion and Reform in Changing America* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1976), 5-15.

<sup>263</sup> Most evangelicals advocating for such a social transformation held to an a-millennial or post-millennial eschatology. These theologies held that during, (a-millennialism) or after, (post-millennialism) one thousand years of Christian advocacy, Christ would return and complete what was still yet to be perfected. See Charles Lee. Feinberg, *Millennialism, the Two Major Views : The Premillennial and Amillennial Systems of Biblical Interpretation Analyzed & Compared*, 3rd. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), Frederic J. Baumgartner, *Longing for the End : A History of Millennialism in Western Civilization* (New York: Palgrave, 2001). George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth Century Evangelicalism, 1870-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 92.

<sup>264</sup> The connection between nationalism and millennialism is discussed by Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism in the Twentieth Century* (New York: New York University Press, 1979), 16-21.

unveiling of God’s Kingdom ethos until the return of Christ.<sup>265</sup> Marsden writes that postmillennialism dominated 19<sup>th</sup> century evangelicalism and created the view that “America has a special place in God’s plans and will be the center for a great spiritual and moral reform that will lead to the golden age or “millennium” of Christian civilization.”<sup>266</sup> Thus moral reformation, personally, socially and politically was considered a hastening of God’s overarching will and plan.<sup>267</sup>

This optimism was eventually crushed by the tragic longevity and severity of the Civil War (1861-1865). The progressive socio-religious evangelical vision was replaced by a deep consternation over the inhumanity of war and racism. The prolonged debauchery of war no longer validated a belief in the ascendancy of civil righteousness and a triumphant millennial Kingdom ruled by virtue and righteousness. Human decency appeared to be in a free-fall decline within both Christian and non-Christian groups alike. This growing pessimism opened the door for a new theological understanding of divine providence to develop and represents yet another indication of the continuing plasticity and adaptability of evangelical theology to changing contexts and circumstances. In this post-Civil War gloom John Nelson Darby (1800-1882) offered renewed hope for evangelicals looking to make sense of their disappointing, yet grand social project.

Darby’s hermeneutical configuration was well suited to the biblicist, conversionist and activist propensities of evangelical theology. In short, his dispensationalism argued the

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<sup>265</sup> James Reichley, *Religion in American Public Life* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1985), 207.

<sup>266</sup> George Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1991), 92-112.

<sup>267</sup> Many examples of the benefits of the so-called social gospel are still available. The abolition of slavery, the six day work-week, child-labor laws, the public school system, women’s suffrage, and the beginnings of equal rights are all traced to the social activism of evangelical theology in the nineteenth century. See ME Marty, *Religion and Republic : The American Circumstance* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1987), 116. And Gary J. Dorrien, *Social Ethics in the Making : Interpreting an American Tradition* (Chichester, U.K. ; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009),

Bible should be divided by eras (dispensations).<sup>268</sup> These eras carried separate and distinct attributes that governed God’s action with humanity.<sup>269</sup> Each dispensation was understood in terms of divine covenants God made with key patriarchs of Scripture such as Adam, Moses, King David, etc.<sup>270</sup> And like all contractual agreements, Darby’s theology taught each covenant had its unique terms and conditions through which God’s personal action was mediated. Hence the era or “dispensation” for those struggling to make sense of the tragic events of the Civil War was significantly different than previous eras described in Scripture.

Darby’s exegesis/eisegesis of Scripture posited the dispensation of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was one of trials and tribulations, where worldwide evil would grow and spread.<sup>271</sup> Darby proposed the immediate future would be marked by an increasingly tumultuous climate. Faithful Christians should therefore expect and prepare for the imminent return of Jesus to rescue (rapture) true believers from the trials and destruction of a tribulation period. Darby described this hellish purgation of evil from the world as the pouring out of God’s wrath as a judgment on those “left-behind” during the rapture.<sup>272</sup> As a result a pre-millennialism formed around the tenet Jesus would return before (pre) the millennial rule to rescue (rapture) the faithful from his divine punishment. After the tribulation, Jesus would return with the faithful and establish his millennial reign in a purged and purified world.<sup>273</sup>

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<sup>268</sup> Peter E. Prosser, *Dispensationalist Eschatology and Its Influence on American and British Religious Movements* (Lewiston, N.Y.: E. Mellen Press, 1999),

<sup>269</sup> Mal Couch, *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1996),

<sup>270</sup> Roger E. Olson, *The Westminster Handbook to Evangelical Theology*, 1st ed. (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 112.

<sup>271</sup> Kenneth G. C. Newport and Crawford. Gribben, *Expecting the End : Millennialism in Social and Historical Context* (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2006),

<sup>272</sup> This is where the title of the best selling “Left Behind” gained its inspiration.

<sup>273</sup> There are several descriptions of this theological proposition. Much of it remains key to mainstream contemporary evangelical theology. See Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd. (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Book House, 1998), 1212-1216. Also W. W. Meissner, *Thy Kingdom Come :*



Pre-millennial dispensational eschatology grew and spread largely through the preaching of Dwight L. Moody, (1837-1899) and Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892).<sup>274</sup> Now undergirded with the eminence of premillennial rapture eschatology, evangelicals following Moody's vision of the gospel saw a divine imperative to reach as many unsaved souls as quickly as possible.<sup>275</sup> As a result, the Moody-esque 19<sup>th</sup> century revival preaching departed from the more holistic Edwardian/Wesleyan message that articulated a growing spiritual maturity as a result of salvific faith. Instead evangelists proliferated a confrontational call directed specifically to the non-churched and unsaved.<sup>276</sup> Premillennialism evoked a fear response to the impending delivery of God's wrath.<sup>277</sup> Thus Moody's focus was primarily on justification of the unsaved, not sanctification of the believer. His revivals focused almost exclusively on eliciting conversion decisions.<sup>278</sup> Combined with Darby's pre-millennial eschatology, Moody's soteriology highlighted the urgency of removing sin guilt through a profession of faith in the viability of Christ's penal substitutionary atonement.

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*Psychoanalytic Perspectives on the Messiah and the Millennium* (Kansas City, MO: Sheed & Ward, 1995), Craig Blomberg and Sung Wook Chung, *A Case for Historic Premillennialism : An Alternative to "Left Behind" Eschatology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2009),

<sup>274</sup> Influenced by the theology and works of William Carey (1761-1834) and Andrew Fuller (1754-1815), Moody combined his pre-millennial dispensationalism with a renewed focus on a fulfilling *The Great Commission*. Carey and Fuller departed from the traditional English view of evangelism and missions of their day believing instead that, in view of the Great Commission, pastors and churches were given a divine responsibility to call the lost to conversion, not existing believers to a holier life. John Mark Terry, "The Great Commission and International Missions: A Historical Look," in *The Challenge of the Great Commission: Essays on God's Mandate for the Local Church*, Chuck Lawless and Thom S. Rainer, editors (Louisville, Pinnacle Publishers, 2005), 70.

<sup>275</sup> D. W. Bebbington, *The Dominance of Evangelicalism : The Age of Spurgeon and Moody* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005).

<sup>276</sup> Ibid.

<sup>277</sup> Timothy Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming : American Premillennialism, 1875-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), John R. Rice, *We Can Have Revival Now* (Murfreesboro, TN: Bob Jones University Press, 1992), 199.

<sup>278</sup> Kathryn Long, *The Revival of 1857-58 : Interpreting an American Religious Awakening* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 128.

Such a profession saved one from both the trials of the tribulation, the world-ending battle of Armageddon and the fires of eternal damnation.<sup>279</sup>

In light of the demise of humanity and the end of time, matters such as piety and spiritual maturation were largely ignored. By the time of the publishing of the Scofield reference Bible in 1909, premillennial dispensational theology had taken deep root, replacing Methodism's social gospel as the embodiment of American evangelical Christianity.<sup>280</sup> Again, this soteriology fit well with the growing American sense of democracy and populism. The result was another broadening of evangelical prominence in America. The priorities of personal piety, character transformation, development of the intellect, concern for liturgy and the pursuit of sound theology carried forward in the writings and ministries of Luther, Calvin, Edwards, Wesley, Whitefield, Edwards and Finney gradually diminished.<sup>281</sup> Moody and Spurgeon's form of revivalism, which eventually led to the popularity of bombastic evangelists such as Billy Sunday and Aimee Simple McPherson, dramatically changed evangelical theological priorities and values.<sup>282</sup> Evangelicalism migrated toward an anti-intellectual, populist movement set on evoking emotional religious conversion experiences in large crowds led by famous personalities. This populist version of evangelicalism became increasingly well known through Billy Graham's Crusades and remains prevalent in the plethora of tele-evangelist organizations

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<sup>279</sup> Ibid., Russell Moore, *The Kingdom of Christ : The New Evangelical Perspective* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2004), 90-93.

<sup>280</sup> ME Marty and RS Appleby, *Fundamentalisms Observed* (University of Chicago Press, 1994), 170. Tim LaHaye, *Revelation Unveiled* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), Chapter 34. Rice, *We Can Have Revival Now*, 199.

<sup>281</sup> Moore, Ibid.

<sup>282</sup> Richard Wightman Fox and James T. Kloppenberg, *A Companion to American Thought* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 1995), 219-223.

today.<sup>283</sup> Additionally, the birth of Pentecostalism in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century further contributed to a widening and more populist, experiential, individualistic form of evangelicalism. Entering the 20<sup>th</sup> century, premillennialism had built an evangelical missional superstructure around a myopic compulsion to save as many souls as possible from both a hellish tribulation and Hell itself.<sup>284</sup>

Willard's holistic theology of the Kingdom of God starkly opposes the effect, if not all the doctrinal eccentricities of premillennial dispensationalism. Further, Willard's emphasis of discipleship evangelism contradicts the conversion-focused, soul saving impetus of Moody/Graham's populist revivalism. However, other contributing factors were also building during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The rise of fundamentalism would radically affect evangelical theology and practice over the next century. The long-ranging influence of fundamentalism is the topic to which we now turn.

### *Fundamental vs. Liberal Theology*

In conjunction with the proliferation of premillennial dispensationalism and revivalism the third key influence Balmer describes is the rise of fundamentalism.<sup>285</sup> Inspired by Moody's teachings, in 1910 two wealthy Chicago businessmen compiled and published a collection of twelve books, containing some ninety essays, titled *The*

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<sup>283</sup> William Warren Sweet, *Revivalism in America, its origin, growth, and decline*. (Gloucester, Mass.: P. Smith, 1965), 24-25. Michael James McClymond, *Embodying the Spirit : New Perspectives on North American Revivalism* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 132.

<sup>284</sup> This is an incredibly interesting confluence of factors which come together at a fortuitous period in evangelical history. For an excellent discussion on this see Amos Yong, *In the Days of Caesar : Pentecostalism and Political Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 2010), 316-323.

<sup>285</sup> George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth Century Evangelicalism, 1870-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), Chapter 3. In fact, the premillennial rapture theology became one of the fundamentalist evangelical beliefs. See R. A. Torrey, Charles Lee. Feinberg, and Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Fundamentals : The Famous Sourcebook of Foundational Biblical Truths* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Publications, 1990), 400.

*Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*.<sup>286</sup> Written by conservative evangelical scholars and pastors, these essays reveal a deep concern over the increasing influence of modern empiricism, specifically evidenced in the new application of German higher criticism of Scriptural texts.<sup>287</sup> One third of the essays in the *Fundamentals* dealt specifically with the issues of biblical inspiration. Together they attempted to forge a bulwark defense, saving Christianity against the encroachment of modernism and its accompanying liberal theology.<sup>288</sup>

Chief among the defenses pursued in the *Fundamentals* was a strict belief in the supernatural acts of God and a clear doctrine of verbal, plenary inspiration of the Bible that produced an absolutely inerrant Scriptural text. This inerrancy extended to all genres of Scripture and created a literalist hermeneutical methodology to all the historical, theological as well as supernatural events described in the Bible.<sup>289</sup> *The Fundamentals* also conveyed strong opposition to any and all deviations from their stated orthodoxy. Infamously stated, “the literal exposition of all the affirmation and attitudes of the Bible and the militant exposure of all non-biblical affirmations and attitudes” was essential to fundamentalism's ability to discern proper participation and inclusion in evangelical Christian faith.<sup>290</sup> The

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<sup>286</sup> R. A. Torrey, Charles Lee. Feinberg, and Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Fundamentals : The Famous Sourcebook of Foundational Biblical Truths* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Publications, 1990).

<sup>287</sup> Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, xiii.

<sup>288</sup> Torrey, et al. *The Fundamentals*, 22. And Mal Couch, *The fundamentals for the twenty-first century : examining the crucial issues of the Christian faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2000), 22.

<sup>289</sup> Christian Historian Roger Olson notes that it was completely disregarded by these mostly reformed protestant fundamentalists that the early reformers and Pietists that were their forefathers did not teach anything like the meticulous perfect inerrancy. Inerrancy only came after liberal theology put the Bible in question. Previously verbal, plenary inspiration and meticulous inerrancy was an unnecessary proposition for orthodoxy. Thus inerrancy is a fundamentalist reaction not a tradition. Roger Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition & Reform* (Grand Rapids: Intervarsity Press, 1999), 548-608. Also see Jack B Rogers and DK McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (New York: Harpercollins, 1979),

<sup>290</sup> George W Dollar, *A History of Fundamentalism in America* (Indiana: Bob Jones University Press, 1973),

*Fundamentals* provided a reliable litmus test for fundamentalists to judge orthodox evangelical faith and were used as the virtual playbook in the fight against the encroachment of liberalism. Conjoined with premillennial dispensational theology, fundamentalists saw higher literary criticism as a providential sign of the predictable and systemic rise of evil prophesied during the end times. Darby's interpretation of the book of Revelation argued for a widening refutation of the gospel as a whole in the run-up to the rapture and tribulation.<sup>291</sup>

By the beginning of the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century evangelical fundamentalism had achieved wide spread popularity in America. Marsden notes that during this period, American evangelicalism and fundamentalism were nearly synonymous. He writes, "There was not a practical distinction between fundamentalist and evangelical: the words were interchangeable."<sup>292</sup> Princeton University served as headquarters for fundamentalist theological training where J. Gresham Machen, A. A. Hodge and B. B. Warfield held sway from 1812-1921.<sup>293</sup> Presiding over *The Princeton Review*, Warfield editorialized the benefits and virtues of exclusivist, separatist fundamentalism.<sup>294</sup> His exuberant theological claims became a lasting trademark of the narrow, rigid legalism inherent to fundamentalist Christianity.<sup>295</sup> According to Warfield anyone who did not

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<sup>291</sup> Ironically, in an apparent acquiescence to modern rationalism, the complexity and chronological classifications within dispensationalism provided a rationalistic means of developing a systematic intellectual foundation that fundamentalists hoped would conserve evangelical theology. John Nelson Darby, *Notes on the Book of the Revelation* (London: Forgotten Books, 2007). See also Robert H. Krapohl and Charles H. Lippy, *The Evangelicals : A Historical, Thematic, and Biographical Guide* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1999), 119-129.

<sup>292</sup> George Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1995), 48.

<sup>293</sup> James C. Livingston, Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, and Sarah Coakley, *Modern Christian Thought: the Twentieth Century*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 315.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid.

<sup>295</sup> James Montgomery Boice and Philip Graham Ryken, *The Doctrines of Grace : Rediscovering the Evangelical Gospel* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2002), 58-61.

accept the specific doctrines depicted in the *Fundamentals* “forfeits the right to be called a Christian. There could be no legitimate position in between.”<sup>296</sup>

When the Scopes Trial opened in 1925, fundamentalist Christianity in America had positioned itself in direct competition to the rise of modern thought.<sup>297</sup> Fundamentalists found themselves fighting liberalism on many fronts. In addition to the threat of literary criticism, fundamentalists also contended against the Enlightenment philosophy of Immanuel Kant and his proposition that called into question the possibility of attaining objective knowledge of anything beyond the limits of sensory experience. In combination with the questions Charles Darwin’s theories of evolution raised regarding the origins of humanity, fundamentalists prepared for battle against any and all “liberal” ideological threats.<sup>298</sup>

Although William Jennings Bryan officially won the Scopes trial, in the larger court of public opinion, his brand of anti-science, anti-reason, anti-modern, biblically literalist fundamentalism was broadly lampooned by the newly formed media culture of newspaper journalism and radio broadcasting. The media characterized fundamentalism as a stereotypically intolerant, rural, backward, ignorant, over-zealous and even bigoted religious underbelly of American Christianity. With these broad stroking characterizations,

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<sup>296</sup> William R. Hutchison, *Religious pluralism in America : the contentious history of a founding ideal* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 146.

<sup>297</sup> The Scopes Trial is formally known as *The State of Tennessee v. Scopes*. It is also informally known as the Scopes Monkey Trial. The trial was a landmark American legal case in 1925 in which high school biology teacher, John Scopes, was accused of violating Tennessee's Butler Act which made it unlawful to teach evolution in public schools. See Barry Hankins, *American Evangelicals: A Contemporary History of a Mainstream Religious Movement* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Pub Inc, 2009), 81.

<sup>298</sup> These are extremely complicated issues that are very interesting and intricate. They are mentioned in summary here due to their complexity and the space it would require to give full credence to their heft. For a review of these issues see Peter J. Bowler, *Monkey Trials and Gorilla Sermons : Evolution and Christianity From Darwin to Intelligent Design* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007), John Cornwell and Michael. McGhee, *Philosophers and God : At the Frontiers of Faith and Reason* (New York: Continuum, 2009), Harriet A. Harris, *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals*, (Oxford ; New York: Clarendon Press Oxford University Press, 1998), 327-329. Richard L. Pratt, *He Gave Us Stories : The Guide to Interpreting Old Testament Narratives* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P. & R. Pub., 1993), Chapter 1.

increasing numbers of evangelicals became disassociated, alienated and marginalized from the wider American culture. Balmer classifies this as the creation of the “evangelical subculture” and the beginnings of a separatism that defined evangelicals for more than forty years.<sup>299</sup>

Fundamentalism’s reaction to the scientific revolution remains a lingering issue in evangelicalism's attempt to conjoin their theology and political policy. Public discourse about the separation between faith and reason, or science and faith, has at times created a widening dualistic gap regarding the appropriate means of attaining knowledge and what kind of education should be provided in public educational institutions. In the aftermath of the Scopes trial, large groups of evangelicals faced dwindling public acceptance, a dispensational eschatology that perceived the events of WWI and WWII as poignant signs of the eminent progression of the apocalyptic tribulation and its accompanying persecution, secularization and ultimate rejection of Christianity.<sup>300</sup> In response evangelicals retreated from the public square to begin a four-decade building spree.

The result was the development of an autonomous religious infrastructure that fundamentalists hoped would maintain the purity of their doctrinal beliefs.<sup>301</sup> During the period from roughly 1930 through 1976 evangelicalism developed into a broad-scaled subculture of local churches, national denominations, private schools, Bible colleges, publishing houses and parachurch groups.<sup>302</sup> The majority of these organizations remained cloistered from the influences of both secular and mainline religious institutions of the

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<sup>299</sup> Balmer, 43.

<sup>300</sup> Jonathan Kirsch, *A History of the End of the World : How the Most Controversial Book in the Bible Changed the Course of Western Civilization* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006),

<sup>301</sup> Joel A. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again : The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 7.

<sup>302</sup> Alan Peshkin, *God’s Choice : The Total World of a Fundamentalist Christian School* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), AlSayyad. Nezar and Mejjan. Massoumi, *The Fundamentalist City? : Religiosity and the Remaking of Urban Space* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2011), 82.

day.<sup>303</sup> “Evangelicals burrowed into their own subculture. They socialized almost entirely within that world....” and were able to function virtually independently from the larger American culture.<sup>304</sup> Ironically, forty years later this separatist subculture, first created as a response to the perceived threat of religious liberalism and civil secularism, would become one of the largest and most powerful conservative political activist organizations in the history of American society.<sup>305</sup> It is to this contemporary brand of evangelicalism we now turn.

### *Evangelicalism's Contemporary Streams*

The past three sections have set the stage to best understand the contemporary context of American evangelicalism. The Biblicist, Conversionist, Activist and Crucicentrist focus of Bebbington's analysis, combined with the historical transitions in Calvinist vs. Arminian soteriology, millennial vs. dispensational eschatology, and the fundamentalist reaction against liberalism are all essential issues still swirling within contemporaneous forms of American evangelical religion. These issues are also integral to Willard's theological proposal as well. This section will consider how each of these previous incarnations and adaptations of evangelical faith have combined to create four expressions of evangelicalism in America today. First, a review of the rise of the neo-evangelicals will describe what has come to be accepted as the most prevalent mainstream form of evangelical doctrine and practice. Secondly, the politically powerful and polarizing “Religious Right” movement will be discussed. Third, the Church Growth Movement

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<sup>303</sup> Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 5.

<sup>304</sup> Balmer, 50.

<sup>305</sup> Glenn H. Utter and James L. True, *Conservative Christians and Political Participation : A Reference Handbook*, (Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-CLIO, 2004), Bill Press, *How the Republicans Stole Christmas : The Republican Party's Declared Monopoly on Religion and What Democrats Can Do to Take it Back*, (New York: Doubleday, 2005), Kenneth D. Wald, *Religion and Politics in the United States*, 4th ed. (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003),



(CGM) reveals yet another pragmatic move in the ongoing contextualization of the evangelical gospel and the goal of fulfilling the Great Commission. Finally a short discussion will investigate the rise of postevangelicalism evidenced in the Emerging Church movement (ECM).

### *Neo-Evangelicals*

Evangelical fundamentalism has maintained a long and illustrious influence on American life.<sup>306</sup> However, after WWII a new brand of evangelicalism would attempt to break from fundamentalist hegemony. By the mid-point of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the first signs of a more moderate evangelical perspective began to emerge.<sup>307</sup> The separatism advocated by fundamentalists created a split with moderates over the issues of cultural integration in an increasingly secular society. Moderates protested fundamentalism's overvaluing of the eminence of doctrinal primacy and the desire to remain pure through reclusively resisting the broader culture.<sup>308</sup> Instead this new breed of moderates or "neo" evangelicals attempted to maintain devotion to the core tenets of evangelical orthodoxy while also appropriately engaging the wider culture.<sup>309</sup> Instead of separatism, neo-evangelicals sought increasing degrees of acculturation in an effort to both evangelize their communities and constructively influence the moral and spiritual direction of society at large.

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<sup>306</sup> The National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) created in 1942 listed key fundamentalist leaders Bob Jones, Sr., John R. Rice, and Harry Ironside as founding members. John R. Rice, *The Charismatic Movement* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1977), 15-17. As such much of American evangelicalism has German Protestant roots which eventually transitioned into Lutheran Pietism.

<sup>307</sup> Webber presents an excellent study of this history. See Robert Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals : Facing the Challenges of the New World* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Books, 2002), Also see Leonard Sweet, *The Evangelical Tradition in America* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1984), and *Post-Modern Pilgrims: First Century Passion for the 21st Century World* (Nashville: B & H Pub Group, 2000),

<sup>308</sup> Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, 108.

<sup>309</sup> Richard G. Kyle, *Evangelicalism : An Americanized Christianity* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 2006), 135.

Significant numbers of key evangelicals began to dispute the separatist tendency of the fundamentalist majority. Larry Pettigrew points to a Southern Baptist source from 1956 entitled “*Is Evangelical Theology changing?*” which lists the key indicators of a “new” or neo-evangelicalism.<sup>310</sup> The article described moderate neo-evangelicals as representing:

- Friendly attitudes toward science
- Willingness to re-examine beliefs concerning the work of the Holy Spirit
- More tolerant attitudes toward varying views of eschatology and a shift away from so called “extreme dispensational” theology
- Increased emphasis on scholarship and intellectual pursuits
- A more definite recognition of social responsibility
- Desire to re-open the subjects of biblical hermeneutics and inspiration
- A growing willingness to dialog with liberal theologians

Pettigrew notes fundamentalists were quick to offer a chastening response to the article.<sup>311</sup>

The fundamentalists’ critique levels concerns of an increased reliance on the experiential, or transcendent aspect of Christian spirituality instead of maintaining a dependence on the veracity of imminent, concrete biblical doctrines that define salvific faith.<sup>312</sup> Ironically,

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<sup>310</sup> Larry D. Pettigrew, “Evangelicalism, Paradigms, and the Emerging Church,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* Vol. 17/2, (Fall, 2006), 159-175. Christian Life Magazine Editorial, “Is Evangelical Theology Changing?,” *Christian Life* 17/11, (March 1956): 16-19. Olson, *A-Z of Evangelical Theology*, 43. Marsden, *Reforming fundamentalism*, 163. Marty, *Modern American Religion, 1941-1960*, 524.

<sup>311</sup> Alva J. McLain responded to the article by stating the worst part of new evangelicalism was a focus on “new birth” as opposed to contending for accuracy and orthodoxy in doctrines of faith. He clearly stated a deep fear that new evangelicalism focused significant attention on the “subjective experience” of new birth and not the “objective matters” of faith. He concluded, as a result “real” conversions would soon become impossible. See Alvin J. McLain, “Is Theology Changing in the Conservative Camp,” *The Brethren Missionary Herald* Vol. (February, 1957). Additionally, Richard Clearwater, then the first President of the self-described fundamentalist seminary Central Baptist Theological Seminary, directly confronted the flaws of new evangelicalism by suggesting it “depreciated doctrinal differences, neglected outward churchly arrangements and highlighted human experience.” See Richard Clearwater, “The Bible: The Unchanging Evangelical Volume,” *The Sword of the Lord* Vol. 20, (May 1956). Many other sources of similar responses are available in the literature. Perhaps the best examples may be Jesse M. Bader, *Evangelism in a Changing America* (St. Louis: The Bethany Press, 1957), ; Alan Walker, *The Whole Gospel for the Whole World* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1957),

<sup>312</sup> There is a significant connection to the increasing influence of Pentecostalism within evangelicalism in America that appears to coincide with this concern of the experiential noted by fundamentalist theologians above. However, the revivalism of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, led by fundamentalist preachers was clearly not a Pentecostal expression of evangelical faith. It did create many schisms within evangelicalism. Pentecostalism will again rise to the forefront later in the research as the post-evangelical movement spawns the Vineyard Churches through John Wimber. Wimber will have a significant

these critiques suggest perhaps an unconscious acquiescence to modernity and a scientific, empirical rationalism motivating the doctrinal-centric focus.

Some neo-evangelical theologians such as Jesse Bader argued the neo-evangelical movement was simply a new manifestation of old evangelical pietism and not a foundational shift in evangelicalism at all.<sup>313</sup> Carl Henry, a theologian at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School was a key figure who argued for a studied engagement with broader culture.<sup>314</sup> As a result of Henry's exegetical prowess and substantial evangelical credentials, neo-evangelicals found a biblical basis to distance themselves from fundamentalism's separatist dogma. Joining Henry were influential pastors and evangelists Harold Ockenga, Charles Fuller and Billy Graham.<sup>315</sup> Each came to recognize the liability in the public's conjoined fundamentalist/evangelical perception. Such a view greatly limited their ability to evangelize non-believers.<sup>316</sup> Neo-evangelicals moved to shape a future evangelicalism defined as a more positive, non-legalistic, inclusive, evangelizing, more culturally relevant movement. However, as the neo-evangelical splinter evolved, most if not all of the fundamentalist theological positions remained, including premillennialism, literal biblicism, free-will Wesleyanism, Moody's revivalist activism and soul-winning conversionism.

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influence on the ministry training of Todd Hunter which is a special focus in this research. See Gary B. McGee, *Miracles, missions, and American Pentecostalism* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2010), and "William J. Seymour and the Azusa Street Revival," *Enrichment Journal* Fall, (1999). Especially helpful was James R. Goff and Grant Wacker, *Portraits of a generation : early Pentecostal leaders* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2002).

<sup>313</sup> Jesse M. Bader, *Evangelism in a Changing America* (St. Louis: The Bethany Press, 1957),

<sup>314</sup> CFH Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans publishing company, 1947),

<sup>315</sup> Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, 180-186.

<sup>316</sup> The very term neo-evangelical was an attempt by Ockenga to create distance between evangelicalism from fundamentalism. Christian Smith and Michael Emerson, *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 11. Wendy Murray, *The Beliefnet Guide to Evangelical Christianity*, (New York: Doubleday, 2005), 62-80.

The key difference was the manner by which neo-evangelicals pursued their faith. As Pettigrew's taxonomy described, neo-evangelicals engaged in more open dialogue and intellectual engagement in non-condemning, non-judgmental ways in hopes of portraying a more attractive faith.<sup>317</sup> Additionally, neo-evangelicals increased their participation in popular culture, putting more attention and effort into public relations. Ockenga, Fuller and Henry joined to form Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, CA. Ockenga led Fuller Seminary as President from 1947 to 1954, and again from 1960 to 1963.<sup>318</sup> His leadership pushed Fuller Seminary to assume, like Princeton half a century prior, a seminal role in developing the newer, non-fundamentalist neo-evangelical movement.<sup>319</sup> In 1956 Ockenga and Graham also established the widely successful evangelical periodical *Christianity Today* which remains the most influential voice of mainstream evangelicalism today.<sup>320</sup>

Neo-evangelical participation in secular American culture created disequilibrium in evangelical circles.<sup>321</sup> Fundamentalist groups continued to express discomfort and warning to increasing levels of worldly integration. This apparent dichotomy of being “in the world but not of the world” represents a long-standing debate in evangelical circles.<sup>322</sup> In a PhD dissertation, Farley Butler suggests this separation between evangelicals and fundamentalist is further evidenced in the increasingly tense relationship between the young upstart Graham and his fundamentalist mentors.<sup>323</sup> Farley describes how Graham's sermons began

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<sup>317</sup> Also see Kyle, *Evangelicalism* 134-137.

<sup>318</sup> Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism* 146n.

<sup>319</sup> Marty, *Modern American Religion*, 1941-1960, 445-6.

<sup>320</sup> Smith and Emerson, *American Evangelicalism*, 12.

<sup>321</sup> Mark Taylor Dalhouse, *An island in the Lake of Fire: Bob Jones University, fundamentalism, and the Separatist movement* (Athens Georgia: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1996), 2.

<sup>322</sup> This phrase, although often quoted as if from the Bible is not actually written as such. It seems to come from a culmination of phrases Jesus makes in a prayer recorded in John 17 or a statement in John 15:19-20. It may also have some connection with the apostle Paul's letter to the Romans in chapter 8, verse 12.

<sup>323</sup> Billy Graham notes in his autobiography that Jones, Rice and McIntire provided a significant degree of influence on the then young evangelist. Both Bob Jones Sr. and Bob Jones Jr. were apart of

to propose a version of evangelicalism focused on “matters of the heart” and not the pursuit, profession and maintenance of fundamentalist doctrinal orthodoxy.<sup>324</sup>

Even Graham’s popularity did not prevent him from coming under severe scrutiny and even repudiation by fundamentalists who condemned his ecumenical work with non-evangelical denominations as heretical.<sup>325</sup> The result of Graham’s decision to remain open to non-evangelical Christians created a clear departure from fundamentalist exclusivism and highlighted differences in neo-evangelical objectives. Marty notes neo-evangelicalism was “devastating to the flank that wanted to keep ties to separatist fundamentalists and liberating to those who promoted Ockenga’s ‘new evangelicalism.’”<sup>326</sup> Historian Mark Noll suggests neo-evangelicalism was crucial in the progression and development and popularity of current evangelical expression.<sup>327</sup> He draws a straight line from Graham/Ockenga/Henry’s neo-evangelical vision to the popularity of modern,

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Graham’s first evangelistic crusade through the south, starting in the Carolina’s. As a one-time student at Bob Jones University, Graham had significant ties to Jones and the fundamentalism Jones advocated. Billy Graham, *Just as I am: the autobiography of Billy Graham* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1999), 34-42, 303-304.

<sup>324</sup> Farley P Butler Jr., “*Billy Graham and the End of Evangelical Unity*” Ph.D., (University of Florida: Gainesville, FL, 1976).

<sup>325</sup> This is one of the most compelling and seemingly untold stories in American evangelical history. Mark Noll, an evangelical scholar and historian, recalled this tension in an article for the 50-year anniversary edition of *Christianity Today*. Noll noted Graham’s crusade in New York city was a key turning point for highlighting key-differentiating features and marked a decisive break from the fundamentalist past. Graham’s overwhelming popularity allowed him to cooperate with whoever would assist his evangelistic endeavors. This including mainline Protestants and Catholics, many of which conservative evangelicals considered dangerously liberal. When fundamentalist critics challenged this strategy, Graham stood firm. Graham notes that the divide between he, Jones, McIntire and Rice was difficult. Graham writes the battle started over “their objections to my growing ecumenism, of course, but the New York Crusade marked their final break with our work. I studied and prayed over their criticism, wanting to accept their indictments if they were right. But I came to the firm conclusion that they were not, and that God was leading us in a different direction. Ruth likewise studied the whole matter; we discussed the issue and prayed over it frequently, Her conclusion was the same as mine. In addition, my study of the major evangelists in history also showed me that the issue was not new; every one of them—from Whitefield and Wesley to Moody and Sunday—had to contend with the similar criticism, both from the right and from the left.” See Grant Wacker, “Billy Graham’s America,” *Church History: Studies in Christianity and Culture* Vol. 78, no. 03 (2009), 494. Billy Graham, *Just as I Am* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 302-303.

<sup>326</sup> Marty, *Modern American Religion*, 447.

<sup>327</sup> MA Noll, “Where We Are and How We Got Here,” *Christianity Today* Vol. (October, 2006).

contemporary evangelical pastors Bill Hybels, Rick Warren, and Timothy Keller.<sup>328</sup> These contemporary neo-evangelicals, first led by Graham's example, promoted neo-evangelicalism by entering the world and attempting to convert the lost out of secular society and into a more accepting and savvy evangelical subculture.<sup>329</sup>

Once called liberals by conservative fundamentalists, neo-evangelical theology now represents the mainstream, theological, ecclesiological and doctrinal norm from which evangelical orthodoxy is measured.<sup>330</sup> Neo-evangelicals, once a minority, now claim the most prestigious positions in each of the most significant evangelical institutions once held by their fundamentalist forbearers.<sup>331</sup> The exclusive, separatist approach of early 20<sup>th</sup> century fundamentalism is now no longer normative even within most conservative evangelical circles. The preponderance of mainstream evangelical institutions, universities and denominations now employ some semblance of Graham, Henry, Ockenga and Fuller's theological, ecclesiological and missiological perspectives.<sup>332</sup>

### *The Religious Right*

Yet theologian Robert Webber reminds us that fundamentalism never left the evangelical tent. Webber, a long time evangelical scholar at Wheaton University from

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<sup>328</sup> Ibid.

<sup>329</sup> Ibid.

<sup>330</sup> This is not to suggest there are not both liberals and conservatives now within the neo-evangelicalism. There are such distinctions and they are regularly in conversation. This phenomenon is called the "evangelical tent." See David K. Clark and John S. Feinberg, *To Know and Love God : Method for Theology*, (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2003), 221-223. Leonard Sweet, *The Evangelical Tradition in America* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1984), 84. Paul Basden and David S. Dockery, *Southern Baptists & Evangelicals: The Conversation Continues* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 40, 231.

<sup>331</sup> Neo-evangelicals are now leading many of the publishing houses, seminaries, magazines, universities and para-church organizations once held by their fundamentalist forbearers. See D. Michael Lindsay, *Faith in the Halls of Power : How Evangelicals Joined the American Elite* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>332</sup> Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*. Also the media appears to understand evangelicalism from this perspective as well. See two studies from Ron Sells, *Defining Evangelical in Polling and Research: Are We Speaking the Same Language* (Phoenix, AZ: Grey Matter Research and Consulting, 2008), and *America's Definition: What is an Evangelical Christian?* (Phoenix, AZ: Grey Matter Research and Consulting, 2008),

1968-2000, chronicles his first-hand experience of both neo-evangelicalism and the “younger evangelical” movements of the 1970’s-90’s.<sup>333</sup> He argues fundamentalism began to reshape itself during the 1960’s when Americans widely reacted to the proliferation of the “peace, love and dope” sentiments of the counter-culture movement. In concert with the tragedies and protests of the Vietnam war, Supreme Court rulings on prayer in public school, legalization of abortion, and the Watergate scandals, a growing number of Americans rekindled a desire for a more conservative lifestyle. In the wake of these complex social upheavals Balmer suggests Americans were eager for “a message that cloaked itself in a very simple morality, one that appropriated the language of Christian values.”<sup>334</sup>

With the election of evangelical president Jimmy Carter, *Newsweek Magazine* declared 1976 the “Year of the Evangelical.”<sup>335</sup> Historian Roger Olson suggests fundamentalist leaning political groups represented by Southern Baptist pastor Jerry Falwell, Pentecostal/Charismatic televangelist Pat Robertson and Focus on the Family psychologist James Dobson fostered a growing audience for their conservative blend of patriotism and Christian virtue.<sup>336</sup> Falwell’s Moral Majority and Robertson’s Christian Coalition began to exert tremendous influence in American culture and politics.<sup>337</sup> En masse evangelicals came out of their self-imposed hiatus and exerted their considerable influence on national and local political machines. Backed by the infrastructure and financial clout of radio and television media outlets, universities, publications houses and

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<sup>333</sup> Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals* and Webber and Donald G. Bloesch, *The Orthodox Evangelicals : Who They Are and What They Are Saying* (Nashville: Nelson, 1978),

<sup>334</sup> Balmer, 55.

<sup>335</sup> Jon Meacham, “From the Editors Desk,” *Newsweek* Vol. 46, (November 13, 2006), 6.

<sup>336</sup> Olson, 568.

<sup>337</sup> David Snowball, *Continuity and change in the rhetoric of the Moral Majority* (New York: Praeger, 1991), James T. Patterson, *Restless giant : the United States from Watergate to Bush v. Gore* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 139.

para-church organizations built during the preceding four decades of seclusion, Falwell, Robertson and Dobson blanketed the country with conservative evangelical values, sponsored legislation and endorsed evangelical candidates.<sup>338</sup>

Political parties once avoiding evangelical connections began to court evangelical endorsements. As a result, from the 1980's through the present, conservative evangelicals have played substantial roles in each national election cycle.<sup>339</sup> A considerable amount of research and commentary has given either credit or blame to the “new Christian right”<sup>340</sup> for their role in the two term presidency of Ronald Reagan,<sup>341</sup> the impeachment of Bill Clinton,<sup>342</sup> and the two-term elections of George W. Bush.<sup>343</sup> Although the issues of abortion, prayer in schools and moral/family values remain key concerns, conservative right wing evangelicals have also taken on other contemporary issues such as same sex marriage, the appointments of federal judgeships, Islamic terrorism and Jewish-Muslim-American relations regarding the state of Israel.<sup>344</sup> Additionally, the theo-political

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<sup>338</sup> Anthony Campolo, *Speaking My Mind* (Nashville, Tenn.: Word Pub. Group, 2004), chapter 3.

<sup>339</sup> David G. Bromley and Anson D. Shupe, *New Christian Politics* (Macon, GA: Mercer, 1984), 92-97.

<sup>340</sup> The term “Religious Right” and “New Christian Right” are interchangeable. Jennifer S. Butler, *Born Again : The Christian Right Globalized* (Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press, 2006), 4-12.

<sup>341</sup> Michael Corbett and Julia Corbett Hemeyer, *Politics and Religion in the United States* (New York: Garland Pub., 1999), 369. Paul A. Djupe and Laura R. Olson, *Encyclopedia of American Religion and Politics* (New York: Hermitage Facts On File, 2003), 366-371. Jeffrey Haynes, *Routledge Handbook of Religion and Politics* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2009), 389. Edward L. Queen, Stephen R. Prothero, and Gardiner H. Shattuck, *Encyclopedia of American Religious History*, Rev. ed., vol. 1 (New York: Hermitage Facts on File, 2001), 82-86. William C. Martin, *With God on Our Side : The Rise of the Religious Right in America* (New York: Broadway Books, 1996),

<sup>342</sup> Chip Berlet and Matthew Lyons, *Right-Wing Populism in America : Too Close for Comfort* (New York: Guilford Press, 2000), 305-322. Glenn H. Utter and John W. Storey, *The Religious Right : A Reference Handbook*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-CLIO, 2001),

<sup>343</sup> Bruce Ellis Benson and Peter. Heltzel, *Evangelicals and Empire : Christian Alternatives to the Political Status Quo* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2008), Katrin. Erdmann, *So Help Me God : The Influence of the Religious Right on the Campaigning of George W. Bush* (Hamburg, Germany: Lit Press, 2006), Daniel K. Williams, *God's Own Party : The Making of the Christian Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 282.

<sup>344</sup> John Clifford Green, Mark J. Rozell, and Clyde Wilcox, *The Christian Right in American Politics : Marching to the Millennium* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2003), Anthony. Campolo, *Red Letter Christians : A Citizen's Guide to Faith & Politics* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2008), Duane Murray



connection with Republican fiscal conservatism, trickle-down economic policy and the rising popularity of the “prosperity gospel” created a mutually reinforcing ideological symbiosis between conservative nation-state political ideology and conservative evangelical theology.<sup>345</sup>

However, over the past three decades, the political arena is only one demonstration of the increased willingness and ability of evangelicals to exert tremendous influence on American culture. Beginning in the 1960’s and running through the present, a more pragmatic and culturally sensitive brand of evangelical ecclesiology began to evolve within younger generations of neo-evangelicals. It is to the creation and effect of the Church Growth Movement (CGM) we now turn.

#### *The Baby-Boomer/Church Growth Movement*

Richard Quebedeaux records the genesis of this transition in his 1974 work *The Young Evangelicals*. There he records the continuing evolution of neo-evangelicalism and reveals the fermentation and coalescing of theology and practice currently representative of mainstream evangelical thought.<sup>346</sup> Quebedeaux suggests the “younger” evangelicals of the mid-1960’s began to move away from the remnants of fundamental theology that remained inside Graham, Ockenga and Henry’s neo-evangelicalism.<sup>347</sup> While neo-evangelicalism had become increasingly popular and taken firm hold in American culture during this period, younger neo-evangelicals paid increased amounts of attention to political and social policy.

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Oldfield, *The Right and the Righteous : The Christian Right Confronts the Republican Party* (Lanham, MA: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996),

<sup>345</sup> Balmer, 61. Alan Wolfe and Ira. Katznelson, *Religion and Democracy in the United States : Danger Or Opportunity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2010), 34. Kent Gerber, “Behind the Prosperity Gospel,” *US News and World Report* Vol. (February 15, 2008), Editorial.

<sup>346</sup> Richard Quebedeaux, *The Young Evangelicals; Revolution in Orthodoxy*(New York: Harper & Row, 1974),

<sup>347</sup> Ibid.

Due to the conflicts surrounding the injustices within the Vietnam War, younger evangelicals demonstrated an interest and capacity for prophetic criticism of the state and a greater openness to conversation with non-evangelicals and non-Christians.<sup>348</sup> Further, the charismatic forms of evangelicalism gained increasing popularity in both their ecclesiological and theological frameworks. These are the first signs of what would eventuate in the CGM.<sup>349</sup>

Organizations such as Calvary Chapel and the Association of Vineyard Churches became significant evangelical movements during this period.<sup>350</sup> John Wimber, the founder of the charismatic Vineyard movement was also a professor of Church Growth at Fuller Theological seminary.<sup>351</sup> This period also marked the beginnings of Bill Hybels and Rick Warren's careers and their introduction to the CGM ideology from Robert Schuler, the first protégé of Fuller Theological Seminary professor and CGM founder Donald McGavran.<sup>352</sup> The two influences of the charismatic and pragmatic would eventually transform neo-evangelicalism into the current manifestation widely recognized in contemporary American society at present.<sup>353</sup>

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<sup>348</sup> Ibid.

<sup>349</sup> Grant Wacker, *Heaven Below : Early Pentecostals and American Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), "Uneasy in Zion: Evangelicals in Postmodern Society," *Evangelicalism and Modern America* Vol. (1984), 17-28. Gary B. McGee, *Miracles, Missions, and American Pentecostalism* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2010),

<sup>350</sup> Donald E. Miller, "Routinizing Charisma: The Vineyard Christian Fellowship in the Post-Wimber Era," *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* Vol. 25, 2, (Fall, 2003), 216-239.

<sup>351</sup> Douglas A. Sweeney, *The American Evangelical Story : A History of the Movement* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2005), 151.

<sup>352</sup> Lynn Hybels and Bill Hybels, *Rediscovering Church: The Story and Vision of Willow Creek Community Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 69. Mara Einstein, *Brands of Faith : Marketing Religion in a Commercial Age* (London: Routledge, 2008), 61-65.

<sup>353</sup> The history and evolution of the CGM is best presented in a paper presented to the American Society of Church Growth on the past and future of the movement. See Ed Stetzer, "The Evolution of Church Growth, Church Health, and the Missional Church: An Overview of the Church Growth Movement From, and Back to, Its Missional Roots," *American Society of Church Growth, Biola University, Los Angeles, CA*, (November, 14, 2008).

Centered mostly on college campuses and beach communities on the west coast, the “Jesus People” Vineyard/Calvary Church movement of young adults, later called the “Baby-Boomer” generation, became a focal point of growing number of “adumbrated evangelical hippies of the late 1960’s.”<sup>354</sup> Comprised largely of students, recent seminary graduates, street people, intellectuals, activists, pastors, evangelists, politicians and concerned laity, younger evangelicals attempted to form evangelical churches significantly different and more aesthetically appealing to their counter-cultural generation.<sup>355</sup> Quebedeaux discusses a number of intellectual and theological catalysts for the younger evangelicals. Among these influences he cites the works of C. S. Lewis, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Francis Schaefer.<sup>356</sup> The influential works of George Ladd and the broader contribution of other scholars at Fuller Theological Seminary are also noted as significant contributing factors.<sup>357</sup>

Quebedeaux notes younger evangelicals also placed greater weight on discipleship as the necessary effect of a genuine Christian conversion. The transformational effect of a gospel that spoke to the “whole person” and not simply the conversion of a “soul” rose in

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<sup>354</sup> James Davidson Hunter, “The New Class and the Young Evangelicals,” *Review of Religious Research* 22, 2, (Dec. 1980): 155-169. Baby-Boomers are classically considered the generation born to WWII veterans between 1945 and 1965. See William M. Easum and Herb. Miller, *How to Reach Baby Boomers*, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1991), Robert Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers : How Twenty- and Thirty-Somethings Are Shaping the Future of American Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007),

<sup>355</sup> They also desired an honest dialog on what appeared to some as an inappropriate level of complicity in the syncretism of conservatism in both evangelical theology with American political policy. Many works catalogue these events and people in addition to Quebedeaux. Arthur Gish *The New Left and Christian Radicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), John Howard. Yoder, *The politics of Jesus; vicit, Agnus noster* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1972), ME Marty, *A Nation of Behaviors* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), Dale W. Brown, *The Christian revolutionary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971) and James Davidson Hunter, “The New Class and the Young Evangelicals,” *The Review of Religions Research* 24/3, (March 1983): 261-267 and Webber, *The younger evangelicals: facing the challenges of the new world*, Webber and Bloesch, *The orthodox evangelicals*.

<sup>356</sup> Richard Quebedeaux, *The Worldly Evangelicals* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), 107-109.

<sup>357</sup> An excellent review of the significant influence of Fuller Theological Seminary is compiled by Marsden, *Reforming fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the new evangelicalism*, 1995. Fuller is at the forefront of the new evangelical movement discussed here. Several EC leaders teach adjunct classes or seminars at Fuller who has welcomed the evolution of evangelical theology wherever it leads.

importance as well. This inclusive, whole-life conversion traces back to the early ministries of Wesley and Edwards but was also a focus of evangelical Leighton Ford, Billy Graham's brother-in-law, and the development of organizations such as Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship and the Urbana 70 conferences.<sup>358</sup>

Both Quebedeaux and Webber also describe an increased desire for making a substantive impact on societal condition and a deeper, more valid, systemic change in their individual lives. However, as with their neo-evangelical parents, younger evangelicals resisted doctrinal innovation and maintained Bebbington's basic evangelical tenets. The Bible retained its core authoritative position as divine revelation.<sup>359</sup> Premillennial dispensationalism also remained. A focus on crucicentrist conversionism was the premier focus of Ladd, Bonheoffer and Schaefer's missiological soteriology and ecclesiology. Again, the theological difference between neo-evangelicals and their evangelical offspring was one of emphasis and application, not content.

As the new ascetically and culturally "hip" younger evangelical/Jesus People movement grew, McGavran's publishing of *Understanding Church Growth* provided an ecclesiological platform for the enterprising baby-boomer generation to follow.<sup>360</sup> McGavran and C. Peter Wagoner's unique conceptual mix of corporate organization, brand of marketing and missiology encouraged accommodation to local culture as an essential

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<sup>358</sup> Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches : Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 49.

<sup>359</sup> The eventual split between Chuck Smith and John Wimber was largely over how literally one chose to interpret the Bible on the issue of spiritual gifts. See Margaret M. Poloma, *Main Street Mystics : The Toronto Blessing and Reviving Pentecostalism* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2003), 148.

<sup>360</sup> Donald A. McGavran, *How Churches Grow; the New Frontiers of Mission*. (London: World Dominion Press, 1959), and Donald A. McGavran, *Church Growth and Christian Mission*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), Donald A. McGavran and C. Peter. Wagner, *Understanding Church Growth*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1990),

element to successful evangelistic efforts.<sup>361</sup> To capitalize on the key evangelical pursuit of the Great Commission, McGavran and Wagoner buoyed pastors and leaders to focus efforts on evangelizing non-believers through first advocating the benefits of church affiliation, then conversion, and eventually church membership. To best accomplish this evangelization churches should create programs and structures that met “felt needs” of relatively homogenous culture groups.<sup>362</sup> To track the quality of church membership McGavran suggested modern quantitative accounting methods to evaluate and measure specific determiners of church “success.”

Therefore, the CGM methodology gradually emphasized the accumulation, public reporting and management of key metrics and measurements of congregational accomplishment.<sup>363</sup> These measurements focused on the number of new converts, membership growth, church service attendance and financial giving.<sup>364</sup> McGavran’s overt focus on quantitative—not qualitative—measurements created an ideological and theological rationalization for developing entertaining, attractional religious programming to compete in what Barry Kosmin calls a religious “free-market” ideology.<sup>365</sup> To both participate and win in this competitive environment churches applied business model

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<sup>361</sup> McGavran eventually created the Institute of Church Growth at Fuller Theological Seminary. Elmer L. Towns and Gary McIntosh, *Evaluating the Church Growth Movement : 5 Views* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), chapter 1.

<sup>362</sup> This proved to be one of McGavran’s most controversial suggestions. Yet still, many Church Growth advocates sense McGavran’s pragmatic wisdom in maintaining cultural and even racial segregation in growing churches. See Aubrey Malphurs, *Planting Growing Churches for the 21st Century : A Comprehensive Guide for New Churches and Those Desiring Renewal*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2004), 320. And Donald A. McGavran and C. Peter. Wagner, *Understanding Church Growth*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1970), 223.

<sup>363</sup> Each subsequent reissuing of McGavran’s *Understanding Church Growth* shows a progression of more pragmatic language and the use of increasing “thermometers” of church growth. There are currently three editions, one published in each decade from 1970-1990. Also see Elmer L. Towns and Gary McIntosh, *Evaluating the Church Growth Movement : 5 Views* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2004),

<sup>364</sup> McGavran called these measurements “facts” See chapter 6 of each edition of *Understanding Church Growth* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965, 1978, 1990)

<sup>365</sup> Barry A. Kosmin and Ariela Keysar, *Religion in a Free Market : Religious and Non-Religious Americans : Who, What, Why, Where* (Ithaca, NY: Paramount Market Pub., 2006), 11.

marketing strategies, hoping to attract as many potential purveyors as possible to their evangelical “storefront.”<sup>366</sup> The now popular “seeker-sensitive” or “seeker-driven” methodology which spawned the megachurch phenomenon was the culmination of upstart, enterprising pastors applying the CGM theology and missiology.<sup>367</sup>

There are four essential principles that define the CGM as applied in the “seeker” church model.<sup>368</sup> As mentioned earlier, quantitative measurements of determining success play a significant role. Metrics such as worship attendance, increases in cash receipts, and number of new converts are considered significant determiners for discerning if proper contextualization is occurring and to what degree. If “crowds, cash and converts” are growing, then successful contextualization of the gospel into the culture is assumed. This represents the second goal of the CGM/Seeker methodology and the overarching objective of the movement. Third, applying the latest, modern consumer marketing techniques and technologies are essential for displaying cultural acumen, creating an entertaining atmosphere and maintaining brand loyalty in a competitive religious marketplace. The technology and marketing efforts focus directly on the Sunday morning “worship service.” This typically becomes the calling card or primary focal point of the entire church organization. Each segment of the service, from the sermon, music, drama, video, etc., are each carefully choreographed to convey a pleasurable, relevant, user-friendly and palatable Christian message.<sup>369</sup> Thus, the seeker-driven worship service became significantly

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<sup>366</sup> Ibid. Also Kyle, *Evangelicalism : an Americanized Christianity*, 2.

<sup>367</sup> Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven : Spirituality in America Since the 1950s* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), Wade Clark Roof, *A Generation of Seekers : The Spiritual Journeys of the Baby Boom Generation* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), Wade Clark Roof, *Spiritual Marketplace : Baby Boomers and the Remaking of American Religion* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999).

<sup>368</sup> Ibid.

<sup>369</sup> To draw and not offend the seeker, CGM organizations strive to implant or mimic the larger cultural milieu into their religious services, reducing the contextual conflicts between the non-religious and religious environments. A wonderful description of this is provided by Kent Carlson and Mike Lueken,

centered on the creation of a performance event or spectacular that would equally entertain as it would inform and enlighten.<sup>370</sup> The outcome is an acculturated church experience using popular communication styles, entertainment trends and beneficial programs to satisfy “felt needs” in an attempt to accomplish an evangelistic priority.<sup>371</sup> Finally, the value of networking with like-minded churches and church leaders allows younger church leaders to learn from veterans of the movement to pass on “what is working” in terms of growth strategies for competitive advantage.<sup>372</sup>

The seeker-oriented churches were vastly successful at corporately applying McGavran’s ecclesiology and missiology.<sup>373</sup> The goal is to contextualize and implement popular forms of secular culture to first attract, then to convert, attendees to evangelicalism and finally membership to a particular church.<sup>374</sup> In the process megachurch pastors often became minor celebrities in their own right. Following the example set by Robert Schuller at his Crystal Cathedral and its weekly service televised as the *Hour of Power*, megachurch

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*Renovation of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Intervarsity, 2011). Also Stuart M. Hoover, “The Cross At Willow Creek: Seeker Religion and the Contemporary Marketplace,” in *Religion and Popular Culture*, ed. Bruce David Forbes and Jeffrey Mahan, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 145-160. Also Aubrey Malphurs, *Strategy 2000 : Churches Making Disciples for the Next Millennium* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Resources, 1996), 93.

<sup>370</sup> Bob DeWaay, *Redefining Christianity: understanding the Purpose Driven Movement* (Springfield, MO: 21st Century Press), 6. Richard Warren, *The purpose driven church : growth without compromising your message & mission* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Pub, 1995),

<sup>371</sup> Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, 75-80, 251-308. Lynn Hybels and Bill Hybels, *Rediscovering Church: The Story and Vision of Willow Creek Community Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997).

<sup>372</sup> For additional insight into the “Seeker” movement other than Wuthnow and Roof see Bob DeWaay, *Redefining Christianity: understanding the Purpose Driven Movement* (Springfield, MO: 21st Century Press), Richard Warren, *The purpose driven church : growth without compromising your message & mission* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Pub, 1995), Aubrey Malphurs, *Strategy 2000 : churches making disciples for the next millennium* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Resources, 1996), and Ed Stetzer, *Planting new churches in a postmodern age* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman, 2003).

<sup>373</sup> Mara. Einstein, *Brands of Faith : Marketing Religion in a Commercial Age* (London: Routledge, 2008), 61-65. Richard Warren, *The purpose driven church : growth without compromising your message & mission* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Pub, 1995), 29. David Gortner, *Transforming Evangelism* (New York: Church Publishing Inc., 2008), 25.

<sup>374</sup> Kimon Howland Sargeant, *Seeker Churches : Promoting Traditional Religion in a Nontraditional Way* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2000).

organizations worked with noted business consultants such as Peter Drucker and John Maxwell, professional athletes, famous entertainers, and celebrities to spread and endorse the evangelical ethos.<sup>375</sup> As such, this era of American evangelicalism tended to present a populist, persuasive and attractive group of cultural icons and leaders across a broad spectrum of American society who gave convincing testimonials and endorsements for the benefits of evangelical brands of faith in their lives and professional careers.<sup>376</sup>

Leith Anderson, a CGM advocate, puts perhaps the best spin on the contrast between the more traditional neo-evangelical and CGM ecclesiology. He writes, “We cannot view the church as an island isolated from the rest of society. It cannot be isolated. As the culture changes, the church changes.”<sup>377</sup> Critics such as scholar Os Guinness commenting on the CGM suggest, “Fundamentalism prided itself on being world denying by definition. Today [evangelicalism] has become world affirming in a worldlier and more compromising way than liberalism.”<sup>378</sup> In less strident terms, Mark Noll says mainstream CGM evangelicalism has become exceedingly “flexible and adaptable” and that evangelicals have become “pervasively shaped by their particular cultures.”<sup>379</sup> Other scholars and writers label this move not simply enculturation but rather a secularization of evangelicalism itself.<sup>380</sup>

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<sup>375</sup> G. A. Pritchard, *Willow Creek Seeker Services : Evaluating a New Way of Doing Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1996), Herbert E. Douglass, *Truth Matters : An Analysis of the Purpose Driven Life Movement* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press, 2005), 14.

<sup>376</sup> Gary Dorrien, *The Remaking of Evangelical Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Pr, 1998), 171. Kyle, *Evangelicalism*, 272.

<sup>377</sup> Leith Anderson, *Dying for Change: An Arresting Look At the New Realities Confronting Churches and Para-Church Ministries*, (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1990), 43.

<sup>378</sup> Os Guinness, “Sounding Out the Ideals of the Church,” in *No God But God*, ed. Os Guinness and John Seel, (Chicago: Moody Pub, 1992), 92, 154.

<sup>379</sup> MA Noll, *American evangelical Christianity: an introduction* (New York: Blackwell Pub, 2001), 14

<sup>380</sup> Shayne. Lee and Phillip Luke Sinitiere, *Holy Mavericks : Evangelical Innovators and the Spiritual Marketplace* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), Os Guinness, *Dining With the Devil : The Megachurch Movement Flirts With Modernity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1993), Thomas.



Despite its critics, the seeker oriented/CGM brand of evangelicalism has become the prevalent stream of evangelicalism in American culture. The mega and “super-mega” church phenomenon continues to spread across the nation often at the expense of smaller, less fiscally robust congregations.<sup>381</sup> Timothy Weber interprets the seeker-driven megachurch trend as evidence of the height of evangelicals’ enculturation into the broader American society.<sup>382</sup> Driven largely by the works and publications of Hybels and his Willow Creek Association and Warren’s publication of the *Purpose Driven* series of books and study guides the CGM’s seeker model continues to attract the largely suburban, baby-boomer audience.<sup>383</sup> Expansive building programs have been commonplace during this era. Outside business consultants often assist with professional fundraising strategies, management direction and leadership development.<sup>384</sup> Church campuses tend to resemble

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White and John M. Yeats, *Franchising McChurch : Feeding Our Obsession With Easy Christianity*, (Colorado Springs, Co.: David C. Cook, 2009), Marshall. Davis, *More than a purpose: an evangelical response to Rick Warren and the megachurch movement* (Enumclaw, Wash.: Pleasant Word, 2006), Conrad Eugene Ostwalt, *Secular steeples : popular culture and the religious imagination* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2003), Mara Einstein, *Brands of faith : marketing religion in a commercial age* (London: Routledge, 2008), 61-65.

<sup>381</sup> Anne C. Loveland and Otis B. Wheeler, *From Meetinghouse to Megachurch : A Material and Cultural History* (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 2003), 127-180. Definitions of the term “mega” church vary. However most commonly a mega church is categorized as regularly drawing more than 2000 in weekly attendance. “Super” megachurches are those with over 10,000 weekly attendees. Approximately 50 churches in America are in the “Super” category. Scott Thumma and Dave Travis, *Beyond Megachurch Myths : What We Can Learn From America’s Largest Churches*, 1st ed. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 186. And Scott Thumma and Warren Bird, “Not Who You Think They Are: The Real Story of People Who Attend America’s Megachurches,” *Harford Institute of Religious Research* Vol. (June 2009).

<sup>382</sup> Timothy Weber, “Fundamentalism Twice Removed,” in *New Dimensions in American Religious History*, ed. Jay Dolan and JP Wind, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmann, 1993), 428-430.

<sup>383</sup> Warren makes it clear how significant the teaching of McGavran was on his early development. See Warren, *The purpose driven church*, 29. Hybels and Warren recognize the influence of megachurch television pastor Robert Schuller as the first “seeker driven” church model. Hybels and Warren studied with Schuller prior to the planting of their churches. Mara. Einstein, *Brands of faith : marketing religion in a commercial age* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2008), 62.

<sup>384</sup> Omri Elisha, *Moral Ambition : Mobilization and Social Outreach in Evangelical Megachurches* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011), 50-55. Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Pillars of Faith : American Congregations and Their Partners* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), 104-108.

modern shopping malls.<sup>385</sup> Theatrical lighting, smoke machines, laser lights and large projection video and sound equipment continue to entertain larger and larger crowds. Some congregations have even taken over stadiums venues to accommodate larger audiences, convinced increased attendance represents affirmation and often a degree of divine blessing.<sup>386</sup> Thus at the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century American evangelicalism has more than recovered from their early 20<sup>th</sup> century malaise. Evangelicalism now presents a popular, articulate, attractive, well-managed organizational structure that pursues corporate excellence in all its endeavors and is well represented within the popular media outlets. Evangelicals learned well from the American corporate culture how to market, manage and mobilize evangelicalism into both mainstream American society and its political institutions.<sup>387</sup>

### *Seeds of Discontent*

In response to the expanding influence of the seeker oriented/CGM theology and methodology, groups of evangelicals began to express concerns. Sociologists J. B. Watson and Walter Scalen describe several “counter movements” which rose to correct excesses, oversights in the CGM’s ecclesiological syncretism.<sup>388</sup> They suggest these groups

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<sup>385</sup> An interesting investigation into the connections between shopping malls and religion is done by *Malls R Us*, Directed by Helene Klodawsky, Icarus Films, 2009. Also see J Gruber and DM Hungerman, “The Church Versus the Mall: What Happens When Religion Faces Increased Secular Competition?” *Quarterly Journal of Economics* Vol. 123, no. 2 (2008), 831-862.

<sup>386</sup> Larry Witham, *Marketplace of the Gods : How Economics Explains Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 91.

<sup>387</sup> Thomas. White and John M. Yeats, *Franchising McChurch: feeding our obsession with easy Christianity*, (Colorado Springs, Co: David C. Cook Pub.), Conrad Eugene Ostwalt, *Secular Steeples : Popular Culture and the Religious Imagination* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2003), Christian Smith and Michael Emerson, *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), Kevin M. Taylor, *American Evangelicals and Religious Diversity : Subcultural Education, Theological Boundaries, and the Relativization of Tradition* (Greenwich, Conn.: Information Age Pub., 2006),

<sup>388</sup> J.B. Watson and Walter Scalen, “‘Dining With the Devil’: The Unique Secularization of American Evangelical Churches,” *International Social Science Review* 83, 3, (2008): 171-180.

are contemporary versions of counter or protest movements of the past and offer five common yet integral critiques. The first critique centers on the prioritization of individualism and the acquiescence of consumerism in the evangelistic strategies of the CGM. These critiques contend consumerism and competition drive church activities toward the single goal of attracting more and more attendees. One result is to pay less attention on the development and maturation of existing members. This absence of focus on the development of Christian character became a more obvious concern as prominent evangelical leaders were discovered engaging in various sexual, financial and political improprieties.<sup>389</sup>

Second, as a corollary to the first critique, the soteriology communicated in the CGM ecclesiology often carried a Moody-esque focus. CGM-styled evangelicalism tended to climax at the moment of conversion. Lacking in the seeker/CGM theology was a holistic vision of life after justification. The concepts of discipleship and “holiness” discussed earlier were not a primary concern beyond the civility required for church membership. This absence left increasing numbers of evangelical church attendees desiring a more holistic, satisfying and robust Christian experience.<sup>390</sup> Thirdly, the sheer size of many megachurch organizations is not conducive to the development and maintenance of

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<sup>389</sup> The lists of writers and references on this subject are plentiful yet very few are objective. For a sampling see Jim. Wallis, *The Great Awakening : Reviving Faith & Politics in a Post-Religious Right America*, 1st ed. (New York, N.Y.: HarperOne, 2008), J. K. Genda, *Republican Conservative Hypocrisy: The Gop Has Successfully Linked Christian Conservatism to Filthy Politics in the Battle for Religious Votes* (Bloomington, IL: Author House, 2010). Robert S. McElvaine, *Grand Theft Jesus : The Hijacking of Religion in America* (New York: Three rivers Press), Glenn. Greenwald, *Great American Hypocrites : Toppling the Big Myths of Republican Politics*, 1st ed. (New York: Crown Publishers, 2008). Michael Patrick Leahy, *Letter to an Atheist* (Thompsons Station, TN: Harpeth River Press, 2007). For a conservative view see S. E. Cupp and Brett. Joshpe, *Why You're Wrong About the Right : Behind the Myths : The Surprising Truth About Conservatives* (New York: Threshold Editions, 2008), S. E. Cupp, *Losing Our Religion : The Liberal Media's Attack on Christianity* (New York: Threshold Editions, 2010),

<sup>390</sup> This is perhaps best described in the Reveal study conducted by seeker church advocate and mega church Willow Creek led by Bill Hybels. See Greg Hawkins, Cally Parkinson, and Eric Arnson, *Reveal: Where Are You?* (Barrington, IL: Willow Creek Resources, 2007).

intimacy in personal relationships.<sup>391</sup> Communal engagement can be difficult. Increasingly, some megachurch attendees began to sense the loss of a church “family” and desired more meaningful relational interactions. The result was the beginning of the “cell” or “small group” movement.<sup>392</sup>

Fourth, premillennial eschatology provided a strong motive for CGM organizations to evangelize the world. However, the premillennial rapture theory carried significant repercussions. One repercussion was an overarching disinterest in responsible environmental care.<sup>393</sup> Premillennial rapture theory holds Christian will be removed from the earth before the Tribulation period while the planet is destroyed and recreated. Thus, Christian environmental groups became increasingly concerned about the cavalier approach to pollution, destruction and over consumption of natural resources these eschatological views elicited.<sup>394</sup> A second repercussion of premillennialism was the creation of an insider/outsider mentality within many evangelical groups. The overwhelming popularity of the *Left Behind* novels, an 18 book series of biblio-fiction works describing the premillennial apocalypse capitalized on the literalist, fundamentalist bibliography lingering from early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>395</sup> The book series drew a number of significant critiques.<sup>396</sup>

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<sup>391</sup> This is best described by home church advocate Frank Viola, *Finding Organic Church : A Comprehensive Guide to Starting and Sustaining Authentic Christian Communities*, (Colorado Springs, Colo.: David C. Cook, 2009) and *So You Want to Start a House Church?: First-Century Styled Church Planting for Today* (Present Testimony Ministry, 2003),

<sup>392</sup> C. J. Mahaney, *Why Small Groups*, (Gaithersburg, MD: People of Destiny International, 1996), 3-16. Bill Donahue, *The Willow Creek Guide to Leading Life-Changing Small Groups* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Pub. House, 1996), Bill Donahue and Russ. Robinson, *Building a Church of Small Groups : A Place Where Nobody Stands Alone* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2001),

<sup>393</sup> Norman C. Habel and Vicky Balabanski, *The Earth Story in the New Testament* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press Pilgrim Press, 2002), 171. E. Calvin. Beisner, *Where Garden Meets Wilderness : Evangelical Entry Into the Environmental Debate* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 1997), 33.

<sup>394</sup> Ian C. Bradley, *God is Green : Ecology for Christians* (New York: Image Books, 1992), Jonathan. Merritt, *Green Like God : Unlocking the Divine Plan for Our Planet* (New York: FaithWords, 2010).

<sup>395</sup> There are 18 books in the left behind series. Tim F. LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *Left Behind : A Novel of the Earth's Last Days* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 1995),

Perhaps most troubling aspect of the series critics mention was the extremely violent and wrathful portrait of God that was widely accepted by millions of mainstream evangelical readers.

One or more of these four central issues motivates each of the particular counter movements and creates Watson and Scalen describe as “emerging schools of thought much larger than simply a response to the CGM, [which] in some cases have a long history.”<sup>397</sup> Barna’s research group has also tracked specific reactions within younger generations of evangelicals against the neo-evangelical theological distinctives and the CGM ecclesiology.<sup>398</sup> Watson, Scalen and Barna’s research suggests these counter-reactionary movements are evangelical and not influenced by outside or non-evangelical agendas. As such each counter-movement shares a similar evangelical, historical and theological context. In particular, two of these counter-movements are most pertinent to this thesis.<sup>399</sup>

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<sup>396</sup> A good survey of the critiques of the Left Behind theology is found in Nancy M. Tischler, *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Christian Fiction : From C.S. Lewis to Left Behind* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: Greenwood Press, 2009), 190-196. And Gordon L. Isaac, *Left Behind Or Left Befuddled : The Subtle Dangers of Popularizing the End Times* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008), and James M. Efird, *Left Behind? : What the Bible Really Says About the End Times* (Macon, Ga.: Smyth & Helwys Pub., 2006),

<sup>397</sup> Watson and Scalen, *Ibid.*

<sup>398</sup> George. Barna, *Baby Busters : The Disillusioned Generation* (Chicago: Northfield Publishing, 1994), 158. *Generation Next : A Probing Examination of America’s Teenagers* (Glendale, CA: Barna Research Group, 1995), 107. George. Barna and Mark Hatch, *Boiling Point : It Only Takes One Degree : Monitoring Cultural Shifts in the 21st Century* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2001), 233-235. Tony Dale, Felicity Dale and George. Barna, *The Rabbit & the Elephant : Why Small is the New Big for Today’s Church* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2009),

<sup>399</sup> The two other counter movements described by Watson and Scalen are the “cell” or “house church” movement and the “small group” faction. The small group movement has already been mentioned briefly. The house church movement appears to be a reaction against the hierarchical leadership, celebrity pastors and large budgets of megachurch organizations. The house church movement seeks smaller groupings of evangelicals organized around a simpler more relationally centered Christian expression. The house church movement is often thought to be led by Frank Viola, See *Pagan Christianity? : exploring the roots of our church practices*, first edition ed. (Gainesville, FL: Present Testimony Ministry, 2003), *Who is Your Covering?: A Fresh Look at Leadership, Authority, and Accountability* (Present Testimony Ministry, 1998), *So You want to Start a House Church?: First-Century styled Church Planting for Today* (Present Testimony Ministry, 2003),

### *Spiritual Formation*

The “Spiritual Formation” movement (SFM) is one of the more pronounced counter-CGM/seeker movements.<sup>400</sup> The subject of Christian spiritual formation is a vast, multi-layered and historically diverse phenomenon within both evangelical and global forms of Christianity. Thus there is no attempt here to define or localize the movement in general. However, the Renovare ministry became increasingly popular in evangelical circles through its reemphasizing of the concepts of character formation and “holiness” once so prevalent in early years of evangelical faith.<sup>401</sup> Led by philosophers, theologians and psychologists like Richard Foster, Larry Crabb, Garry Moon, John Ortberg and Willard, the SFM centered on the development of Christian character and discipleship.<sup>402</sup> Significant in the SFM message was the professed attempt to focus more exclusively on the gospel Jesus preached; one centered on transformation of the human heart enabling Christ followers to manifest Godly character in everyday interactions and events. Such a virtuous life was described as one inhabiting the Kingdom of God.<sup>403</sup>

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<sup>400</sup> Watson and Scalen. 171-180. George Barna, *Growing True Disciples : New Strategies for Producing Genuine Followers of Christ*, (Colorado Springs, Colo.: WaterBrook Press, 2001),

<sup>401</sup> Keith Matthews, “How is it With Your Soul? The Renovare Movement Fosters Spiritual Development as the Heart of Social Justice,” *Sojourners* Vol. 32, 6, (November, 2003), 42-45.

<sup>402</sup> Willard describes this shift well in his book *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus’ Essential Teachings on Discipleship* (HarperOne, 2006). Hereafter referred to as GO. For a description of the SFM impetus see Richard J Foster, *Prayer: Finding the heart’s true home* (New York: HarperOne, 1992), Richard Foster, *Celebration of discipline: The path to spiritual growth* (New York: HarperOne, 1988), and Dallas Willard, *Hearing God: Developing a Conversational Relationship With God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), Gary W. Moon, *Apprenticeship With Jesus : Learning to Live Like the Master* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2009), Julia L. Roller and Lynda L. Graybeal, *Connecting With God : A Spiritual Formation Guide : A Renovare Resource for Individuals and Groups*, (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006),

<sup>403</sup> Several Renovare authors describe this Kingdom life principle. For an inclusive explanation see James Bryan Smith’s foursome, *The Good and Beautiful Life : Putting on the Character of Christ* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Books, 2009), *The Good and Beautiful God : Falling in Love With the God Jesus Knows* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Books, 2009), *The Good and Beautiful Community : Following the Spirit, Extending Grace, Demonstrating Love* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Books, 2010), *The Kingdom and the Cross* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Books, 2010).

In time Renovare and other spiritual formation/discipleship ministries such as Navigators, joined with the relatively new sub-discipline of Christian Psychology to reintroduce the traditions and practices of Christian formation in a distinctly therapeutic format of mental health.<sup>404</sup> The growing arena of Christian counseling increased interest and attention in the formation, and re-forming, of human personality and character.<sup>405</sup> The use of personal retreats and the spiritual disciplines such as contemplation, holiness, silence, solitude and service were also reintroduced and re-emphasized.<sup>406</sup> To this end the SFM initiated many evangelicals into the classic devotional and contemplative readings from ancient church fathers such as St. John of the Cross, Brother Lawrence, Augustine and Thomas Merton.<sup>407</sup>

The ideals and values of the SFM offered a sometimes-stark alternative to the individualistic, corporate and consumerist values of the CGM ethos. Willard, Hull, Foster, Crabb and others conveyed warnings against the overt pragmatism inherent to the CGM and its focus on proliferating larger church organizations simply for the sake of attaining numerical growth.<sup>408</sup> They warned congregational size, large budgets and expansive buildings could become antithetical to what SFM leaders understood as the intent of the

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<sup>404</sup> Larry Crabb, Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally healthy spirituality : unleash a revolution in your life in Christ* (Nashville, TN: Integrity, 2006), Peter Scazzero and Warren. Bird, *The emotionally healthy church : a strategy for discipleship that actually changes lives* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2003),

<sup>405</sup> John Ortberg and Gary Moon were early advocates of the connection between SFM and psychology. See John. Ortberg and Dallas Willard, "What Makes Spirituality Christian?," *Christianity Today* Vol. (March 1995), 16-17. "Rethinking the Kingdom of God: The Work of Dallas Willard and Some Applications to Psychotherapeutic Practice," *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* Vol. 14, 4, (Winter, 1995), 306-317. Gary W. Moon and David G. Benner, *Spiritual Direction and the Care of Souls : A Guide to Christian Approaches and Practices* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2004),

<sup>406</sup> Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, and Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*.

<sup>407</sup> See Renovare website for reading list <http://www.renovare.us/SPIRITUALRENEWAL/FollowingJesusFollowers/ClassicDevotionalWritings/tabid/2504/Default.aspx> (accessed 10-01-2010).

<sup>408</sup> This is seen clearly in Willard's, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus' Essential Teachings on Discipleship* (HarperOne, 2006), Bill Hull, *Choose the Life: Exploring a Faith that Embraces Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004), Lawrence J. Crabb, *Connecting : healing for ourselves and our relationships : a radical new vision* (Nashville, Tenn.: Word Pub, 1997), and *Becoming a true spiritual community : a profound vision of what the church can be* (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson, 2007),

biblical message of Jesus, the mission of the Kingdom of God and the historically orthodox purposes of the Church. Some of these critiques rose to the level that some suggested the SFM's vision of the Kingdom of God posed direct opposition to the CGM's propensity to build a "kingdom of the church."<sup>409</sup> In time SFM's theology of the Kingdom of God became a prominent focus of the ECM, which Watson and Scalen suggest is the second influential evangelical counter movement. Early leaders in the ECM write of being widely attracted to the ideas of the Kingdom of God offered by writers such as Willard, Wright, Ladd and Eugene Peterson.<sup>410</sup> Thus we now shift our focus to this genesis and impact of the ECM and its effect on contemporary evangelicalism.

### *Emerging/Emergent Church Movement*

The roots of the ECM are varied but the history is rather clear.<sup>411</sup> Like previous evangelical generations described in this chapter, the ECM arose as Gen X evangelicals attempted to adapt and correct the theology and praxis they inherited.<sup>412</sup> As a protest/counter movement, Watson and Scalen claim the ECM embodies the most direct and complete critique to the perceived inadequacies of the CGM, the influence of modern

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<sup>409</sup> Thomas P. Dooley, *Praying Faith : I Live By the Faith of the Son of God* (Shippensburg, Pa.: Destiny Image Publishers, 2004), 181. Elmer L. Towns and Gary McIntosh, *Evaluating the Church Growth Movement : 5 Views* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), chapter 2. Also an early theologian discussing the difference between the Kingdom of God and traditional evangelical theology was Fuller Theological seminary professor George Eldon Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom; Scriptural Studies in the Kingdom of God*. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1959).

<sup>410</sup> Gibbs and Bolger, 63.

<sup>411</sup> Excellent descriptions are provided by several key ECM leaders. See Gibbs and Bolger's *Emerging Churches : Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), Doug Pagitt, *A Christianity Worth Believing : Hope-Filled, Open-Armed, Alive-and-Well Faith for the Left Out, Left Behind, and Let Down in Us All* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2008), Doug Pagitt and Tony Jones, *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2007), Tony Jones, *The New Christians : Dispatches From the Emergent Frontier* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2008),

<sup>412</sup> The term "Gen X" generally refers to those born after the baby-boomer generation. Also called the "baby-buster" generations they are commonly considered individuals born between 1965 and 1976. Tara Brabazon, *From Revolution to Revelation : Generation X, Popular Memory, and Cultural Studies* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2005), Susan Mitchell, *Generation X : Americans Aged 18 to 34*, 3rd ed. (Ithaca, N.Y.: New Strategist Publications, 2001),



philosophical empiricism and its quest for certainty, and the lingering fundamentalism in neo-evangelical theology.<sup>413</sup> Furthermore, when considering the whole of ECM literature, it becomes clear some ECM leaders have not only questioned, but also opposed, seminal interpretations of each of the previously listed characteristics of Bebbington and Balmer's evangelical distinctives. In total, the ECM has clearly demonstrated resistance to the hegemony of the religious right, the consumerism of the CGM, the fundamentalist anti-intellectualism of premillennial dispensationalist theology and the effects of modern Enlightenment epistemology in systematic theology prevalent within neo-evangelical institutions, denominations and universities. The ECM's protest of these aspects of evangelicalism demonstrates an essential desire to recapture an authentic recontextualization of Christian faith to their postmodern cultural setting.<sup>414</sup> These same sentiments are present in Willard's theological pursuit, albeit with a different outcome. Thus, the overall sentimentality, ethos and objective of the ECM's pursuit found a sympathetic conversational companion in many of Willard's works and therefore become indispensable topics for consideration in this thesis.

The first seeds of discontentment are articulated in the early works of ECM writers and leaders such as Brian McLaren, Tony Jones, Doug Pagitt, Dieter Zander, Mark Scandrette, Karen Ward and Todd Hunter. While positing different views, and offering varying solutions, each recognized a significant degree of American nationalism, corporate styled leadership structures, consumer driven ecclesiology and fundamentalist theology that

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<sup>413</sup> Watson and Scalen. 171-180.

<sup>414</sup> Each of these issues are seen in Brian McLaren's works. See Brian D. McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy: Why I Am a Missional, Evangelical, Post/Protestant, Liberal/Conservative, Mystical/Poetic, Biblical, Charismatic/Contemplative, Fundamentalist/Calvinist, Anabaptist/Anglican, Methodist/Catholic, Green/Incarnational, Depressed-Yet-Hopeful, Emergent, Unfinished Christian* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan/Youth Specialties, 2006).

became synergistically conjoined inside mainstream evangelical theology and practice.<sup>415</sup> By 1995 a “conversation” between groups of younger (under 40), youth and young adult pastors, formalized into what was first labeled The Young Leader Network. These pastors, coming from mostly mainstream evangelical churches and megachurches, were seeking to find a means of recontextualizing the neo-evangelical gospel to a changing generational dynamic.<sup>416</sup> Early in its evolution, few ECM proponents suggested outright dismissal of evangelicalism. Initially, the ECM focused primarily, but not exclusively, on more stylistic differences or preferences in worship styles, evangelistic endeavors and leadership structures. Since many early ECM leaders started ministry careers in evangelical churches with CGM type structures, initially ECM leaders only attempted to discover or create new and more effective ways of communicating the fundamental principles of traditional evangelical theology. Therefore like previous CGM advocates, many ECM leaders believed the Gen X crowd required yet another re-contextualizing adjustment in order to re-appropriate the gospel into more culturally relevant terms.

However, ECM leaders soon sensed the CGM’s pragmatically focused, corporate-styled structure that advocated consumerism, conservatism and theological fundamentalism had created an insider/outsider culture of separatism and a tendency to celebrated the “profane elements within established evangelical religion.”<sup>417</sup> Thus, the differences between the Gen X/emerging culture and the CGM’s Baby-boomer culture quickly came into more striking relief. Trying to make sense of this difference, ECM leaders began discussing

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<sup>415</sup> Each of these issues are chronicled by Gibbs and Bolger in interviews with those noted above. See *Emerging Churches*, 49. Also Frank Viola later describes a similar but more pointed critique in , *Pagan Christianity? : Exploring the Roots of Our Church Practices*, (Gainesville, FL: Present Testimony Ministry, 2003),

<sup>416</sup> Pagitt was the leader of this first group. In an interview with Pagitt, he describes being funded and task by Bob Buford, an evangelical author and speaker to find “the next Bill Hybels” for the Gen X crowd. Doug Pagitt, “Skype Interview” interviewed by Author, 10-29-09.

<sup>417</sup> Barry A. Kosmin and Ariela Keysar, *Religion in a free market : religious and non-religious Americans : who, what, why, where* (Ithaca, NY: Paramount Market Pub, 2006), 39-59.

postmodern philosophy and epistemology. ECM leaders argued the postmodern proclivities of Gen X groups caused a rejection of more than the seeker-sensitive, purpose-driven ecclesiology. To many in the ECM, a recontextualization of neo-evangelicalism in total was required in light of the tenets of postmodern epistemology.<sup>418</sup> Hence ECM leaders began to write and discuss the philosophical concepts and potential effects of philosophical postmodernism and how the cultural phenomenon of postmodernity might impact the receptivity of evangelicalism to Gen X groups.<sup>419</sup>

By the turn of the millennium the ECM's protest against neo-evangelical theology and praxis was becoming more visceral. Some ECM writers suggested, at points, the institutionalization of neo-evangelicalism threatened to escape the limits of biblical Christian faith and the traditional purposes of the Church.<sup>420</sup> Eventually, these writers and leaders began to inch toward advocating a separate and distinct post-evangelical theology and praxis. Many postevangelicals remained sympathetic to a preponderance of evangelical theological distinctives. Biblical authority, activism and conversionism remained key measures of Christian orthodoxy. However, with the growing interest in postmodern hermeneutics, gone was the literalist interpretations of Scripture and a more communal

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<sup>418</sup> In an interview with Dieter and Val Zander, they describe trying to work a “church-within-a-church” model at Willow Creek. The concept was to have both a Gen x and a baby-boomer church meeting on the same campus but in different venues. Others mentioned trying this approach as well. In the end, the church-within-a-church model failed. Dan Kimball, Doug Pagitt and Zander all state the concept failed because senior pastors of the established churches could not handle the church having two contextualized theologies. As long as the only differentiating feature between the two in-house churches was a worship style, but the content of the sermons were the same or similar, the church-within a church model was acceptable to them. This proved to be an impossible task for most CGM leadership structures. Dieter Zander and Valerie Zander, “Research Interview” interviewed by Author, Novato, CA., June, 2009.

<sup>419</sup> These conversations would eventually become essential to a group called Re:Imagine and will be discussed in detail in chapter 4. Re:Imagine was originally a small group of five or six evangelicals in the San Francisco Bay Area who were struggling to find out how to contextualize their faith into the postmodern cultural context of California. See Mark Scandrette, *Soul Graffiti : Making a Life in the Way of Jesus*, (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2007),

<sup>420</sup> See Becky Garrison, *Jesus Died for This? : A Satirist's Search for the Risen Christ* (Grand Rapids Michigan: Zondervan, 2010), WC Smith, *A Lover's Quarrel With the Evangelical Church* (Colorado Springs, CO: Authentic, 2009). Jay Bakker, *Fall to Grace : A Revolution of God, & Society*, (New York: FaithWords, 2011).

hermeneutic became preferred. Additionally, postevangelicals no longer expressed the overt desire to evangelize their world with a wrath-filled, pre-millennial, crucicentrist gospel wedded to a penal substitutionary atonement theory. Postevangelicals considered this an anemic soteriology offering only an ambiguous description of life after death and membership in a megachurch. Such a gospel was uninspiring, theologically reductionistic and increasingly anthropomorphic to postevangelicals.<sup>421</sup> Such a message was received as impotent in its ability to positively shape the broader culture as it was incapable of transforming the lives of those in the evangelical congregations advocating the its virtues.

As a result, an increasing sense began to grow within many ECM leaders that something foundationally altering would need to occur within modern evangelical forms of faith to accomplish their objective of recontextualizing the gospel into postmodern culture. At this point a shift occurred in the new ECM leadership. One time ECM leader Mark Driscoll describes a moment when he felt the ECM conversation moved from reformation, recontextualization and deconstruction of orthodox Christianity into heretical propositions against not only evangelicalism but also Christianity at large.<sup>422</sup> Driscoll ceremoniously distanced himself from the movement and became a prolific opponent of his former colleagues, going as far as labeling some heretics and non-Christians.<sup>423</sup> In a much less demonstrable way, Todd Hunter, a key figure in this thesis, describes sensing the ECM conversations appeared to him to be suggesting the reconstitution of many liberal

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<sup>421</sup> Frank Viola, *Pagan Christianity? : Exploring the Roots of Our Church Practices*, first edition. (Gainesville, FL: Present Testimony Ministry, 2003),

<sup>422</sup> Mark Driscoll, “The Emerging Church,” *The Convergence Conference*, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, (2007).

<sup>423</sup> Driscoll’s infamous description of Rob Bell as a heretic is well known in ECM lore. See Mark Driscoll, “The Emerging Church Highway,” *Christian Research Journal* Vol. 31, 4, (2008). And his podcast Mark Driscoll, “The Emerging Church,” *The Convergence Conference*, <http://theresurgence.com/2008/02/27/convergent-conference-session-3-the-emerging-church> (accessed 2-9, 2010).

theological pursuits of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>424</sup> Thus, for those inside the movement, as well as its outside critics, claims of “warmed over” liberalism began to filter through the ECM ethos.

During the early development of the ECM, leaders like McLaren, Zander, Scandrette, Hunter and others were all experiencing similar epiphanies about the difficult conflicts inherent to modern vs. postmodern perspectives on a variety of sociological, ecclesiological and theological problems mentioned above.<sup>425</sup> Scott Bader-Saye describes this period as one where the implications of postmodern philosophy and hermeneutics began to cause some ECM leaders to investigate alternative, essentially non-evangelical theological values and goals.<sup>426</sup> Bader-Saye describes the significant amounts of literature, blogs and websites attributed to the ECM beginning in the mid-1990’s, much of which deconstructs and exposes significant flaws in the CGM/neo-evangelical theology and practice.<sup>427</sup> One seminal work published during this period came from author and pastor

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<sup>424</sup> Todd Hunter, “Research Interview” interviewed by Author, Costa Mesa, CA., July 13 2010.

<sup>425</sup> Martyn Percy, “Review of Reinventing American Protestantism: Christianity in the New Millennium,” *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 13:3, (October, 1998): 406.

<sup>426</sup> Scott Bader-Saye, “The Emergent Matrix,” *Christian Century* (November, 30, 2004): 20-25.

<sup>427</sup> These sources are widely referred to by proponents of the EC. They were collected in a combination of interviews conducted by this author and referenced in the EC literature, blogs and podcasts. This list presents a sample of the works that deal with the theology and praxis of contemporary American evangelical faith that concerns the EC in some manner or degree. DB Forrester, *Theology and Practice* (Epworth, London, 1990), ; William M. Easum and Herb. Miller, *How to Reach Baby Boomers* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1991), ; Leith Anderson, “A Church for the 21st Century,” *Bethany House Pub* Vol. (1992). ; George. Barna, *The Invisible Generation : Baby Busters* (Glendale, Calif.: Barna Research Group, 1992), ; P Berry and A Wernick, *Shadow of Spirit: Postmodernism and Religion* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 1992), ; David Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (New York: Orbis Books, 1992), ; Anthony. Campolo, *Everything You’ve Heard is Wrong* (Dallas, TX: Word, 1992), ; Charles Colson, MS Horton, JI Packer, RC Sproul, AE McGrath, *Power Religion: The Selling Out of the Evangelical Church?* (Chicago: Moody Pub, 1992), ; Richard Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart’s True Home* (New York: HarperOne, 1992), ; Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1993), AE McGrath, *Luther’s Theology of the Cross: Martin Luther’s Theological Breakthrough* (Oxford: Blackwell Pub, 1990), ; MA Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), ; Jim Wallis, *The Call to Conversion : Recovering the Gospel for These Times*, New HarperCollins pbk. ed. (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1992), ; N. T. Wright, *Christian Origins and the Question of God*, vol. The New Testament and the People of God (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), ; JL Marsh, JD Caputo, and M Westphal, *Modernity and Its Discontents* (New Jersey: Fordham Univ Pr, 1992), ; J Milbank, “Problematising the Secular: The Post-Modern Agenda,” *Philippa Berry and Andrew Wernick, Shadows of Spirit: Postmodernism and Religion*, Routledge, London Vol. (1992), 31; Greg Ogden, *The New Reformation: Returning the Ministry to the People of God* (Grand Rapids:

Dave Tomlinson. Tomlinson was the first to discuss the concept of a postevangelical vision for evangelical reform.<sup>428</sup> However, Tomlinson was not alone in his conclusions. The works noted below represent a marked interest and angst within a growing, critical segment of younger evangelicals.<sup>429</sup> Also, Barna continued to publish research detailing the changing attitudes of the Gen X and Gen Y evangelicals. Sensing that evangelicalism was not prepared for the cultural changes these groups would require, Barna increasingly raised warnings forecasting evangelicalism's inability to attract future generations of believers.<sup>430</sup>

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Zondervan Publishing Company, 1991), ; Roger Olson and Stanley Grenz, *20th Century Theology: God and the World in a Transitional Age* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), ; Jim. Wallis and Joyce. Hollyday, *Cloud of Witnesses* (Maryknoll, N.Y. Washington, D.C.: Orbis Books Sojourners, 1991), ; Stanley J. Grenz, *The Millennial Maze: Sorting Out Evangelical Options* (Wheaton, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992-09), ; Stanley J. Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the 21st Century* (Grand Rapids: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 25-29; Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olson, *20th Century Theology: God and the World in a Transitional Age* (Paternoster Press, 1993), ; Neil Howe and Bill Strauss, *13th Generation: Abort, Retry, Ignore, Fail* (New York: Vintagebook, 1993), ; George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, Rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1993), xiv, 764; AE McGrath, *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1994), ; Noll, 1990, #76237; MA Noll, DW Bebbington, and GA Rawlyk, *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, the British Isles, and Beyond, 1700-1990* (London: Oxford University Press, 1994), John Milbank, "The End of Dialogue," in *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, (New York: Orbis, 1990), 174-191.

<sup>428</sup> Tomlinson, *The Postevangelical*, 1995.

<sup>429</sup> An example of this early literature is seen in William M. Easum, *Sacred Cows Make Gourmet Burgers : Ministry Anytime, Anywhere, By Anybody* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 21-22; Robert J. Kriegel and David. Brandt, *Sacred Cows Make the Best Burgers : Paradigm-Busting Strategies for Developing Change-Ready People and Organizations* (New York: Warner Books, 1996), 320. J. Richard Middleton and Brian J. Walsh, *Truth is Stranger Than it Used to be : Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1995), 70-75. Brian D. McLaren, *Reinventing Your Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), Donald Miller, *Blue Like Jazz : Nonreligious Thoughts on Christian Spirituality* (Nashville: T. Nelson, 2003), Rob Bell, *Velvet Elvis: Repainting the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), Spencer. Burke and Colleen. Pepper, *Making Sense of Church : Eavesdropping on Emerging Conversations About God, Community, and Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan/Youth Specialties, 2003), Jimmy. Long, *Emerging Hope : A Strategy for Reaching the Postmodern Generations* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2004), Leonard Sweet, Andy Crouch, Brian D. McLaren, Erwin Raphael McManus, Michael Horton, *Church in Emerging Culture: Five Perspectives* (Zondervan/Youth Specialties, 2003), Chris Van Gelder, "Mission in the Emerging Postmodern Condition," in *The Church Between Gospel and Culture: The Emerging Mission in North America*, ed. George Hunsberger and Craig Van Gelder, (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1996), 113-139.

<sup>430</sup> George Barna, *The invisible generation : baby busters* (Glendale, Calif.: Barna Research Group, 1992), George. Barna, *Generation next : a probing examination of America's teenagers* (Glendale, CA: Barna Research Group, 1995), 107. George. Barna, *Evangelism that works : how to reach changing generations with the unchanging gospel* (Ventura, Calif., U.S.A.: Regal Books, 1995), 176. George. Barna, *Baby busters : the disillusioned generation* (Chicago: Northfield Publishing, 1994), 158. The changing styles of worship, theology and evangelical expression are well described by Donald E. Miller, *Reinventing American Protestantism : Christianity in the New Millennium* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1997),

Several writers in the ECM have suggested the key issue, and perhaps one of the most significant hurdles, in both the ECM's adaptation or contextualization of mainstream evangelicalism and the postevangelical reconstruction of an authentic Christian praxis, is the conundrum within the rise of postmodernism and its effect on epistemology. Tony Jones has declared consistently the proverbial "it" that funded the overall impetus of the ECM was the philosophical implications of postmodernism.<sup>431</sup> Pagitt also recalls, early on in the evolution of the Young Leader Network, discussions and discoveries of postmodernism began to develop an agenda surrounding the subject of epistemology.<sup>432</sup> These discussions soon began to trump all other topics. According to Jones, philosopher John Caputo, one time student of Jacques Derrida and professor at Syracuse University, was the first voice within the ECM regarding the issue of postmodern epistemology.<sup>433</sup> Gibbs and Bolger also suggest postmodernism came into increasing focus and interest as the ECM deconstruction of evangelicalism progressed.<sup>434</sup> McLaren's seminal book *A New Kind of Christian* refers continually to the concepts of postmodernism.<sup>435</sup> Key scholars and researchers of the EC movement refer back to McLaren's references to postmodernism often.<sup>436</sup> Certainly, McLaren is not the first to introduce the potential effects of postmodern

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<sup>431</sup> He claims Brad Cecil, another young leader in the movement was the first to articulate the postmodern ethos at a meeting Pagitt organized for what was then called the Young Leader Network (YLN) in Colorado Springs in 1997. Tony Jones, *The New Christians : Dispatches From the Emergent Frontier* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2008),

<sup>432</sup> Doug Pagitt, "Skype Interview" interviewed by Author, 10-29-09.

<sup>433</sup> Ibid.

<sup>434</sup> Gibbs and Bolger, 26.

<sup>435</sup> Brian D. McLaren, *A New Kind of Christian: A Tale of Two Friends on a Spiritual Journey* (Jossey-Bass, 2001).

<sup>436</sup> Ibid, also Labanow, *Evangelicalism and the Emerging Church*.

epistemology on American evangelicalism. Theologians Lesslie Newbigin, D.R. Griffin, Stanley Grenz and others had previously bracketed the subject.<sup>437</sup>

Consequently, the theological conversations in the ECM slowly shifted from how to reformulate the neo-evangelical theology towards deconstructive efforts that targeted both the modern rationalist epistemology and its effect on neo-evangelical theology. A reconsideration of the efficacy of such a ‘modernized’ Christianity became a significant priority.<sup>438</sup> Therefore appreciating how the ECM describes and defines postmodernism and postmodernity is crucial to better understanding their motives for recontextualizing evangelical theology and practice. Additionally, the effect of the cultural, social and intellectual phenomenon of “postmodernism” on evangelical Christianity is a significant feature in the development of protoevangelical faith.<sup>439</sup> A brief description of these philosophical and cultural phenomena will follow.

### *The Postmodern Effect and Dilemma*

This section will briefly engage the key concept of postmodern thought specifically integral to this thesis. This will require a discussion of how the terms postmodernity and

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<sup>437</sup> D.R. Griffin, *God and Religion in the Postmodern World: Essays in Postmodern Theology* (New York: State Univ of New York Pr, 1989), Roger Olson, “Postconservative Evangelicals Greet the Postmodern Age,” *The Christian Century* Vol. 112, no. 15 (May 1995), 480-483. William Brown, “Theology in a Postmodern Culture: Implications of a Video-Dependent Society,” in *The Challenge of Postmodernism: An Evangelical Engagement*, ed. David Dockery, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), Millard J. Erickson, *Postmodernizing the Faith : Evangelical Responses to the Challenge of Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1998), 163.

<sup>438</sup> This is best described by Tony Jones description of the development of the ECM ethos in Tony Jones, *The New Christians : Dispatches From the Emergent Frontier* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 41-52. Jones picks up and fills in where Gibbs and Bolger stopped their research in 2004.

<sup>439</sup> Here postmodernism is put in quotes to convey the notion postmodernism is a contested phenomenon. Whether the claims of so called postmodern philosophers and theorists actually create a delineated field of study or whether the concept of the postmodern is simply a critique of the modern remains in doubt within many valid philosophical circles. Some have termed postmodernism myth or could be better described as hypermodernity. Willard is one such scholar who widely accepts this view. See Eva Etziomo-Halevy, “The New Theories of Postmodernity and Hypermodernity: Social/Ideological Context and Implications for Inequality,” in *Ideology and the Social Sciences*, ed. Graham Charles. Kinloch and Raj P. Mohan, (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 2000), 87-106. See John R. Short, *New Worlds, New Geographies*, (Syracuse, NY.: Syracuse University Press, 1998), 110-120.



postmodernism are frequently used in relationship to the moods, sensibilities, forms of assessment and retorts to modern thought and its effects. To understand the postmodern protest of modernity, one must first have a clear understanding of modernity itself. Therefore, this analysis will articulate what postmodernists believe about modernity.<sup>440</sup>

However, postmodernism is a difficult concept to encapsulate. The very nature of the postmodern construct resists consistent description and embraces pluralism and relativist shifts depending on the nature and contexts where postmodern priorities and assumptions are applied. This thesis does not seek or intend to legitimize or validate the epistemological or philosophical foundations of either modern or postmodern intellectual theory. However, the past half-century of intellectual historical scholarship does seem to reveal a discernable response to what has been termed the “postmodern move” within Western culture. The result of which has forged a new perspectival paradigm in contemporary life.<sup>441</sup> If we can call this phenomenon a “postmodern sensibility,” and resist the temptation to legitimize its epistemological or philosophical assumptions, it is easier to witness how widespread the effects of postmodernism are within the cultural arenas of the arts, literature, education, medicine, law, politics, sports and entertainment.

In particular for this inquiry, evangelical theology has also been widely influenced by postmodern intrigue. This “postmodern effect” is clearly articulated as a key, shaping feature of the ECM movement and directly relates to the postevangelical search for a more

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<sup>440</sup> However, this research will refrain from offering a critical description of the entire philosophical scope of modernity or postmodernity. As interesting and incisive the postmodern subject may be, to do so would be to lose the “forest in the trees.” As a result, this inquiry will limit itself to the characteristics of postmodernism and the concomitant effects it has made on evangelicalism and the postevangelical impetus.

<sup>441</sup> This is widely discussed and virtually assumed from all sides, even within the most modern stalwarts of philosophy and theology. See Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2007), 695-717. James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door : A Basic Worldview Catalog*, 5th ed. (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 214-244. James K. A. Smith, *Who’s Afraid of Postmodernism? : Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 19. And D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God : Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 1996), Chapter 3.

authentic expression of Christian faith and practice.<sup>442</sup> Additionally, several noted conservative evangelical theologians and scholars seem to consider postmodernism perhaps the most significant threat to the maintenance and viability of evangelical faith and practice since the rise of liberal theology in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>443</sup> Combined then, the *zeitgeist* of contemporary American culture, including both the conservative and liberal wings of evangelical religion, are in some measure pursuing, giving credit to, or vehemently resisting the postmodern phenomenon.<sup>444</sup> Further, the positioning of Willard as both a widely acclaimed evangelical author and theologian, combined with his professional expertise as a philosopher and Husserlian scholar, uniquely places him as an influential voice on these seminal issues.

Therefore, the intent of this section is to discuss the key issues surrounding the postmodern phenomenon. Specific attention will be paid to the three postmodern claims which have directly affected the American evangelical context where Willardian theology has gained popularity. Additionally, a discussion will probe the implications postmodernism creates when compared to Willard's philosophical realism and theo-

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<sup>442</sup> Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*. Celek and Zander, *Inside the Soul of a New Generation*, Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan/Youth Specialties, 2003) Brian D. McLaren, *Reinventing Your Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), Robert Webber, John Burke, Dan. Kimball, Doug Pagitt, Karen M. Ward, Mark Driscoll, *Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches : Five Perspectives* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2007), 240. Tony Jones, *Postmodern Youth Ministry : Exploring Cultural Shift, Creating Holistic Connections, Cultivating Authentic Community* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Youth Specialties, 2001), 238. Jones, *The New Christians*.

<sup>443</sup> See R Albert Mohler, "Confronting Postmodernism," *Southern Baptist Theological Journal* Vol. 5/2 summer, (2001). Robert. Webber, John Burke, Dan. Kimball, Doug Pagitt, Karen M. Ward, Mark Driscoll, *Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches : Five Perspectives* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2007), Andreas J Köstenberger, R Albert Mohler, J. P. Moreland, Kevin J Vanhoozer, *Whatever Happened to Truth?* (Wheaton, Il.: Crossway Publishers, 2005), Charles Colson, "The Postmodern Crackup: From Soccer Moms to College Campuses; Signs of the End," *Christianity Today* Vol. (Dec. 2003). Kevin. DeYoung and Ted. Kluck, *Why We're Not Emergent : By Two Guys Who Should be* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008), Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth, and Justin Taylor, *Reclaiming the Center : Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2004), John MacArthur, *The Truth War : Fighting for Certainty in an Age of Deception* (Nashville, Tenn.: Nelson Books, 2007).

<sup>444</sup> Johannes Willem. Bertens and Douwe Wessel Fokkema, *International Postmodernism: Theory and Literary Practice* (Philadelphia, PA: J. Benjamins, 1997), 17. Steven. Best and Douglas Kellner, *The Postmodern Turn* (New York: Guilford Press, 1997), 256.

ontology. Chapter three will provide a more in-depth discussion on how Willard's philosophical realism addresses the anti-modernist sentiments within postevangelical thought while resisting the nihilism, skepticism and pluralistic relativism incumbent upon much of postmodern constructivist epistemology.<sup>445</sup>

*Differentiating Postmodern-ism from Postmodern-ity*

Many postmodern theorists, pop-culture critics and theologians alike place the cause or genesis of postmodernism at the feet of a broad scale rejection to the effects and conclusions drawn from the Age of Enlightenment.<sup>446</sup> The postmodern critique of the Enlightenment centers on the overreaching and totalitarian claims of intellectual reason. For some, postmodernism represents the end of the manipulative and dictatorial reign the disciplines of science and philosophy enjoyed beginning in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>447</sup> With the demise of Enlightenment scientism, postmodernism claims the hegemony of intellectual objectivity, empiricism, totalitarianism, universality and the hubris of epistemological certainty collapsed as well.<sup>448</sup> In its place, postmodernism seeks to establish a more

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<sup>445</sup> The term constructivism is here used to convey the philosophical position that claims to know the empirical real not as it is in itself in independence of the subject but rather as one or more subjects construct it as a necessary condition of knowledge. In giving up on efforts to know metaphysical reality, constructivists typically claim no more than to know the empirically “real” world as it is given to experience but not the “real” world as it is given in itself. See Tom Rockmore, *Kant and Idealism* (New Haven, NJ: Yale University Press, 2007), 57.

<sup>446</sup> One of the best summaries of postmodernism can be found in two works. The first is Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996). The second is the opening chapter of Steven Knowles, *Beyond Evangelicalism : The Theological Methodology of Stanley J. Grenz* (Surrey, England: Ashgate Pub. Ltd., 2010.) This review is heavily indebted to Grenz's engagement with postmodernism from an evangelical perspective and Knowles articulation of Grenz's methodology and insight. Also influential are the perspectives provided by Middleton and Walsh two works, *Truth is Stranger Than it Used to be : Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1995), and *The Transforming Vision : Shaping a Christian World View* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1984.),

<sup>447</sup> Stuart. Sim, *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2011), 203.

<sup>448</sup> Ibid. Also Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991), 257. George. Ritzer, *Postmodern Social Theory* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1997), 248-252.

flexible, temporal, local, humble, holistic, and necessarily uncertain, epistemological framework.

In this pursuit, some experts—many evangelical theologians among them—propose postmodernists have largely achieved their goal of elevating doubt to a virtue. However, the long tail of side effects to these postmodern proposals has also elicited unwanted levels of instability, fragmentation, skepticism and hints of nihilism. In the wake of this modern/postmodern epistemological joust, an untenable space for many contemporary Christians has emerged. In this gap grandiose and esoteric rationalizations and justifications from both sides compete for dominance in a battle for the devotions of an increasingly illiterate, consumed and weary constituency.

For this thesis, it is important to separate the popular cultural expression of postmodern-*ity* from the intellectual and philosophical pursuit of postmodern-*ism*.<sup>449</sup> Simply put postmodern-*ity* is the sociological and cultural manifestation of the philosophical and epistemological fulfillment of modern thought.<sup>450</sup> Whether evidence of a new epistemological paradigm or the fulfillment of an existing one, there is wide acceptance that the theories proposed by Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Jean

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<sup>449</sup> A good discussion of this is found in Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 12 and James K. A. Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism? : Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 20.

<sup>450</sup> However, this is not an uncontested claim. There remains significant disagreement between constituencies and academic disciplines regarding what the term “postmodern” itself actually means. Some scholars suggest part of this dilemma is found in the difficulty in properly understanding and defining modernity. Therefore to suggest the “post” in post-modern is impossible or at minimum a misnomer. Others contend postmodernism would be more accurately labeled “more modernism” or “effete modernity,” meaning modern thought has matured and “gone to seed” inside the postmodern paradigm. The framers of postmodernism themselves are contradictory in describing their own enterprise. An excellent discussion on this ambiguity of the term postmodern is found in Tim Woods, *Beginning Postmodernism* (Manchester, UK: Manchester Univ. Press, 1999), and David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity : An Enquiry Into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1989), 7. Graham Ward, *The Postmodern God: A Theological Reader* (Wiley-Blackwell, 1997), 585ff. The term ‘effete’ modernity was coined by Willard and mentioned in several conversations and interviews. See also David Ray Griffin, *Founders of Constructive Postmodern Philosophy : Peirce, James, Bergson, Whitehead, and Hartshorne*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 201. And Johannes Willem. Bertens, *The Idea of the Postmodern : A History* (London: Routledge, 1995),

Baudrillard, Jean-François Lyotard, et. al. represent the seminal foundation of the postmodern perspective.<sup>451</sup> Summarily stated, postmodern philosophical inquiry, (postmodern-*ism*) seeks to systematically undermine each modern foundation for philosophical inquiry. This would include the four classical arenas of philosophical inquiry: epistemology, metaphysics, ethics and logic. In the pursuit of challenging these foundations, the nature of existence, objectivity, realism and the human ability to engage or know of these areas of inquiry are in placed in doubt. As a consequence postmodern-*ism* claims the ability to undermine the viability and veracity of both the claims and attainment of knowledge along with any substantive level of objectivity or comprehension of transcendent truths.<sup>452</sup> Postmodern-*ity* represents the sociological and cultural manifestation or consequence of this proposal. Postmodernity is therefore the application of postmodernism.<sup>453</sup>

The first two features of postmodern thought focus on theories centered on power abuses in modern metanarratives (proffered by Foucault and Lyotard), and the deconstruction of all inherent meaning behind texts and language (Derrida's addition to Wittgenstein's linguistic constructivism). The resulting combination of the first two postmodern theories and their eventualities creates the third feature. This is termed the postmodern self; the cultural and psychological consequence of postmodern theory

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<sup>451</sup> To make this claim is to do something distinctly un-postmodern. Since postmodernity resists univocal explanations or limiting inquiry to a solitary process of discernment most postmodernists will resist the concept of definition or classification as the imposition of a modern enterprise. The desire would be to remain free of distinguishing or valuing one interpretation over another. Therefore a level of incoherence is part and parcel of the postmodern paradigm. See Zygmunt Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity* (London: Routledge, 1992), 5-7.

<sup>452</sup> This is the single greatest concern of most conservative evangelicals but is also a concern for philosophical realists. See Andreas J Köstenberger, R Albert Mohler, J. P. Moreland, Kevin J Vanhoozer, *Whatever Happened to Truth?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Publishers, 2005), Dallas Willard, Daniel Cho, and Sarah Park, *A Place for Truth : Leading Thinkers Explore Life's Hardest Questions* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Books, 2010), and Crispin Wright, *Truth and Objectivity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992),

<sup>453</sup> In many ways the current conflicts and reactions among evangelicals to these three features of postmodern thought created a self-selecting criterion.

combined to form postmodernity. There are of course many other significant manifestations of postmodern thought. These three characteristics of postmodernism are chosen due to their presence in the literature and their reported effect on the cultural and intellectual climate of contemporary American evangelicalism as a whole.<sup>454</sup>

Perhaps the most significant effect postmodernism has made on contemporary evangelicalism is found in Derrida's program of deconstruction. Derrida's deconstructive ideology builds on previous works by Peirce, Heidegger and Saussure to form esoteric concepts such as *difference*, signs and signifieds, and the erasure of the transcendental signified.<sup>455</sup> Although interesting and complex, these issues are tangential to the specific interests related to evangelicalism and Willardian theology. It is Derrida's infamous phrase, "there is nothing outside the text" that most directly relate to this thesis and has created a firestorm of critique. Conservative evangelicals fear Derrida's linguistic constructivism, idealism and the implications these ideologies have on divine revelation and Scripture. Simply stated, Derrida's claim for indeterminacy in texts is only a clarification or exponent of the constructivist project. Nothing, including texts, can have any transcendent effect,

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<sup>454</sup> There was a period in the later half of the decade beginning in 2000 where there appeared to be something of an obsession with all things postmodern in conservative Christian publishing. See R Albert Mohler, "Confronting Postmodernism," *Southern Baptist Theological Journal* Vol. 5/2 (2001). R Albert Mohler, Bruce Ware, Jim Hamilton, Gregory Wills, Stephen Wellum, "Southern Seminary Panel Discussion on Brian McLaren's a New Kind of Christianity," <http://www.sbts.edu/resources/chapel/chapel-spring-2010/panel-discussion-a-new-kind-of-christianity-brian-mclaren-recasts-the-gospel/?play=true> (accessed 10-3, 2010). John Piper and Justin Taylor, *The Supremacy of Christ in a Postmodern World* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2007), James K. A. Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism? : Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church*, vol. The church and postmodern culture (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 19., RC Sproul, Jr. RC Sproul, R Albert Mohler, Ravi Zacharias, "Christianity and Postmodernism Q and a #2," *Contending for the Truth 2007*, Florida, (2007). Andreas J Köstenberger, R Albert Mohler, J. P. Moreland, Kevin J Vanhoozer, *Whatever Happened to Truth?* (Wheaton, Il.: Crossway Publishers, 2005), D. A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant With the Emerging Church : Understanding a Movement and Its Implications* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2005), Charles Colson, "The Postmodern Crackup: From Soccer Moms to College Campuses; Signs of the End," *Christianity Today* Vol. (Dec. 2003). Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjos Helseth, and Justin Taylor, *Reclaiming the Center : Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2004), John MacArthur, *The Truth War : Fighting for Certainty in an Age of Deception* (Nashville, Tenn.: Nelson Books, 2007), 221.

<sup>455</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Guyatri C. Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 326. John. Llewelyn, *Derrida on the Threshold of Sense* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, 1986), xi.

intent or meaning “outside” the contextual limitations of a reading or reader. No meaning, reality or authorial intent exists in a text, and thus cannot be conveyed and maintained across time, history and experience. Strict constructivists such as Derrida propose no text, because no object—no “thing”—is independent of reader response and subjective interpretation.

Therefore Derridian deconstruction proposes all things, including texts, are ultimately subordinated to the inherent subjectivism of individual or communal constructivist hermeneutics. There is no objective or logocentric metaphysical and ontological basis for knowledge.<sup>456</sup> Nothing is outside the eye of the beholder since there is no “thing” behind the text to which the text can refer. The temporal interpretation of the texts, as with all things engaged or encountered in human life, is forever limited by the subjective application of whatever hermeneutic is chosen. There are no objects, only subjects and ideals, with subjective interpretations and ideological constructions of objects, that can come before the mind.

This concept is what D.A. Carson has termed “hard postmodernism.”<sup>457</sup> In analyzing the implications of Derrida’s postmodern constructivist epistemology Carson argues no Christian can reasonably assume a “hard” postmodern worldview. However, it is not just Christianity that stands opposed to “hard” constructivism. Any knowledge claim, religious or not, that points to even a semblance of potential for objectivity or realism in areas of

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<sup>456</sup> This is discussed in greater detail in the chapter on Willard’s theology and philosophical realism. See page 236.

<sup>457</sup> Carson, *Becoming Conversant With the Emerging Church*, 104. Scot McKnight makes a similar claim. Scot McKnight, “What is Emerging Church, Westminster Theological Seminary,” *Fall Contemporary Issues Conference*, (Oct 26-27, 2006).

logic, epistemology, metaphysics or ethics is anathema to a “hard” constructivist position.<sup>458</sup>

Chapter three more fully explores those critical aspects of postmodern theory most pertinent to Willard’s protoevangelical theology. What is important in this brief backdrop are the specific effects philosophical postmodernism have made on mainstream evangelical theology. First, conservative evangelicals sense “hard” postmodernism violates the modern assumption that humanity, or the critical self, is capable and competent to consciously discern the world through the employment of empirical and rational means. Instead, the skeptical nature of postmodernism argues the modern, “Enlightened” self, which has come to comprehend selfhood through its stories, texts, (especially the Bible), vocations, and its intellectual history, is severely affected by a myopic epistemological hubris and cultural blindness of the certainty, absolutism, and the delusion of humanistic mastery. ECM leaders tend to apply this same critique to the doctrinal certainty present in systematic evangelical theology and praxis. Postevangelicals perceived the political power of the Religious Right, the CGM ecclesiology, and neo-evangelical dogmas of pre-millennial eschatology and biblical literalism as contemporary manifestations of Foucault, Lyotard and Derrida’s warnings against modernity’s manipulation of language games, abuses of power and dominating metanarratives to subvert any and all competing claims for epistemological authority.

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<sup>458</sup> It is mentioned here to recognize the continuing struggle to define postmodernism due to the ambiguous and perhaps misunderstood nature of the endeavor. Secondly, what need be highlighted is not so much the real or imagined threat Derrida makes to Christianity. Instead it is essential to note constructivism is in no way a postmodern invention. Constructivism has a long history dating back to Giambattista Vico, a great admirer of Cartesian philosophy who first defined the constructivist paradigm. Therefore there appears to be a significant misnomer in most claims regarding the “post” nature of postmodernism. Since constructivism is tightly connected to Cartesian and Kantian thought, which is then modified and expounded on by Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Nietzsche and finally Derrida, the concepts of deconstruction do not arise after the modern enterprise but right in the middle of it. See D. C. Gruender, “Constructivism and Learning,” *Educational Technology* Vol. 36, 3, (1996), 21-29. Gerard. Delanty, *Social Science : Beyond Constructivism and Realism*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 39-47. Val Dusek, *Philosophy of Technology : An Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2006), 199.



There are other conflicts that have arisen between modern evangelicals and postmodern ECM advocates. Yet none is perhaps greater than the struggle between postmodern hermeneutics and its direct threat to evangelical biblicism. ECM leaders suggest that evangelicalism's *a priori* assumptions regarding Scriptural inerrancy, infallibility and divine revelation must recon with the advent of postmodern deconstruction and the anthropomorphic temptation to abuse such grand claims to knowledge. Further, Derrida's employment of textual criticism calls for an investigation beyond traditional evangelical presentational and representational ways of describing texts, revelation and modern forms of discerning metaphysics.<sup>459</sup> As a result, the attempt of modern evangelical theologians to undergird their biblicist priority through the application of modern hermeneutical methodology, systematic theological rationalization or historical context comes under increased scrutiny. Postmodern hermeneutics places suspicion on each of the evangelical attempts to validate and authorize a totalizing structure of the biblical metanarrative.<sup>460</sup>

These epistemological differences leave modern evangelicals at somewhat of a logical impasse with postmodern philosophy in general and postmodern evangelicals in particular. As a result the ECM began to distance themselves, not so much from the underlying theological objectives of historical evangelicalism, much of which many ECM leaders have retained. Rather postevangelicals seek to create separation from the modern methodological and epistemological devotions within evangelical theology. Postmodern

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<sup>459</sup> Jacques. Derrida, *Dissemination* (Chicago: University Press, 1981), 43-46. Also John Caputo's work on the metaphysics of presence is a substantial problem for many evangelicals. JD Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction, and the Hermeneutic Project* (Indiana Univ. Pr, 1987), and *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion Without Religion* (Indiana University Press, 1997).

<sup>460</sup> John Fekete, *The Structural allegory : reconstructive encounters with the new French thought* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), Intro. And Derek Attridge, *Post-structuralism and the question of history*, ed. Derek Attridge, Geoffrey. Bennington, and Robert Young (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 6-11.

evangelicals argue the neo-evangelical devotions to modern foundationalism, universalization, rationalism, totalitarianism and exclusivism threaten the veracity of the very gospel they profess. ECM leaders argue such fidelity seems more a product of modern fundamentalist arrogance than divine inspiration.

Conversely, for conservatives, postmodernism represents nothing short of a reconstruction of theological liberalism which threatened to eviscerate not just evangelicalism but historic Christian orthodoxy. ECM advocates often contend mainstream evangelicalism remains encumbered by the undercurrent of fundamentalism and its hopelessly logical, consistent and rationalistic form of Christian faith. To the ECM such a rigid Christianity is left void of mystery, miracle, transcendence and awe; all characteristics unworthy of a limitless God evangelicals claim to worship. Postmodernism contends for a paradoxical epistemology modern evangelical rationalism cannot endure. The uncertainty, nuance and mystery despised in modernism is equally valued and celebrated in postmodernism. Modern Christian apologetics melded a paradox into their systematic theology by remaking the super-natural very natural, rational and methodologically consistent. Mysterious, miraculous wonders became rational events completely within the comprehension and explanation of the modern systematic theology. Other metaphysical biblical concepts such as the Incarnation and the atonement of sin followed suit.

Modern evangelicals continually triumph the virtues of method and consistency. A daily devotional “quiet time” of daily prayer and Bible reading, weekly church attendance and Bible memorization programs were touted as the proven methods for reliably achieving a “Christian life.” Yet the evidence of personal transformation into Christ-likeness resulting from the applications of these methods were far from obvious or consistent. Worse, to postmodern evangelicals such reductionistic methods effectively eliminated the transcendent, awe-inspiring power and ambiguity inherent to the supernatural. What

conservative evangelicals had feared a century earlier from liberal theology had come to pass. Ironically, the diminishment of the divine in their own ranks did not come from the result of theological liberalism but through the heavy-handed legalism, rationalism and reductionism of their own theological platform.

### *Current State of Confusion*

Eventually, various ECM leaders began to try their hand at forming alternative, postmodern theological platforms. Theologians and philosophers such as Stanley Grenz, Ray Anderson, Robert Webber, Carl Raschke, John Milbank, James K. A. Smith and others have each attempted to create a meaningful epistemological framework that remains true to key Christian distinctives but arrives at theological conclusions through “softer” postmodern proclivities. Others have attempted to use the works of theologian Jurgen Moltmann,<sup>461</sup> philosopher/theologians Mark C. Taylor,<sup>462</sup> Thomas Altizer,<sup>463</sup> John Caputo and Jeffery Robbins,<sup>464</sup> to develop “hard” postmodern theologies that employ more constructivist, relativist and pluralist epistemologies. These theologies often highlight ambiguity, communal discernment, contextual dependence, and dialectical engagement of idiosyncratic semantic definitions of theological concepts. As such their conclusions routinely present proposals tied to few if any evangelical priorities. Even popular ECM writer and speaker Brian McLaren's most recent attempt at forming a postmodern/postevangelical theological praxis in *A New Kind of Christianity* has struggled

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<sup>461</sup> Jürgen. Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology : Ways and Forms of Christian Theology*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000), 258.

<sup>462</sup> Mark C. Taylor, *Erring : A Postmodern a/Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), and *After God*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007),

<sup>463</sup> Thomas J. J. Altizer, *Living the Death of God : A Theological Memoir* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006),

<sup>464</sup> Jeffrey W. Robbins, *Between Faith and Thought : An Essay on the Ontotheological Condition* (Charlottesville. WV: University of Virginia Press, 2003), *In Search of a Non-Dogmatic Theology*, (Aurora, Colo.: Davies Group, 2003).

to gain traction.<sup>465</sup> Although an interesting and insightful writer, McLaren's latest publications do not appear to have garnered the same effect of his earlier works.<sup>466</sup>

The inability to make any truth claim capable of withstanding the nullifying subjectification within Derridian deconstruction eviscerates much of the Christian theological objective. The lack of an undergirding theological framework has caused some leaders in the ECM to split ranks, suggesting "hard" postmodernism threatens an irretrievable loss of any coherent, substantive argument for a consistent and defensible concept of knowledge or truth in general. Long after Driscoll's departure, key ECM leaders such as Scot McKnight, Dan Kimball, Anthony Jones and Hunter began to develop alternative missional/emerging/postmodern networks.<sup>467</sup>

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<sup>465</sup> Brian D. McLaren, *A New Kind of Christianity : Ten Questions That Are Transforming the Faith* (New York: HarperOne, 2010).

<sup>466</sup> See McKnight's and Brink's review of McLaren's *A New Kind of Christianity* Jonathan Brink, "A Review of a New Kind of Christianity," <http://jonathanbrink.com/2010/02/26/a-new-kind-of-christianity-book-review-question-1/> (accessed 3-11, 2011). Scot McKnight, "Review: A New Kind of Christianity," *Christianity Today* Vol. 54, 3, (March, 2010), 59-66.

<sup>467</sup> Brian Obrien, "Emergent's Divergence," *Christianity Today* Vol. (December, 18, 2008). This relatively recent division has also created a lingering question about the ECM movement that has yet to be convincingly pursued. Is the ECM an evangelical movement? Or more poignantly, who in the ECM is evangelical? Popular ECM writer, speaker and philosopher Peter Rollins, a key voice in guiding and forming the ECM theology and ethos has expressed no qualms dissenting from either evangelicalism or Protestantism in general. The same can be said for Shane Claiborne, perhaps one of the more popular contemporary speakers and writers responsible for what is now termed the "new monastic movement." So too Tony Jones apparently feels no such allegiance to the structures or traditions of evangelicalism. However, other ECM leaders do feel such an allegiance to evangelical history and theology. Andrew Jones, Erwin McManus, Mark Scandrette, Dieter Zander, Todd Hunter and Dan Kimball seems to want to stay connected in some measure to American evangelical ideals. Also Doug Pagitt, perhaps one of the first ECM leaders argues he has remained devoted to evangelical traditions. Pagitt came to Christianity as an evangelical and as he put it, "One can't change their family of origin nor can they choose it. It just is what it is." The same can be said for popular writer and speaker Rob Bell. Bell is arguably one of the most popular and creative teachers and pastors of the Gen X generation. Many have labeled Bell part of the ECM. Yet Bell himself has not officially declared either support or opposition to the ECM. It is important to note that Bell has not used or applied the terms Emerging or Emergent to describe his Mars Hill congregation. When asked about the term in a 2004 televised interview on PremierTv, a Christian television station in the UK, Bell stated he did not see any real benefits from the label Emerging or Emergent. This interview came during a period when the ECM leaders, specifically McLaren and the Emergent Village, were receiving significant pressure and attack from conservative evangelicals D. A. Carson, Albert Mohler, Driscoll and others. See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s049aMBtFAA> accessed 9-20-10. Yet Bell's books and videos remain widely popular in evangelical circles. Recorded Interview with Shane Claiborne, Oct, 2009. Also Shane Claiborne, *The irresistible revolution : living as an ordinary radical* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2006). Doug Pagitt, "Skype Interview" interviewed by Author, 10-29-09. Tony Jones, 2007 AAR Forum on the

Attempting to describe this awkward and inconsistent shifting of allegiances in the ECM historian Richard Kyle points to the historically paradoxical relationship evangelicals have maintained in their romantic affiliation with popular culture. He believes “Evangelicals have not created a Christian America. Rather, they have developed an Americanized Christianity and they cannot tell the difference between the two.”<sup>468</sup> But Kyle notes evangelical acculturation is a symbiotic relationship. American culture, most notably its religious cultures, has also been largely influenced by evangelicalism. Kyle sees evangelical acculturation into American society as valid evidence for its numerical growth and financial success. Evangelicalism has never been a sub-culture in Kyle’s view. Rather he suggests the 20<sup>th</sup> century evangelicalism created by the CGM and the Religious Right created a counterfeit culture when “they have baptized and sanctified secular culture.”<sup>469</sup> Kyle captures what many leaders in the ECM saw in contemporary evangelicalism; a general absence of an identifiable Christian ethos in American evangelicalism. Whether to remain affiliated and attempt reform from the inside or to separate and recreate a new vision of Christian expression are dilemmas and decisions many postevangelical/ECM advocates currently face.

### *Summary*

This chapter has reviewed specific instances in American evangelical history that continue to shape and affect contemporary forms of evangelical theology and praxis. The issue of soteriology has been demonstrated as a historically evolving and contested theological doctrine. Starting with the Calvinist/Arminian debate which progressed into

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Emerging Church. Tony Jones, Keith Matthews, Scot McKnight, Diana Butler Bass, *American Academy of Religion* (October 2007).

<sup>468</sup> Kyle, *Evangelicalism: an Americanized Christianity*, 1.

<sup>469</sup> Ibid.

Moody revivalism, Methodist social activism, and finally arriving in the contemporary distinctions and juxtapositions between fundamentalist separatism, the Religious Right, the CGM/seeker movement, and the ECM's protest of the same, a commonly agreed upon definition of salvation remains an elusive and divisive pillar in the evangelical enterprise. The presence of a dichotomous soteriological message continues to fragment the movement.

The result is a multitude of competing, oppositional and polarizing factions struggling to claim the "biblical" authority for what an evangelical convert can and should become as a result of applying an evangelical brand of faith. Past and present examples of evangelical priorities directed toward cross-purposes are plentiful. Pre-millennial fundamentalists choose to abstain from social and political interaction while the Religious Right strives to overwhelm the American political process. The seeker/CGM ecclesiology attempts to attract the highest quantity of non-believers as possible to church complexes the size of sports arenas while the SFM attempts to focus on developing the highest quality of individual character through small communities gathered in living rooms. Evangelicals committed to modernity advocate the benefits of doctrine, and find the concepts of certainty, mastery and predictability inherent to systematic theology warmly securing. Conversely, postmodern evangelicals champion humility in the face of a mysterious, ambiguous, dangerously unpredictable, yet awe-inspiring God. Each of these opposing perspectives finally stems from different expectations, interpretations and assumptions about the core message Jesus presents in the New Testament gospels. Yet, this lack of consensus on the end product of evangelical faith creates a dearth of confidence that is devastating to young evangelical generations looking for guidance and direction within an increasingly post-Christian, globalized, multi-racial, cross-cultural environment.

The ECM protests has offered significant critiques against secular acculturation by neo-evangelicals in the seeker/CGM ecclesiology, fundamentalist theology and the Religious Right. Even some neo-evangelicals leaders agree with the insights and constructive criticisms of the excesses of mainstream evangelicalism exposed by the ECM. However, as a counter-movement to contemporary evangelicalism, the ECM organized itself appropriately. Evangelicalism in America is a sweeping institutional, systemic, religious and cultural phenomenon. To protest such an entity, postevangelicalism tended to adopt institutional structures and means equivalent to the opponent it encountered. While simultaneously advocating either caution or distrust for religious institutionalization, postevangelicals ironically organized in a nearly identical manner. Consequently, this research suggests a degree duplicity may have eased into the postevangelical ethos. Perhaps due to the sheer size and scope of the enterprise, the ECM may not have been able to escape evangelicalism's gravitational pull with its powerful stable of pundits and protectors long enough to gather critical mass behind a positive theological alternative.

The majority of the ECM's efforts focused on re-critiquing or creating alternatives to contemporary evangelical denominational institutions structured around dogmatically erected theological frameworks and their social followings. Neo-evangelical institutions are well fortified and well funded. Long histories of rich hermeneutical apologetics, each organized around and proliferating a certain, defensible understanding of an orthodox, Christian "gospel" have now been handed down for over two centuries and gained a degree of familiarity that breeds devotion. Such a situation elicits the contentious "insider/outside" phenomenon so feared inside the evangelical tent. Postevangelicalism may have constrained itself too rigidly by defining and representing its objectives primarily through what it resists. The ECM adopted the same mannerisms and fought on the opposite side of the same issues, yet remains fixed on a battlefield of its opponents choosing.

Evangelicalism is a modern, Americanized, rational version of Christian doctrine. Thus postevangelicalism has positioned itself as a postmodern, globalized, mystical version of Christian experience. Perhaps unwittingly, postevangelicalism has therefore become limited simply by the scope of the issues it seeks to correct.

Articulating this larger point, James Davidson Hunter makes a poignant insight in describing how significant the dichotomy exists between younger and more traditional evangelical visions of Christianity. In describing the stark difference between the two, Hunter questions whether young evangelicals are actually intending to be missional to non-believers or if in fact their goal is to re-evangelize traditional evangelicalism itself.<sup>470</sup> The impact of that statement is profound. Postevangelicals have perhaps unwittingly sought the means to evangelize their neo-evangelical progenitors into a gospel void of the traditional trappings of modern epistemology, fundamental theology, literalist bibliology, secular enculturation, sectarian factions and grandiose political or social aspirations.

In short, postevangelicalism seeks a Christianity deemed worthy of its namesake and funded solely by the same. It is a significant and troubling irony that postevangelicals sense evangelicalism has evolved into a form of Christendom devoted to esoteric doctrines that no longer well represent the “*euangelion*” Jesus articulated in the New Testament. Joining historians Kyle, Marty and Marsden, and theologians Grenz, Gibbs, Bolger, Guinness and Webber, the ECM sensed a troubling paradox of theological and epistemological compromise inside mainstream contemporary evangelicalism.<sup>471</sup> Each of these scholars in their own way articulate evangelicalism’s steady approach toward a line

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<sup>470</sup> James Davidson Hunter, “The New Class and the Young Evangelicals,” *Review of Religious Research* 22, 2, (Dec. 1980): 155-169.

<sup>471</sup> Marty and Hunter write of this paradox in Kyle’s *Evangelicalism: an Americanized Christianity*, 3, 2ff.



which separates relevance to, versus absorption into, the surrounding culture. Therefore, this intellectual historical review reveals the lingering volatility, plurality, and plasticity in American evangelical tradition and validates the postevangelical enterprise as one integrated within this tradition.

It is in these dilemmas, whether in an ambiguous state of postmodern constructivism, or a closed state of modern, totalitarian and absolutist dogmatism, where many contemporary postevangelicals lament their faith. It is also where the protoevangelical theology offered by Willard has provided increasing numbers of postevangelical hopefuls a reasonable, encouraging, biblical grounded alternative. The next chapter will present Willardian theology and distinguish the postevangelicalism previously described from the protoevangelicalism Willard articulates. Protoevangelicalism should not be confused with a pursuit of the “first” version of American evangelicalism. Rather, Willardian theology seeks to uncover the primal essence of the original “good news” Jesus first conveyed to humanity and the resulting implications of his message of God’s Kingdom reality. Although Willard speaks to American evangelicalism and its issues, he desires not to correct evangelicalism as to offer all people, including evangelicals, the *euangelion* of life in the present reality of the Kingdom of the Heavens. Like Dayton advocated at the beginnings of this chapter, Willard’s protoevangelicalism seeks something of a moratorium, or an escape from the trappings and limitations of the modern/postmodern, sacred/secular, revelational/communal, fundamentalist/liberal “insider” theological debates, alterations and standards of evangelical orthodoxy. Instead Willard seeks to recapture the transcendent quintessential goodness and opportunity Jesus first taught, demonstrated and manifested in the New Testament. It is to this historically “post” evangelical, yet theologically “proto” evangelical vision we now turn.

**CHAPTER THREE**

**WILLARDIAN THEOLOGY**

### *Introduction*

This chapter is organized in specific reference to the forms and expressions of evangelicalism described in the preceding chapter. Both Bebbington and Balmer's descriptions of the evangelical distinctives and key transitional events will serve to structure and clarify the Willardian theological response. Consequently, this section will review Willard's perspectives on biblicism, activism, conversionism and crucicentrism. It will also review Willard's perspective on the significant soteriological implications Balmer describes in the historical transitions shaping contemporary evangelical theology and praxis. This will include an investigation into the specific critiques Willard makes of evangelicalism in America.

In an attempt to frame Willardian theology and the protoevangelical vision he offers, an overarching schema will also be presented. This schema articulates Willard's undergirding theological motive. In combination with Willard's alterations of Bebbington's evangelical distinctives, the schema, termed *essentia Dei*, offers the positive vision and objective for Willardian theology. This chapter will also present Willard's theo-ontological perspective encompassed in his articulation of the Kingdom of God. Finally, a discussion of Willard's critical realist position as juxtaposed against Derridian deconstructionism illustrates perhaps a mediating path through the divisive modern/postmodern hermeneutical dilemma discussed in the previous chapter.

At its conclusion, these descriptions, comparisons and analysis of Willardian theology, contrasted against both the history and polity of mainstream evangelicalism and postmodern constructivism, build a platform for understanding Willard's protoevangelical quest. Such a pursuit seeks a contemporary articulation of the original gospel represented by Christ in the New Testament gospels regarding the reality of God's Kingdom being

available to all who would desire it with their whole heart. A theological organization of this protoevangelical vision will set the stage for the ethnographic material in chapter four.

At the onset, before engaging Bebbington's key theological distinctives, it is important to mention in discussing Bebbington's work, Willard admitted to not agreeing with an equal evaluation of Bebbington's four evangelical theological distinctives.<sup>472</sup> Willard does agree that evangelicalism has traditionally focused intensely on the areas of biblicism, activism, crucicentrism and conversionism. Therefore as a descriptive analysis, Willard is in agreement with Bebbington's work. To the degree Bebbington offers perhaps a prescriptive or evaluative analysis of evangelical theological values, Willard contends only Biblicism and conversionism are quintessential to orthodox Christian expression. Even still, Willard's perspectives on Biblicism and conversionism are far more encompassing than those articulated by Bebbington. Yet Willard suggests the full compliment of Bebbington's evangelical priorities should naturally emerge from an appropriate consideration and application of Christian biblicism and conversionism. Willard argues, when an intimate engagement of Scripture is undertaken, and when one desires to convert one's life to Scriptural truths, the results will include a progression of maturity which develops a world view inclusive of activism, crucicentrism, along with much more.<sup>473</sup>

### *Bibliology in Willardian Theology*

Willard contends the creation of Scripture required two aspects, the human and divine, participating in concert. With regards to the human aspect, Willard suggests there is

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<sup>472</sup> Written notes of this discussion were made during one of Willard's doctoral cohorts for Fuller Seminary held at Mater Dolorosa, CA., June 14, 2011.

<sup>473</sup> Ibid. Willard states, "It's not Biblicism as much as it is the "life" describe in the Scriptures that is important. The devotional life to Scripture, meditating, and applying its truths...this is what is most important. And when this happens, one is changed or converted. And thus we receive what John chapter 3 is revealing. A new life from above. So yes...the bible and conversion go hand in hand. And everything else proceeds from those."

nothing in the authorial creation of Scripture to suggest that the Bible was preserved and produced by anything less than highly competent individuals who were at least as intelligent and devout as any contemporary peoples within contemporary society. Willard expects the biblical authors would have been fully capable of both accurately interpreting their own experience and then presenting what they heard, witnessed and understood in the language of their historical community.<sup>474</sup> As such Willard suggests that the Bible can and should be considered a reliable and authoritative representation of the story and truth God willed to be revealed to humanity.

However, Willard does not dogmatically propose the Bible to be strictly inerrant nor does he make overt claims of plenary inspiration in conjunction with normative fundamentalists/literalist positions. He offers some nuance to the biblicist argument in his statement,

The Bible is inerrant in its *original form* and infallible in *all its forms for the purposes of guiding us into a life-saving relationship with God in his kingdom*. It is infallible in this way precisely because God never leaves it alone...the Bible reliably fixes the boundaries of everything God will ever say to humankind. (italics added)<sup>475</sup>

Here one can see a bit of dancing around the historic issues at hand. While using similar wording, a careful reading of the quote above does not communicate what many inerrantists might assume. Willard's statement does not expressly condone the concept of strict biblical inerrancy of the original autographs of Scripture. Nor does this statement expressly support the inerrancy of the many proceeding translations of Scripture. As a result Willard bypasses the fundamentalist tendency toward the application of a literalist hermeneutic.<sup>476</sup> What the

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<sup>474</sup> Dallas Willard, *Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (San Francisco: Harper, 1996), xvi. Hereafter referred to as DC.

<sup>475</sup> Dallas Willard, *In Search of Guidance : Developing a Conversational Relationship With God*, (San Francisco: Harper, 1993), 141-142. Hereafter referred to as ISOG.

<sup>476</sup> Willard recognizes the fact none of the original autographs are available. Therefore the proposition the original manuscripts are "inerrant" is a faith claim, one Willard suggests is "most likely true."

statement affirms is the inerrant and infallible *ability* of the Bible to fulfill the “purposes” of God.<sup>477</sup> Willard separates the divine “purposes” of the Scriptures, and an “error” proof biblical manuscript, as altogether separate issues and avoids the more banal disputes in what has been traditionally labeled the “battles over the Bible”<sup>478</sup> Willard does argue the divine contribution to the creation of Scripture necessitates that God both is willing and competent to arrange and steward the biblical record, including the record of Jesus, to emerge and be preserved in reliable ways that will secure his sovereign, benevolent intentions for humanity at large. Willard mentions that for those who maintain a faith in the God the Scriptures describe, such a proposition will be untroubling.

Willard’s position cautions against conservative or fundamentalist assertions regarding their claims to the infallible participation of human beings in the inspired transcription of the Bible. Such claims may be valiant attempts to protect the priority of Scriptural authority against early 20<sup>th</sup> century attacks from liberal theologians employing

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Yet the proposition all the subsequent copies or translations accurately match the original autographs is also impossible to empirically verify. What Willard understands as the motive behind the evangelical “inerrant” dogma is the desire to maintain the veracity and authority of Scripture through applying some form of rational or empirical methodology. In his view this has tended to take modern evangelicals far afield from what he perceives are the key issues regarding the role of Scripture in the Christian life and the nature of divine revelation.

<sup>477</sup> Willard suggests the infallible role of Scripture to communicate God’s “word” is inherent to all the “forms” or translations the Bible takes.

<sup>478</sup> For an explanation of these issues see Harold Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1976). Interestingly, Willard does not mindlessly assume the total, unmitigated objectivity of every description, elucidation or interpretation in the Biblical record. As witnesses, commentators, participants and/or hearsayers of these events, Willard assigns to the writers of Scripture a veracity and integrity both assumed in their task and conveyed in their work. As such, the events of the Bible are accurate descriptions of the testimony provided or event witnessed in direct relation to the author’s own beliefs, perceptions and experiences. Hence, the Bible presents no outright attempts to deceive or mislead its reader. However, Willard seems to give credence and allowance for the nature of witness testimony and the limitations of individual perspectives when compared to the omniscient circumference of the “God’s eye view.” Thus the human aspect in the creation of Scripture adds a necessary degree of subjectivity to the text. The result appears to be a position where the Bible represents a mixture of both the objective, accurate, perfect, and unadulterated revelations from God and the subjective and imperfect perceptions, reactions and interpretations of that revelation. Ultimately, Willard contends God can and should be trusted to compile and preserve the totality of the biblical message in such a way to guard against any human limitation, misinterpretation or misperception fatal to either the contributions of its ancient writers or contemporary readers pursuing its truths.

higher criticism.<sup>479</sup> However, Willard suggests such overreaching declarations often end in the transparent application of unreasonable rationalism and/or legalistic dogmatism.

Equally critical of liberal theologians, Willard does not believe the message of the Bible can be left in the hands of 20<sup>th</sup> century scholars engaged in the esoteric applications of modern literary critique. Willard recognizes higher critics are unable to agree even among themselves on which of their theories best determines what exactly the Bible consists of, or even its general purposes.

### *The Divine Logos*

In place of either liberal higher criticism or fundamentalist literalism, Willard's bibliology takes the Scriptures outside of traditional evangelical arguments of the past century. Instead Willard describes the Scriptures as a physical, written manifestation of God's revealed presence among humanity. The Scriptures are a means, but not the only means, used to represent the Greek, and later Christian concept of the divine *Logos*. Willard understands the *Logos* as both a metaphysical, spiritual presence that represents and encapsulates the ultimate and final order of reality.<sup>480</sup> Hence the *Logos* is present in the Scriptures, in history, in nature, and also discovered in the lives of individuals.<sup>481</sup>

In discerning the difference between Christ discussed in John 3:16 (God's Son), the person of the "Word" described as present in John 1:1 (*Logos* translated in English is "Word"), and the historic person of Jesus of Nazareth, the *Logos* represents the member of

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<sup>479</sup> See page 88 and following.

<sup>480</sup> Dallas Willard, "Day 10, Session 2, Topic-Scripture, Recorded Lecture," *Fuller Seminary Doctoral Class* (6-16-2010).

<sup>481</sup> Furthermore, the Trinitarian presence of God is also equally present in each of these divine manifestations as well. Willard does not develop a specific doctrine of the Trinity. However, it is a consistent theme in his works. See specifically DC, 318, 386-289. ROH, 184-185, KCT, 228ff. Dallas Willard, Gayle Beebe, Lynda Graybeal, Thomas C. Oden, *The With God Bible*, ed. Richard Foster, Eugene Petersen, and Walter Breuggemann, New Revised Standard Version (New York: HarperCollins, 2005), 87 and 477.

the Trinity of which Jesus of Nazareth claimed of himself “Before Abraham was, I am.”<sup>482</sup>

Willard suggests this claim is a reference by Jesus to his identity as the member of the Trinity understood as the “cosmic Christ.”<sup>483</sup> This is the same individual described as the divine *Logos*, of whom Jesus of Nazareth was the physical manifestation on earth during the first century. Willard argues that revealing the divine personhood of Jesus is a major point of John’s gospel. John seeks to distinguish between the historical Jesus, as a human being, which is different and unique from the embodying spirit of the *Logos*, which empowers the life of Jesus of Nazareth. This differentiation seeks to highlight the spiritual nature of the Kingdom of God, created through the *Logos*, made accessible through Christ and utilized by humanity in the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Each of these features of the Trinity are therefore essential to the existential reality of life in the Kingdom of God.<sup>484</sup>

What makes this subject pertinent to Willard’s bibliology is the proposition that the Bible does not communicate the exclusivity of Jesus the Nazarene but the exclusivity of the Trinitarian cosmic Christ, revealed in the *Logos*, and made manifest in Jesus of Nazareth. Therefore the Scriptural exclusivity of Christ does not necessitate knowledge of the historical individual of Jesus of Nazareth referred to in the New Testament.<sup>485</sup> This is due to the *Logos* being both a physical and non-physical reality. The *Logos* became incarnated (in Jesus) and yet still remained the same Spirit that was with God at the beginning of

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<sup>482</sup> John 8:58

<sup>483</sup> Willard discusses the *Logos* at length in chapter seven of *Knowing Christ Today* where he reviews the concept of Christian pluralism. Hereafter referred to as KCT in the notes. Dallas Willard, *Knowing Christ Today: Why We Can Trust Spiritual Knowledge* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2009), 169.

<sup>484</sup> This divine-human-cosmic-Trinitarian characterization of Jesus is simply a mystery, largely indiscernible and far beyond the scope of this thesis. Willard suggests however that since the subject lays largely beyond human purview and thus a matter from which only the divine is fully equipped to engage, understanding necessitates an approach at the level of the heart (internal motives and desire) and not only at the level of the mind or intellect. Hence Willard argues spiritual matters are best approached and understood at the level of spirit. This is one of Willard’s insights and critiques regarding the anemia of purely academic theology.

<sup>485</sup> The Bible verses that surround the question of exclusivity that are in question here are found in Acts 4:7-12 and John 3:16.



creation.<sup>486</sup> This understanding maintains and allows the *Logos* freedom to be an omnipresent creative and communicative force throughout the cosmos. It also allows for the manifestation of the *Logos* in various other forms. Likewise, Willard argues the Bible contains the words of God but the Bible does not exclusively represent or encapsulate the existential reality of the *Logos* (Word). The *words* printed in the Bible are significantly different than the *Word* it describes and bears witness to.<sup>487</sup>

Unlike theologian Karl Barth, who asserted that the Bible is the Word of God only when God uses it to speak, Willard states God has certainly and unequivocally communicated to the world through the Scriptures.<sup>488</sup> Thus the message of the Word (*Logos*) is always available in the Scriptures whether effectively communicated or not. Willard also contends the Bible reveals the *Logos* when God uses it to convey his will. However, in contrast to Barth, Willard contends the Scriptures consistently represent God's revelation at all times. Willard believes God speaks continually through the Bible, not simply periodically or circumstantially. Willard recognizes God's readiness to use the Scriptures as a medium to communicate. Yet there must also be a commensurate willingness or desire on the part of humanity to actively listen.<sup>489</sup> Willard is keen to say God is not the only one who can use the Scriptures as a communicative means. Both Satan and human beings have the ability to use and misuse the Scriptures and have done so, to both manipulate and deceive, toward ignominious motives and tragic ends.<sup>490</sup>

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<sup>486</sup> John 1:1-3

<sup>487</sup> This position encompasses what Willard describes as "Christian pluralism" and has significant impact on the evangelical idea of crucicentrism. This will be discussed in greater detail in this chapter.

<sup>488</sup> K Barth, *Church Dogmatics, Vol I, Pt.2 the Doctrine of the Word of God* (New York: T & T Clark, 1956), 525.

<sup>489</sup> Dallas Willard, "Day 10, Session 2, Topic-Scripture, Recorded Lecture," *Fuller Seminary Doctoral Class* (6-16-2010). 33:00 in

<sup>490</sup> Ibid

Furthermore, the written manifestation of the *Word*, or Scripture, is bound by language. Thus the Scriptures are an objective presence of the *Logos* in the world. Yet the Bible is never to be considered an all-inclusive representation of the *Logos*. The Bible remains a very important, necessary and powerful presence in human history. However, it cannot and should not be confused with God himself. The living *Word (Logos)* is transcendent of language. Willard suggests that Romans chapters 1 through 11 reveal that the *Logos* speaks in nature and through the lives of the Old Testament patriarchs, the New Testament saints and in Jesus himself.<sup>491</sup> When Jesus states “man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God,” he is not suggesting humanity should live from every word written in the Hebrew Torah or the Greek Septuagint.<sup>492</sup> Rather, Willard suggests Jesus is revealing the reality of the sustaining metaphysical substance of the *Logos*. This is God’s substantive communication for sustaining life and cannot be bound or limited to the words written in the Bible.<sup>493</sup> Willard argues this is why the apostle Paul commands Timothy to preach the *Logos*—which is larger than simply the written, language limited manuscripts of the Scriptures.<sup>494</sup> Hence the Kingdom of God is found in all the various complementary manifestations of the *Logos* of God.

As a whole Willard believes the Bible is God’s gift to the world through his Church, not through scholars or theologians of either the conservative or liberal persuasion. Its

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<sup>491</sup> Specifically Romans 1:18-21, 2:17-28, 3:21-31, 4, 5:12-20, 6-11.

<sup>492</sup> Matthew 4:4

<sup>493</sup> This is a very Jewish understanding of God’s creative act in Genesis which stems from the act of originating speech. Genesis 1:1-26 and referenced in John 1:1-3. Gordon J. Wenham, vol. 1, *Word Biblical Commentary : Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 8.

<sup>494</sup> The Greek translation of Paul’s advice: κήρυξον τὸν **λόγον**, ἐπίστηθι εὐκαίρως ἀκαίρως, ἔλεγξον, ἐπιτίμησον, παρακάλεσον, ἐν πάσῃ μακροθυμίᾳ καὶ διδαχῇ. Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Matthew Black et al., *The Greek New Testament*, 4th ed. (Federal Republic of Germany: United Bible Societies, 1993), 554-55. 2 Timothy 4:2.

purposes are primarily practical, not academic or dogmatic. Therefore an intelligent, careful and intensive but straightforward reading, one not governed by obscure and faddish theories or by a mindless orthodoxy, is required to receive appropriate direction for life in God's Kingdom. Any other approach threatens to derail the vision God desires to reveal in and through the *Logos*.<sup>495</sup> Willard also admonishes evangelicals against a mindless, routinized reading of the Bible. Methodological consistency alone will not overwhelm or transform the will. One's expectations imputed onto the Scriptural texts, whether liberal or conservative, are rarely overcome or significantly altered through ritually reading the Bible.<sup>496</sup> More commonly, one's perusal of Scripture becomes an act seeking to justify a pre-existing expectation of the text or condone a preferred behavior. Such an approach routinely re-entrenches the self-appropriated hermeneutical lens with every subsequent engagement of the text. Ironically, the ability of the Scriptures to then break through these biases becomes increasingly less likely the more "devoted" one becomes. Willard recognizes this conundrum and recalls how such biblicism has been used over the centuries to catastrophic effects.

Willard argues applying an epistemic humility to Scripture interrupts this dynamic. His advice in overcoming this tendency is to allow the Scripture to set its own intents and purposes. One must come to the Scriptures and let its values and agenda set the tone, not vice versa. This assumes some degree of intentional and renewable naïveté when approaching the Scriptures. Anything less threatens to devolve into a method of justifying anthropocentric aims and overwhelming divine communion altogether. Humbly approaching the Bible creates a disposition capable of apprehending its prophetic and

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<sup>495</sup> Whether such an argument uses circular reasoning is left to consider.

<sup>496</sup> Dallas Willard, "Willardian Theology, Bibliology, Epistemology, Phenomenology and Current Praxis." interviewed by author, Chatsworth, CA., February 10, 2011.

corrective intents to “teach, correct, rebuke and train in righteousness (*dikaiousune*).”<sup>497</sup>

Willard reminds, the Bible, as a tool of the *Logos*, in tune with the character of God, does not set out to overcome the human will. Consequently, the message of the Scriptures must be willingly accepted. The Scriptures do not aggressively wrangle the human personality into submission simply through the course of reading its words. Willard laments this fact is often misunderstood and misapplied within the evangelical propensity to saturate its members in Bible studies, Sunday schools, exegetical sermon series, commentaries and read-thru-the-Bible-in-a-year devotionals.

In summary, Willard agrees with the primacy and centrality of biblicism as a key tenet in any vibrant Christian faith.<sup>498</sup> The Bible is a coalesced representation of all the essential aspects and arenas of human inquiry compiled in a coherent manner. As such the Bible is a treasure because it reveals God’s perspectives on all essential aspects of life and reality. It also creates a platform of ideas and thoughts which makes relational depth with God and his world accessible.<sup>499</sup> Willard’s bibliology also brings into greater relief his theo-ontological perspective. He argues the Scriptures presents both a reliable description of the substantive metaphysical reality of God’s Kingdom. The Scriptures illuminate a tremendous collection of research which provides insight into the spiritual realm within which the reality of the Kingdom exists. For Willard, Jesus’ statement, “the words that I speak to you they are spirit and they are life” characterizes the totalizing metaphysical

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<sup>497</sup> 2 Timothy 3:16. *Dikaiousune* is a key concept in DC, 144. The term is often translated as “righteousness” in the New Testament. Willard suggests the term connotes the idea of the ability to both know and do the right thing. In ancient Greek text the term was often translated virtue.

<sup>498</sup> Dallas Willard, “Day 10, Session 2, Topic-Scripture, Recorded Lecture,” *Fuller Seminary Doctoral Class* (6-16-2010).

<sup>499</sup> However, Willard recognizes it would be difficult to comprehend how these factors are presented in the Bible by reading the Bible alone. Good teaching and preaching must accompany individual Bible study for well-rounded comprehension of the Bible to be attained. The lack of this in modern evangelicalism is something Willard commonly laments.

quality and benefit of both the Scripture in specific and divine revelation in general.<sup>500</sup> As both a phenomenologist and epistemologist, Willard recognizes the power of words and the ideas they represent. Therefore his perspective of Scripture is one that appreciates the potential of words to illustrate and reveal the substance of life and reality, all of which falls under the direction of the cosmic *Logos*. Such a perspective exponentially affects the potentiality one places on the power of Scripture to effect human life and perception.

Finally, key to Willard's bibliology is the advocacy of putting the guidance provided in the Bible into practice. This brings the knowledge of the reality the Bible describes into proper fruition and perspective. The knowledge and wisdom the Bible imparts, in Willard's view, creates the opportunity for freedom because one is given the resources for manifesting, incarnating and inhabiting the God permeated reality the Bible describes. Willard suggests one's "view" of Scripture intellectually or theoretically, although important, is not of greatest consequence. Of greatest importance is actually doing or applying the concepts and truths described in the Bible, "getting the words to come off the page" as it were.<sup>501</sup> For Willard, this represents the "highest" view of Scripture, regardless of one's academic or intellectual reasoning about what the book may or may not represent. If one maintains an inaccurate view of Scriptural authority, such a position could easily make applying or placing value in the Scriptures increasingly difficult. Additionally, certain perspectives of Scripture, even those historically identified with particular views of "orthodoxy" can also make realizing the overarching message of Scriptures increasingly difficult as well.<sup>502</sup>

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<sup>500</sup>John 6:63

<sup>501</sup> Dallas Willard, "Day 10, Session 2, Topic-Scripture, Recorded Lecture," *Fuller Seminary Doctoral Class* (6-16-2010).

<sup>502</sup> As an example, Willard cites double-predestination as a traditionally orthodox view in many conservative Calvinist theological arenas. However, to ascribe fully such a doctrine may create a situation

*Conversational Revelation*

Based on the unlimited creative and communicative ability of the divine *Logos* it follows that Willard's understanding of how a follower of Christ receives divine revelation would exceed the singularity of the written Scriptures. In his first theological work, *In Search of Guidance*, Willard tackles this historically controversial topic.<sup>503</sup> He proposes individuals have the potential, and should expect to experience the reality, of hearing God communicate or "speak" personally and directly. Willard's specific intent is to provide the reader with a clearer understanding and greater confidence in the practical means God uses to guide individuals within a communicative relationship. In *Guidance* Willard strives to reveal this deep spiritual, relational interaction with God that builds and develops through the result of the maturation process of discipleship.

Part of this maturation and development is realizing the availability of God's directive communication. However, Willard states hearing God is neither the end nor the goal of discipleship. Rather...

The great height of our development as disciples of Christ is not that we shall always have guidance, but that we shall be trained under the hand of God in such a way that we are able to stand even without guidance, at our appointed time and place, in faith, hope and love.<sup>504</sup>

Discipleship, like all theological or ecclesiological endeavors in Willardian theology, is not an end in itself. Instead discipleship represents only a means into the existential reality of life as God's "children of light" in his Kingdom, which begins now and stretches for all

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where belief in God's overarching goodness, justice and loving character become increasingly difficult. Such an example illustrates losing the "Biblical forest in the doctrinal trees."

<sup>503</sup> Dallas Willard, *Hearing God: Developing a Conversational Relationship With God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999). Hereafter referred to as HG.

<sup>504</sup> HG, 225.

eternity.<sup>505</sup> Part of that Kingdom ethos involves direct communion with God, both through the *Logos* of God revealed in the Scriptures but also through direct, unmediated interaction. As a manifest reality of a citizen in such a Kingdom, ruled by a benevolent King, Willard purposes God is not only both willing and able to communicate individually but in fact does communicate personally and directly with “ordinary” human beings.<sup>506</sup> Therefore, when one is taught to expect and listen for such communication, such training can allow for entering into the established Kingdom reality of relational life “with God.”<sup>507</sup>

Although Willard contends there should be no inconsistencies in divine revelation, whatever form it takes, his position on divine revelation puts him at odds with evangelicals advocating cessationist dispensationalism.<sup>508</sup> In response, using a multitude of Scriptural accounts, Willard identifies the ways God has communicated to individuals throughout the ages and argues against the cessationist view that neither the establishment of the Church, nor the establishment of a closed canon of Scripture, excludes God’s communicative ability or desire.<sup>509</sup> Furthermore, Willard asserts God has always communicated through means other than the Scriptures. In addition to general revelation (creation) God continues to use specific events or circumstances, angelic messengers, visions and dreams, miraculous

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<sup>505</sup> Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (Grand Rapids: NavPress, 2002), chapter 12. Hereafter referred to as ROH.

<sup>506</sup> HG, chapter 5.

<sup>507</sup> This is also a common phrase in the *Renovare Bible* in which Willard was a co-editor. See Dallas Willard, Gayle Beebe, Lynda Graybeal, Thomas C. Oden, *The With God Bible*, ed. Richard Foster, Eugene Petersen, and Walter Breuggemann, New Revised Standard Version (New York: HarperCollins, 2005).

<sup>508</sup> Cessationism is still a very active dogma in conservative evangelical circles. It stems on the belief the miraculous, and the miraculous “sign gifts” described in the New Testament such as prophesy, speaking in tongues, healing, etc. are no longer part of the current dispensation experienced by the Church. Cessationism is strongly connected to dispensational theology and became a key issue in B. B. Warfield’s fundamentalist evangelical theology. In this case, many cessationist contend hearing God’s voice would be included as a miraculous event and therefore outside the limits of the current dispensation. For an excellent discussion on this issue referencing several points of view see Richard B. Gaffin, Wayne A. Grudem, and Douglas A. Oss, *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? : Four Views* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Pub., 1996), Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles*. (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1972), 4-5.

<sup>509</sup> HG, 106.

events such as signs, prophetic messages, along with the widely accepted concept of “still, smaller voice,” as viable and reliable platforms by which to communicate with persons in contemporary contexts.<sup>510</sup>

Ironically, Willard suggests that of these communicative choices, God has traditionally chosen to use more dramatic communicative methods with those in a less spiritually mature condition.<sup>511</sup> The most common means God uses, Willard suggests, is the “still, small voice.”<sup>512</sup> This juxtaposition presents an insight into Willard’s concern over the spiritual condition of the more flamboyant spiritual leaders, television evangelists and the regularity of their incredible claims of divine communication.<sup>513</sup> However, Willard also suggests that the outright absence of any revelations from God may not be a sign of maturity, but instead an indication of resistance or even spiritual deadness. Both these extremes, either no communication or continual, spectacular or dramatic revelations suggest dangers and distractions to the original purposes of God to develop an intimate communal relationship. Instead, God seeks a rapport to aid and guide human beings toward an attentive and responsive knowledge of his character regardless of the means of communication. Open dialog is maintained through what Willard describes as the intentional act of constantly “keeping God present to the mind.”<sup>514</sup> This constant interaction

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<sup>510</sup> HG, 108-110.

<sup>511</sup> Many examples are evident in the biblical account. The apostle Paul’s conversion conversation is one poignant example. Additionally, the “burning bush” example with Moses is a case in point. After which it appears Moses needed less dramatic communicative encounters with God.

<sup>512</sup> HG, 91.

<sup>513</sup> Several televangelists use the rationale God has dramatically spoken to them as a means of manipulating or cajoling their followers. Such is the immaturity Willard discusses. See Marshall William Fishwick and Ray B. Browne, *The God Pumpers : Religion in the Electronic Age* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1987), Kenneth D. Johns, *The Popes of Pentecostal Television* (Longwood, FL: Advantage Books, 2005),

<sup>514</sup> HG, 214



with the voice of God slowly builds the nature and character of Christ into ever fuller maturity in the life of a believer.

Willard's view of the divine revelation is very practical and reasonable. He advocates a proper theological understanding of God should recognize divine relationship with humanity not in abstract, literary, propositional, doctrinal or theoretical terms as may become the expectation of an overtly biblicistic faith. Rather as a person engaging persons, God desires a level of open, interactive and dynamic engagement simply unimaginable with a book. Hence, as a "father" or parent, Willard suggests God desires good and moral choices to be made by his children within the context of the freedom essential for the development of fully capable, loving human beings. God's will, Willard suggests, is for individuals to embody the character which empowers them to freely "be" who they were created to be.

Therefore, the Bible should not be used as a mind-dumbing index of legalisms or obligations. Rather God desires humanity to learn properly "to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ," developing a Godly character, which is capable of discerning God's "law of love."<sup>515</sup> Willard recognizes this as a very close representation to the Augustinian precept, "love God and do as you please."<sup>516</sup> Consequently, the purpose of all divine communication, including the Bible, works toward the internalization of the ethos of God becoming so thoroughly integrated as to become essentially "written on the heart."<sup>517</sup>

In summary, Willard's bibliology argues the Bible itself illustrates that the written Scriptures should not be considered the exclusive mean for divine communication and revelation. Therefore, Willard does not limit God to the predetermined theological

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<sup>515</sup> 2 Peter 3:18 and James 2:8.

<sup>516</sup> John Burnaby, *Augustine: Later works*. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955), 316.

<sup>517</sup> Romans 2:13-15. This statement is an apparent reference the apostle Paul makes to Jeremiah 31:33.

assumptions and interpretations of the written Scriptures. One does not have a relationship with a text. This position does not so much contradict, but expands the mainstream evangelical view to include a broader understanding of the divine *Logos*. Willard also resurrects the pre-cessationist spirituality reminiscent of the earlier Christian theology prior to Darby's dispensational theology.<sup>518</sup> This presents an opportunity to reinvigorate and put substance on the overly used but sparsely understood evangelical phrase "relationship with God." As such, on a subject that many evangelicals remain concerned about, and which some see as a threat to the nature of what it means to be in relation with God, Willard unveils a biblically validated vision regarding divine revelation that includes, but also transcends, the issues described in Bebbington's evangelical biblicist apologetics.

Yet the much larger goal in relationship to God is to grow into the kind of person who not only desires to hear God's voice but also equally endeavors to obey, or heed, what the divine voice requires. Hearing God, attaining knowledge of the Scriptures or placing high doctrinal authority on the validity and veracity of the Scripture all maintain value in and of themselves. Regardless of these esoteric points of doctrine and theology and despite whatever one might or might not claim about the traditional liberal vs. conservative arguments over the Bible, Willard contends obedience demonstrates the highest view of Scripture. Ultimately the goal of relationship with God is to grow into the kind of person who desires to hear God, through any and every means available, and then follow that call.

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<sup>518</sup> This pre-dispensational theology is seen in the early Christian mystics. Examples of this spirituality are seen in Willard's references to the ancient works of Teresa Avila, St. Jerome, Brother Lawrence, Bonaventure, Athanasius, Ignatius Loyola and others in his class syllabus for the Fuller Seminary Doctoral seminar.

*Conversionism in Willardian Theology*

Conversionism too plays a significant and enduring role in Willardian theology. However, Willard rarely uses the exact term. The most accurate and useful synonym in Willardian theology for conversionism is transformation.<sup>519</sup> As mentioned in the preceding chapter, evangelical theology has historically considered Christian conversion a moment or a choice wherein an individual either receives or chooses the forgiveness and grace offered through Christ's atoning sacrifice on the cross.<sup>520</sup> This event alters the spiritual and existential nature of the human being. Commonly termed justification, the convert's sins are atoned or "redeemed" which results in rescue or deliverance from the eternal consequences or penalty of the previously unjustified or unsaved condition. The concept of sanctification, following justification, becomes quite another matter; an issue encountered subsequent to the atoning, salvific choice (Arminian) or act of God's grace (Calvinist).

In short, Willardian theology reconnects the justification/sanctification event that evangelical versions of conversionism previously separated. He positions justification (atonement) as something accomplished solely by the Trinity and therefore altogether beyond human interaction.<sup>521</sup> Willard argues conversion/transformation is not the same as atonement. Instead conversion is the initial step or action of placing one's confidence in the reality and effect of divine love and grace. This new outlook begins the process of "converting" the entire life and worldview. Conversion is therefore identical to transformation, alteration and renovation of the entire person. Willard suggests the convert's ontological position becomes progressively adapted through discipleship to Jesus

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<sup>519</sup> The idea of converting and transforming in Willardian theology are nearly identical. In both words the focus is placed on the action of change from one preexisting status or condition.

<sup>520</sup> See pgs. 89-91.

<sup>521</sup> An entire article is devoted to Willard's view of the atonement in Gary W. Moon's, "Getting the Elephant Out of the Sanctuary: An Interview With Dallas Willard, Expanded Text," *Conversations Journal*, Vol. 8.1, (Spring 2010).

into the metaphysics of the Kingdom of God. Willard reconnects the historically divided and bifurcated terms of justification and sanctification, unifying their qualities and objectives as elements of the same convertive process and the transformational journey. In short, Willard views conversion as a simultaneous conjoining of justification and sanctification to the point a convert can be considered equally both “saved” and “being saved.”

Willard’s most popular work *The Divine Conspiracy* focuses on describing the ontological condition and process of living in this convertive state. Willard also spends the majority of *Renovation of the Heart* discussing the reasons and hurdles that prevent persons from entering into the “easy yoke” of transformation with Jesus as a guide. *Renovation* pursues the roles anthropology, psychology, sociology and epistemology play in the theological understandings of individuals and groups attempting to convert/transform their previous worldviews and enter into a relational interaction with the Kingdom of God.<sup>522</sup> This process is what Willard describes as the biblical understanding of “*metanoia*” or repentance; an important theme carried throughout his description of the apostle Paul’s encouragement to become “transformed by the renewal of the mind.”<sup>523</sup> Willard defines repentance as “rethinking one’s thinking” or “reconsidering one’s considerations.”<sup>524</sup>

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<sup>522</sup> ROH represents a significant aspect in Willard’s engagement with larger fields of inquiry (anthropology, psychology, sociology, philosophy, etc.) and consequently evokes a wider vision of a more robust practical theology. To classify *Renovation* as a work specifically limited to the subject of spiritual formation, as some of Willard’s peers are apt to do, is an oversight. Again, as mentioned earlier, Willard sees theology as nothing if not practical. Yet *Renovation* also is perhaps Willard’s most philosophical treatment of the subjects surrounding conversion or transformation, and the effect of the protoevangelical gospel Jesus articulated on these issues.

<sup>523</sup> Romans 12:2. This will also be revisited specifically in the ethnographic material in relationship to how certain leaders go about positioning Willard’s theology to their congregations/organizations.

<sup>524</sup> DC, 227-229. Trevor Hudson and Jan Johnson use Willard’s definition of *metanoia* in their works. See Trevor Hudson *Discovering Our Spiritual Identity: Practices for God’s Beloved* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Books, 2010), 94. And Jan Johnson, “Guilt Odyssey,” [http://www.janjohnson.org/march\\_2011\\_wisbits.html](http://www.janjohnson.org/march_2011_wisbits.html) (accessed April, 12, 2011).

Willard suggests that Christianity, rightly understood, represents not a belief system as much as a unifying philosophy, as it were, that when appropriately applied in a consistent manner eventuates conversion and transformation of every aspect of the human condition. The general outline provided in *Renovation* presents an ample vista that captures the depth and breadth of Willardian theology as a whole and what potential alterations a convert faces once introduced to the theo-ontology of the Kingdom of God. Combined, *Renovation* and *Divine Conspiracy* provide bookends of Willard's theology and praxis, demonstrating both personal application and theological insight on individual and corporate conversion/transformation into the Kingdom of God.<sup>525</sup>

More specifically, *Renovation* focuses primarily on unfolding Willard's understanding of the multi-layered, interdependent, symbiosis involved in the individual parts of the human self. Here each aspect of the person (the heart, mind, body, social relations and all encompassing soul) carry specialized needs and aspects that require progressive transformation into Christlikeness. Willard starts this dissection of the self by reviewing Jesus' gospel announcement of the reality and availability of God's theo-ontology into every arena of human existence. Willard intimates that such a Christlike life is not only possible, but has been attained by many dedicated disciples over the ages. Secondly, *Renovation* points to how and why Jesus must be considered Christianity's primary teacher and guide for Christian living. Thus converting one's life, mind, heart, body and soul to Jesus is an act of confidence in Jesus' ability and wisdom to competently guide his followers into this worldview. This theme is also referenced as the soteriological opportunity Jesus articulates in the New Testament and is the central theme of *Divine*

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<sup>525</sup> Moreover, reviewers seemed to miss that ROH represents Willard's comprehensive treatment of Kingdom theology through his detailed descriptions of each segment of the self. Chapters 4, 12 and 13 specifically can be considered a clarified restatement of the overarching object of Willard's theological goals in general.

*Conspiracy*.<sup>526</sup> Finally, Willard moves into his description of not only what holistic conversion would look like in the life of a disciple, he also describes how churches and their leaders can facilitate such a transformation and what curriculum would be required to facilitate such a change. In some respects *Renovation* picks up on Willard's eschatological vision and continues providing details where *Divine Conspiracy* ends.

Perhaps *Renovation*'s most pertinent chapter deals with the issue of how spiritual conversion occurs, and why it often does not occur. Willard deals with the issue of "intentionality" briefly in *Divine Conspiracy*, while *Renovation* devotes an entire chapter to the concepts involved in creating a "general pattern of personal transformation."<sup>527</sup> As an answer to what components are required for any sustainable change, Willard presents the acronym "VIM" that represents the terms, Vision, Intention and Means. Willard makes the all-encompassing claim that "If this VIM pattern is not put in place properly and held there, Christ simply will not be formed in us."<sup>528</sup>

Willard points to each aspect of the VIM pattern as containing necessary components required to progress to the next stage of Christlike development. Thus change starts with a vision of what is possible in the potentially changed life. Vision provides the necessary establishment of hope that the change advocated or promised is not only possible, but is significantly better than that currently experienced. A proper vision of who Jesus is, what message he is delivering, and what kind of life he is understood to advocate for and provide, must be properly grasped and communicated.

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<sup>526</sup> The first two sections of *Renovation* are deeply theological and as such repeat some of Willard's earlier writings. Yet *Renovation* also evidences a refinement and clarity of theological explanation and insight that may have been missing in previous works. See DC, 273, 316.

<sup>527</sup> ROH, chapter 5.

<sup>528</sup> ROH, 85.

Building on the topic of vision, Willard offers a theological critique of the differing soteriological ends within competing professions of the evangelical gospel.<sup>529</sup> What vision of life one is asked to convert to, or accept as normative, is paramount in the conversion process. This is why Willard believes pastors, preachers and teachers hold such significant roles in the process of conversion and transformation. He sees ecclesiastical leaders as either keepers and tenders of the gospel of Jesus, or proliferators of a different—often competing—adaptation. When the message preached or taught is altered significantly from the vision Jesus professed, the experience is changed as well. In short, this is precisely the view Willard takes with regard to most neo-evangelical theology and preaching today. The evangelical gospel preached from many pulpits today has been adapted to the point where a different story, with a different vision for life and purpose, is communicated. One essentially different than the original message of Jesus, present in the *protoeuangelion* and revealed in the biblical accounts.

The next step, intention, is specifically a responsibility of the individual and not a duty laid on Christian leaders, teachers and pastors to persuade, manipulate or cajole. However, intentional decision-making is not completely separate from the vision cast. The two are somewhat dependent since the essence of the vision compels the intention to follow Christ's lead.

The vision of life in the Kingdom of God through reliance on Jesus makes it possible for us to intend to live in the kingdom as he did. We can actually decide to do it...If we do not count on him as "the one" we will have no adequate vision of the kingdom or of life therein and no way to enter it. He is "the door"; he is "the way." Find another whoever can.<sup>530</sup>

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<sup>529</sup> More will be discussed on this topic in the section titled Willard's Critique of Evangelicalism beginning on page 220.

<sup>530</sup> ROH, 87.

Willard goes on to make a significant critique of other ideologies and theologies regarding the nature of conversion. He bases this critique on his understanding that intention is the pivotal bridge between the declaration of good intentions and the reality of actual change. Most pointedly, two of the more extreme ideological/theological camps within evangelicalism garner Willard's disparagement.

First, Willard offers correction to the more fundamentalist/conservative strands of evangelicalism which traditionally position the profession of belief in correct doctrine as occasioning conversion and achieving a salvific end. As a result, these groups have viewed obedience in discipleship and its transformative properties as an unnecessary or clearly optional aspect of Christian life and experience. To which Willard suggests,

Indeed no one can actually believe the truth about [Jesus] without trusting him by intending to obey him. It is a mental impossibility. To think otherwise is to indulge a widespread illusion that now smothers spiritual formation in Christlikeness among professing Christians and prevents it from naturally spreading worldwide.<sup>531</sup>

Willard argues any "saving" faith must exemplify itself in a will directed toward obedience. Something less, by definition, should be considered suspect as to its effectiveness or intent. Such a claim, if broadly applied to the statistics regarding the lack of discipleship evident in contemporary evangelicalism, is staggering to consider and a reality Willard comes back to again and again in his work.

Secondly, Willard advises against the promotion of any form of "super" natural transformation. Pentecostal/charismatic forms of evangelical conversionism tend to advocate wholesale transformation of the personality "in a moment." This advocates or accentuates an undisciplined, unprepared and decidedly passive role in transformation. These theologies tend to encourage specific reliance on a miraculous production of Christlike behavior, character or knowledge, while in the moment of need, or what Willard

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<sup>531</sup> ROH, 87.



calls “on the spot.” This is a significantly mistaken understanding and appreciation both for the power of the human will in combination with a lack of awareness and recognition of the unobtrusive nature of God’s character.<sup>532</sup>

One of the greatest temptations that we face as evangelicals—for the moment I include in that what is sometimes called the charismatic stream of the church—is the idea that the personality and the heart are going to be transformed by some sort of lightning strike of the Spirit. You can call it revival or whatever you want. There is going to be the great boom and then suddenly you will be transformed in every aspect of your being. There will be no need for a process—it will all be accomplished passively and immediately.<sup>533</sup>

As a result, charismatic/Pentecostal perceptions of “on the spot” empowerment require an expectation, imploration and infusion of divine intervention to either overcome or transcend the weaknesses of the “flesh.” Such a view of the “Spirit-filled life” can become essentially a “Spirit-contravening” life that happens despite the individual will, not because of it. “God is not going to pick us up by the seat of our pants, as it were, and throw us into transformed kingdom living, into holiness.”<sup>534</sup> It is important to note that Willard fully places spiritual formation and conversion as a work of the Spirit, an activity he terms a “Spirit-driven process.”<sup>535</sup> It is the passivity inherent in many forms of popular charismatic/Pentecostalism that Willard warns against. “Well informed human effort is certainly indispensable, for spiritual formation is no passive process.”<sup>536</sup>

Converse to many supernatural transformational proposals, Willard recognizes the power of deeply established habits and tendencies of the mind, emotions and body, in their ingrained status, which routinely present themselves stronger than even the most valiant

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<sup>532</sup> ROH, 90

<sup>533</sup> GO, 56.

<sup>534</sup> ROH, 91.

<sup>535</sup> ROH, 22.

<sup>536</sup> ROH, 23.

desire of the heart “in the moment.” While not dismissing God’s omnipotent ability to act as he sees fit, in whomever he chooses, at any stage of a person’s maturation, Willard articulates the normative means God has established for spiritual transformation is routinely different than the abstract and inconsistent reality of the “super” natural means that remain at his disposal. Instead, Willard suggests the biblical record demonstrates “off the spot” training, through meditation, prayer, study, solitude and other spiritual disciplines. These activities allow one to become the individual who routinely and ordinarily— not extraordinarily or spontaneously—engages and extends the power of God’s grace and love.

Sanctification is not an experience, though experiences of various kinds may be involved in it. It is not a status, though a status is maintained by means of it. It is not an outward form and has no essential connection with outward forms. It does, on the other hand, become a “track record” and a system of habits.<sup>537</sup>

Therefore, Willard proposes such a “track record” is validated by the righteous character one is capable of displaying “on the spot” which is a result of the training engaged through the spiritual disciplines “off the spot.” These represent the consistent and reliable means toward attaining a regularly sustained conversion experience true to the teachings of Christ and exemplified in his life.<sup>538</sup>

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<sup>537</sup> ROH, 226.

<sup>538</sup> *Renovation* has been widely repackaged and re-publicized, with Willard’s permission, by accompanying authors. Perhaps the best received of these re-publications came from John Ortberg, a long time Willard advocate, who accumulated increasing popularity as a mega-church pastor at Bill Hybels’ Willow Creek Church. Ortberg is a prolific author in his own right and as such has brought increasing attention to Willard’s work. Ortberg’s *The Life You’ve Always Wanted*, is self classified as a “Dallas for dummies.” Apparently a reference that suggests the book represents a rendition of Willard’s work for the popular reader. See John Ortberg, *The life you’ve always wanted: Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People* (Philadelphia, PA: Running Press, 2004), 10. Ortberg is not the first to re-package Willard’s words in a more “user friendly” manner. Randy Frazee published a youth edition of *Renovation of the Heart* see Dallas Willard and Randy Frazee, *Renovation Of The Heart: Putting On The Character Of Christ (An Interactive Student Edition)* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2005), Similarly, Don Simpson released a less theologically sophisticated and simplistic version of *Renovation of the Heart* entitled, *Revolution of Character* See Dallas Willard and Donald Simpson, *Revolution of Character: Discovering Christ’s Pattern for Spiritual Transformation* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2005),

*Activism in Willardian Theology*

As the previous section has already described, Willard's discussion of the subject of Christian activism is spread throughout his corpus. However, his most condensed statement on the topic is found in *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives*.<sup>539</sup> Published in 1988, this work presents an intellectual, philosophical, psychological and theological justification and explication of the essence and nature of the activist Christian life. It also investigates and discusses what Christian conversion is and how it is affected in the life of the Christ follower.

This points to Willard's primary departure from evangelical traditions regarding the subject of activism. Bebbington argues evangelicals have focused primarily on a revivalist, proselytizing view of activism made popular by Moody, Graham and later the CGM. In a summative statement Willard argues,

Christian evangelism today is rooted in a misunderstanding of salvation. People have been told they are Christians because they have confessed they believe that Jesus died for their sins, but the total package is presented in such a way that it leaves the general life untouched. Biblically, salvation means deliverance; the question is, "Deliverance from what?" The common message is "deliverance from guilt." But the full concept of salvation in the New Testament is deliverance from our present sins. This deliverance from sins comes from the new life of God's Kingdom when we place our confidence in Jesus the person. The problem is that we have been obsessed with this idea that the real issue is "making the cut" to get to heaven. We have taken the discipleship out of conversion.<sup>540</sup>

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<sup>539</sup> Hereafter referred to as SOD in the notes. Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1991). *Disciplines* can be viewed as perhaps a more academically rigorous handling of Foster's *Celebration of Discipline*. Combined with Willard's *Spirit of the Disciplines* Foster and Willard are co-dependent volumes on the same subject. Foster's work focuses his interest in orthopraxis and Willard bolsters Foster by providing a history of the subject. See article with Foster and Willard interviewed together. Agnieszka Tennant, "The Making of the Christian: An Interview With Richard Foster and Dallas Willard," *Christianity Today* October, (2005): 42-44.

<sup>540</sup> Dallas Willard, "Rethinking Evangelism," *Church Planting* Vol. 4, (Winter, 2001).

Instead of focusing on evangelizing the world with a salvific message constrained to deliverance from sin guilt and a heavenly dwelling place after death, Willard proposes an activism based on “discipleship evangelism.”<sup>541</sup> To this end, his discussion of the spiritual disciplines starts with unveiling the proper motivations required to fund the disciplined life and what corresponding effects discipleship activities should produce.

*Disciplines* suggests discipleship/activism is quintessential for Christian life.

Willard asserts, “My central claim is that we can become like Christ by doing one thing—by following him in the overall style of life he chose for himself. If we have faith in Christ, we must believe that he knew how to live.”<sup>542</sup> To substantiate this claim, Willard employs what might be similar to a general education survey of previously applied Christian perspectives on what the ends of Christian faith can and should produce in the life of a follower of Jesus. The result is a consideration of the various Christian means (practices and doctrines) currently employed in contemporary Christianity. Many of which Willard suggests have most often not resulted in a transformed life or a Christlike community.

*Disciplines* makes other definitive statements regarding the role of practical theology as a means of theological inquiry that conjoins activism and praxis in order to make clear,

...how we can be like [Christ] not as a pose or by a constant and grinding effort but with the ease and power he had—flowing from the inner depths, acting with quiet force from the innermost mind and soul of the Christ who has become a real part of us.<sup>543</sup>

This is the most poignant and clear description of Willard’s view of an appropriate Christian activism. He suggests activism is essentially identical to the understanding of

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<sup>541</sup> DC, 304-305.

<sup>542</sup> SOD, ix.

<sup>543</sup> SOD, 14.

praxis defined earlier in this thesis as “ideology of action.”<sup>544</sup> As such, an appropriate theology should reveal “the manner in which our actions interact with God to accomplish his ends in human life.”<sup>545</sup> Accordingly Willard suggests everyone has both an active, practical theology, even that of the atheist. Further, every theology vitally directs the course of individual life. To wit, the presence of a thoughtful activism is as powerful as a thoughtless activism, since, at its end, each praxis fuels the answers to questions about how one goes about perceiving and living life. In this way Christian theology should equally have as its goal the development of practical, implementable methods by which “women and men interact with God to fulfill the divine intent for human existence.”<sup>546</sup> This is the heart of the activist objective Willard encourages.

In connection with such a vision, Willard indicates the goal of ecclesiology should be focused solely on,

the effective proclamation of the Christian gospel to all humanity, making disciples from every nation of ethnic group, and the development of the disciples’ character into the character of Christ himself. . . . If these are done well, all else desirable will follow.<sup>547</sup>

Christian leaders, pastors and teachers are therefore those tasked with preparing and developing Christian (Christlike) character within the lives of those inside the ecclesial organizations they lead and serve. Here Willard quotes the apostle Paul who suggested that the task of leadership is to “equip the saints for the work of ministry.”<sup>548</sup> Willard recognizes this has been a less than consistent reality throughout the history of the church. “Our leaders have not always been sufficiently wise and powerful in their work.”<sup>549</sup> Willard

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<sup>544</sup> See page 49-51.

<sup>545</sup> SOD, 14.

<sup>546</sup> Ibid.

<sup>547</sup> SOD, 15.

<sup>548</sup> Ephesians 4:12.

<sup>549</sup> SOD, 15.

laments the historical emphasis and zeal in accomplishing the Great Commission through global expansion and missional endeavors, which articulate only a sin guilt/heaven bound gospel, that has “deflected us from an adequate emphasis upon the understanding and practice of growth in Christlikeness *after* conversion.”<sup>550</sup>

Specifically, the misinterpretation of Jesus’ message and mission as a whole is where Willard finds the primary flaw within modern evangelical activism. He comes back to this theme again and again. Willard disagrees with the overt advocacy that Jesus’ primary, if not solitary mission on earth was to provide “forgiveness of sin.” As a consequence, evangelical activism has interpreted the life, death and resurrection of Jesus through the monolithic lens of the atonement. By extension, most other facets of evangelical theology have been adapted to align with the crucicentric bias. Willard argues the modern evangelical activist theology has in fact “robbed” the restorative, redemptive, meaning from the traditional Christian understanding of salvific faith by perpetuating the hegemony of “special theological interests.”<sup>551</sup>

This represents one of Willard’s most significant critiques of American evangelicalism. Such a critique strikes at the heart of the biblical, soteriological, conversionist, activist and crucicentrist assumptions of evangelical faith. Willard recognizes there are moments within both the historical and contemporary manifestations of evangelical faith which have become singularly focused on attaining either professions of faith or forgiveness of sins to the exclusion of all other priorities. Willard warns, any missionary endeavor, Christian organization or denomination perpetuating a Moody-esque activism that focuses singularly on issues of forgiveness and eternal rewards, risks missing

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<sup>550</sup> SOD, 15.

<sup>551</sup> SOD, 33.

the entire point of the *protoeuangelion* Jesus preached. Such a condition presents what Willard understands as the “great omission from the Great Commission.”<sup>552</sup>

Willard devotes the whole of chapter 3 of *Spirit of the Disciplines* asking and answering the central questions related to what evangelical soteriology comprises and to what degree that understanding is contrary to and in opposition of what he understands biblical activism should represent.<sup>553</sup> Here is where Willard reveals his clearest, most summative thinking, command of Scripture and logical consistency. Although his conclusions threaten established evangelical orthodoxy, the force of his arguments reveal a mix of a philosopher’s temerity with an evangelist’s zeal. In the end, it seems clear Willard endeavors to use all of his considerable resources to plead his case to his own evangelical family in hopes of encouraging a reconsideration of misapplied values, blind faith and deadening legalisms tied to an almost fanatical proselytizing zeal. Willard takes great pains to entreat his readers to reposition their misplaced evangelical activism onto a more accurate and contextually honest application of Jesus’ original message.

Although he does not venture into all the “specific theological interests” he considers culprits of this shift toward a proselytizing agenda, he does mention one specific interest. It is the uniquely evangelical view of grace which Willard suggests is improperly understood and therefore misapplied across the spectrum of evangelical theology. He asserts evangelicalism has developed a theological position which reduces, limits and situates grace as only a divine means employed to provide eternal life. Such a partial and narrow designation of grace has driven a dividing wedge into evangelicalism ability to inculcate an incarnational and activating Christian life. Willard contends such a

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<sup>552</sup> See Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus’ Essential Teachings on Discipleship* (HarperOne, 2006). Hereafter referred to as GO.

<sup>553</sup> SOD, 28-43.

marginalization reduces the concept of grace to only that required for the forgiveness of sin. As a result, this limited vision of God and his grace loses its restorative power to reconstitute a vital spirituality demonstrating effectiveness in the Kingdom of God and positively effecting the present needs and circumstances of daily life.

Instead Willard argues for the need for “radical rethinking of the Christian concept of salvation.”<sup>554</sup> His articulation of discipleship, and the employment of the spiritual disciplines are both fully funded by and accomplished through regular and sustaining infusions of God’s ongoing participatory grace. Furthermore, with such a limited definition of grace, neither discipleship nor the engagement of spiritual disciplines can be engaged with any degree of confidence or expectation. To prove this point, Willard exemplifies that current teaching and preaching largely omits the work of grace in discipleship. Willard asks the rhetorical question, “What is your group’s plan for teaching your people to do everything Christ commanded?”<sup>555</sup> Due to his long tenure of engagement with evangelical churches Willard is all too aware of the answer.

The fact is that our existing churches and denominations do not have active, well designed, intentionally pursued plans to accomplish this in their members. Just as you will not find any national leader today who has a plan for paying off the national debt, so you will not find any widely influential element of our church leadership that has a plan—not a vague wish or dream, but a plan—for implementing all phases of the Great Commission.<sup>556</sup>

For modern evangelicalism, which has historically forged its identity on the singularity of the Great Commission’s command to “make disciples,” such an omission in its applied values is not only striking but also equally catastrophic to the integrity of the

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<sup>554</sup> SOD, 32.

<sup>555</sup> SOD, 16.

<sup>556</sup> SOD, 16.



gospel it professes.<sup>557</sup> Therefore, Willard spends the rest of *Disciplines* highlighting exactly how Jesus, and his followers through the ages, learned to embody Godly character in their daily lives. This act of embodiment, the shaping of character, and the freedom it provides, is what Willard understands as Jesus’ “way” of entering into the “easy yoke” of the Kingdom of God.<sup>558</sup> Further, Willard suggests the Christian understanding of the righteous life (*dikaiosune*) is the indirect outcome of the directed efforts of spiritual disciplines, with God’s grace.<sup>559</sup> God’s grace is manifested when human beings are able to accomplish what they could never accomplish by their own efforts.<sup>560</sup> Transformation of the human life is therefore evidence of the conjoining of both God’s grace with human effort to affect a previously unattainable result. Such a life, one both willing and able to follow the commands of Christ and achieve supernatural results is unfortunately roundly missing in both evangelical doctrine and experience.

According to Willard, much of evangelical dogma actually discourages the “easy yoke” of Christ. He argues the more Reformed understandings of evangelical doctrine misinterprets the Wesleyan theologies of perfection. The Calvinist suggestion that effort placed on holiness is antithetical to the doctrine of grace is but one example of where “heavy burdens” become inhibitors to meaningful Christian discipleship and the practice of spiritual disciplines.<sup>561</sup> Conversely, Willard argues from experience and history for the spiritual disciplines as a self-validating means by which a person becomes able to do what

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<sup>557</sup> Matthew 28:16-20. Ironically, the Great commission’s task is to make disciples, not converts or activists.

<sup>558</sup> SOD, 3.

<sup>559</sup> The Greek concept *dikaiosune* will be dealt with in greater detail in the concluding chapter of this thesis. See DC, 144.

<sup>560</sup> GO, 60-68 and ROH, Chapter 1.

<sup>561</sup> SOD, x.

needs to be done, when it is required of them. Such is the nature of freedom, but so too is the nature of a disciplined life.

The general human failing is to want what is right and important, but at the same time not to commit to the kind of life that will produce the action we know to be right and the condition we want to enjoy. This is the feature of human character that explains why the road to hell is paved with good intentions. We intend what is right, but we avoid the life that would make it reality.<sup>562</sup>

Thus there is not an oppositional relationship between human efforts and God's grace, as positioned in the Edwardian/Wesleyan debate. Instead of hoping for an infusion of grace "in the moment" where moral courage is necessitated in a crisis of life's challenging circumstances, Willard posits that God has provided the means, in the spiritual disciplines, through which a person can actively choose to develop the poise required to do the good simply because they have become "a good person."

In conclusion, Willard's view of Christian activism is much broader and deeper than the single activity of evangelization posited by contemporary evangelicalism. Rather his holistic vision of activism represents the result of a whole-life pursuit of God's Kingdom through discipleship to Christ employing the time-tested disciplines that train one's own will to gain "ever increasing sway over our embodied selves."<sup>563</sup> Through applying the disciplines, with God's grace, one gains freedom from addictions or compulsions to social convention, self-consciousness, hate, fear, greed, emotionalism and the many other obstacles present within the human condition and experience of life. Willard believes Jesus, and the protoevangelicalism he advocated, presents an unmitigated understanding of how the human life can be lived to the fullest capacity. Fortunately Jesus also demonstrated what means need be employed to accomplish that end. Thus *Disciplines* articulates

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<sup>562</sup> SOD, 6.

<sup>563</sup> SOD, 86.

Willard's view of the vision Jesus presents of the Kingdom life and the appropriate activities "activist" Christians can employ to engage the reality of God's reign.

*Crucicentrism in Willardian Theology*

Building on the reforms Willard advocates to the traditional evangelical views on biblicism, activism and conversionism, crucicentrism is another arena of significant adaptation as well. Willard's view of the all-encompassing reality present in the absolute beneficence of God as King of his Kingdom substantially reformulates his view of the cross and its effects. Willard agrees with evangelicals that,

Embracing the cross with Jesus is to be our salvation. It is to release ourselves into the realm of God, into God's care, and to stop trying to work the human system of power and desire to get what we want.<sup>564</sup>

Willardian theology posits the contemporary evangelical understandings of atonement, justification/sanctification and salvation, which have often been segmented in crucicentrist investigations, are best dissolved into parts of the same objective whole. "They are distinct but inseparable"<sup>565</sup> Thus a consideration of how Willard understands the three crucicentrist arenas of atonement, justification and sanctification is appropriate.

First, justification for Willard simply describes the act of restoring relationship to God. Willard does not prescribe to the evangelical theologies of justification that delimit the cross to a transactional propitiation attained through Jesus' sacrificial payment paid on the cross. Such a view of justification, for evangelicals, has often created a situation where humanity is believed cleansed of all sin, to the point where a person returns to a perfected condition as if sin had never occurred. To which Willard states,

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<sup>564</sup> Dallas Willard, "The Craftiness of Christ," in *Mel Gibson's 'Passion' and Philosophy: Challenges in the Trial, Conviction, and Crucifixion of Christ*, ed. Jorge Gracia, (Chicago: Open Court Publishers, 2004).

<sup>565</sup> Gary Moon, "Getting the Elephant Out of the Sanctuary: An Interview With Dallas Willard, Expanded Text," *Conversations Journal* Vol. 8.1, (Spring 2010).

I think it's very unfortunate the way we use [justification] and say, "It's just as if I'd never sinned." It will never be that way. I will always be a redeemed sinner, and that's going to be part of the mental and spiritual furniture that helps me live before God for eternity. It will never be "just as if I had never sinned."<sup>566</sup>

Instead, Willard sees justification as initiating the resumption of relationship, also described as attaining "peace with God," "being reconciled to God," or perhaps "God being reconciled to man." All of these descriptions Willard will accept as adequate descriptions of what justification accomplishes. However, the atonement is a much more ambiguous concept in Willard's view.

Atonement is God's act that makes this [justification] possible, and that act is the giving of His Son. The giving of His Son is much bigger than His Son's death on the cross. When we read John 3:16, [we] have to understand that the whole passage is not about forgiveness. It is about life that comes in our relationship to the Son—and that is atonement; that is a gift.<sup>567</sup>

Willard recognizes the atonement is inseparable from placing confidence in Christ's ability to reestablish relationship with God. This interconnectivity becomes increasingly difficult for traditional evangelical theology to accept or perhaps agree with. Purposively due to Willard's delineation that justification is not only a forensic act. "And that's what John 3:16 is about. It's about life from above, and that is atonement."<sup>568</sup> When considered from a phenomenological perspective, exactly how Jesus saved humanity on the cross, Willard humbly suggests, is a mystery no one will probably ever be able to answer.<sup>569</sup> It is a mystery as deep as the incarnation, the creation and the Trinity itself and therefore too deep for words and/or the human intellect to describe and understand fully.

Consequently, Willard's definitions of both atonement and justification necessitate a reconsideration of the evangelical understanding of salvation as well. Willard recognizes

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<sup>566</sup> Ibid.

<sup>567</sup> Ibid.

<sup>568</sup> Ibid.

<sup>569</sup> Ibid.

how contemporary evangelicalism conveys the concept of deliverance has broad ranging implications. Some evangelicals, depending upon their theory of atonement, can completely miss the relational focus of justification mentioned earlier and instead focus solely on the penal substitutionary concept of a transaction of credit. Such a view allows for an inappropriate confidence that, “now your sins are paid off and you have a kind of contract with God that you will not be punished for your sins.”<sup>570</sup>

Salvation for Willard is centered on the act of deliverance. Exegetically, salvation is described in Scripture as the escape or rescue from harm.<sup>571</sup> *Soteria* (deliverance) is the same word used in the Septuagint to describe God’s miraculous efforts in the exodus or escape of the Israelites from Egyptian slavery by traveling through the Red Sea (Exodus 14:13).<sup>572</sup> Willard argues the biblical proposal referenced in the New Testament presents salvation as not the imputation of a meritorious condition, but a different form of life, one not focused and dependent on the self but rather fully cognizant of God. Thus the hermeneutical contexts of the usage of the term salvation need be properly discerned in order to determine if the usages refer to life with God into an eternal kind of life mentioned in John 14:6, or whether the term is used to describe deliverance from some degree of physical affliction (as in Peter healing the lame man in Acts 3). Willard states, it is the former definition which Jesus is most cognizant about describing.

And that, I think, is what John and Paul and the New Testament generally understand [salvation] to be... that people now have a life from above, and their salvation, their deliverance, is a matter of having that life and living that life with God.<sup>573</sup>

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<sup>570</sup> Moon, “Elephant Out of the Sanctuary”, *Conversations Journal* (Spring 2010).

<sup>571</sup> W. E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger and William White, *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Nashville: T. Nelson, 1996) and Colin Brown and David. Townsley, *The New international dictionary of New Testament theology*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Regency Reference Library, 1986), 339-401.

<sup>572</sup> KCT, 186.

<sup>573</sup> *Ibid.*

Therefore salvation is not a matter of forgiveness of sin and deliverance from a consequential destiny in an eternal state of heaven or hell. Willard states, “Associated with this agreement that the issue in salvation is only heaven or hell, is a further agreement that being saved is a forensic or legal condition rather than a vital reality or character.”<sup>574</sup> To summarize these positions Willard states,

I would say that justification is a new beginning for a relationship that has been broken, and it is made right by forgiveness, but that’s just the doorway into the resumption of relationship. The relationship [itself] is atonement, and that involves Christ becoming one with us. [Atonement] means that we now [can] walk with Him and that He is in us, and we are in Him. We have eternal life, and that is what atonement is. The result of atonement is deliverance or salvation. We are not under the power of sin and death anymore. Justification, atonement, and salvation are three aspects of one thing.<sup>575</sup>

Thus the most poignant crucicentric issue for Willard is not where a person goes after death. This is not what he believes is the focal point of Jesus’ emphasis on eternal life and salvation. Instead Willard suggests the Scriptures articulate a concept of salvation that is attained not after life, but while living as a disciple of Jesus. The disciplined life is an ongoing salvific experience consisting of an ongoing existential engagement with agape that inexorably involves forgiveness, faith, and hope. But this life also includes a new kind of existence that has no limits of these eternal qualities. Faith, hope, love and life become unlimited by time, quantity or quality. This describes the nature and quality of the life Jesus offers and depicts in his use of the terms “from above,” “abundant,” “eternal,” “overflowing,” and “heavenly.” What one is saved to is this life from above. What one is saved from is their own self-centered attempts at achieving an ever elusive illusion of human flourishing.

In Willard’s view, conservative theories of atonement can completely miss the

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<sup>574</sup> DC, 47.

<sup>575</sup> Ibid.

object of Jesus' gospel message. Salvation is neither about "demerit and merit." Nor is salvation attained from mental ascent to a certain salvific "belief" or doctrine one must profess. For Willard salvation is not essentially a forensic agreement but rather one inescapably tied to a certain type of life, a vital reality and a personal character. Willard suggests how the Scriptures demonstrate the concept of faith and righteousness as an active, participatory, interactive relationship with God. Such vibrant and relational interaction with God brings with it forgiveness as a natural product of relational interaction based on love. What is not evident in Scripture is a doctrinal astuteness test on atonement theories. This is Willard's response to the idea there is a significant difference in placing one's confidence (faith) "in the real person of Jesus, with all that that naturally involves, versus trusting some arrangement for sin-remission set up through him—trusting only his role as guilt remover. To trust the real person Jesus is to have confidence in him in every dimension of our real life."<sup>576</sup> This entire subject is summed up well in Willard's perception that,

The sensed irrelevance of what God is doing to what makes up our lives is the foundational flaw in the existence of multitudes of professing Christians today. They have been led to believe that God, for some unfathomable reason, just thinks it appropriate to transfer credit from Christ's merit account to ours, and to wipe out our sin debt, upon inspecting our mind and finding that we believe a particular theory of atonement to be true—even if we trust everything but God in all other matters that concern us.<sup>577</sup>

The emphasis on heaven for Willard is commensurate with the emphasis Jesus places on it. He cites Jesus' definition. "This is eternal life, that they, "disciples" may know you, the only real God, and Jesus the anointed, who you have sent." (John 17:3.) This knowing, again an epistemological mainstay with Willard, refers to "an intimate, personal, interactive relationship" and not a mental ascent to a set of theological propositions.<sup>578</sup>

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<sup>576</sup> DC, 49.

<sup>577</sup> DC, 49.

<sup>578</sup> Ibid.

The conservative evangelical views of the atonement do not place the believer in a position to understand how reconciliation to God through the death of his Son helps elucidate the reality Paul suggests is acting on their behalf by stating Christians as “saved by his (Christ’s) life.” (Romans 5:10.) Willard suggests that the concept of Jesus’ saving death, and not his life that triumphs over death, confuses the entire point of such atonement theories discussed above and further,

the body and therefore the concrete life we find ourselves in are lost to the redemption process. And when that happens how else could we see the disciplines and the spiritual life but as historical oddities, the quaint but misguided practices of troubled people in a far-off and benighted time.<sup>579</sup>

Therefore, Willard’s theology demonstrates a significant value placed on the cross of Christ. Yet Willard’s crucicentrism is tempered by a more theologically encompassing soteriology he believes is biblically rooted in a more holistic exegetical understanding of the Kingdom of God. Willard’s crucicentrism also rests on the application of a discipleship relationship with Jesus both demonstrated and advocated in the New Testament gospels. Such views have the potential to radically shift evangelical theological interests and practice away from the revivalist conversionism of the Moody/Graham/CGM era. Yet Willard is very aware any potential for change in evangelical theology must eventually pass through the current dedications and commitments conservative evangelicals have made to penal substitutionary atonement theories.<sup>580</sup> To which Willard is fond of replying, “it is not about getting people into heaven but getting heaven into people.”<sup>581</sup>

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<sup>579</sup> SOD, 34.

<sup>580</sup> Dallas Willard, “Discipleship,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Evangelical Theology*, ed. Gerald R McDermott, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010),

<sup>581</sup> ROH, 238.



*Essentia Dei*

After discussing Willard's perspective, analysis, critique and correction on Bebbington's four evangelical distinctives, a constructive description of Willard's overarching theological motif will serve to coalesce each of the various parts into a unified whole. This section will discuss the two central themes that run throughout Willard's work. These themes are defined under the terms *essentia Dei* and the theo-ontology of the Kingdom of God.<sup>582</sup>

The primary, undergirding ethos or schema tying all of Willard's work together is his perception, understanding and personal experience of the *essentia Dei*.<sup>583</sup> *Essentia Dei* is defined as a mental pattern in Willardian theology that prioritizes the consistent pursuit of discovering the nature or essence (*essentia*) of God. Willard continually calls his readers and students toward a deeper, more specific understanding and awareness of the personality, temperament and disposition of God that is described by the *Logos* of Scripture, made manifest in Jesus, and currently present and experienced through the Holy Spirit and the Church. Further, Willard's writing and teaching consistently extracts and highlights this knowledge of God's essence or disposition from the situations and people described in Scripture. Similarly, the New Testament gospels demonstrate Jesus teaching and explaining to his disciples, not only the nature of the Kingdom of God, but also the nature and essence of God himself. Willard argues the *protoeuangelion* Jesus conveyed was focused first and foremost on introducing or re-introducing humanity to his benevolent Father.

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<sup>582</sup> *Renovation of the Heart* can in some measure be viewed as a synopsis to the trilogy of *Guidance*, *Disciplines*, and *Conspiracy* mentioned earlier which best present a synopsis of these two themes.

<sup>583</sup> After lengthy conversations with Willard on the topic, this author proposes the term *schema* is appropriate to convey a mental pattern of organizing a certain perspective.

This schema sets the stage for all Willard's theological insights. His understanding of the *essentia Dei* wills, pulls, and empowers his Christian experience and theology toward its goal of appropriate knowledge of God, God's creation and his purposes for humanity. Similar to Farley's description of *theologia habitus* Willard assumes such an intimate encounter and awareness of God's magnificence will provide all the motivation needed for theological inquiry and Christian living. So central is *essentia Dei* to Willardian theology, in order to properly understand the more concrete details of his vision of the Kingdom of God, or the means of personal character formation and discipleship Willard proffers, one must first come grasp the quality, disposition and temperament of the King who governs this order. Such awareness correspondingly effects exactly whom human spiritual formation and Christianity at large seeks to find as its sustaining model.

*Essentia Dei* also colors Willard's view of the atonement, sanctification, ecclesiology, eschatology and thus all the objectives of Christian life and faith. However, more than just applying to these broader categories of theological inquiry, Willard's application of the *essentia Dei* schema can also be seen in the more minute aspects of his theology. These more specific topics might be aspects of individual motive, personal thoughts, internal dialogue or interpersonal relationship issues. Thus Willard's perspective on the *essentia Dei* applies to every aspect and application of his theology.

As a description of the *essentia Dei* Willard often uses Adam Clark's portrayal of God. Clark states God can be conceived as,

The eternal, independent and self-existent Being; the Being whose purposes and actions spring from himself, without foreign motive or influence; he who is absolute in dominion; the most pure, the most simple, the most spiritual of all essences; infinitely perfect; and eternally self-sufficient, needing nothing that he has made; illimitable in his immensity, inconceivable in his mode of existence, and indescribable in his essence; known fully only to himself, because an infinite mind can only be fully comprehended by itself. In a word, a being who from his infinite wisdom, cannot err or be deceived and who from his infinite goodness can do nothing

but what is eternally just and right and kind.<sup>584</sup>

From Clark's description Willard suggests the key characteristic—perhaps the only vital characteristic—of God's character is the eternally manifesting presence and effluence of *agape*. This love-focused understanding of God is expressed and experienced through several means. Yet all of the expressions of God's love come to humanity in a relational manner. This, Willard recognizes, is identically representative of an enduring tenet within evangelical Christianity; the personal experience of relationship to God.<sup>585</sup> In Willard's view, such a God as Clark describes, expresses his loving character through relational communication and endless displays of grace. Again, Willard defines grace as "God's action in the lives of human beings that allows them to do what they could not do by their own efforts."<sup>586</sup> Thus many aspects of the Christian life can be considered actions or evidences (communications) of grace including the provision of Scripture, the body of Christ (Church), nature, salvation, etc. Additionally, Willard proposes that God is not limited or self confined to such implicit displays of grace. As mentioned earlier, God's loving desire compels him, when appropriate, to overtly or explicitly reveal himself to humanity conversationally, through direct communication.

Furthermore, Willard's vision of the *essentia Dei* contains a parental aspect to God's character. God is considered a protective, supportive and nurturing Father, giving guidance about what to avoid in life, what to pursue and how to flourish. God is also seen as a provider of every "good and perfect thing" needed for life in His Kingdom.<sup>587</sup>

Furthermore, God is as equally concerned about the individualistic needs of the one as He

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<sup>584</sup> Adam Clark, "Definition of God," in *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature*. Vol. II, ed. McLintock and Strong, (New York: Harper, 1894), 903-904.

<sup>585</sup> Dallas Willard, "Day 10, Session 2, Topic-Scripture, Recorded Lecture," *Fuller Seminary Doctoral Class* (6-16-2010).

<sup>586</sup> GO, 67.

<sup>587</sup> James 1:17.

is the corporate needs of the group. Therefore Willard presents a parental characteristic of God that remains intensely aware of the detailed events and concerns of human life as well as maintaining his universal, dynamic control over the entire cosmos.

Together, God's *agape* nature, his communicative and caring character, and his parental concern combine to create a vision of a Christian existence Willard describes as a "with God life." Such an existence creates a paradigm, or worldview, and a theology that Willard suggests is exemplified in many of the characters depicted in the Scriptures. These characters and their stories, (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, Solomon, Sampson, Daniel, John the Baptist, John, Peter, Paul, etc) all reveal that God's goodness and grace is trustworthy and unconditional. Further, these biographies reveal a God that continues to faithfully "walk with them" despite their temporality and frailness. God is seen to continually provide communication, protection, encouragement, and guidance—all displays of love— despite malfeasant behavior, undeveloped character or simple lack of understanding.

These biblical characters and their stories reveal various degrees of improper choices, often motivated by a lack of confidence in God's character, and the consequential results of those choices. Yet in each instance, God's faithful character, his integrity to covenant loyalty, remains unfettered. This Willard suggests is the goal and intent of the Scriptural account and the *euangelion* of Jesus; to reveal the nature and character of God among his people, in both their success and failures, and to proclaim the possibility of what life with God can make manifest if chosen and applied. As such, all theology and ecclesiology, in Willard's view, should be acid tested for how they articulate, reveal and exalt a vision of God's loving character.<sup>588</sup>

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<sup>588</sup> DC, 328.

*Filling the Mind with Essentia Dei*

It follows then that to assume the life of a disciple of Jesus, and to live life in his Kingdom, the first and primary task of a disciple is to put on the “mind of Christ.”<sup>589</sup> This presents the key intellectual opportunity Jesus presents to humanity and becomes one of the primary goals of a disciple.<sup>590</sup> Willard is often observed asking the question of a certain belief system, theological doctrine or description of God, “If that were true, what kind of God would that be?” This mode of inquiry was most evident in his class lectures and interviews. In his textual work, Willard presents the question in *Divine Conspiracy* regarding the common understanding of the evangelical doctrine of atonement, “Would God really do it that way?”<sup>591</sup> In another instance, he discusses the conflicting theological images of God portrayed in various evangelical doctrines. Such conflicts are regularly demonstrated in images of an angry, wrath-filled God which dominate conservative doctrines of Hell, double-predestination, substitutionary atonement, the pre-millennial tribulation theories and many others.<sup>592</sup> Willard juxtaposes these images to those describing and articulating a loving, grace-filled, kind, patient and benevolent God Jesus is seen describing in chapter three of John’s gospel.<sup>593</sup> Again, Willard asks the question about the efficacy of the images these opposing theological propositions portray of a God who is

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<sup>589</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:16. The concept of the “mind of Christ” in Willardian theology represents the concept of coming into the same type of knowledge Jesus possessed about God, the human condition, and the world at large. This does not mean human beings will have an exacting replication of divine omniscience. Rather disciples of Jesus progressively learn how to realize the essential aspects of God’s character and his creation which makes life in his Kingdom both possible, peaceful and fulfilling. This is an example of Willard’s theology being effected by his realist philosophical positions. See SOD, 210, DC, 24, ROH, chapter 6.

<sup>590</sup> DC, 323.

<sup>591</sup> DC, 37.

<sup>592</sup> As to the issues related to substitutionary atonement and the assumption of conservative evangelical theology as to the doctrine of God’s represented in common views on the crucifixion see Dallas Willard, “The Craftiness of Christ,” in *Mel Gibson’s ‘Passion’ and Philosophy: Challenges in the Trial, Conviction, and Crucifixion of Christ*, ed. Jorge Gracia, (Chicago: Open Court Publishers, 2004).

<sup>593</sup> Moon, “Getting the Elephant Out of the Sanctuary” *Conversations Journal*, (Spring 2010).

finally and always described in the Scriptures as more than loving, but the very fulfillment and perfection of love itself.<sup>594</sup>

Perhaps one of Willard's best and most detailed illustrations in regards to the application of thinking through the *essentia Dei* is found in his yet to be published article concerning the problem of good and evil.<sup>595</sup> Using logic and his *a priori* understanding of *essentia Dei*, Willard argues a proof against one of the more historically difficult problems related to Christian theodicy. Willard proposes that, by necessity, the nature of freedom requires the presence of choice. This includes the choice for humanity to maintain the free ability to choose good or evil. Additionally, such a choice is also required to build human character. A person without a choice cannot build a character from which good choices are made and discernment is built. Consequently, without the freedom incumbent for choice, one could not develop the values that proceed from the outcomes of morally weighted decisions.

Willard argues God's loving character works to provide freedom and therefore hope for humanity to develop such a moral character. Love funds his desire for persons to make moral decisions well. Hence the ability to choose poorly must remain a viable option. There is no logical alternative. Thus God's love and character makes possible the situation where freedom is allowed and character is developed in the humanity he values so deeply. However it is also the case that God's love makes it impossible to restrict the alternative of a poor choice. Further, any assertion God did not provide or demonstrate an omnipotent

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<sup>594</sup> Willard makes the point that 1 John 4 says explicitly that God is the personification of agape. This is much more than stating that God acts lovingly. Rather God's essence is the totality of all agape can claim to be. See ROH, Chapter 10. Further, Willard pursues these questions with secular representations of God as well. For instance, in commenting on books and movies such as *The Da Vinci Code* and *The Last Temptation of Christ* Willard wonders if a person could imagine the saints and martyrs believing in, thinking about or laying their lives down for the type of person characterized or portrayed of either Christ or God in these works.

<sup>595</sup> Dallas Willard, "Good and the Problem of Evil," <http://www.dwillard.org/articles/artview.asp?artID=30> (accessed 11-5, 2010).

ability to create a situation that disallows poor choices and the consequential evil that often proceeds, is an illogical argument. Such an option does not exist, since it is impossible. Something that does not exist is nothing. Nothing by definition is not something which can be considered in any form or substance. Therefore God cannot be accountable for not accomplishing something that does not exist. It follows then that God's nature of love, and his love of humanity, demands the possibility of evil as a consequence to human freedom.

In this argument, like all of Willard's theological pursuits, God is presented as acting consistently within his characteristic *agape* nature. Since *agape* is the primary component that informs the *essentia Dei*, it is the position from which all biblical theological inquiry should proceed and the point from which discipleship commences. Any doctrine or dogma that does not conform to the *agape* nature cannot be assigned or attributed to the actions, will or providence of God.

When considering all the characterization and actions attributed to God that flow from past and present versions of evangelical doctrine and biblical interpretation, one quickly finds innumerable heinous proclivities and motives placed at God's feet. Even in learned evangelical circles there are often attitudes and actions attributed to God which are far afield from anything even remotely demonstrative of a loving, or even a considerate act, even by human standards of ethics and morals. A prime example is found in Pat Robertson's recent declaration that Haiti's earthquake, which killed tens of thousands of Haitians, was a direct result of a divine "curse."<sup>596</sup> Another popular evangelical pastor and writer John Piper recently made headlines when he interpreted the divine purposes of a

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<sup>596</sup> Robertson claimed the earthquake was a punishment for an ancestral "pact" Haitian slaves were rumored to have made with Satan in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century to barter their freedom. Representatives for Robertson were quick to declare he did not directly say the earthquake was a specific act of God's wrath. However, the felt need to clarify (spin) Robertson's statement is itself evidence that wrath was exactly what anyone listening to Robertson believed him to communicate. It would be the exception that anyone would assume him to communicate anything but that very idea. See Andrew Zajac, "Pat Robertson Links Haiti Quake to Pact With Devil," *Los Angeles Times*, January, 13, 2010.

significant tornado which ripped through Minneapolis. Piper suggested the tornado's damaging of a particular Lutheran church that was considering a vote on ordination of homosexual clergy, was a "gentle but firm warning" of God's disapproval.<sup>597</sup>

These examples are used here to illustrate what kind of God, what character, nature or essence such a God must have, in order to be assigned responsibility for such capricious acts. To consider these possibilities is to begin to grasp the dichotomy Willard recognizes within evangelical theology. Such stark contrast in depictions of God's person represents some insight into what many "post," "ex," or "anti" evangelicals vehemently protest within modern evangelicalism's dispensational pre-millennial theology and penal substitutionary atonement theories. Such characteristics of God require something of a theological schizophrenia, or a divine multiple personality disorder to explain a theological system which simultaneously describes a deity who "loves me and has a wonderful plan for my life" yet is also willing and able to randomly kill tens of thousands of Haitians or send tornadoes to destroy neighborhoods surrounding "liberal" churches.<sup>598</sup> This conundrum and dichotomy illustrates how deeply Willard's *essentia Dei* departs from the more standard evangelical doctrines of God.

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<sup>597</sup> There were many other properties not connected to the church which were damaged as well. Piper, who is from Minneapolis, wrote an interpretation a tornado strike. He surmises, "*Conclusion*: The tornado in Minneapolis was a gentle but firm warning to the ELCA (Evangelical Lutheran Church of America) and all of us: Turn from the approval of sin. Turn from the promotion of behaviors that lead to destruction. Reaffirm the great Lutheran heritage of allegiance to the truth and authority of Scripture. Turn back from distorting the grace of God into sensuality. Rejoice in the pardon of the cross of Christ and its power to transform left and right wing sinners." See John Piper, "The Tornado, the Lutherans, and Homosexuality," <http://www.desiringgod.org/blog/posts/the-tornado-the-lutherans-and-homosexuality> (accessed 5-12, 2011).

<sup>598</sup> The phrase "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life" is from Bill Bright's Four spiritual laws. See Bill Bright, *Four Spiritual Laws* (Peachtree City, CA: Bill Bright Media Foundation, 2007),



*Theo-Ontology — The Kingdom of God*

As has previously been discussed, Willard believes the *protoeuangelion* Jesus taught revealed and made available the metaphysical reality of the spiritual life in relationship to, empowered by, and under the authority of a benevolent God and his Kingdom. This theological understanding takes on a significant ontological and pneumatological quality since Willard defines the spiritual realm as the non-material substance which undergirds all material reality and empowers all forms of life and existence.<sup>599</sup> Consequently, God, as the supreme spiritual entity, maintains a direct cause and effect relationship to all material and non-material existence. Therefore Willard articulates an onto- (being) theology in his articulation of the Kingdom of God since all things are considered to exist under God's totalizing metaphysical sovereignty and will. This section will investigate Willard's description of the Kingdom of God and its ontological and pneumatological properties.

Willard's definition of the Kingdom of God reveals his realist philosophical perspective. He understands the Kingdom of God to be the "effective range of God's will." Thus the Kingdom is where God is reigning. Perhaps one could say it is where God is actually in control, or wherever what God desires is accomplished. This brings an interesting potential dilemma into the orthodox understanding of the doctrine of God's omnipotence. To state that God's Kingdom is where he "reigns" is to equally recognize there are places and people over which God's rule and reign does not extend, or where God's will is not currently applied. Certainly one can infer from the activities of contemporary life, both now and in the past, there are conditions and circumstances where what God would want to occur does not and has not occurred. Thus the question arises if

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<sup>599</sup> SOD, 56-74. The entire chapter 5 is devoted to Willard's description of the role pneumatology plays in his theo-ontological view of the Kingdom of God.

God is fully in control and omnipotent. In response Willard states God is sovereign over, but not necessarily in control of, every aspect of reality. Willard therefore delineates God's omnipotent ability from its actuality. He states,

The Kingdom [of God] is to be sharply contrasted with the kingdom of man: the realm of human life, that tiny part of visible reality where the human will, for a time, has some degree of sway, even contrary to God's will.

And again,

God does not like to be present where he is not wanted. And he knows when he is wanted and when he is not. Similarly, where people are really seeking a response from someone else, he does not intrude—generally speaking. So when our aim is [something other than God's will] he lets us do that and stands aside. Of course, he will eventually have his day. There will be a “day of the Lord,” his turn at bat, as it were.<sup>600</sup>

The bulk of *Divine Conspiracy* sets the expansive stage for this theo-ontological vision of the Kingdom of God which Willard suggests was introduced by Jesus in his Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7).<sup>601</sup> Willard describes this revelation as Jesus' “divine conspiracy,” the often invisible, quite and covert presence of God's person, here and now, working on the earth, in his creation, to expand and establish his Kingdom in, through and around humanity. Jesus' Sermon on the Mount makes available this Kingdom reality to everyone, both despite and in the midst of everyday circumstances, however banal those conditions might be. Hence Jesus compares and contrasts God's Kingdom to the other

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<sup>600</sup> DC, 190.

<sup>601</sup> Willard acknowledges that *Divine Conspiracy* is the final work in a three-part exposition of his theology intent on elucidating his understanding of both the kingdom of God and the formation of Christian disciples. Thus throughout the trilogy of *Hearing God*, *Spirit of the Disciplines* and *Divine Conspiracy* many of Willard's concepts overlap and are interwoven in order to form a single theological tapestry. Inside this tapestry one can identify three “themes” that appear to capture much of Willard's attention. These themes are: human interaction with God, (anthropology and spirituality) personal character formation, (soteriology and psychology) and the Kingdom of God, (ecclesiology and eschatology). Although these themes continuously appear beyond the three-part treatment in these works, there is no explicit organizational intent on Willard's part to nominate these themes. He appears opposed to overtly systematizing his theology. Instead he makes logical inferences that stem from first developing very detailed and specific definitions of terms. The terms of these definitions are argued not as *a priori* assumptions but rather from Willard's use of philosophical realism. Thus throughout Willard's writings, he intentionally and routinely defines his terminology and ideology, and in so doing recognizably re-defines common evangelical assumptions in his definitions. Examples of these redefinitions will be detailed in the summation of Willard's theology in the next section. See DC, xvii.

kingdoms, which can either compete against or complement God’s vision and purpose. Likewise, Willard attempts to position Jesus’ articulation of the ethos of God’s Kingdom into contemporary contexts and through modern lenses. He argues this message of hope and reality is just as viable today as it was when originally revealed two millennia earlier.

Further, Willard defines a “reign” as where a certain will or governance is effectuated. As such, every person has a reign, a range or environ where their will is put into place and actively engaged or imputed. Thus Willard understands Jesus’ statement “the Kingdom of God is within you” to communicate that the individual will is the deciding factor as to whether the Kingdom of God will be manifested in a human life.<sup>602</sup> Moreover, the Kingdom ethos is as close or as far away from the individual as their individual choices allow. Therefore other competing “kingdoms” and wills also exist. Many of which are seen and experienced in action, some of which actively oppose God’s will and Kingdom desire.

Here Willard’s view of the Kingdom of God is seen in starkly different terms than that conceptualized by earlier social gospels and that presented in the patriotism or nationalism of the Religious Right. No country, no religious party, no human organization can legislate, moralize, facilitate, manufacture nor conquer the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is fully and completely within God’s sovereign control, with its destiny and direction impenetrable and secure. One can only chose to join, ignore or endeavor to oppose God’s purposes for a time. Such decisions are meaningful and full of consequential effects. Yet the eventual dominance of God’s Kingdom is guaranteed.

Willard’s view of the New Testament gospels suggests Jesus’ mission was to preach, teach and manifest this Kingdom reality and demonstrate the benefits of a life led under God’s authority. Therefore the “good news” that such a King and Kingdom is

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<sup>602</sup> This phrase is ascribed to Jesus in Luke 17:21.

available far exceeds the limits of a message constrained to forgiveness of sin or an afterlife in heaven. Rather Willard suggests contrary to the primacy placed on sin and its effects, Jesus, along with the whole of the New Testament writers, routinely present the availability and preference of a present life empowered by the spiritual realm which is governed by God. Jesus outlines a gospel not centered on justification and therefore mired in atonement theories. Rather Willard believes Jesus conveyed a message of regeneration toward God's original *missio Dei*; to reestablish intimate, constructive and empowering relations with humanity, now and forever. Willard points to the most often quoted chapter and verse in the Bible, John 3:16, which never mentions the forgiveness of sin. Rather the context of the entire third chapter of John's gospel focuses on unveiling the nature of God's ways to an ignorant religious leader, and explaining God's mission to make available his heavenly Kingdom to the all humanity.

### *Pneumatology*

Willard's articulation of the Kingdom of God also focuses on its unique non-material (spiritual) essence. The spiritual effect of God's Kingdom is seen working largely through the implementation and application of God's words, will and purposes. When placed in confident action in the material lives of people, Willard argues Jesus teachings endeavor to reveal the nature of this spiritual reality and its ability to redeem and transform all creation.<sup>603</sup> Thus the Kingdom of God appears, or is made manifest, as a "heavenly" kind of Kingdom. The term "heavenly" here does not suggest a singular, spatial location but rather an invisible reality that becomes tangible (visible) through the action of God in

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<sup>603</sup> DC, 25-33.

peoples hearts, minds and lives.<sup>604</sup> Secondly, God acts perceptibly with persons who desire to act on his behalf, or as Willard states, “in his name.”<sup>605</sup> Jesus opens the availability of such a life, driven from, and empowered by, this spiritual reality and demonstrates its possibilities and preferences. Further, the Kingdom Jesus describes is professed to have no end. It and its progenitors will endure forever.

Here the significance of pneumatology is seen demonstrated throughout Willard’s theo-ontology. One gets the impression Willard understands more than most how modernity’s resistance to the supernatural deeply robbed evangelicalism of an essential spiritual, non-physical or metaphysical component.<sup>606</sup> As a result the pneumatological nature of both the Christian religion in general and its essential role in an accurate anthropological definition of humanity in specific has significantly hampered evangelicalism’s articulation and application of a theology espousing life in the Kingdom of God. *Spirit of the Disciplines* is Willard’s attempt to reestablish a vital pneumatology and a clearer anthropological description of the spiritual nature of human beings.<sup>607</sup> Willard

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<sup>604</sup> DC, 71. Willard makes use of the three synonymous terms used in the Scriptures for the word “Heaven.” The first definition in the semantic domain of the word Heaven describes the atmosphere, or the air human beings breathe. The second definition describes outer-space or the celestial sky. The third definition describes the realm where God is positioned or enthroned over the universe and where angels and spiritual beings tread. Thus in Willard’s use of the word “heavens” carries each of these meanings, sometimes conjoined in usages and sometimes separated.

<sup>605</sup> Dallas Willard, “Who is Your Teacher?,” *Promise Magazine* Vol. (January, 1996).

<sup>606</sup> As a result, Willard, similar to Renewalist-Pentecostal theologians such as John Rodham Williams, Ray Anderson or more recently Amos Yong, suggests the significance of the role of the spirituality need be reemphasized in Christian theology. Where Willard may depart from these aforementioned scholars is the degree to which the Holy Spirit should be given more attention and acclaim. Nevertheless, Willard agrees and supports the notion that much of evangelicalism in the modern era has neglected the role of spirituality.

<sup>607</sup> SOD, chapter 5. Willard first detailed treatment of anthropology is found in *Spirit of the Disciplines*, yet since his anthropology is distinctively pneumatological and based on the human divine relationship, all his works are essentially describing in various degrees of detail his anthropological perspective.

also begins to uncover the extent to which he understands God’s purpose for humanity as inexorably tied to their pneumatological composition.<sup>608</sup>

Using a quote from Wesley, Willard suggests that the human beings are far more than what they have allowed themselves to be defined as.

We consider that the body is not the man; that man is not only a house of clay but an immortal spirit; a spirit made in the image of God; a spirit that is of infinitely more value than the sun, moon, and stars put together; yea than the whole material creation. Consider that the spirit of man is not only of a higher order, of amore excellent nature, than any part of the visible world, but also more durable; not liable either to dissolution or decay.<sup>609</sup>

Willard’s pneumatological perspective suggests that life can be understood in terms of an inner power to relate to other things in certain specific ways.<sup>610</sup> Thus the living thing, human and non-human alike, has an inherent power that contexts with that which is beyond it, drawing from this “beyond” to enhance and extend its own being and influences.<sup>611</sup> Additionally, life has the ability to contact and selectively take in from the surrounding environment whatever supports its own survival, extension and enhancement.<sup>612</sup> As such Willard perceives human life as unique in its purposive individuality and internality.<sup>613</sup> The power humans have to use that which is “beyond” themselves for their own purposes gives some degree of indication the kind of creation human beings are in their essential nature.

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<sup>608</sup> Dallas Willard, ed., *Fuller Seminary Doctoral Seminar Text*, (Pasadena, CA: Fuller Seminary, 2010), 10.

<sup>609</sup> John Wesley, “What is Man Sermon 109,” in *Sermons on Several Occasions*, ed. T. Jackson, (London: Paternoster, 1825), 573.

<sup>610</sup> SOD, 57.

<sup>611</sup> Ibid.

<sup>612</sup> Ibid. Here one can see the building blocks of Willard’s use of phenomenology. He is not looking at how a thing is produced, in this case life, but rather describing what essential qualities make life, in this case, that which it is. Hence he strives to describe and understand the nature or essence of life, and how it separates itself from other things in order to differentiate and describe its uniqueness and identity. This is the work of the phenomenologist and Willard employs these skills expertly in elucidating his perspectives of the spiritual life.

<sup>613</sup> SOD, 60.

Consequently, Willard argues the spiritual life is that which lies “beyond” the physical but which gives all life both energy and purpose. Willard believes the human being is essentially a living, embodied spirit, created in God’s likeness, both spiritual in nature and essence. God too is a living spirit. God is not just spiritual. His existential nature is spirit. In the Genesis creation narrative the writer describes God’s blowing spirit, or breath, into the body of Adam and this act delivers the spark of animation to Adam’s body. Thus to understand the nature of humanity, one must understand the nature of spirit or pneumatology. This illuminates why Willard sees a contemporary renewed interest in spirituality. Such an interest is a natural curiosity searching for understanding about a fundamental reality of the human condition. Thus to understand humanity, Willard suggests one must equally comprehend the nature of spirituality.

Here one can see the connection Willard makes between pneumatology and ontology. This presents a significant human need as Willard views it; the ontological need to understand the nature of what things really are and how they exist or come to be. As mentioned previously, the biblical view presents God as a spirit. Also, Genesis describes humans as spiritual beings but not exclusively spiritual. Unlike God, humans are embodied spirits. As such, Genesis signifies the concept there is an invisible (spiritual) nature to the world that has the power to effectuate all the seen reality. Willard defines spirit as “unbodily personal power.”<sup>614</sup> As such a spirit is capable of interacting with, influencing and in some manner inhabiting a body. Thus spirituality is the common heritage of the human race. Willard recognizes the difficulty such a definition places on both a modern

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<sup>614</sup> SOD, 64.

empirical understanding of reality and therefore an equal difficulty for any theology resting solely on an empirical/rationalistic foundation.<sup>615</sup>

The primacy of spirituality to Willard's argument is well illustrated in a very interesting question he presents to his students. He suggests students consider the hypothetical of a brain transplant. He posits the question, if it were possible to transfer one brain into the cranium of another, who, or what personality would wake up from the anesthesia? If the answer is that the person who donated the brain would wake in the new body, there is a revealed assumption that the personality (soul) is somehow housed in the brain. If the possessor of the body were to awake from the surgery, then the assumption is that the personality (soul) is domesticated in the body, not the brain. Such a response is thought to reveal an assumption the brain simply acts as any other essential organ.

The question searches to understand where one considers the locus of the human essence. Willard refers to earlier periods of medical advancement, specifically when the heart transplant was considered. Many ethical discussions were afield regarding if personal characteristics of the donor would be present in the organ part. Willard suggests that human beings "are not our brains" but rather a working spirit that energizes both the mind and the body. Therefore the brain, certainly unique and essential to life, is no more or less valuable than any other organ and therefore as inert as a kidney, heart or liver.

That such a proposition is widely disputed suggests to Willard the lack of depth in understanding and appreciation for the nature of the pneumatological significance of human existence and the ontological implications that proceed from such ignorance. In Willard's view the physical universe, and human life, requires an alternative explanation other than those provided by physicists alone. A non-physical explanation is required in order to

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<sup>615</sup> Ibid. Here Willard gives accounts of the problems Da Vinci faced when attempting to describe the role of the invisible to a medieval Catholic church. Willard also references Newton's critics who thought his concept of gravity was occultist because it represented an unembodied 'force.'



justify the presences and experiences of non-material reality. In what Willard terms as the theology of  $E=MC^2$ , he suggests Einstein's theory not only presents an equation that explains the amount of mass that is in energy, it also equates the amount of energy required in order to create the amount of mass one finds in the universe. Energy is power; the capacity to make change.

Thinking about spirit as disembodied power (energy) one can see how Willard understands the nature of the physical world as one inextricably full of or energized by spiritual power. In fact, one senses he believes them to be one and the same. As divine image holders of God, Willard understands humans as eternal, never ceasing beings, with an eternal destiny in God's great universe.<sup>616</sup> Thus human beings, understood as embodied spirits, do not die simply when the body dies. For the follower of Jesus, at least, Willard asserts that death is abolished and the experiences of that person, passing from earthly existence, will be uninterrupted even through the period of the body's demise. Quoting Teilhard de Chardin Willard suggests, "We are not human beings having a spiritual experience but spiritual beings having a human experience."<sup>617</sup>

### *Competing Pneumatologies*

Obviously there are other competing spiritualities and Willard recognizes them. He defines a human spirituality, in contrast to a Christian spirituality, as one marked by a significant reliance on natural ability. This is what Willard sees the Scriptures referring to as the "flesh." In his article, *What Makes Spirituality Distinctly Christian* he separates and

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<sup>616</sup> DC, 211 and Chapter eight, ROH.

<sup>617</sup> Teilhard Pierre de Chardin, *The phenomenon of man*. (New York: Harper, 1959), 211. It is important to note here Willard's understanding and navigation of the monist, dualist issues at play between body and spirit. He is clearly a dualist in the sense that he recognizes the affect of both in human interaction and integration. The spirit empowers the mind. They are in an inseparable relationship. The body is the means provided to accomplish the will. Thus monism, suggesting an either/or necessity of body or spirit is clearly not an option in Willard's pneumatology or his anthropology.

distinguishes Christian spirituality from other instances such as the “Power of positive thinking” or an “Oprah” spirituality that is guided by an active or aggressive imposition of the will toward that which one senses is the “most right thing to do.” Such spirituality presents itself as something of a “willing” or “visualization” of situations and circumstances into some form of experience or reality. This may connect to versions of spirituality which suggest one can join with the Star Wars version of the “force.” Such spiritualities are distinctly non-Christian in origin or substance in Willard’s view. Nor does Willard subscribe to the version of naturalism, or its different varieties of panentheism or pantheism. Different than the belief that God’s being exist and can be found in all creation, or that God may in fact exist in all things, Willard subscribes to the position that God’s spirit sustains all things and created all things. However, God remains uniquely separated from his creation. Bearing the image of God is not the same as containing God or his existential reality.

Interest in these non-Christian spiritualities, including the more recent interest in angels and demons, suggest to Willard there is a deep hunger in the human heart which yearns to learn and connect with the underlying spiritual reality that sustains life and living. Humanity, in some measure and in different ways, has long searched and struggled to understand the nature of the crucial non-physical factors from which much of their existence emanates. This is where religion has always stemmed from and, in Willard’s view, where Jesus’ teaching originates. Yet Willard recognizes this renewed desire for understanding spirituality presents a problem for many contemporary evangelical churches. Evangelical theology, and the ecclesiology which proceeds, is often not robust enough to meet the common level of curiosity on the subject. Willard senses the renewal movements (charismatic/Pentecostal), along with the early revival movements of the Great Awakenings, both express the same basic experience; the established church and its

ecclesiology did not present spirituality that was potent, sensitive, and effectual enough to meet the demands of their era. Also, Willard states the rise in interest of secular spiritualities represented in organizations like Alcoholics Anonymous serves as yet another verifiable sign of the continuing dearth of spirituality in many churches today.

Willard's critique of evangelical pneumatology starts with recognizing how systematic theology often starts the story of the Christian faith not at the creation of humanity in Genesis 1 but in the fall of humanity and the need of an atonement discussed in Romans 1. The rising popularity of evangelical Pentecostal theology tends to begin the story of Christianity neither in Genesis or Romans but on the Day of Pentecost described in Acts 2. As a result such oversights and reductions largely ignore the ministry of Jesus and the Kingdom of God as a whole. Contrarily, Willard proposes the functional aspect of the gospels, and the entire run-up of the Hebrew Scriptures, conveys the proposition that both the world (cosmos) and the human being are deeply ingrained in the spiritual realm by their very essence and purpose. Thus God and his Kingdom are interested and devoted to the spirituality of the entire person; heart, soul, body, mind and relationships.

The last point where Willard's pneumatology affects his view of theology is witnessed in his sense of the effect secularism and modernism has had on the Christian perspective of human ontology. Secularism presents the theory of reality, which has become authorized by the historical progression of western thought over the past several centuries. In so doing it has attempted to provide mastery over every aspect of the human project. Modernists, humanists and secularists often believe these efforts to be both plausible and beneficial. Yet these positions, in Willard's view, are nothing short of "self-idolization. The Faustian drive of humanity [that] is rooted in original sin."<sup>618</sup> Therefore

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<sup>618</sup> Dallas Willard, ed., *Fuller Seminary Doctoral Seminar Text*, (Pasadena, CA: Fuller Seminary, 2010), 10.

Willard senses that theology should never feel the need to back away from so called secular pursuits such as physics or science, something he fears has become all too common.

When it comes to the definition of ultimate reality, Willard senses that theology and its emphasis on the spiritual, has as much to offer in terms of “knowledge” as the strictly physical sciences. That theology is engaged in a spiritual inquiry does not in any way diminish its value to the pursuit of truth in the real world. To allow such diminishment is to entreat the committal of disobedience to the first commandment of Mosaic Law, the worship of an alternative god or idol. “Our accepted intellectual systems today, often called “scientific” or “naturalistic” is in reality idolatry, though usually not intended as such. Education fails us by not teaching us to be intellectually thorough, but to conform.”<sup>619</sup> Likewise, Christian inquiry should be liberally open to all truth. There should be no fear of pursuit or of what is found and proven true as a result of honest inquiry. Again, Willard ascribes to an *essentia Dei* which suggests that if there is a better truth than that offered within a Christocentric understanding of knowledge, God is the sort of person who would desire one to have it, regardless of the implications that might come about in orthodox Christian faith.

Willard’s prioritization of *essentia Dei*, his theo-ontological perspective on the Kingdom of God, his pneumatology and application of critical realism uniquely cast his theology in a complicated light. Philosophically and theologically, he appears, at least to this author, set apart from any other known evangelical thinker on these matters. His Husserlian views of modern realism, and his pneumatological understandings about the nature of spirit, do not necessarily contradict.<sup>620</sup> In fact, they complement each other when considering Willard’s view that phenomenological realities can be discerned in and of

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<sup>619</sup> Ibid.

<sup>620</sup> The influence of Edmund Husserl is discussed in greater detail and starts on page 237.

themselves to determine their efficacy. Therefore it would appear Willard is bringing to bear his extensive philosophical disciplines to the arena of spirituality and to his investigations of Christian theological claims about the pneumatological essence of life. The fact that he finds no contradiction makes for a strong case as to the reliability of Christian claims to knowledge about the nature of human existence and the spiritual of reality of the universe.

In summary, as never ceasing spiritual beings of immeasurable worth, Willard sees humanity as created to “reign” with God over all creation in mutually collaborative and creative governance. Human life on earth is understood as the place where one is trained for progressive character development, empowerment and reasonability. In so doing, Willard believes God’s original and final intent for the universe will become a reality. This vision consists of a Trinitarian dwelling with humanity and nature, each enjoying a mutually beneficial relationship, as described in the opening of the Genesis account. Such a condition, albeit altered significantly due to the events of the past several millennia, will be redeemed and restored. This vision represents the *missio Dei*, the universal restorative and redemptive plan of God.<sup>621</sup> Such a mission comes from the loving heart of a benevolent and grace-filled God seeking relationship with humanity. It is this same God, and the availability of his Kingdom that Jesus came to represent and effectuate. Such is the nature of both Willard’s theo-ontological description of the Kingdom of God and his articulation of the *protoeuangelion* Jesus conveyed in the New Testament.

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<sup>621</sup> Although Willard does not use this term specifically, his vision of the Kingdom is similar to the point of identical to what Christopher J.H. Wright has described in this exhaustive work *The mission of God : unlocking the Bible’s grand narrative* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2006),

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Yet Willard’s theo-ontological, protoevangelical vision and *essentia Dei* schema stand in conflict to significant tenets of mainstream evangelical theology and praxis. Ironically, Willard’s most consolidated critique of evangelicalism is found in *The Divine Conspiracy*, which was also his most widely acknowledged and acclaimed work in mainstream evangelical circles.<sup>622</sup> It epitomizes both Willard’s soteriology and his exegetical study of the Kingdom of God as articulated in Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. Willard’s handling of these two key subjects provides a complete investigation of the many soteriological implications of applying the worldview of Jesus to the human condition; a project Willard began in *Disciplines*. As such *Divine Conspiracy* also represents an inclusive expose of Willard’s conceptualization of what Jesus communicates and embodies as the “God bathed” existence available to all who chose to enter his Kingdom.<sup>623</sup> These two tenets, soteriology and theo-ontology also represent the basis from which Willard stages his critiques of contemporary forms of evangelical theology and praxis. It is to these critiques we now focus.

Building on the earlier themes, *Divine Conspiracy* posits the foundational premise that the essential nature and ethos of the Kingdom of God is the central, driving force behind the message Jesus presents. As has already been discussed in the previous sections on activism, conversionism and crucicentrism, Willard steadfastly argues the *euangelion* Jesus presented is uniquely different to that often presented in many evangelical settings. To reiterate, Jesus’ gospel, contrary to the mainstream evangelical gospel, is one not dependent on, tailored for, or given doctrinal primacy to the concept of “forgiveness of

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<sup>622</sup> The *Divine Conspiracy* received *Christianity Today*’s award for book of the year. Dallas Willard, *Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (San Francisco: Harper, 1996), 61. Hereafter referred to as DC.

<sup>623</sup> DC, 61.

sin.” Nor does Jesus focus on the development of methods for his followers to “manage” their sin condition after a “conversion” experience.<sup>624</sup> Rather Willard argues Jesus is seen in the gospel accounts presenting a vision of both— a) the Kingdom of God and— b) what type of life is available in a God permeated reality.<sup>625</sup> Furthermore, Jesus is more than a proclaimer or preacher of good news. He also is seen in the Biblical texts exemplifying and utilizing the means and principles for both entering and living in the goodness of a “Kingdom” type of life.

Willard uses *Divine Conspiracy* to take the reader, in a slow, steady and methodical way, through many of the popular misunderstandings of well-used Christian terms, dogmas and doctrines such as salvation, grace, heaven, eternal life, hell, love, etc. Willard recognizes and articulates the common usage of these terms and concepts then sets about redefining them in view of the *essentia Dei*, the protoevangelical message of Jesus and the theo-ontological view of God’s Kingdom ethos. In this process Willard shows himself to be an expert evangelical insider, revealing contradictions or anomalies in popular evangelical theology and tracking down ill-gotten doctrines to their sources. In this process Willard makes pointed, stinging comments and reflections about American evangelicalism.

First, Willard suggests the most common and revealing characteristic of contemporary evangelicalism is the lack of any overriding compunction that interactive knowledge of, and not only a profession of faith in, Christ’s teaching is vital to Christian life and faith. Willard recognizes the now uniform assumption that mandatory conformity to Jesus’ teaching is optional and no longer essential to the evangelical articulation of Christian life. Such a “profession of faith” represents what amounts to an empty

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<sup>624</sup> The concepts of sin management are discussed on page 227.

<sup>625</sup> This is handled directly in Chapter two of *Divine Conspiracy*. But is also a frame of reference in, *In Search of Guidance, Renovation of the Heart, Spirit of the Disciplines, The Great Omission* and *Knowing Jesus Today*.

allegiance.<sup>626</sup> Thus Willard's position is clear, as one reviewer of *Divine Conspiracy* noted, most contemporary Christians simply "don't get it."<sup>627</sup> Modern evangelicalism's focus on first explicating then garnering belief in correct doctrines has in fact left contemporary evangelicals devoid of the very knowledge of reality Jesus sought to provide.

Willard understands Jesus first and only as a pragmatist regarding belief and suggests Jesus advocated belief only as a basis from which interaction with God begins. Neither belief itself, nor the profession of belief, should be considered the final goal or end of Christian faith.<sup>628</sup> Rather belief is the initial step that must proceed toward the development and eventual establishment of an interactive knowledge of the reality of God and his character. Thus the current trend in evangelical teaching and preaching that illustrates what doctrines Jesus, Paul, John, and others, "believed" and taught as orthodoxy misses the overall vocation of Jesus' ministry. To the degree that such information is taught correctly, Willard senses most "Christians" want to "believe" what Jesus and Paul, etc. "believed." Yet Willard contends the hard facts support the conclusion the majority simply

...do not really understand [the gospel of Jesus], and their confidence in its reality is shaky. They are like Peter in his truly earth shaking confession that Jesus was the only one to save humanity. He had it right of course, but he had no real idea of what it meant.<sup>629</sup>

Accordingly, the most one can claim of such a level of understanding is only a confidence that Jesus himself "believed" in the message he professed. Or perhaps one can hope to attain a certain level of "belief" about Jesus that offers some degree of ethical or moral benefit. Yet remaining at the level of doctrinal acknowledgement (profession) of a belief is

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<sup>626</sup> DC, xv

<sup>627</sup> Mark Galli, "Downsizing Sin: Willard Believes Discipleship is Not as Hard as We Make it," *Leadership Journal* Vol. 19, no. 3 (Summer 1998): 105-106.

<sup>628</sup> This is a theme that will arise later in *Knowing Christ Today*.

<sup>629</sup> DC, 317.



not itself a representation of knowledge, nor a demonstration of confidence in the gospel Jesus presented for transformed lives.

This is a stark and pointed criticism of popular evangelical piety juxtaposed against the impetus of Jesus' message. The concentration on "belief" that stops at "knowing the right answers" to doctrinal questions has too often become the entire goal of evangelical Christianity. Such "professions" of "beliefs" are opposed to what Willard understands as viable confidence in the person and life of Christ. Willard argues that a biblical description of belief necessitates a dedication to the proposition of a conviction to the point of actively placing one's life in the realities those beliefs represent. Hence, biblical belief represents the willingness to act *as if* that which is "believed" is in fact the truth of the matter at hand. Thus the nature of biblical belief demands a much higher level of confidence in the veracity and reliability of the underlying claim or proposal. The value Jesus' teachings place on belief requires his followers to engage "the task in ourselves and in others to transform right answers into automatic responses to real-life situations."<sup>630</sup> Unfortunately, Willard sees the status of contemporary evangelical theology and praxis as largely incapable of attaining the type of genuine "belief" defined either in the Scriptures or used in any non-religious arena.<sup>631</sup> This dearth of a robust and biblical concept of belief is decimating evangelicalism and its credibility across the spectrum of cultural and societal institutions in America.

Thus Willard admonishes the Church to "simply bring people to believe, with their whole being, the information they already have as a result of their initial confidence in Jesus—even if that initial confidence was only the confidence of desperation."<sup>632</sup> This

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<sup>630</sup> DC, 317.

<sup>631</sup> Ibid.

<sup>632</sup> DC, 318.

confidence is uncomplicated for Willard. Gone is the evangelical version of salvation that includes the doctrinally laden “Romans Road to Salvation” or the “Four Spiritual Laws.”<sup>633</sup> Instead faith (confidence) in Jesus is simply and powerfully created with the settled understanding that “Jesus is right. He is the greatest and best.”<sup>634</sup> From there one learns continually, as a disciple, what that profound yet simple statement involves in every area of life.

The second major critique Willard places at the foot of the evangelicalism is the absence of intentionality placed on the necessity to follow the example of Christ in obedience. Such a commitment to whole-life conversion is a non-negotiable requirement of any genuine conversional decision. This is an ironic twist in the historic role “decision” has played in evangelicalism over the past two centuries. Willard suggests, in large measure, the “elephant in the church” is the widely unacknowledged but well-known fact that large numbers of evangelicals simply do not intend to follow the example of Jesus.<sup>635</sup> This is a striking statement when taken at face value. But Willard suggests the evidence is again overwhelmingly obvious and he provides statistics to prove it.<sup>636</sup> The most significant point finds that, overall, Christians are rarely if ever called to make a considered decision to follow Christ in an obedient, discipleship relationship. In fact, churches are not organized to accomplish such a task. Thus Willard surmises, “in the last analysis, we fail to be disciples

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<sup>633</sup> These are commonly used evangelistic tracks developed to assist in the proselytizing of non-Christians. Bill Bright, founder of Campus Crusade for Christ, created the Four Spiritual Laws pamphlet. The Romans Road to Salvation is a common evangelical term used to describe a series of passages in systematic order from the apostle Paul’s letter to the Romans in the New Testament. They are coalesced to form a description of the need for salvation and how to receive that salvation. See Pamela McQuade, *How Do I Get to Heaven? Knowing the Romans Road* (Uhrichsville, OH: Barbour Publishing, 2011), and Bill Bright, *Four Spiritual Laws* (Peachtree City, CA: Bill Bright Media Foundation, 2007),

<sup>634</sup> DC, 318.

<sup>635</sup> DC, 301.

<sup>636</sup> DC, 318.

only because we do not decide to be. We do not intend to be disciples. It is the power of the decision and the intention over our life that is missing.”<sup>637</sup>

Willard recognizes much of the historical evangelicalism described earlier in chapter two had defined “making a decision for Christ,” to connote the “event” where the “soul” is saved from an eternal destiny in hell. This decision was thought to come in many various forms. However, salvific “decisions” in evangelicalism’s past most often described one’s reception of Christ’s atoning sacrifice on the cross. This came to be understood as God’s “saving” act of grace. Thus mental assent to this “fact” and the realization of oneself as a sinner in need of this grace is now broadly understood to encompass the totality of “the decision for Christ.” In Willard’s view such a “decision” is in fact nothing more than a realization. Therefore such realizations need to be followed by an actual decision to commit oneself to a life of discipleship to Christ. Anything less does not constitute a decision for anything that resembles a biblical form of Christian commitment demonstrated in Jesus’ life and message or in the lives of his first disciples.

As critical as Willard is of mainstream evangelical theology and practice, one wonders why *Divine Conspiracy* was so widely received and acclaimed. Although perhaps new to evangelicals, Willard’s soteriology is not novel in light of the broader history of the Church catholic. Yet since Willard places such a high value on Scripture, a longstanding evangelical theological bulwark, he is seldom if ever perceived or critiqued as offering a “new” gospel or even an extremist shift in evangelical theology. To do so would require a thorough exegetical, hermeneutical battle which reviewers sense Willard’s rather orthodox exegesis does not leave open for significant critique.<sup>638</sup> Conversely, reviewers which

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<sup>637</sup> DC, 298.

<sup>638</sup> Randall D Engle, “Book Review: The Divine Conspiracy,” *Calvin Theological Journal* Vol. 36, no. 1 (April 2001): 217-219.

recognize and advocate for his interpretation of the gospel and its corresponding theology, realize if properly understood, Willard would be a significant and radical departure from the status quo within the preponderance of evangelical settings.<sup>639</sup>

Here Willard's critique is commensurate with other appraisals of American evangelicalism delivered by G. K. Chesterton, C. S. Lewis, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Os Guinness. Willard often quotes their works to contravene the established norms found in evangelical theology and offer either a more traditional or less modern perspective. Yet reviewers also note that *Divine Conspiracy* presented much more than a critique of evangelical faith and likened Willard's espousal of the Christ centered spiritual life to the devotional classics of Thomas a' Kempis, Luther, Calvin and John Wesley.<sup>640</sup> High praise indeed.

Like Willard's earlier works, few negative critiques were levied on *Divine Conspiracy*.<sup>641</sup> One critique of Willard's view comes from a more Calvinist perspective. All of Willard's discussion about making a "decision" to follow Christ, without a fuller explanation of the role of grace, is problematic in *Divine Conspiracy*. This may be a valid critique and one that Willard takes up in fuller detail in later works. Yet this author does not agree that Willard mishandles the concept of grace, but rather is re-defining the concept of grace within Protestant or Reformed theology. As such Willard sees current definitions of grace as not helpful, but a hindrance, to life in the Kingdom of God. He emphasizes that

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<sup>639</sup> Paul A. Johns, "Book Review: A Conspiracy Revealed," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* Vol. 28, no. 4 (Winter, 2000): 327-330 and Mark Galli, "Downsizing Sin: Willard Believes Discipleship is Not as Hard as We Make it," *Leadership Journal* Vol. 19, no. 3 (Summer 1998): 105-106.

<sup>640</sup> Steven Van Der Weele, "Book Review: The Divine Conspiracy," *Christian Century* (July 14-21, 1999), 719-720.

<sup>641</sup> What corrections were suggested appear minor and largely stylistic. One reviewer suggested that Willard's view on the Beatitudes of Matthew 5 leaves little room for those "on the other end of the scales" suggesting either Willard or Jesus does not allow for the "haves" and only works with the "have not's." The reviewer wonders if there is a gospel for the rich and if so where Willard would place the wealth in his theological understanding of the gospel. See Randall D Engle, "Book Review: The Divine Conspiracy," *Calvin Theological Journal* Vol. 36, no. 1 (April 2001): 217-219.

grace does not allow for complacency and inactivity, but rather is the means by which God acts, “with us,” a theme that is brought out in the *Renovare Study Bible* and *Renovation of the Heart*. Yet the reviewer is right to notice how starkly different Willard’s notion of grace is compared to that of classical Protestantism of the past. It represents yet another reformatory idea Willard takes to task in his works.

### *Gospels of Sin Management*

The overarching metaphor Willard uses to describe the effect his two main critiques have had on modern evangelicalism is encompassed in the term “sin management.” Willard uses this term to illustrate those religious ideologies formed as a means to deal with the guilt experienced in relation to the continued lack of effectual change despite the application of religious efforts and beliefs. Therefore, sin management strategies are a means for the religiously devoted to “manage” the lingering negative effects of a guilt-ridden conscience. The doctrinal beliefs one applies to manage or assuage this guilt are defined by Willard as the “gospels,” or purposed religious methods that fund and structure the management rationale. The ultimate goal of the sin management system is to only diminish the effects of the continuing presence of the sin condition, while remaining impotent to ever eliminate or transform its source.<sup>642</sup> This section will pursue the nature of the sin management ideology and how Willard sees its effects on contemporary forms of evangelical religion.

There are two main systems of sin management, one representing the conservative “right” and one for the liberal “left” wings of evangelicalism. Both are active in contemporary evangelicalism today and have risen to an acute stage. Additionally, both

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<sup>642</sup> Mark Galli, “Downsizing Sin,” *Leadership Journal* (July, 1998).

systems contain views of redemption that pay little to no attention to the everyday human condition and its transformational necessities. Willard writes,

History has brought us to a point where the Christian message is thought to be essentially concerned only with how to deal with sin; with wrongdoing, and wrong-being and its effects. Life, our actual experiences, is not included in what is now presented as the heart of the Christian message, or it is included only marginally.<sup>643</sup>

Both sin management strategies have effectively highlighted the means of justification over and above sanctification as the primary objective to evangelical Christianity. On this shift Willard refers to Karl Barth's statement that early evangelicalism in America developed as “absorption of Christology into soteriology.”<sup>644</sup> This absorption brought a gaping loss of “Christological concern” regarding the nature and substance of one's own salvation or the effect Christ's life and influence should have on society at large.<sup>645</sup>

As a result, the conservative (right) evangelical sin management proposal presumes a Christ with no serious work other than to atone for sin. Willard describes this view as a “vampire faith.” This is a version of evangelicalism that requires a profession of belief in necessity of accepting Jesus' blood for penal substitutionary atonement while largely ignoring commitment and devotion to a disciplined life of obedience.<sup>646</sup> Such a theology marginalizes anything more from relationship with Jesus other than relief from the intrapsychic terrors of fundamentalist versions of hell in contrast to the glories of heaven. Therefore the conservative sin management system assuages their greatest fear through the proclamation of appropriate beliefs in certain theories of the atonement discussed earlier.<sup>647</sup>

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<sup>643</sup> DC, 41.

<sup>644</sup> DC, 42, cf. 8 pg. 403.

<sup>645</sup> Willard quotes, Peter L. Berger, “Crisis in Continental Theology,” in *European Intellectual History Since Darwin and Marx*, ed. W. W. Wager, (New York: Torchbooks, 1966), 255.

<sup>646</sup> Dallas Willard, “Why Bother With Discipleship?,” *Renovare Perspective* Vol. Vol. V, no. 4 (October, 1995).

<sup>647</sup> Discussed in greater detail on pages 195-199.

If one never develops a Christlike character or endeavors to be an obedient disciple, this may be unfortunate but is not considered necessary nor exclusionary.

For liberals or progressives (left), Willard suggests the sin management aim is displayed differently. Unlike doctrinally focused conservatives, progressives tend to apply a contextualized degree of Pharisaic activism to their sin management endeavors. Such activism centers on displaying self-determined acts of righteousness that often benefit some disenfranchised people group, cause or charity. Such benevolent activities are deemed to demonstrate a heart worthy of acceptance by God or at least a valiant attempt at applying the social mores evident in the actions of Jesus. Faith in the historicity of Jesus, his divine attributes or activities, or the reality of his ontological Kingdom is marginalized. Primacy is placed on the accumulation of “good acts” in relation to “bad acts” for achieving a level of confidence in the quality of one's existential virtue. Like conservatives, the liberal sin management system eliminates the greatest fear by creating a means of gauging self-righteousness and assuring a preferred condition.

In terms of responding to both the “left” and the “right” Willard quotes A. W. Tozer who suggested there is absolutely nothing in what Jesus himself or his early followers taught that suggests one can decide only to accept and benefit from forgiveness

...at Jesus' expense and have nothing more to do with him. To this point Tozer expressed feeling that ‘a notable heresy has come into being throughout evangelical Christian circles—the widely-accepted concept that we humans can choose to accept Christ only because we need him as Savior and that we have the right to postpone our obedience to him as Lord as long as we want to!’ ...salvation apart from obedience is unknown in the sacred Scriptures.<sup>648</sup>

Willard suggests such a “heresy” creates a situation where modern Christians find it quite acceptable to be “vampire Christians” on the right or “activist” Christians on the left. Put

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<sup>648</sup> A. W. Tozer, *I Call It Heresy* (Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publication, 1974), 5f.

simply, Willard suggests the veracity of one's Christian faith or the presence of a saved condition is best determined through the overwhelming existential reality of a Christlike character emblematic of agape love. Instead, the two sin management systems seek to answer this same question through ascertaining proper profession of belief (right) or proper behavior (left).

Specifically considering the sin management of the “right” Willard roundly disagrees with the proposition that the gospel of Jesus almost exclusively advocates for the eternal benefits which come from the “forgiveness of sin.” Discussed at length earlier in regards to particular version of the atonement, the “right” suggests the cross presents the beginning and end motivation of the entire story of God’s hope for humanity. Therefore the Great Commissioning task is to spread the atonement message of trading eternity in hell for life in heaven.<sup>649</sup> Willard recognizes the popular bumper sticker that states the theological position, “Christians aren’t perfect just forgiven.”<sup>650</sup> Here he senses such an idea gives the impression that Christianity is all or “just” about forgiveness of sin.

In regards to the sin management systems of the “left” Willard proposes the emphasis on righteous acts devoted to liberation or social justice advocates for more than political correctness but “general correctness.”<sup>651</sup> He points to liberal theologians, such as James Findlay, who suggest that those involved in the social gospel movement experience significant life-transforming moments and events associated with their activism.<sup>652</sup> Thus Findlay remarks many see social activism and its transformative benefits as the primary and

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<sup>649</sup> This is a significant issue in Willard’s writing. Perhaps due in part to the heritage from which his faith ensues in the fundamentalist evangelical tradition of the Southern Baptists. See SOD, 33-34

<sup>650</sup> Dallas Willard, “Why Bother With Discipleship?,” *Renovare Perspective* Vol. Vol. V, no. 4 (October, 1995). Also DC, 35, SOD, 23.

<sup>651</sup> DC, 51.

<sup>652</sup> James F. Findlay, *Church people in the struggle : the National Council of Churches and the Black freedom movement, 1950-1970* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993),



best uses of the Christian church and its constituent members. The language and hope of the kind of life that those leading the civil rights movement offered, in Willard's view, was not simply the hope of the outcome of their religion. Rather, instead, such a liberating hope was the entire purpose of the religion altogether. Commitment to the oppressed, or simply to the "community" became the fulfillment of what was essential to liberal views of Christian commitment. The gospel, or good news, on this view, was that God himself stood behind liberation, equality and community; that Jesus died to promote them, or at least endeavored to correct the lack of these virtues. As a result Jesus is seen either metaphorically or metaphysically "to live on in all efforts and tendencies favoring them."<sup>653</sup> This focus on the oppressed and their cause became the overwhelming message of liberal evangelicalism, the activities that determine appropriate Christian behavior, and thus the totalizing view of God's mission on earth. Hence Jesus becomes diminished to a motivating instrument used for further liberating political and civil causes.<sup>654</sup>

What both gospels of the "left" and "right" have accomplished is to divorce the personal integrity of their adherents from the namesake of their faith. Jesus' current effect on the lives of their adherents and his example for how life can and should be lived is a secondary consideration if at all. "Both lack any essential bearing upon the individuals life as a whole, especially upon occupations of work time and upon the fine texture of our personal relationships in the home and neighborhood."<sup>655</sup> In the end, Willard considers both

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<sup>653</sup> DC, 51.

<sup>654</sup> Ibid. Willard sees the myopic focus of the liberationist gospel as presenting a message different than that proffered by the likes of liberal theologians and pastors such as Schleiermacher or Niebuhr. Liberation theologians presented theologies, views of God, as a kind of liberator which is different than presenting the entire *missio Dei* with a culminating soteriological end of liberation and holistic freedom. Schleiermacher and Niebuhr's social gospel offered a social ethic which valued freedom and could be shared culturally but which did not require reliance on God or a living Christ for its fulfillment. As such the social gospel, different than the liberationist gospel, valued a "total inclusivism of all beliefs and practices except oppressive one, such as the exclusivism of traditional Christianity itself." DC, 51.

<sup>655</sup> DC, 54.

sin management systems largely irrelevant and ineffectual in their ability to effect human transformation due to their almost singular focus on the removal of sin guilt through either socially constructed and approved behaviors or beliefs. There is no expectation of effectual transformation of individual human lives towards increasing obedience to the example of Christ. “That real life goes on despite them is a natural consequence of this.”<sup>656</sup> In effect both of these ideologies categorize the work of Jesus as a means to their own end. Thus Willard suggests both sin management systems offer the ability for their constituencies to resist the call of the protoevangelical vision and instead take the anti-evangelical position, “But I don't care to be your student or have your character. In fact, won't you just excuse me while I get on with my life, and I'll see you in heaven.”<sup>657</sup>

Such a stance is inconceivable to what Willard suggests is found in protoevangelicalism presented by Jesus in the New Testament gospels and of that lived by the early church. To which Willard asks, how such a faith, if not based on supreme confidence in Jesus, could be relied upon for anything if one is unwilling or unable to trust Christ for anything other than relieving the guilt of sin or social reform. Willard states “one can't trust him without believing that he was right about everything, and that he alone has the key to every aspect of our lives here on earth. But if you believe that, you will naturally want to stay just as close to him as you can, in every aspect of your life.”<sup>658</sup>

In an analogy to describe the effect of sin management gospels in practice, Willard uses the example of what he terms “bar-code faith.”<sup>659</sup> The illustration draws on the popular supermarket bar-coding system displayed on the outside of most packaging materials.

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<sup>656</sup> DC, 54.

<sup>657</sup> Chapter 2 of GO, 14. First published as “Why Bother With Discipleship?,” *Renovare Perspective* Vol. V, no. 4 (October, 1995).

<sup>658</sup> GO, 14.

<sup>659</sup> DC, 36.

When the bar code is laser scanned at the register a listing of the item and its price is called up and added to the list of items on the receipt. The pricing system automatically assumes what is represented on the barcode accurately reflects the product contained inside the box or package. Whether the barcode is accurate is never questioned.

Likewise, Willard argues Christianity has for centuries endeavored to answer the question of how one can gain assurance their outside behaviors (the barcode) accurately reflect the internal condition of the heart (the actual product). The answer to that question has brought different responses theologically and ecclesiologically over the past several millennia. More recently Willard recognizes the Modernist/fundamentalist controversy that consumed American religion for many decades is still at work and powerfully divisive on this question and has led different wings of Christianity to develop their own “bar-code” identifiers.<sup>660</sup> The Protestant conceptualization of “grace” confounds this problem because it holds that one “can do nothing” in relation to one's eternal destiny. Much of orthodox evangelicalism holds that salvation is the result of only God’s act of grace and thus a work of unmerited favor of which humans play no part. Thus salvation is totally independent of human activity, including one's character, whether for the better or worse. By implication there is little to no concern for what type of person one is to become while alive on earth. God alone is responsible for the redemption of the elect.

Therefore personal character formation is ancillary and subordinate to the greater focus of either the effect of works (social gospel faiths) sacraments (high church/liturgical faiths) and ritual or doctrinal correctness (conservative fundamentalists). Each of these brands of Christian expression advocate their own esoteric sin management ideology as “the” orthodox “bar-code” representation of “proper” faith. Each unique outward

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<sup>660</sup> DC, 41.

manifestation of these faiths are positioned as containing that quality of Christian expression that will assure God's acceptance (pass the scanner). Finally, a cosmic exchange is made somewhere in God's economy and debts are paid for or credit is extended. Some Christian traditions suggest the "account" has to be deposited into regularly (gospel of the "Left") while others believe the account has an endless supply once it is opened in your name (gospel of the "Right"). Either way, Willard suggests both ideologies are caught focusing almost exclusively on the problems and effects of sin.

It is not then necessary, in a sin management system, to be or become a morally upright person of character. It is only necessary to be considered by God as having the appropriate "bar-code" which designates one "good" or "worthy." Willard sees this as a massive means of "working the system" to the point where "doing good," (gospel of the "Left") or "believing good" (gospel of the "Right") are the means by which one gets what is desired. Both strategies overlook the integrity of their faith and therefore seldom engage the option of actually "being good." This integrity is found in the process of transformation into the type of person Jesus demands of those who would follow him. As such, sin management systems appear very pagan and idolatrous in their conception. To search for a means of either placating a god from wrath, proving one's meritorious condition, or enticing divine favors are all indicative of exactly the kind of paganism the Scriptures specifically prohibits. Unfortunately, neither the gospel of the Right or Left place their primary concern on what the product of the faith results in, or what the object or person who advocates either of these ideologies becomes internally. The only interest in these "barcode" systems of faith is the outward appearance and end result of passing God's "scanner" and avoiding the potential consequences of condemnation.

Here Willard asks the question centered on *essentia Dei*. “Would God really do it this way?”<sup>661</sup> Thinking that one can really get away with either developing or “working” such a religious system, in Willard’s view, reveals both foolishness and a theology that positions God as a fool as well.

No one need worry about getting the best of God in some bargain with him, or that we might somehow succeed in using him for our purposes. Anyone who thinks this is a problem has seriously underestimated the intelligence and agility of our father in the heavens. Any arrangement God has established will be right for him and right for us. We can count on it.<sup>662</sup>

Ultimately, Willard recognizes that this system of “barcode Christianity” has not worked. To illustrate this Willard quotes Mike Yaconelli<sup>663</sup> and Phillip Yancey<sup>664</sup> as examples of evangelicals who have lost their faith in evangelicalism’s ability to actually change people.<sup>665</sup> These key figures admit their brand of evangelical faith has failed their best attempts at applying its ethos. Willard suggests evangelicalism is not what fails them despite their honest efforts. Rather it is precisely because of the sin management systems inherent to their faith structure that their efforts have remained largely impotent.<sup>666</sup> Thus like the ECM leaders who began to read his works, Willard suggests that the poor results evangelical faith has produced in recent years “is not in spite of what we teach and how we teach, but precisely because of it.” Willard quotes the works of Neil Hamilton who marks the degeneration of these opposing sin management systems in general terms.<sup>667</sup> Hamilton describes how each of these parties, being most proud of not being the other, are none-the-

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<sup>661</sup> DC, 37

<sup>662</sup> Ibid.

<sup>663</sup> Mike Yaconelli, “The Terror of Inbetween-ness,” *The Whittenburg Door* (Nov.-Dec. 1992):.

<sup>664</sup> Philip Yancey, “Be Ye Perfect, More Or Less: Tolstoy, Dostoevsky and the Impossible Sermon on the Mount,” *Christianity Today* (July, 17, 1995).

<sup>665</sup> DC, 40.

<sup>666</sup> Ibid.

<sup>667</sup> Neil Hamilton, *Recovery of the Protestant Adventure* (New York: Seabury Books, 1981),

less helpless to demonstrate their theological propositions as “transcendent life forces powerful enough to threaten the structures of secular existence.”<sup>668</sup>

In the end the impotence of contemporary evangelicalism became more obvious to the world in general and increasingly so to the early members of the ECM. Yet more than modern evangelical theology was causing the ECM protest. Postmodern epistemology was also a key factor. Willard’s philosophical training in epistemology and phenomenology places him in a unique position to speak to these complicated but essential questions. It is to these key philosophical issues we now turn.

*Critical Realism—Willard’s Response to Modern and Postmodern Epistemology*

It is a significant irony that many postmodern Christian leaders and writers list Willard as a key influence. Specifically in light of the fact Willard is most certainly neither a modern nor a postmodern philosopher. Willard’s commitment to critical realism is a unique departure from modern constructivism and its postmodern spawn. Constructivism is what Willard calls “Midas touch epistemology” and its application has in his view wreaked havoc and confusion in contemporary thought, education and theology.<sup>669</sup> This section will consider Willard’s specific responses to the modern/postmodern epistemological duel. It will first discuss the nature of realism, and then pursue the effects postmodernity has made on contemporary evangelical theology and Willard’s perspectives on these issues.

Had it not been for Edmund Husserl’s interest in realism and its influence on his work in phenomenology, Willard states he would never have become interested in philosophy or pursued a degree in the discipline. Early in his studies Willard came to

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<sup>668</sup> SOD, 22. cf. 27.

<sup>669</sup> Dallas Willard, “Prediction a Originary Violence: A Phenomenological Critique of Derrida’s View of Intentionality,” in *Working Through Derrida*, ed. G.B. Madsen, (Evanston, IL: Northwestern Press, 1993), 120-136.

recognize Husserl stood relatively alone in defending the Aristotelian claims of realism against the rising influence of constructivist idealism and linguistic nominalism in the Continental schools of philosophy during the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>670</sup> Taking Husserl's lead, who first sought to disprove Giambattista Vico and later Emanuel Kant's constructivist assertions regarding mathematics, Willard's thesis applies Husserl's phenomenological platform as a logically and methodologically sound means of assuring the veracity of the classical logocentric roots of traditional philosophy.<sup>671</sup> Throughout his professional career Willard has consistently worked to produce detailed, logical arguments for the realist position, its claims regarding the attainability of knowledge and the existence of an objective reality undergirding the pursuits of metaphysics, ethics, epistemology, logic and theology.

Constructivism is the primary battleground for realism. Kant's famous remark that the greatest problem of philosophy is the question—how anything in the mind can be a representation of anything outside the mind—remains the integral issue in the debate.<sup>672</sup> Kant's conclusion that things inside the mind cannot be represented outside the mind has been widely termed the “Copernican revolution” of modern philosophical thought.<sup>673</sup> What Kant's German idealism forged was a lineage of constructivist philosophical inquiry Husserl directly opposed but which philosophers such as Hegel, Heidegger, Wittgenstein,

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<sup>670</sup> Willard handles this in, “Attaining Objectivity: Phenomenological Reduction and the Private Language Argument,” in *Topics in Philosophy and Artificial Intelligence*, ed. Lillian Abertazzi and Alberto Poli, (Bozen, Italy: Istituto Mitteleuropeo di Cultura, 1991),15-21.

<sup>671</sup> Edmund Husserl, *The Idea of Phenomenology*, trans. Lee Hardy (Boston: Kluwer Academic, 1999), 39-43.

<sup>672</sup> Dallas Willard, “How Concepts Relate the Mind to Its Objects: The God's Eye View Vindicated” (Paper, Biola University Conference on Faith and Philosophy, February, 1998).

<sup>673</sup> Tom Rockmore, *In Kant's Wake : Philosophy in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Blackwell Pub., 2006), 37.

Nietzsche, and later the French philosophers such as Derrida, widely assumed and propagated.<sup>674</sup>

Contrary to Kantian constructivism Willard finds in Husserlian phenomenology proofs for exactly what Derrida sought to undermine; namely the foundational metaphysical presence of objects existing outside the mind. Husserl's work established, "the possibility of human interaction with objects, as they are, in and of themselves, apart from any individuals knowledge or interpretation of them."<sup>675</sup> Willard argues the effect of Husserlian phenomenology is the maintenance of the logocentric objective, often referred to as the "God's Eye View" of reality.<sup>676</sup> In contrast to Kantian constructivism, which differentiates and separates things "inside" the mind from those "outside" the mind, Willard suggests realism establishes,

...as G.E. Moore saw a century ago, we are already outside the circle of ideas merely by having a thought or sensation. We are outside precisely because thought and sensation do not produce anything by being what they are. We are outside because there is no inside. The inside is produced by the Kantian illusion that the touch of the mind (language, culture, history) produces things that form a wall over which we cannot logically or epistemically get.<sup>677</sup>

The implications of the realist perspective are devastating to the "hard" concepts of pluralism, relativism, constructivism and deconstructionism which surround nearly every tenet of postmodern thought. Willard's theology, in concert with his philosophy, holds there to be an objective "God's eye view" that is both accurate in its perspective on all reality and therefore wholly independent of its description or claims to its knowledge.

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<sup>674</sup> Tom Rockmore, *Kant and Idealism* (New Haven, NJ: Yale University Press, 2007), and *In Kant's Wake : Philosophy in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Blackwell Pub., 2006), 37.

<sup>675</sup> Dallas Willard, "Historical and Philosophical Foundations of Phenomenology," in *Phenomenology and Counseling*, ed. Paul Bloland, (forthcoming),

<sup>676</sup> This is a term of Hillary Putnam referred to in the article Dallas Willard, "How Concepts Relate the Mind to Its Objects: The God's Eye View Vindicated" (Paper, Biola University Conference on Faith and Philosophy, February, 1998). Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth, and History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 50.

<sup>677</sup> Ibid.



Realism however does not intimate human attainment of the objective reality contained in the God's eye view, only that thoughts and their concepts do not effect objects but merely describe, accurately or inaccurately, their existence or nature. Therefore realism holds there is a "way things are" but refrains from proposing that any one person or theory perfectly describes, illustrates or captures such a reality. Certainty and absolutism are not part of the realist objective.

The vagaries, indeterminacies, differing viewpoints and so on that are unmistakable and irremovable characteristics of our experience of the world do not transfer to the world itself, and do not erect a wall that encloses us from the world as it is without regard to our experience of it.<sup>678</sup>

What Willard finds interesting in the constructivist argument is that, at its conclusion no knowledge is attainable, not even for God. For strict constructionists, even the construct of "God" must remain unconscious of objects since God does not engage in sense perception. Therefore Kant's conclusion that "Thoughts without concepts are empty, intuitions without concept are blind" is impossible.<sup>679</sup> Hence, God too must remain ignorant of the world and as equally void of reason as any other perception disabled entity is destined to be. The point of this line of inquiry is to illustrate that the theism of the Christian point of view posits a God who, if he so desired, could and does reach beyond the limitations of human knowledge, consciousness and language to bring humans revelations of reality apart from human descriptions. Yet constructivism creates a construct, which nothing, not even a divine figure, can escape. For the constructivist nothing exists outside of constructivism. The idea of escape is impossible in the Kantian proposal of how concepts come before the mind. In the closed system of inside-outside imagery, everyone is trapped in the constructivist loop, including the divine. Further, if God could escape into

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<sup>678</sup> Ibid.

<sup>679</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Pr, 1999), 50.

the outside world of objectivity, constructivist contend God would still be limited in his inability to communicate to humanity through language. Thus Willard recognizes,

We are left to construct [God] and what he says along with everything else, from within our circle of ideas of our language. Prospects for revelation of divine truth are pretty gloomy to say the least. Construction and reconstruction are the only possibilities and even then can only be constructions if we are to be consistent. Then consistency too is only...<sup>680</sup>

The importance of Willard's realism in his philosophy and theology is to offer a reasoned approach to epistemology that is not forced into the "all or nothing" dilemma of a modern vs. postmodern constructivism. Again, Willard is not arguing that realism proposes certainty and empirical superiority. Only that objectivity exists and the human mind is specifically able to engage reality and experience objects apart from the need to have omniscient knowledge of them. Willard claims that from the inception of Husserlian phenomenology realism sought to,

respond to the increasingly subjectivistic and skeptical interpretations of human consciousness which have somewhat paradoxically accompanied the rise and development of modern science and undermined the cognitive status of all, or nearly all, claims or beliefs about the meaning and nature of human existence.<sup>681</sup>

Husserl described the essence of phenomenology as a "general doctrine of essences within which the science of the essence of cognition finds its place."<sup>682</sup> Consequently, Willard proposes the phenomenologist is regularly wary of definitions tending to incorporate unchecked prejudices with regard to a subject or conceptualization. "He never works from [subjects or conceptualizations] alone or primarily."<sup>683</sup> In this regard, Willard's realism

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<sup>680</sup> Ibid.

<sup>681</sup> Dallas Willard, "Historical and Philosophical Foundations of Phenomenology," in *Phenomenology and Counseling*, ed. Paul Bloland, (forthcoming),

<sup>682</sup> Ibid.

<sup>683</sup> Ibid.

represents both a critique to the scientific hubris arising in the Enlightenment metanarrative which is a shared theme with the postmodern protest of modernity.

However, this is also a point where Willard's intellectual challenge of Derridian deconstruction and the postmodern metanarrative originates as well. Willard sees the pursuit of all intellectual work as the process of distinguishing things one from another. Therefore the postmodern goal of critiquing the modern hubris of scientism, individualism, consumerism and systematic theology is an equally valuable and essential task in Willardian thought. Yet Lyotard's and Foucault's critique of modernism overlooks the *a priori* Cartesian and Kantian ontological and metaphysical constructivist assumptions in its own postmodern metanarrative. Further Derrida's deconstruction also fails to deconstruct the "foundational" constructivist theory in his own philosophy. Therefore the choice for postmodern epistemology is limited to determining not if, only what constructivist method is deemed appropriate to their agenda. A selective deconstructivism is the result.

For example, postmodern metaphysics defers its epistemological base to the local, communal context in order to save their constructivist assumptions. Yet there is little differentiation to be found between the modern preference for the universal and the postmodern appeal to the particular.<sup>684</sup> Neither position resists constructivism and therefore largely, if not intentionally, eludes the realist perspective altogether.<sup>685</sup> Although wary of Lyotard and Foucault's epistemological means, Willard appears largely empathetic to their intent. The abuse of power and the over-enthusiastic hubris of humanistic and scientific metanarratives is a shared concern for Willard. The impetus of materialism, naturalism,

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<sup>684</sup> For an excellent discussion on this see Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, *Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations* (New York: Guilford, 1991), 172.

<sup>685</sup> A prime example of this tension is seen in one of the early dealings with postmodern theory by evangelicals in Dave Tomlinson, *The Post Evangelical*, (El Cajon, CA: Emergent YS/Zondervan, 2003), 82-83. An excellent description of the post-evangelical tension, Tomlinson stresses the need to break the hold of metanarratives but struggles to recognize, describe or reconstruct a more valid epistemology or metaphysics.

utilitarianism and physicalism all arise out of the Enlightenment assumptions and have been used for good or ill as attempts to establish an authoritarian plane of knowledge.

These have been a topic of concern in Willard's writings for decades.<sup>686</sup>

Yet, Willard's most detailed critique of postmodernism is saved for Derrida.<sup>687</sup>

Willard suggests Derrida's misinterpretation and misapplication of Husserl has done nothing less than "unhinge the American mind" and cause a crisis in the university system of education.<sup>688</sup> In summary Willard suggests Derrida's theories of texts and deconstructionism announced the elimination of "transcendental signifieds," the non-existence of "original data" or new concepts, and the inability to access "real stuff" apart from that which is shaped and formed by language.<sup>689</sup> The results of deconstruction, Willard concludes, are not the creation of coherent methods of thought but instead a set of claims about thought and a discourse on the meaning of thought. Hence Willard claims that the sum total of Derridian corpus presents very little in terms of a result. Instead Derrida makes many claims, sets definitions, plays on words, and presents stories while providing precious few discernable arguments for his conclusions.

Nevertheless, Willard recognizes Derrida's popularity is unmistakable and suggests personal style is mistaken for cognitive substance. However unsubstantiated Derrida's philosophical constructs may be, Willard recognizes Derrida's brilliance and the fascination

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<sup>686</sup> Dallas Willard, "Utilitarianism and Phenomenology," in *Phenomenological Approaches to Moral Philosophy: A Handbook*, ed. John J. Drummond and Lester E. Embree, (Boston, MA: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002), Dallas Willard, "Knowledge and Naturalism," in *Naturalism: A Critical Analysis*, ed. William L. Craig and J.P. Moreland, (New York: Routledge, 2000), Dallas Willard, "Non-Reductive and Non-Eliminative Physicalism," <http://www.dwillard.org/articles/artview.asp?artID=48> (accessed 2-23, 2011).

<sup>687</sup> Willard has several articles on this subject. See "Is Derrida's View of Ideal Being Rationally Defensible?," in *Derrida and Phenomenology*, ed. William McKenna, (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1995), 23-41, "Prediction a Originary Violence: A Phenomenological Critique of Derrida's View of Intentionality," in *Working Through Derrida*, ed. G.B. Madsen, (Evanston, IL: Northwestern Press, 1993), 120-136.

<sup>688</sup> Dallas Willard, "Unhinging of the American Mind-Derrida as Pre-Text," in *European Philosophy and the American Academy*, ed. Barry Smith, (LaSalle, IL.: Hegeler Institute, 1994), 3-20.

<sup>689</sup> Ibid.

his theories have attracted within popular culture. What concerns Willard most is the tragic impact Derridian thought has made on higher education. Willard writes,

The undermining of the normative power of the disciplines [and their texts] seems at the popular level to open the way to saying that any reading of a text by anybody has a certain legitimacy to it—and this can be rationalized in various ways—or by saying that the reading of the text that is socially sustainable at present is the right one, as long as it is socially sustainable. . . . And the intellectual atmosphere at the teacher student nexus is thick with such views, coming from both sides. This goes along with the view, commonly defended or assumed that all texts are as good or can be as good as any other since there is no objective ordering of text as to their value, no “canon” other than what is politically enforced.<sup>690</sup>

What is reconstructed in Derrida’s deconstruction, if anything, remains a mystery. It appears the effect of deconstruction is to engage in endless pursuits of reduction to the point of eliminating any possible foundation (logos) upon which any authoritative position could rest. It would seem Derrida proposes the epistemological virtue of “singularity,” where no single idea or thought is foundational enough to be build upon. Yet, Derridian singularity itself proves this a practical impossibility since the deconstructive effort employs an immense and intricate theory, representing no less an accumulation of ideological constructs than those of any metanarrative or text it seeks to undermine.

However, a poignant finding was made in the process of this research regarding the difference between the Derridian concept of deconstruction and the intellectual process most often applied by many self-proclaimed postmodernists engaged in reconsidering evangelical theology and praxis. When deconstruction moves from the ideological framework of postmodernism into the popular, cultural articulation of postmodernity, deconstruction loses much of its ambiguity and nihilistic bite. Within the postevangelical, ECM contexts of this research, the overwhelming majority of intellectual reconsideration done under the banner of “deconstruction” resembles little to none of what Derridian

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<sup>690</sup> Ibid.

deconstruction actually entails.<sup>691</sup> In other words, in postmodernism, deconstruction functions as a noun. In postmodernity the concept of deconstruction works like a verb or an adjective to describe the attempt to apply the phenomenological exercise of “bracketing.”

Here Husserl’s concept of the *epoche* is crucial and is displayed as a significant aspect of why Willard’s theology is so attractive in postevangelical circles. Husserl’s phenomenological method describes in detail the essential requirement of separating ideas about a thing from the thing itself.<sup>692</sup> Therefore, one “brackets” or sets aside thoughts and ideas about a thing, including all preconceived notions and assumptions, and focuses only on the experience of the object itself. This is Husserl’s means of clearing out any clouded and confusing delimiters that prevent the engagement of an object as it is “in and of itself.” In similar but not identical fashion, Willard’s theological methodology and philosophy prioritizes the “bracket.” He often sets aside preexisting statements, claims or doctrinal beliefs about the world, philosophical assumptions, theological doctrines, self-evident propositions and dogmas of Christian faith. The bracket allows Willard and his readers to pursue an “unvarnished” description of the experience of life and its objects as they appear in the world and the lives of individuals. In this process, philosophical realism combines

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<sup>691</sup> In general terms, whenever there is a claim that “truth” or “reality” of “facts” are completely and totally inaccessible, one is often presented with a Derridian form of deconstruction. However, in interviews with most EC leaders, very few actually take this “hard” epistemological position. Although there remains disagreement on the vague notion regarding the degree to which certainty and truth are conjoined in conversations about knowledge, See Scot McKnight’s, “What is Emerging Church, Westminster Theological Seminary,” *Fall Contemporary Issues Conference*, (Oct 26-27, 2006) However, many EC leaders make very strong and visceral truth claims. Not the least of which is Rob Bell and Dan Kimball. See Kimball’s *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan/Youth Specialties, 2003), and Rob Bell, *Sex God: Exploring the Endless Connections Between Sexuality and Spirituality* (Zondervan Publishing, 2007), *Velvet Elvis: Repainting the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), Rob Bell and Don Golden, *Jesus Wants to Save Christians: A Manifesto for the Church in Exile* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008-10-01), *Drops Like Stars: A Few Thoughts on Creativity and Suffering* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009-08-01), *Love Wins : A Book About Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2011),

<sup>692</sup> Joseph J. Kockelmans and Edmund Husserl, *Edmund Husserl’s Phenomenology* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1994), 124.

with phenomenological methodology as a means to search for a more direct vision and experience of the world.

The result of this approach presents an epistemological position unique to either Enlightenment empiricism or modern/postmodern constructivism. Theologically, from this epistemological platform, Willard argues the teachings of Jesus, and much of the body of knowledge passed down through the intellectual Christian tradition, while imperfect, have rather competently articulated the metaphysical, ethical, logical and epistemological reality of human life and existence. Further, Willard's realist phenomenology builds his articulation of the theo-ontological reality of the Kingdom of God. There is a sense in which Willard's phenomenological methodology "deconstructs" or "distinguishes" assumption, preconception, supposition, conjecture and theory from the actual experience Jesus described and offered in Kingdom of God. What is often confusing to postmoderns reading Willard's work is his frequent highlighting of the contradictory distinctions between Jesus' description of "life in the Kingdom" to that of the traditional dogmas and doctrines of evangelical theology. It is the "bracketing" of these evangelical interpretive lenses and their assumptions which readers appear to misunderstand as a Willardian application of Derridian deconstruction.

Willard's bracketing is instead the simple, free and fearless intellectual pursuit to discover and experience the essential nature of Christian thought and life. Such an inquiry requires a willingness to consider every claim and doctrine based upon its own merit and void of the implicative baggage attached to it. This work is significant and intrinsically valuable. Especially for postevangelicals, many of whom were reared in anti-intellectual and legalistic backgrounds where intellectual inquiry is often considered oppositional to

faith.<sup>693</sup> Willard's work provides a poignant and liberating experience and sets an example and standard of intellectual excellence for both evangelicals and postevangelicals to pursue. However, Willard's methodology is in no way affiliated to the Derridian deconstructive exercise. To assume so is to miss the critical epistemological difference between the role logocentrism plays in both realism and constructivism. Willard is seeking and describing the discovery of exactly what Derrida claims does not exist and cannot be known. Willard claims to have found, is continuing to find, and is providing knowledge to others about, the very point, realm, and reality of the biblical text which Derrida contends has no external referent and lives only in the minds of the reader.

There are other aspects of the postmodern move Willard appreciates and supports. One such facet is the positive attention postmodernism has brought to abuse of power, manipulation and increased proclivity to defend the marginalized voice of the "other." Here Willard and other evangelical theologians seek to bolster the postmodern aim. Historically, several political and military régimes have used authority, propaganda, and manipulation to articulate a metanarrative and a theology for abusive ends. Some postevangelical theologians such as Grenz,<sup>694</sup> Walsh and Middleton,<sup>695</sup> as well as more popular writers such as McLaren,<sup>696</sup> Jones,<sup>697</sup> and Pagitt,<sup>698</sup> pick up on Foucault's argument.<sup>699</sup> They also

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<sup>693</sup> This was discussed in the preceding chapter pages 129-156 but will also be discussed more specifically in the biographical and background material of the four subject groups studied in the ethnographies. See appendix 2a, 3, 4 and 5.

<sup>694</sup> Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 45.

<sup>695</sup> Middleton and Walsh, *Truth is Stranger Than it Used to be*, 70-75.

<sup>696</sup> McLaren, *A New Kind of Christianity*, 265.

<sup>697</sup> Jones, *The New Christians*, 139-141, 229. Jones does speak to metanarratives in this work but his interpretation of the effect of metanarratives and subsequent preference of "communal discernment" and a "hermeneutics of humility" are the terms he uses.

<sup>698</sup> Doug Pagitt, "The Emerging Church and Embodied Theology," in *Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches : Five Perspectives*, ed. Robert. Webber, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007),127. And Doug Pagitt, *Preaching Re-Imagined: The Role of the Sermon in Communities of Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan/Youth Specialties, 2005), Like Jones, Pagitt responds to the metanarrative hegemony by choosing instead to enlist a local, communal hermeneutic.



suggest the effect of modern metanarratives and language manipulation, within contemporary culture in general, and evangelical theology in specific, has been to oppress the minority view and create a moral crisis of elitism and separatism.<sup>700</sup>

However, the greatest degree of commonality between postmodernism and Willardian thought is found in the critique of the modern construction of the self and rejection of the optimism and myopic anthropocentrism of secular humanism.<sup>701</sup> Willard agrees the modern hubris of the Enlightenment narrative has largely lost its influence on Western humanity. He discusses at length the fracturing of the human soul, the loss of selfhood, and the consequential devolving condition of both society at large and the local church. Additionally, Willard would agree with Middleton and Walsh's ironic suggestion that "*homo autonomus* is reconstituted as *Homo linguisticus*."<sup>702</sup> Not as a truth statement as much as a recognition of the pragmatic reality inherent to postmodernity. Willard would also agree with Kenneth Gergen's conclusion that in such a linguistic-centric paradigm, where words do not reflect reality itself but only representations of reality that may or may not be accurate, the idea of constructing a knowable and reliable concept of the self is also "effectively dismantled" since the autonomous self is a particular construct of the Enlightenment ethos.

The fact that postmodernism tends to reflect almost exclusively on the negative aspects of individualism, consumerism and humanism, results in the emergence of an identity gap within much of Western society. Willard describes this gap in both *The Divine*

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<sup>699</sup> Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge : Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), Michel Foucault and Jean. Khalfa, *History of Madness* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2006), 333.

<sup>700</sup> Middleton and Walsh, 71.

<sup>701</sup> An excellent discussion on this and the effects of postmodernism at large on the evangelical theology is found in Knowles, *Beyond Evangelicalism*), 22-26.

<sup>702</sup> Middleton and Walsh, *Truth is Stranger Than it Used to be*, 51.

*Conspiracy and Renovation of the Heart* as the ruined soul which has struggled to land on a worthy cause or substance for its existence largely to no avail. A significant part of Willard's theological corpus is devoted to the concepts surrounding the topic of spiritual formation.<sup>703</sup> These works keenly describe how and why the human soul is frequently fractured and the results of the dis-integration of the individual aspects of a person that form a single personality.<sup>704</sup> Without a focus, purpose or central motivating vision for life Willard suggests "the greatest obstacles to effective spiritual formation in Christ today is the simple failure to understand and acknowledge the reality of the human situation as it affects Christians and non-Christians alike. We must start from where we really are."<sup>705</sup> And unfortunately, Willard recognizes how people in a postmodern consumeristic society can find themselves in a state of what he calls "helter skelter."<sup>706</sup>

Attempting to further explain this concept, Robert Lifton describes what he terms the "protean self" named after the Greek god of the sea who was able to take on multiple forms as circumstances require. Likewise, Lifton concludes the postmodern construct of the self propagates destabilization and thus demands a new search for fulfillment.

We are left in a permanent flux of relativity. In many cases... postmodern anthropology seems now to go to the other extreme. Instead of certainty and purpose, there is now play; for determinacy there is indeterminacy; fixed ideas are replaced by process; the heterogeneous properties of the postmodern self come to the fore. The notion of a de-centered self results in a self that is not anchored to anything. It is a self that floats upon the waters of postmodernity like a fragment of driftwood, on tides of momentary desires and needs, and tossed about by the latest whims, fads and

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<sup>703</sup> Robert Jay Lifton, *The Protean Self: Human Resilience in an Age of Fragmentation* (New York: BasicBooks, 1993.),

<sup>704</sup> See Willard's description of the self in ROH, chapter 2.

<sup>705</sup> ROH, Chapter 3.

<sup>706</sup> Helter Skelter is a term from an early rock and roll song that was popularized for its use in the Charlie Manson murders in northern California in the late 1970's. Commenting on Manson's use of the song to characterize and instill the state of confusion among his followers and himself, Willard suggests, "in a state of helter skelter, nothing makes sense. And everything makes as much sense as anything else. So for example when you cut someone's throat or stab them repeatedly and they die, you didn't really kill them and they didn't really die. That was Manson's [constructivist] teaching." See ROH, 43-44.

fascinations. Who you are depends on where you are, who you are with, what you are doing and the time that you are doing it. This fragmentation of the self produces a chameleon-like self, and a very insecure chameleon at that.<sup>707</sup>

To this chameleon-like existence Willard recognizes American evangelicalism has attached itself to consumerism like a moth to a flame.<sup>708</sup> Willard also speaks to the consumerism in the church as a natural consequence of the unhinging of the self from the traditional understanding of the self-conveyed in Scripture. The consumer-focused identity is a form of materialism which indicates a pronounced dearth in appreciation for the spiritual nature of Christian life and reality.<sup>709</sup> The “have it your way” priority of consumer satisfaction has created an expectation that religiously minded consumers are equally able, and have the self-evident authority, to mix and match the elements of their faith as easily as they can specify their preferences for a hamburger. Willard is critical of modern evangelicalism in the way it panders to the lowest common denominator of consumerism in terms of filling seats and membership lists to the detriment of forming the human spirit in discipling relationships to Christ.<sup>710</sup>

Several key concepts of postmodernism—namely the demise of metanarrative and its power plays, the impact of deconstruction, and their combined effects on the fracturing of the postmodern self—are emblematic of the similar if not the same primary issues concerning postevangelicals. As a philosopher and theologian, Willard is uniquely positioned to explicitly engage these critical issues. Although Willard has not specifically

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<sup>707</sup> Knowles, *Beyond Evangelicalism*, 26.

<sup>708</sup> GO, 52.

<sup>709</sup> SOD, 56-95.

<sup>710</sup> Dallas Willard, “Rethinking Evangelism,” *Church Planting* Vol. 4, (Winter, 2001). Dallas Willard, “The Kingdom of God and Competing Kingdoms” (Lecture, Mater Dolorosa, Pasadena, CA, June, 2010). And Willard, “The Failure of Evangelical Political Involvement in the Area of Moral Transformation,” in *God and Governing: Reflections on Ethics, Virtue and Statesmanship*, ed. Roger Overton, (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2009), 74-91.

dealt with each of these concepts in his theological writing, his philosophical works engage, critique and challenge the foundational assumptions of nominalism and constructivism, which he contends undergirds the entire postmodern enterprise and the theology which proceeds from the same.

To summarize this section, Willard departs from many of his evangelical peers in their sometimes hyper-reactive response to all things postmodern. Willard is sympathetic to the universal claims of scientism and recognizes the harmful effects modern hubris has wrought. Additionally, Willard is a proponent for “deconstruction” albeit not at all the Derridian form previously described. Instead Willard advocates a continual, diligent search for increasing levels of knowledge and discernment within all texts, methodologies and knowledge claims alike. This he understands as the primary motive of intellectual work; to distinguish and delineate things one from another. Thus “deconstructing” hermeneutical tools and their products is a beneficial and necessary endeavor. However, unlike Derrida, Willard contends that there is something behind, underneath and/or above the texts which the texts aim to describe. Context matters, of course. Yet an essential distinction for Willard would be his assertion that context is only a shaper, not a determiner, of reality. Taking an Aristotelian and Husserlian position, Willard holds reality can be engaged, albeit humbly, fleetingly and incompletely, but essentially, through the intentional processes of honest intellectual pursuit.

An example of this distinction is seen in Willard’s treatment of the Bible as a specific text. He holds the Bible as open to interpretation and as such allows for pluralism and subjectivism to a degree. Application of hermeneutical lenses is unavoidable since humans are subjects and apply filters through which experience is shaped. This would include culture, environment, tradition, etc. However, that humans are subjects does not logically demand that Scripture, directed by the *Logos*, cannot transcend the limits of

subjectivity and convey objectivity to human subjects if desired. Hence Willard's reasserts Aristotelian realism and logocentrism into his conceptualization of Scripture. From that position, Willard asserts the claims of the Bible can be tested to determine their veracity. No constructivism is required.

Willard would agree with Derrida that an appropriate means to discern objectivity is found in community. However, Willard is quick to note communal discernment is neither the only, nor the exclusive means of accurate discernment due to the "mob's" ability to both mislead and be misled. Instead Willard holds that knowledge of the world is possible, desirable and essential for life and flourishing both individual and corporately. Additionally, he holds that knowledge, along with grace and love, is a primary benefit of the life Jesus describes in the Kingdom of God. Willard does not share the modern assumptions of certainty, either individually or corporately, as offered in the Enlightenment's optimistic notion of objective truth. Nor is he confident in the application of methodological rigor and strict empiricism present in many modern systematic theologies. However, Willard does hold firmly to the existence of truth, not as an idealist but as a critical realist. Communal consensus can assist in the process of discernment between good or better interpretations, since there is a point of measurement from which members can gauge progress. Therefore, faith communities establish credibility and determine meaning from a preexisting point of reality, and interpretations are guarded and guided by the Holy Spirit into all "truth."

This pneumatological aspect is certainly not without its vulnerabilities and abuses of power. Authority for determining veracity of an interpretation and its advocacy from the Holy Spirit remains a point of contention. Yet Willard would argue that abuse is not to be eliminated in the Christian life. Abuse is an ever-present necessity for the relationship of

free beings.<sup>711</sup> Thus, the character or underlying intent and desire (want) rises to primacy in Willard's theology. If one wants to abuse a text, twist a metanarrative, manipulate relationships or even delude the self, self-determinacy allows and funds such an agenda. Like Foucault, Willard recognizes the potential abuse of power is incumbent in all human activity. But Foucault was not a complete skeptic, nor was he fatalistic about human power relations. "It is precisely the positive mechanism [of power] that needs to be investigated, and here one must free oneself from all the previous characterizations of the nature of power."<sup>712</sup> Foucault encouraged reconsideration of human/power relations. So too Willard's focus on the development of a transformed character, which can assume the responsibility to engage real states of affairs on their own terms and the power that position conveys, without requiring some self-preserving or protecting epistemological maneuver or the marginalization of the "other."

This is the ultimate goal of Willard's theo-ontology. Willard's view of the gospel describes the pursuit and attainment of a quality of personal integration and security of will that effectively eliminates the impetuses which have caused the abuses of power, dominating delusions of grandeur or self-centeredness, and the egomaniacal pursuits postmodernism so vitally protests. Thus Willard's vision of the Christian life appeals to those sympathizing with the postmodern rejection of modernism and asserts the Kingdom of God described by Jesus has as much a claim of legitimacy as any other worldview and should therefore be judged by its results on an equal playing field in the marketplace of ideas.

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<sup>711</sup> Dallas Willard, "Good and the Problem of Evil," <http://www.dwillard.org/articles/artview.asp?artID=30> (accessed 11-5, 2010).

<sup>712</sup> Michel Foucault, *Power and Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977* (New York: Pantheon, 1993), 120-122.

For Willard, the ability and essentiality of distinguishing things one from another is a basic tenet of all intellectual endeavors. However, for evangelicalism, such a pursuit may represent either a lost art or unfortunately a moot point.<sup>713</sup> Yet it is in this dogged pursuit of distinguishing, clarifying, and discriminating where a majority of postevangelicals are increasingly drawn to Willardian thought and theological process. If ideological analysis and separation does not occur between one's feelings, thoughts, opinions or traditions about an object or subject, making a thing independent and distinct in itself, then definitions, meanings, purposes, concepts and structures progressively lose all power and authority over life. A migration occurs toward a self-defining reality. This is Willard's argument for bracketing.

In like manner, evangelicals have largely not learned to separate feelings, needs and experiences about theological issues or ideas from the theological ideas themselves. Therefore, staunch anti-constructivist evangelicals have unwittingly begun to employ the disastrously ironic facilities of constructivism in practice, which they diametrically oppose in theory. Willard highlights these ironies continuously. His works regularly seek to separate and distinguish, for instance, the popular evangelical ideas of the "church" from the biblical concept of Kingdom of God. Likewise Willard spends a great deal of time distinguishing the concepts surrounding "salvation" as articulated in Scripture from the sermonized reductionism in popular evangelical theology which often limits salvation to attaining the destination of Heaven in the afterlife.

There are several examples where Willard separates what contemporary evangelicalism has coalesced. Many of these have already been reviewed in the previous sections of this chapter. The point to make here is that postevangelicals appreciate and

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<sup>713</sup> See MA Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).

respond to Willard's overt resistance to evangelical convolution and interchanging of key theological ideas, their negative implications and the confusion which results. Most troubling, Willard contends this theological negligence, by default, creates a constructivist playground where an alternative, anthropomorphic religious enterprise is humanly constructed under the banner of a historically sound, and biblically Christian theological framework. Willard argues it is exactly this misappropriated endeavor Jesus staunchly opposed and attempted to correct in first century Judaism.<sup>714</sup>

Therefore Willard proposes ongoing vigilance in all theological and epistemological endeavors inside Christian circles. The constructivist "enemy" is inside the camp, as it were, and not simply an outside threat. "Judgment starts with the house of God" Willard writes.<sup>715</sup> This clarification appears to be the underlying motive for Willard; to both seek and achieve a more radical, authentic and metaphysically real protoevangelical theology and practice. It is also this drive and motive which draws postevangelicals to his works.

### *Summary*

To Willard's thinking, the current reality in American evangelicalism represents the dire condition of the construction and application of alternative gospels highlighted above. In differing degrees and to differing effects, the preponderance of evangelicalism and its organizations are mired in one version or another of these non-orthodox visions of Christian faith. The ability to pick and choose between different manifestations of these

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<sup>714</sup> Willard makes a continuing point of this in his deep discussion of John's gospel, chapter 3, where Jesus talks to an apparently confused and unenlightened religious leader, Nicodemus. DC, 68. ISOG, Chapter 7 and KC, 195.

<sup>715</sup> GO, 225.



gospels, in somewhat of a “buffet style” selection process, represents a distinctly Americanized version of evangelicalism that pays homage to consumer culture.<sup>716</sup>

This is not the evangelicalism Willard understands which proceeds from the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century. In his article for the *Oxford Handbook of Evangelical Theology* Willard recognizes that the brand of evangelicalism marked by Whitefield, Wesley and Edwards would have little continuity with contemporary version of evangelicalism in America.<sup>717</sup> He sees the evangelical “revivals” of the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and moving into the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as a very different kind of endeavor than the revivalism of the Billy Graham era which swept the country after WWII. The evangelistic “revivals” of Wesley and others intended to “revive” that which was once “alive” but had become listless. These revivals were efforts targeted at retrieving a *protoeuangelion* that targeted Christians and strived to redirect and spur them on toward Christlikeness and righteous living. According to Willard, these earlier evangelicals believed righteous living (*dikaiosune*), not evangelical forms of proselytizing, was the primary means of establishing and bearing witness to the veracity of their faith to non-believers.

*Divine Conspiracy* intones exactly how Willard views the contemporary systems of sin management and the ignominious effect a bar-code type of faith has made on the broader culture of western civilization. He states his hope for *Divine Conspiracy* was to give the gospel of Jesus a new and fresh hearing,

...especially among those who believe they already understand him. In his case...quite frankly, presumed familiarity has led to unfamiliarity, unfamiliarity has led to contempt, and contempt has led to profound ignorance.”<sup>718</sup>

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<sup>716</sup> DC, 303.

<sup>717</sup> Willard, “Discipleship,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Evangelical Theology*, 239

<sup>718</sup> DC, xv.

Thus ignorance and/or apathy for the original message of Jesus and its effects has allowed other intentions and motives to overpower and control evangelical Christianity, essentially separating the religion from its namesake, and thus eliminating the impetus of the movement altogether.

In conforming the gospel of Jesus to fit these contemporary motives, Willard proposes the message has ceased to make sense and secondly seeks to elicit compliance only from moralizing the negative. Willard believes the message Jesus presented must remain,

...free of the deadening legalisms, political sloganeering and dogmatic traditionalism long proven by history to be soul-crushing dead ends. Obviously [the gospel Jesus himself believed and taught] does not come to us now, and this is a fact widely recognized.<sup>719</sup>

The implications of Willard's statements here are stunning to consider. They also reveal the heart of what may reveal the single differentiating insight into Willardian theology. Simply stated, Willard seems to be communicating that the vision of the Kingdom of God, or the entire point of the enterprise of Christianity itself, has been altered over time in such a way that the corpus of the entire vision or mission of God has been either lost or replaced by another message. Willard is unqualifying in his statement that

...serious difficulties currently bar people of good intent from an effectual understanding of Jesus' gospel for life and discipleship in the kingdom...If we cannot remove [these difficulties] no gospel we bring can have the natural tendency to lead onward into a life of discipleship to Jesus and to personal fulfillment in the kingdom of the heavens.<sup>720</sup>

It is not an exaggeration to suggest that Willard's critique of contemporary evangelicalism places him as one who generally views the enterprise as focused on objectives contradictory to those presented as the *missio Dei* throughout the whole of

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<sup>719</sup> DC, 59.

<sup>720</sup> Ibid.

Scripture. Secondly, Willard also senses the institutions and organizations of evangelicalism have largely ignored or turned away from the application of Jesus' specific teachings and their values. Throughout his works, Willard continually illuminates his views on the results of the re-institutionalization and advocacy of a different, and one could say, un-Christlike, gospel. That these alternative gospels are widely professed from American pulpits and embodied in a multitude of Christian organizations is the single reason Willard proposes to explain the impotency of the Christian religion as the beneficial force in contemporary society.

Further, Willard's alternative vision of the Kingdom is not to be confused as a critique of a slightly misguided recontextualization of Christianity. Willard is not suggesting that the evangelical gospels currently articulated are biblically orthodox but only overly contextualized to a 21<sup>st</sup> century culture. Rather he suggests the evangelical message itself has become substantially and essentially altered to focus on ends different than those valued and presented by Jesus. However, with ample weight given to Willard's claims of un-orthodoxy mentioned above, perhaps his greatest critique is levied at the exclusivity modern evangelicalism currently places on the "conversion" experience as opposed to the decision for discipleship to Jesus. Willard states that current expressions of evangelicalism within more conservative and fundamentalist churches since WW II have presented "very little...about discipleship except what is anecdotal—and there is not a lot of that."<sup>721</sup>

All of these previous critiques and the alternative gospels that have been articulated earlier result in the increasing distance between stated beliefs in appropriate Christian doctrines and the application of said beliefs in the lives of evangelical proponents. In street language, Willard suggests the evangelical "talk" is not matched by the evangelical "walk."

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<sup>721</sup> Ibid.

In Willard's view, a doctrine of belief that does not entail commensurate action is ineffectual. Further, Willard contends such an understanding of belief itself is both psychologically impossible and biblically false.<sup>722</sup>

Nevertheless, the impotence of belief has grown within recent forms of evangelicalism. Willard argues the spread of conservative forms of evangelicalism, which developed a resistance to acknowledging Jesus as a master teacher, is a key factor. To consider or advocate for Jesus as a teacher became a "code" word that hinted at a liberal theology which dismissed Jesus' divinity and valued only his wise teachings. This conservative generalization resulted in the gradual elimination of the view of Jesus as a master teacher of life, one who actually is giving direction on how to live. Instead conservative theology elevated Jesus sacrificial value, highlighting the "lamb of God" characteristic to coincide with their particular atonement theory.

On the left, considering Jesus as a good teacher and not also "divine" equally diminishes Christ's influence. Such a view relegates Jesus to only one of many good teachers with something valuable to add to the cacophony of wisdom offered down through the ages. As such his exclusivity as the Son of God reduces confidence in his claims and the veracity of his miraculous deeds. Consequently, evangelicals on both the "left" and "right" marginalize their faith in and knowledge of Jesus altogether. The evidence for this claim, in Willard's perspective, is found in the disappearance of moral knowledge and the elimination of the Christian worldview as a field of knowledge altogether.

This Willard sees as a failure of the Church to take the God-given, and critically essential place within broader society to both articulate, demonstrate and make manifest the wisdom of Christ. This is not simply the wisdom which argues for social activism, or the

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<sup>722</sup> Ibid.

wisdom which articulates a means of attaining bliss in the afterlife. Nor is it a wisdom that advocates for membership in a local church. Rather Willard sees the Church catholic as given the unique task as a beacon to the world for the demonstration of the knowledge of Christ as the wisdom of God.<sup>723</sup> Such knowledge must be proven in the display of knowledge of Christ and his ways and a character formed around the essence of agape love. This, in Willard's view, was the divine plan for evangelism all along.<sup>724</sup>

It is the strength and vitality of Willard's position on the lack of proper vision in evangelicalism that initially struck a deep chord in the hearts and minds of many young ECM and postevangelical leaders. Combined with their negative encounters of conservative neo-evangelicalism's wrath-filled premillennial dispensationalism, the polarization of the Religious Right and the individualistic consumerism of the CGM, Willard's reasons forged an ideological connection with the ECM. This connection would eventually lead to new attempts at reimagining evangelical theology and to the consideration of different praxis by which to express the gospel of Jesus in a 21<sup>st</sup> century context. *Divine Conspiracy* positioned Willard as a popular theologian in the manner of C. S. Lewis, offering a rather radical revision to and/or protest against much of what had become modern evangelical orthodoxy.

As a result, *Divine Conspiracy* became the work many in the ECM still recognize and point to as a monumental catalyst for their intellectual and spiritual transformation as both Christians and leaders. Rob Bell, arguably the most renowned postmodern pastor, author and speaker to emerging generations of Christians notes, “[Divine Conspiracy] has been the single most influential book in my life. I’ve read that same copy over and over again. Richard Foster said it's the book he waited all of his life for. I can say the same

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<sup>723</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:6.

<sup>724</sup> DC, 311.

thing.”<sup>725</sup> A similar refrain comes from Dieter Zander. Zander took nearly two years studying *Divine Conspiracy* after he left the mega-church model of Willow Creek. His well-worn copy of the book provided a guide in the reconfiguring and deconstruction of his theological and ecclesiological understandings. Notable Emerging Church leaders Mark Scandrette, Todd Hunter, Linda Bergquist and Rod Washington accompanied Zander in this deconstruction of evangelicalism all using Willard’s *Divine Conspiracy* to chart their way into unfamiliar waters.<sup>726</sup>

Willard encouraged this change and met with several young leaders at critical points during their deconstruction of modern evangelical ethos. His initial support was indicative of his belief that, as a whole, mainstream Christian leaders were not demonstrating or teaching about the availability and potency of the Kingdom of God. The obvious demonstrative failure of this leadership responsibility, in Willard’s view, represented the cause and effect of an increasingly inconsequential evangelical church. Willard uses a common saying among business management experts, “Their system is perfectly designed to yield the results they are getting.”<sup>727</sup>

Willard continues to encourage and support many postevangelical leaders. He travels widely to speak to those groups both inside and outside the ECM who are inserting a protoevangelical vision of the gospel new contexts. It is to a select group of these leaders and their organizations that we now turn.

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<sup>725</sup> Rob Bell, “Email Correspondence With Author,” (10-1-2009).

<sup>726</sup> Dallas Willard and Dieter Zander, “The Apprentices: What is Spiritual Formation and How Does a Church Do it? A Professor and a Pastor Discuss a New Language of Making Disciples,” *Leadership Journal* Vol. 26, no. 3 (Summer, 2005), 20-25.

<sup>727</sup> DC, 58.

# CHAPTER FOUR

# ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH

## *Introduction*

This chapter presents a synopsis of the ethnographic data collected from four evangelical groups currently manifesting and applying a form of Willardian theology and praxis previously described. Of these four evangelical organizations two are parachurch groups (Re:Imagine and ACCD) and two are church congregations (Holy Trinity and Oak Hills). As described in Chapter 2, each of the four groups were initially chosen due to published accounts of their affiliation with Willardian theology.<sup>728</sup> There were two stages in the ethnographic research process. Stage 1 involved survey data collected in each group and analyzed to discover if and to what degree Willardian theology was both present, understood and applied.<sup>729</sup> The analysis of this data suggested each organization demonstrated broad awareness and integration of Willard's work and therefore validated a more extensive ethnographic investigation.<sup>730</sup> In stage 2 the qualitative ethnographic data was collected to discover why Willardian theology was chosen and how it has been applied in each context.

Thus the ethnographies serve this thesis in two primary ways. First, they demonstrate that Willardian theology is being implemented in separate evangelical contexts. Secondly, the ethnographies provide insight into how and why Willardian theology is being both developed and interpreted within each context. The ethnographic

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<sup>728</sup> As mentioned in Chapter 2, each of the leaders of the four subject groups had previously published works describing their interest, affiliation or support of Willard's theology. See pages 61-62.

<sup>729</sup> The quantitative data acted as a primer to determine if the larger group demonstrated an overall awareness of Willardian theology. Each group was presented with the same standardized interview questionnaire. The results provided interesting and enlightening insights that warrant further investigation and discussion in the future. However, for this thesis the interview data was used primarily to determine if and to what degree the larger groups had integrated the Willardian theology articulated in the published works of their corresponding leaders. Thus, the quantitative data was collected to determine if a longer, more detailed ethnographic study was appropriate. See page 54-66.

<sup>730</sup> See Appendix 6.



data of Stage 2 validated the position that Willardian theology, when planted in different evangelical or postevangelical “soils” can produce similar yet unique varieties of protoevangelical theology and praxis within contemporary postevangelical contexts.

Due to the size and scope of the interview data, in combination with the qualitative data collected from the ethnographies in Stage 2, it was necessary to appropriately delimit and confine which data necessitated further analysis and reporting in this thesis.<sup>731</sup> After the Stage 1 and Stage 2 survey data was collected, and the theological dynamics of the larger group was analyzed, a significant connection was discovered. Each particular group’s understanding and application of Willardian theology appeared consistently connected to that of its particular leaders. Interviews and observations revealed that collectively, each group displayed significant parallels and alignment with the theological vision, rationale and intentionality conveyed and represented by their respective leaders. Additionally, an overwhelming majority of interviewees stated their original introduction to Willard’s work came at the behest of their leaders.

Therefore, to best present the results of the ethnographic data in this chapter, a decision was made to increase focus on the roles and influences of the key leaders of each group, including their histories and motivations for pursuing Willardian theology.<sup>732</sup> Hence by pursuing the key influencers within each group, this thesis is best able to articulate the common denominators and impetuses present in the larger majority in a more reasonable

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<sup>731</sup> The amount of data collected from the analysis of the published works of each leader of the four subject organizations, in conjunction with the quantitative interview data and the qualitative ethnographic data is impossible to provide within the limits of this thesis. All of the data collected was interesting and will provide opportunity for future research and publications. However choices were made by this author regarding what aspects to focus on within each of the research frames.

<sup>732</sup> Ironically, it is just this sort of key leadership dynamic which highlights incarnational, demonstrative modeling of Christlike living that Willard suggests is essential for refocusing ecclesial groups toward a more protoevangelical vision of the gospel. See KCT, chapter 8.

and organized manner.<sup>733</sup> Additionally, such a leadership focus fits with Ammerman's argument that the role of leadership in a congregation or ecclesial organization is paramount in the formation and structure of each of the Ecological, Cultural and Process frameworks. Furthermore, working in concert with Ammerman's frameworks, sociologist Jackson Carroll argues leadership in religious contexts is often expected to lead by first explaining, and then modeling, the changes or innovations they advocate.<sup>734</sup> It is exactly this "setting of the tone"—which Carroll argues is crucial to congregational life—that was witnessed in the dynamics of each of the four groups studied and therefore validated a more concentrated investigation into the influence and direction of key leaders.

This chapter is organized by three goals. The first goal is to present the ethnographic research of the four subject groups and their leaders in a narrative form. These narratives are interspersed with quotes from participant and leader interviews, published material, eyewitness observation, etc. as appropriate.<sup>735</sup> Secondly, to organize the topics of investigation each ethnographic narrative is divided into three sub-sections. These sub-sections represent the categories of the Ecological, Cultural and Process frames that are present in Ammerman's methodological approach to congregations discussed earlier.<sup>736</sup> Moreover, in reviewing the ethnographic data it was concluded that each of the four subject organizations and their leaders tended to prioritize a few key tenets or "themes" of

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<sup>733</sup> This is not to suggest by any measure these organizations are "top heavy" or in some way dictatorial in nature. Such is not the case. Interviewees demonstrated a wide variety of opinions that differed from their leaders on a variety of subjects. However, in relation to Willardian theology, there was a significant degree of agreement.

<sup>734</sup> Jackson Carroll, "Leadership and the Study of Congregation," in *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook*, ed. Nancy T. Ammerman and others, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), 167-195.

<sup>735</sup> As mentioned in Chapter 2, each participant received and signed a disclosure and consent form. All interviewees were given the choice of remaining anonymous and to reference their interview in connection with a pseudonym. Each request for anonymity was honored. None of the group leaders desired to remain anonymous. In the process of compiling the data this author chose to apply uniform anonymity of all comments attributed to group participants in this thesis.

<sup>736</sup> See description of Ammerman's frames pages 47-49, 62-66.

Willardian theology over others. This is not to suggest the four organizations or their leaders are not both aware of the entirety of Willard's protoevangelical vision and place value on Willard's total corpus. However, it appears that the "soil" of each group, with its unique individual and corporate qualities, have chosen to focus on certain precepts of Willardian theology over others. Therefore, in an attempt to highlight these distinctive foci each ethnography ends with a brief summary to review these key, self-selected prioritizations.<sup>737</sup> Finally, the last goal is to provide an analysis of the shared themes between groups along with a discussion of the possible implications and potential relevance of the other evangelical groups and/or evangelicalism in general.

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<sup>737</sup> The complete summary of the quantitative data is presented in Appendix 6 and includes further analysis of other statistically significant findings.

## Re:Imagine Ethnography

### *Ecological Frame*

Re:Imagine is a unique organization in both its application of Willardian theology and its overarching structure. Its uniqueness comes as a result of many factors, some of which will be investigated as a part of this ethnography. However, the organizations distinctiveness appears to be most directly shaped by the personality and history of its founder Mark Scandrette, and his inimitable forty-year journey within American evangelicalism. Therefore this section will consider the historic ties between Re:Imagine and its founder. It will discuss the distinct manner in which Scandrette's theological evolution, experiences and perspectives on evangelical Christianity have combined to forge the ecological framework for Re:Imagine's pursuit of Willard's protoevangelical vision.

Scandrette's biography reveals deep evangelical roots and illustrates a never-ceasing effort to contextualize the Christian gospel into his contemporary setting.<sup>738</sup> His biography illustrates how Scandrette's story became interwoven into the genesis of Re:Imagine and the formation of its current ecological ethos. This history is significant not only to the formation of Scandrette's personal faith, but also to the creation of the Re:Imagine organization. What his biography also provides is insight into the genesis of Scandrette's restorationist ideals, his desire and belief in the ability to recapture the Christian experience of first century believers, and a growing awareness of the need for social justice, compassion for the poor and disenfranchised members of society. These priorities have been a part of Scandrette's Christian journey since childhood and have remained significant in his experience of and reflection on American evangelicalism. These

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<sup>738</sup> A fuller description of his early formation is provided in Appendix 2a.

same priorities led him to a profound and prolonged engagement and application of key tenets in Willardian theology. Hence Scandrette's lifelong pursuit is one that matched well with Willard's protoevangelical vision.

The beginnings of Scandrette's professional engagement with America evangelicalism began at the age of 24, when he and his wife accepted an associate pastor position in the largest Baptist church in Minnesota. The decision to move into a more institutional religious church structure from his previous position as a minister in Child Evangelism Fellowship (CEF) was considered by many, even his family, as unusual. Scandrette now suggests his motivation at the time came from a desire to join the ample resources of his church to the growing needs of the surrounding community. CEF brought Scandrette into contact with mounting numbers of sexually and physically abused children. He believed connecting to established churches with greater support structures would better facilitate ministering to the needs of at-risk children. Scandrette hoped the institutional church would be as moved as he to the plight of children and use their influence and wherewithal in support of a worthy cause.

Soon after Scandrette joined the church staff the senior pastor left his position leaving Scandrette to assume most of the leadership responsibilities. As a young leader Scandrette attempted to integrate his views on intentional discipleship, holistic spirituality and ministry to marginalized children into the values and purposes of the church. However, the closer Scandrette's ministry focused on the disenfranchised members of his community, the more he realized how oppositional his "official" job responsibilities as a paid employee of the church were in comparison to the actions and priorities modeled by Jesus regarding life in the Kingdom of God and his focus on the impending needs of the poor.

That move was met with mixed success for me. It put me right into this thing that has been so troubling for me over the years. The average church has this mass of 300, 400, or 500 people that sit and listen to these sermons

every Sunday and yet really don't do anything about what they hear. And therefore there's no real community happening, there's no real transformation happening in people. Mostly people are attending only because they're conditioned to go. That was not ok for me.<sup>739</sup>

Scandrette began to recognize a growing sense of exclusivism and separatist tendencies within the congregation. Often couched in terms of a desire for holiness or to eschew worldliness, Scandrette sensed instead a level of fear that produced social anxiety and relational apprehension. To justify the fear, theological rationalizations of personal piety were often used to create distance between the church culture and broader society. He describes recognizing evangelicalism often involved “an enveloping fear of social interaction, a desire to remain disconnected from culture, which also came with varying degrees of anti-intellectualism that valued only traditional thought, and a resistance to taking any form of risks.”<sup>740</sup>

Additionally, Scandrette recognized a growing trend of disengagement among young adults from religious life. High school and college age involvement in traditional activities and worship services of the church had waned. While attending Bethel Seminary, Scandrette started to research and discuss the surrounding dynamics and cultural shifts attributed to modern and postmodern epistemology and philosophy. He remembers professors and students just beginning to discover the Gen X demographics and their potential connotations. While in seminary, Scandrette was relieved to discover the changes he and other evangelicals in his generation were experiencing were apart of a larger sociological, theological and philosophical transition occurring in the broader culture.

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<sup>739</sup> Mark. Scandrette, “Interview With Mark Scandrette” interviewed by Charles Erlam, San Francisco., November 19, 2008.

<sup>740</sup> Mark. Scandrette, “Research Interview” interviewed by Author, San Francisco, May 23, 2010.

Scandrette recalls the initial discussion of postmodernity as providing a valid framework to explain the conundrum he had long experienced but could not adequately articulate.<sup>741</sup>

Soon, his new understanding of the cultural and contextual conflicts between modern and postmodern paradigms allowed Scandrette to become an asset to his denomination by assisting leaders in understanding the nature of the paradigmatic cultural and epistemological shifts occurring around them. By 1996-1997 the denominational leadership invited Scandrette to hold workshops on subjects ranging from postmodernity, popular culture and the need for re-contextualization of the gospel to an increasingly secular culture. Scandrette's understanding and ability to articulate these dilemmas brought him an offer to plant a denominational church within the Baptist General Conference (BGC). He accepted the offer and for two years prayed, researched, planned and gathered others to develop a strategy for planting a congregation in San Francisco. His goal was to found a church that could be a pioneer in the new postmodern, post-foundationalist, and secular culture.<sup>742</sup> The progressive and uncharted cultural waters of San Francisco presented just such an opportunity. Scandrette describes the new church plant was structured as an organization that sought to embody all the key values, vision and distinctives he had come to believe were essential in his Christian journey to that point.

We were an interesting mix of that literalism and cultural engagement. We took a very personal approach of asking, "If our generation is so disconnected from the life of Jesus, it's our fault for not being better carriers of that message." We were looking at social injustice. We were focused on personal spiritual formation, and we were also pretty flexible on our structure and organization. It was exciting. Very formative and as real and earthy as you can imagine. It was both a beautiful and very, very hard

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<sup>741</sup> Scandrette, Research Interview, May 2010.

<sup>742</sup> Scandrette writes, "As an interesting side note, when people were using the term postmodern in Evangelical circles-- it was used as a missiological term-- a people group to reach. The shift to "emergence" language was not about a "them" but about "us" trying to find a way of faith that made sense with our current ecological understanding of the world. Mark Scandrette, Email correspondence with the author, June, 2011.

transition.<sup>743</sup>

However, the move to San Francisco was more of a cultural shock than Scandrette could have imagined. He routinely met individuals in his surrounding community whose understanding of Christianity provoked deep antagonistic reactions. Many San Franciscans held Christian religion directly responsible for many of the worst evils inflicted on humanity throughout history. San Franciscans laid the inquisitions, slavery in America, homophobia, religiously sponsored war, religious intolerance, and the totalitarian or absolutist positions of conservative right-wing political parties, all at the feet of a Christianity gone bad. Scandrette soon realized that much of San Franciscan culture believed modern evangelicalism demonstrated an obvious hypocritical contradiction to the ethics and teachings of Jesus.<sup>744</sup> Further, Scandrette would routinely find highly devoted individuals living committed lives to other religious beliefs that demonstrated a commitment to ethics and morals far exceeding those of many professing evangelicals. For many San Franciscans, it mattered little what one professed to believe. Instead integration of personal belief into the character of one's life needed to be demonstrated before any level of legitimacy or credibility was extended.

The level of resistance was difficult for Scandrette and his new church planters to handle. Their desire to assimilate into the culture was often thwarted and people were suspicious of their motives. Yet, in the midst of such consistent rejection, Scandrette soon came to recognize any version of the gospel that demanded modern, culturally or politically conservative messages that highlighted the preservation of puritanical ideals and focused specifically on moralistic correction of societal evils could never be accepted in the San Francisco context. However, what did resonate with people was the intriguing mystery and

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<sup>743</sup> Scandrette, Erlam interview, 2008.

<sup>744</sup> Mark Scandrette, "Ethnography Interview" interviewed by Author, San Francisco, June 24, 2010.



ethics found in the “philosophy and teachings” of Jesus.<sup>745</sup> San Franciscans were not seeking answers on how to receive forgiveness for their sins or where they would spend their eternal destiny. They were interested in better understanding the teachings of Jesus and his perspectives on the means by which a new humanity and way of existence was attainable.

In the modern culture (Christians) represent and attempt to conserve tradition and convention. And so too often they are not very interested in revolution or reformation. So I wanted to know how do we learn to get that back? And so we took the approach of articulating the message that the life and teachings of Jesus actually changed things, he changed people, and so Jesus needs to be our teacher. We know him as savior in a soteriological sense, what he represents, but damn... he was actually trying to teach people a new ethic, about a different reality in the kingdom, and this is actually a reality, not just some theory of atonement. He lived and exemplified what is possible in a new humanity, and invited his followers into that possibility... my entire being is reconciled to God and we can be reconciled to one another.<sup>746</sup>

The San Francisco culture proved to be so contrarian, indefinable and often incomprehensible to the traditional evangelical imagination that Scandrette decided to make his church plant into a missiological laboratory. They tried various experiments to both understand their culture and then creatively articulate the gospel into their unique and specific context. At times Scandrette’s attempts to recontextualize the gospel were significantly resisted by his denominational supporters. It seems the idea that Californians required a form of missiological contextualization previously reserved only for foreign peoples in distant jungles taxed the imaginary of many religious leaders beyond their level of comfort and support. In time, financial contributions to the church plant began to wane. Yet Scandrette remained undeterred, compiling ethnographic research and deepening his understanding of their surrounding community.

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<sup>745</sup> Scandrette, Research Interview, May, 2010.

<sup>746</sup> Ibid.

This process of investigation and recontextualization of the evangelical gospel into contemporary postmodern cultures marked the birth of Re:Imagine. Started as a think tank of San Francisco church planters, missionaries, pastors and musicians Re: Imagine gathered those interested in rediscovering both the message and the means of communicating the gospel of Jesus into a relatively hostile postmodern, post-Christian environment. For Scandrette, Re:Imagine also provided much needed supportive and collaborative relationships during a period when his church plant struggled for survival. The cohort provided likeminded and kindred spirits who both encouraged, challenged and sharpened one another's focus and goals.

An original participant of Re:Imagine was Dieter Zander. Zander was one of the first Christian authors and pastors to articulate the unique issues of the “Gen X” or “postmodern generation” emerging inside American evangelicalism.<sup>747</sup> Scandrette was aware of Zander's successful church plant in Southern California, and perhaps one of the first “emerging” churches in the US.<sup>748</sup> After moving to Chicago for four years to work with Bill Hybels and Willow Creek, Zander and his family became somewhat disillusioned by the CGM ethos and sought a place to return to a more urban setting where they could seek to develop a more holistic Christian expression and experience for themselves and others.<sup>749</sup> Their move to San Francisco brought them into contact with Scandrette.

Dieter, as a Willow Creek celebrity, was a hero to me—and [my wife and I] were inspired to move to San Francisco because of a talk he gave on the

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<sup>747</sup> See pages 135-143.

<sup>748</sup> Zander chronicled the birth and growth of New Song and his reevaluation of evangelicalism in one of the first books on the Gen X movement and the effects of postmodernity in 1996. After several years in Southern California, Bill Hybels recruited the Zander's to a position at Willow Creek Community Church. His task was to develop and build a “church within a church.” The goal was to create a postmodern-minded, more contemporary setting for the Gen X constituency inside the existing structure of Willow Creek. See Tim Celek and Dieter Zander, *Inside the Soul of a New Generation: Insights and Strategies for Reaching Busters* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996).

<sup>749</sup> Dieter Zander and Valerie Zander, “Research Interview” interviewed by Author, Novato, CA., June, 2009.

needs of generation X. So it was an interesting turn of events when the person that had been my hero moved to my city and wanted to collaborate with me.<sup>750</sup>

Another key member of the Re-Imagine group was Linda Bergquist. As a Southern Baptist U.S. missionary tasked with planting churches and serving the Bay Area, Bergquist was also reconsidering how the gospel could best be communicated to an the ever-changing, diverse northern California culture.<sup>751</sup> Together Scandrette, Zander, Bergquist, along with talented musician, pastor and entrepreneur Rod Washington, began to discuss and debate how the sum total of Christian faith and practice could be “re-imagined” in a urban setting like San Francisco. Scandrette remembers,

The four of us said ‘We don’t know how to be Christian in San Francisco,’ and we wanted to see beautiful communities emerge here. But we realize something’s wrong inside of us. We’ve not solved this thing. So over 4 or 5 months we met one day a week for a think-tank where we would look at the gospels, and the gospel of the kingdom... It was great. It was for survival, for me. And then we kind of developed this.... Kingdom theology emerged as the big conclusion of it all. We realized we had gotten the gospel wrong. It was too reductionistic. We realized Jesus is our teacher and we needed to listen to him about how we help people live into his Kingdom. So we started, like a...we called it Kingdom Theology 101, and it was a weekly gathering where we tried to distill what we were learning.<sup>752</sup>

It was in these early sessions that Willard’s theology came to the forefront. Zander had been introduced to Willard’s work while at Willow Creek through his relationship to John Ortberg.<sup>753</sup> The Re:Imagine group pored over Willard’s theology and was especially

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<sup>750</sup> Scandrette, Email correspondence with author, June 21, 2011.

<sup>751</sup> Bergquist writes of some of these conclusions in her co-authored book with and Allan Karr, *Church Turned Inside Out: A Guide for Designers, Refiners, and Re-Aligners* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 201.

<sup>752</sup> Scandrette, Research Interview, May, 2010.

<sup>753</sup> Ortberg is a long time friend and advocate of Willard’s works and was interviewed by phone by this author on April 18, 2011. Some of the first scholarly investigations into Willard’s work were done by Ortberg. Earning his Ph.D from Fuller Theological Seminary in Psychology Ortberg recognized the value of Willard’s work in the field of psychology. See John Ortberg, “Rethinking the Kingdom of God: The Work of Dallas Willard and Some Applications to Psychotherapeutic Practice,” *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* Vol. 14, 4, (Winter, 1995), 306-317. Also, Ortberg’s, *The Life You’ve Always Wanted: Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People* (Philadelphia, PA: Running Press, 2004).

interested in his theo-ontological view of the Kingdom of God presented in *The Divine Conspiracy*. Through many months of discussion the cohort slowly deconstructed their previous evangelical understandings of the teachings of Jesus. This recontextualization also required the reconsideration of the key traditional evangelical doctrines such as soteriology, eschatology, Christology, bibliology and ecclesiology mentioned in Chapter two. Using Willard as a guide, the group eventually re-envisioned evangelical theology and praxis, where they felt appropriate, to their contemporary context. This eventually led the group to consider where and how they might incarnate this newfound articulation of the gospel.

Scandrette recalls this period as a coalescing of decades of theological and spiritual formation and reflection. His initial reconsiderations of the gospel that were first encouraged by his father at a young age, which continued both at CEF and in his first church ministry position, began to coalesce together with the discoveries and ideas of his Re:Imagine cohort. Thus when recalling these events Scandrette remembers his earliest readings of Willard's work elicited a feeling of confirmation to prior decades of pursuing a more authentic Christian faith. Willard's theology was not so much a new conceptualization for Scandrette as perhaps it was for others in the Re:Imagine cohort. Instead, Willard provided Scandrette perhaps a clearer, or fuller explanation and organization of a theology and praxis he had strived to live and articulate most of his life.<sup>754</sup>

After a year of regular discussion, the Re:Imagine cohort agreed their mission was complete and they disbanded.<sup>755</sup> In the process, Scandrette also reached the conclusion to alter his vocational efforts. After gaining permission and blessing from the other

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<sup>754</sup> Scandrette, Research interview, May 23, 2010.

<sup>755</sup> Interviews with Zander, Bergquist and Scandrette revealed fond memories and appreciation for this period of their lives. They now recognize their task was a significant step in what would later be termed the Emerging Church movement. Zander and Bergquist now acknowledge that although the eventual direction the leaders of the EC directed the conversation seems to have diverged significantly from their initial objective, they all agree Re:Imagine played an unknowing yet significant role at the genesis of what later became a much larger reconsideration of evangelical theology and praxis over the next several decades.

participants, Scandrette assumed the Re:Imagine name and created a stand-alone 501c(3) religious ministry focused on developing and implementing the insights gained from the cohort.<sup>756</sup> Instead of attempting to plant a contemporary version of a traditional church, Scandrette formed a more relationally structured, praxis oriented organization devoted to missiological investigation and recontextualization of the gospel. Broadly based on Willard's *essentia Dei* and a theo-ontological vision of God's Kingdom, Scandrette began to shift the intents and purposes of his ministry toward a model more closely representing a training center for Kingdom living.

Ironically, the most formidable challenge for Scandrette was not overcoming the bias of San Franciscans but instead maintaining the support of other evangelicals. Denominational support ceased when Scandrette's ministerial efforts appeared to represent a compromise of the fundamentals qualities they believed were inherent to biblical Christianity. Claims of heresy were bantered about. Scandrette endeavored to validate his intentions, goals and objectives and to substantiate the biblical precedence and doctrinal orthodoxy of his missiological activities. At the time his persuasive efforts were unsuccessful. Shortly after taking the new Re:Imagine organization public, Scandrette recalls that he and his denomination,

... came to a mutual understanding that what we were attempting missionally didn't fit into their paradigm or measurement criteria for a church plant. The most senior [denominational] leaders could [understand] the missiology we were doing... and the deeper Christian spirituality we were pursuing... but the movement was more pragmatic in general and the churches had a difficult time understanding our work... I was really just trying to introduce them to kingdom theology and a more holistic understanding of Christian faith. The resistance was primarily with redefining the gospel—and

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<sup>756</sup> While applying different means, Zander, Scandrette and Bergquist all stated in separate interviews they left the cohort with essentially the same objective and end in mind. Since that time, each in their own way has endeavored to embody and demonstrate the nature of the discipleship and the reality of the Kingdom of God they discovered in Willard's theology. Each speaks very highly of Willard. They consider him one of if not the most formative influence in their lives and ministries and remain very thankful for his contributions.

secondly, with strategies that didn't look like a church—art projects, care for homeless neighbors, interfaith dialogue, etc. . . . I may not have been as diplomatic or generous in my communication back then . . . because in [San Francisco] I could see the offensive effects of [Christians] who claimed to have a superior relationship with God who frankly, were not well formed or Christ-like. I was convinced that incomplete theology was to blame. So, I'm probably a more compassionate communicator now than I was then . . . Ironically, some of the folks who used to be resistant to what I was saying have become dear friends, supporters and “apprentices” if you will. There was some tough soil that needed broken up so new life could sprout. In retrospect we were too far ahead of the curve . . . And to be honest, my restorationist tendencies were an intentional and not so secret critique of the typical suburban seeker church.<sup>757</sup>

Scandrette's critique of the CGM ethos and its hyper focus on individualistic consumer culture clashed significantly with his denominations concepts and strategies for church planting and evangelism. These differences simply were too ideologically opposed for either Scandrette or his denomination to continue working in concert.

Undeterred, Scandrette embedded himself more deeply into the San Francisco culture. He focused on forming communities of people who were seeking answers to questions about what the gospel means to the diverse people and challenges in San Francisco. Scandrette remembers trying many experiments. With trial and error, he and a small group of other Christians kept endeavoring to reach the heart of the eclectic San Franciscan ethos with the gospel of the Kingdom of God. Much of these early efforts are well chronicled in his first book *Soul Graffiti*.<sup>758</sup>

As a result of the wide acceptance of his book and the speaking opportunities which followed, word of Scandrette's experience and influence began to grow. The unique and intriguing nature of his work in San Francisco began to touch the hearts and minds of others interested in discovering a more authentic and transformative Christian experience. His story and the work of Re:Imagine eventually reached more interested ears. Churches in

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<sup>757</sup> Scandrette, Email correspondence, June, 21, 2011.

<sup>758</sup> Scandrette, *Soul Graffiti*, 2007.

the Bay Area began to discover his views on contextualization and missiology. Now coupled with the hard earned credibility of a missionary's experience, Scandrette and Re:Imagine capitalized on his evangelical background and knowledge of Scripture to reach back into the largely conservative evangelical groups who once rejected his methods and message. As more and more church leaders continued trying to understand the paradigm shift occurring within their own communities, Scandrette began to regain his role as a missiological expert and Re:Imagine was again a laboratory where a protoevangelical theology and ecclesiology could be experienced and validated within popular culture.

Today Scandrette and the leadership of Re:Imagine are still attempting to find out how to best embody ecclesiological life in their unique context. They have resisted developing a traditional church model with a building, programmatic organizational structure, regular worship services and sermonizing. Scandrette senses the lingering effects of the self-help, prosperity gospel which dominates much of the CGM's evangelical structure should be avoided. Instead, Scandrette and Re:Imagine leader Adam Klein and Nate Millheim have developed alternative ecclesial structures. These alternative structures, namely the Jesus Dojo concept and the "tribe" gatherings will be discussed in greater detail in the section on Cultural framework.

In summary, Re:Imagine's ecological structure has largely been formed by and around the significant events of its founder's biographical narrative. Scandrette's theology and practice have been formed, reformed and transformed over and against the cultural interpretations, applications and severe limitation of traditional evangelical Christianity in America. For over thirty years Scandrette has continually and diligently pursued what he believed to be an orthodox, Biblical understanding of the Kingdom of God as represented by Jesus in the New Testament and articulated in Willard's vision of the protoevangelical gospel. Re:Imagine has been and continues to be a vehicle to experiment, create and then

re-create a culturally contextualized application for most of Willard's theological understandings. In many ways, by creating such unique and pragmatic applications, Scandrette has taken Willardian praxis to a level that far exceeds what seems imaginable in theory. Scandrette and the leadership of Re:Imagine have formed a unique and vibrant ecology of investigation, experimentation and intrigue into how protoevangelical praxis can and should proceed. It is to the unique Cultural framework that we now turn.

### *Cultural Frame*

Re:Imagine's website describes the organization as a "center for life integration. Fueled by the life and teachings of Christ, we aspire to revolutionize how people live their lives and empower leaders who will revolutionize their communities."<sup>759</sup> This description adequately articulates a unique feature about the culture of Re:Imagine. As a whole, interviews with Re:Imagine participants substantiated a well-engrained focus and commitment to the processes of personal spiritual formation with the specific goal of developing a more Christlike character through discipleship to Jesus. Here the Re:Imagine culture exemplifies both a dedication to the kind of Willardian activism described earlier and a direct link to Willard's VIM prioritization.<sup>760</sup> This section will investigate the four primary means by which Re:Imagine endeavors to embody these transformational values.

First, the Re:Imagine culture does not place primacy on a "personal decision" or on a proclamation of desire to follow the example of Jesus. Rather Re:Imagine participants have formed a culture that focuses almost exclusively on the resulting actions and behaviors that proceed from the fulfillment of a commitment to implement the teachings of Christ. Primarily, these results are experienced and witnessed through the practice of

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<sup>759</sup> See [http://www.reimagine.org/event/%5Bfield\\_date-yyyy%5D/%5Bfield\\_date-mm%5D/%5Bfield\\_date-dd%5D/resonate-city-based-walking-prayer-poetry-ex](http://www.reimagine.org/event/%5Bfield_date-yyyy%5D/%5Bfield_date-mm%5D/%5Bfield_date-dd%5D/resonate-city-based-walking-prayer-poetry-ex) accessed 6-6-2010.

<sup>760</sup> See pages 181-182.



spiritual disciplines and a commitment to communal life. This very pragmatic, results-oriented expectation permeates the goals and objectives of the Re:Imagine organization and best defines their culture ethic. One interviewee stated, “Show me how you live, and I’ll be able to tell what you really believe.” This sentiment best describes the overarching refrain often heard and repeated by others. Belief or professions of faith mean very little to Re:Imagine participants unless substantiated through the lived experience of those in close proximity to one’s life. This pragmatic perspective well represents Willard’s view that a demonstrable presence and effect of a Christlike character is the evangelistic impetus of Jesus’ protoevangelical message.

Secondly, to accomplish this character development objective, every participant interviewed discussed the important role “tribes” play within the Re:Imagine organization. The “tribe” system is the primary and sustained means through which members of Re:Imagine foster their individual and communal goals of spiritual formation and discipleship. Tribes consist of groups of 10-15 participants that gather weekly in the homes of tribe members in various locations across the city. The tribes are relatively independent and have their own leadership and focus. Each tribe is unique and demonstrates a significant degree of autonomy that well represents the distinct blend of the personalities of each group. However, the organizational structure and goals of the different tribes were largely identical.

Members gather weekly for community, fellowship, mutual support, sharing, prayer, discussion of Biblical topics, Eucharist, and the exercise of various spiritual disciplines.<sup>761</sup> Each of the groups visited was originally formed from the efforts of Re:Imagine interns, staff members or developed out of the various learning labs and Jesus

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<sup>761</sup> Specific disciplines witnessed being employed and/or discussed by Re:Imagine participants during the research period were silence, solitude, fasting, prayer, confession, celebration, secrecy, study, contemplation, giving and suffering.

Dojo events led by Scandrette and the Re:Imagine leadership. Tribe participants reliably stated the motive for their involvement was directly attributed their belief in and need for continued personal spiritual growth and maturity. They believed the communal nature of the tribes to be a necessity for authentic, lasting character development. The tribe activities routinely provided opportunities for open sharing, confession and discussion of areas of progress and improvement. Encouragement was provided to those struggling, with celebration given for those overcoming significant obstacles. Financial assistance and networking of relationships was also provided to those looking for work or struggling to pay monthly expenses. A tithe was collected that paid some of the expenses of the Re:Imagine organization but also was available to be allocated as directed by individual tribes.

Interviews with tribe members also highlighted the importance of the tribal vows. Each tribe was committed to the same seven vows originally written by Scandrette and Nate Millheim. The vows come in the form of a poem and act as a cohesive bond within the tribes and help create a shared sense of commitment to one another and to the purposes of the tribe itself.<sup>762</sup> Vows appear to have been memorized by most tribe members and were routinely recited at each tribe gathering. Some interviewees expressed significant amounts of emotions when discussing the vows since they represent the first time some tribe members were presented with a life choice important enough to require a vow.

Interviewees also suggested the act of stating the vow, the responsibility a vow demands, and the commitment a vow represents, all combine to create a heightened sense of meaning and consequence within the tribe culture. Scandrette describes the vows as proceeding from,

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<sup>762</sup> See addendum 2.

...a thorough and systematic study of the gospels to develop these categories (we identified 5 or 6 but added a 7th “love” that would encompass them all. Our language for these categories was determined by our context. What I’m trying to emphasize is that we sought to be quite methodical in our approach to “teaching everything” that Jesus commanded. The 7 words gave a succinct picture of the kind of life we were trying to invite people into. “Wholeness” or “integration” are words that seemed to describe the reality of the kingdom in language that would connect with the longings of the people around us.<sup>763</sup>

Accordingly, as the vows are recited, the tribe gatherings often took on a degree of seriousness, solemnity and intense reflection. While displaying regular periods of lighthearted and jovial social engagement, there were also prolonged moments of somber earnestness to the gatherings that conveyed a level of gravity to the subjects discussed and individuals involved.

In addition to the vows, each of the tribes also committed to “rhythms.” Rhythms are defined as regular events that each tribe member endeavors to develop and maintain consistent pursuit of in their spiritual maturity. The rhythms include daily morning and evening prayer, daily Scripture reading, weekly communal prayer, monthly commitment to giving, quarterly sharing of created artifacts, yearly silent retreat, and yearly disinvestment of certain possessions.<sup>764</sup> Tribe members admitted to a significant amount of flexibility in the application of the rhythms. Some members admitted to a degree of laxity in the rhythms that was greater than they felt comfortable admitting. Many expressed a desire to grow in those areas. This inconsistency was a regular topic of conversation in the tribe gatherings. Yet there was no sense of condemnation in the discussion nor was there a view presented that suggested the rhythms provided a methodological means that assured a certain end or were evidence of the presence or absence of some existential quality. Instead the rhythms

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<sup>763</sup> Scandrette, Research Interview, May, 2010.

<sup>764</sup> These are also found on the Re:Imagine website. See <http://www.reimagine.org/tribes/rhythms>.

were presented as an opportunity to experience God in daily life in new and increasingly fulfilling ways.

Theologically, the tribe discussions represented doctrinal beliefs that were predominantly consistent with conservative evangelicalism. The Bible was routinely the centerpiece of discussion and was referred to and contemplated more than any other single topic. Interestingly, no official “teacher” or “teaching” is given in the tribe meetings. Instead a discussion leader would guide others through a topic or a biblical passage, opening a discussion for all to comment on and share insights about. This style of learning and discussion appeared to represent a significant value to the group. It allowed no central figure to dominate the discussion and every voice was given equal footing and recognition. There was very little open disagreement witnessed between group members either, although discussions were often lively and animated. Varying opinions and perspectives were shared but few summative answers or final perspective were offered or settled on.

Although such a process of learning may be problematic at times and allow for the proliferation of inaccurate or false statements of fact, this researcher witnessed no such occurrence. Scandrette describes this mode of theological reflection as common in many emerging communities because

We believed that local theology is an important “work of the people” i.e. a Midrash. Although Nate [Millheim] and I, in particular, had a good foundation in biblical literacy, we didn’t want to be teachers of the Bible—but teachers of “the way.” Many of the folks involved were tired of endless Bible teaching without appropriate application... so we went with what we felt had been missing from most people’s experience—participatory engagement in living out the ramifications of the text.<sup>765</sup>

This commentary points decidedly to an application of Willard’s bibliology and his contention that authentic biblical reflection and appreciation of Scriptural authority is

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<sup>765</sup> Scandrette, Ethnography Interview, June 24, 2010.

demonstrated specifically through the application and obedience to its truths in the lives of its readers.<sup>766</sup>

The majority of the tribe members come from evangelical backgrounds. Very few tribe members were new to the Christian faith. A minority group of tribe members came from other Christian mainline or Catholic traditions. However, only those from evangelical backgrounds openly admitted to experiencing high levels of disenchantment with his or her past religious experience. Yet despite this seeming weariness of all things “evangelical,” interviewees also maintained many core evangelical doctrines regarding subjects such as the atonement, salvation and Scripture.<sup>767</sup> This would appear to contradict the opinions of many opponents of Emerging Church culture and theology.

Discussions in tribe gatherings most often centered on a passage or concept from Scripture. However, tribe participants also spent a good deal of time discussing and contemplating contemporary Christian authors. Many in the tribes appeared well read in the areas of discipleship and spiritual formation. Willard was cited as a reference source in tribe gatherings although less than half of those interviewed reported actually having read Willard’s work. However, nearly all interviewees were familiar with his name and reflected a general awareness of this theology.<sup>768</sup> Scandrette and other interviewees tended to shy away from endorsing the opinions, advice or insights of outside “experts” or “authorities.” Instead Re:Imagine leaders and participants value discerning their own lived experience of

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<sup>766</sup> On this topic Scandrette suggests generational factors play a key role in the differing prioritization of doctrine in contemporary evangelical and postevangelical Christian contexts. “I think some of this is attributable to generational dynamics. For “Gen X,” consistency of belief was important—and we could see that when our thinking shifted in one area, it needed to change in other areas as well. With “Gen Y,” they seem more open to action and practice—even if their theology isn’t well thought out. My sense is that “Gen Y” was raised more in the seeker church, with less Biblical literacy or theological indoctrination—so they question their assumptions less, because they have always held beliefs more casually. Conversely, [Gen X] tends to be less pious but more theologically conventional.” Mark. Scandrette, “Follow-Up Interview” interviewed by Author, Atlanta, GA., November, 7, 2010.

<sup>767</sup> See quantitative data in Appendix 6.

<sup>768</sup> Ibid.

applying insight and knowledge offered by others. The discussion and weighing of the opinions of others was almost always couched in first person engagement and experience.

This appears to be an application of the postmodern hesitancy to unwittingly accept or apply any modern rationalism and authoritarianism without first gauging effectiveness in practice. This very hands on approach to knowledge claims was applied to Willardian theology in the tribe settings as well. Scandrette is critical of leaders in what he calls the spiritual formation “cult” in and around in Southern California who “just got good at rearticulating Willard’s ideas without integrating them into a radicalized practice and structural changes.”<sup>769</sup> One can see Scandrette’s critique as reminiscent of the same assessment Willard makes of the theological myopia inherent to the sin management gospels of both the “right” and “left” mentioned earlier. Therefore the culture of Re:Imagine within the tribe settings appears most interested in discovering new means by which to engage and understand their culture with the message of the Kingdom of God and not in the theological or theoretical issues bantered about within the larger framework of evangelical Christianity and its pundits. It was this focus on the lived experiences of everyday life that was most often referenced as the reason why participants initially sought out Re:Imagine and subsequently remained committed to their tribe involvement.

The third culturally shaping factor in Re:Imagine is the formational effect of the Jesus Dojo’s and learning labs. A Dojo is an Asian term describing a studio where the art and discipline of karate or Judo is learned and practiced.<sup>770</sup> In every karate Dojo there is a

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<sup>769</sup>Scandrette, Email correspondence, June, 2011. Additionally, only the leaders of Re:Imagine seemed interested or broadly informed concerning the nature and significance of the Emerging Church, its theology, potential impact on broader American Christianity or its leadership. The entire subject of the Emerging Church movement seemed to elicit very muted responses with little to no curiosity about the subject. Most participants displayed little to no interest in being labeled either as part of, nor being separate from, the Emerging Church movement.

<sup>770</sup> For a detailed explanation see Dave Lowry, *In the Dojo : The Rituals and Etiquette of the Japanese Martial Arts*, (Boston, Mass.: Weatherhill, 2006).

master teacher or instructor called a *sensei*. The *sensei* is in charge of communicating the art of karate to his students. Scandrette and fellow leader Adam Klein began to play with the concept of a Dojo due to the similarities between a first century concept of a Yeshiva. Like a Dojo, a Jewish Yeshiva is hosted by a rabbi that instructs disciples in the disciplines and teachings of Torah. Scandrette envisioned a similar concept where Christians could gather together with an instructor to apply a Dojo-like ethic of intentional, focused, engagement of disciplined practices found in the way of Jesus. The result is what Scandrette calls the Jesus Dojo.<sup>771</sup>

In discussing the genesis of the Jesus Dojo concept, Scandrette recalled how he, Millheim and Klein spent years speaking in public on the nature of the Kingdom of God and the concept of Jesus as an instructor into the ways of living life to its fullest. Yet they perceived little systemic transformation actually resulted from these large group conferences settings. Further, Scandrette recognized that those from more traditional evangelical churches, that highlighted worship services attendance and doctrinal-centric theology, had the most difficulty transitioning into the Re:Imagine ethos. Speaking of the clash between traditional evangelical praxis and his concept of the Dojo Scandrette describes evangelicalism as often caught up in,

...a lot of heady stuff and vague notions about what the Kingdom of God is. And we [at Re:Imagine] were trying to live and be church with [evangelicals] who didn't get it yet. So how do you do that? How do you help people understand the nature of the church and the nature of the gospel who think they have it all figured out already? So finally I said, "I think there's enough of that. Here's what we see. The message of Jesus was about a reality that is now available. It was funded by his life, his death, burial and resurrection, and some power that came out of all that. And so [Jesus] needs to be our rabbi for living in this new way. And what we need is an experimental space where we can try and step out systematically and learn to obey what he taught. So we set up a series of experiments... We wanted people to experience, not just believe in or about the nature of God and his

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<sup>771</sup> See Mark Scandrette, *Practicing the Way of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press, 2011),

Kingdom reality.<sup>772</sup>

At its base level, the Dojo is an organized time to both learn about then practice the teachings of Jesus in a supportive and encouraging community. As an example, Scandrette writes about a specific Dojo focused on wealth and material possessions.<sup>773</sup> Looking at the teachings of Jesus regarding generosity, specifically the discussion in Luke 3:11 where Jesus suggests a person with two coats to share with those who have none, Scandrette and Millheim developed a two month experiment they called *HAVE2GIVE1*. To pursue this concept, a group of individuals gathered to investigate Jesus teachings in light of their current experiences and resistances to generosity. They conducted inventories of their possessions, discussed some of their addictions to consumerism and the hurdles, biases and fears that often prevented them from extending generosity to those in need. The group eventually began discerning which of their possession to keep, what to give away and what to sell and give the proceeds to charity.

The process of applying the teachings of Jesus regarding possessions brought to the surface a number of deeply seated issues, concerns, desires and inhibitions; all of which were openly discussed and worked through as a group. Hence the goal of the Dojo is to take seriously the call of discipleship to Jesus by learning to obey his commands and teachings in very tangible and transformative ways. It is Scandrette's attempt at fulfilling the Willardian call to both envision the Kingdom of God, decide to enter it with intentional action and then employing the means of growth.<sup>774</sup> The Dojo is also the fruit of

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<sup>772</sup> Scandrette, Follow-up interview, November, 2010.

<sup>773</sup> Scandrette articulates and explains in great detail the concepts and exercises of the Jesus DoJo concept in *Practicing the Way of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press, 2011),

<sup>774</sup> This is again a representation of the VIM pattern discussed in Willard's *Renovation of the Heart*. See page 181.



Scandrette's intense reconsideration of evangelical Christianity which began during his time and CEF and continued with Zander and Bergquist in the original Re:Imagine cohort.

Scandrette often calls the Dojo process an “experiment” or a “learning lab” for two reasons. First, he concedes no one knows exactly what will happen as a result of engaging the teaching of Jesus. There is a distinctly divine and thus mysterious or mystical nature to engaging the Christian life and placing ones trust in the way of life Jesus articulated. Hence a position of humility is essential, admitting to the inherent degree of uncertainty within the process of learning. Secondly, an experiment by nature is an opportunity to test if changing a specific decision or behavior will produce a beneficial result.<sup>775</sup> Like Willard, Scandrette contends discipleship to Jesus is a self-validating activity. Yet transformation requires intentionality in order to be experiential and validating.

The whole idea is, let's look at what Jesus said and then do it. Then we'll reflect on this experience and say... “What happened to us? How can we make this an ongoing rhythm and commitment in our lives?” That's the Jesus Dojo. It is an experiment that explores the teaching and example of Jesus and a group of people come up with a project and tangible action based on a teaching of Jesus within a conversation about the real needs and opportunities of their cultural context.<sup>776</sup>

The Dojo experiments create a culture within the Re:Imagine organization at large that is expectant of change, embraces personal evolution and looks optimistically at the process of introspection and contemplation. However, the most powerful impact of the Dojo on the Re:Imagine culture is the overt expectation of realized effort in the pursuit of Christlikeness. As a whole, Re:Imagine dogmatically holds to the belief that some substantive level of activity and effort is non-negotiable in order to genuinely pursue of the teachings of Jesus. Scandrette and the participants of Re:Imagine embraces Willard's position that to miss the practical application of the teachings of Jesus witnessed in the

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<sup>775</sup> This is discussed in chapter 15 of *Soul Graffiti*.

<sup>776</sup> Scandrette, Erlam interview, 2008.

actions and attitudes of ones life is to miss both Jesus and his gospel altogether.<sup>777</sup> The theological objection to human effort in the process of transformation is a bias Scandrette regularly encounters and vigilantly works against within many contemporary Christian ideologies. He agrees with Willard's assessment such a bias stems from a theological misunderstanding of grace and a misplaced belief that professions of mental ascent to certain Christian doctrines are adequate substitutes for what Jesus articulates as a consequential and substantive effect on personal behavior due to the realities professed in the Scriptures.

The fourth significant formative factor for the Re:Imagine culture is the engagement with the arts as a medium through which spiritual expression, formation and enlightenment occurs. Every individual encountered during the research period, whether formally or informally connected to Re:Imagine, expressed a high value and commitment to the arts. Re:Imagine has attracted a wide range of painters, poets, thespians, photographers, sculptures, musicians, filmmakers, chefs, graphic designers, fashion designers and writers. Thus a significant artisan or bohemian ethic surrounds much of the interactions and discussions of theology, spirituality and social culture. Conversations regularly included the use of metaphor, visual descriptions, and analogies drawn back to some piece of art, music, literature or movie to illustrate an idea or feeling.

Scandrette sets the tone of this artisan priority, although he is certainly not alone in this endeavor, nor is he the most artistic participant in the organization. Yet Scandrette's home, a focal point and gathering place for the organization, is full of a rich display, and an eclectic mix of both his own art, those of his family, and the work of others. Scandrette continually searches for ways to illustrate and articulate the message of the Kingdom of

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<sup>777</sup> In media interviews, public presentations and personal discussion Scandrette often refers to the words of Jesus in Luke 11:27-28 that make obedience a requirement, not an option, for a disciple. He discusses this at length in chapter 2 of *Soul Graffiti*.

God through the use of various artistic expressions. *Soul Graffiti* describes in detail the high value and theological significance art plays in the Re:Imagine culture.<sup>778</sup> For Re:Imagine, the reintegration of the arts into the heart of Christian life provides a means to understand, explain, and enter into a deeper and richer understanding of God, his creation and his purposes for humanity. This artistic, creative force is a central theme and essential quality of the human experience that Re:Imagine hopes to reinvigorate into acts of worship. On the subject of the arts Scandrette states,

The arts are culturally important in San Francisco—many people long to be more creative—and see a connection between expressiveness and salvation—where they sense their greatest need or longing—for freedom and lucidity and inspiration. But equally, the primary call of the gospel is to “reimagine” your whole life in view of the present reality of the kingdom. So the arts and an imaginative lens are a means or mode by which to participate in repentance—to rethink, look again, dream again. This is in reaction to a culture in the dominant church that is fear based, tradition worshipping and avoids risk and resists change. The gospel is about change, transformation, mystery, adventure, uncertainty—in general, Bohemian expressions are a useful mode for exploring life in the kingdom.<sup>779</sup>

### *The Process Frame*

Currently, as a para-church organization, Re:Imagine receives oversight from Scandrette and a board of directors. The directors provide guidance and structure for the non-profit entity and Scandrette is responsible for day-to-day operations. In addition, there is a leadership team comprised of the leaders of the five tribes. All together Re:Imagine has approximately 120-140 people regularly attending meetings or tribe gatherings throughout the Bay Area. Thus Re:Imagine has a very flat leadership structure that allows Scandrette to oversee the bulk of the activities in the organization. Additionally, nearly every event within the organization happens as a direct result of a tribe gathering or a Dojo event.

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<sup>778</sup> See chapter eight of *Soul Graffiti*.

<sup>779</sup> Scandrette, Follow-up interview, November, 2010.

However, there is another factor that is significant, but less tangible, that contributes to the morale, flow and dynamics of the organization. In short, Scandrette chooses very purposefully to live his private life in a very public way. He is extremely accessible. He and his wife Lisa own a restored Victorian home in the Mission district of San Francisco. Therefore, in addition to housing their family of five, and providing a classroom for their three-homeschooled children, their home is also the central hub for a significant amount of Re:Imagine activity. There are no Re:Imagine offices or church building. Most meetings are held in the Scandrette's living room. During this research project, many of the interviews were conducted at Scandrette's home, which allowed this researcher to observe a constant level of activity going on at nearly all hours of the day. When Dojo activities are occurring, typically dozens of people from all over the country, are in and out of their home, some sleeping on their couch, eating from their food stores or using their bathroom facilities.

This is mentioned simply to communicate how open Scandrette's personal life is to anyone around him. He lives a very transparent existence. His relationship and interactions with his children, his marriage, his engagement with his neighbors, are available for all to see and experience. There is no "star" quality or status given to Scandrette as the leader of Re:Imagine. Scandrette considers himself and is considered by others as an equal to every other member of the organization. This very democratic or egalitarian leadership ethic is a palpable reality working throughout the processes and climate of the organization. The high level of transparency assumed by Scandrette effects everything and everyone in the organization as they all aspire to be open to criticism, inspection, encouragement and growth toward personal and relational transformation.

This level of authenticity and transparency in the leadership positions of the organization speaks volumes to the participants of Re:Imagine since many have

experienced negative interactions with religious leaders in the past and others are children from broken homes where parents divorced and sometimes left them lonely or abandoned. Therefore the ability to get behind the public persona and discern whether a leader authentically displays privately what they profess publically is a monumental need for many Re:Imagine participants. Several interviewees openly discussed how authentic, trustworthy, yet flawed and unpretentious, their encounters with Scandrette and his family have been. For some this single feature proved to be the most important validating experience of their participation with Re:Imagine. One mentioned,

When I finally got to know Mark I realized this was a guy who actually lived what he believed. He and Lisa aren't perfect and they don't try to be. But they are probably the first Christians I'd ever met who actually lived what everyone else I knew only talked about. That gave me a lot of hope.

### *Summary*

As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, each of the four groups studied in this research have coalesced around a few key attributes of Willard's theology, seeking to implement those tenets very deliberately. Scandrette and the Re:Imagine organization have structured themselves to focus almost entirely on the activities and attitudes necessary for accomplishing the benefits of a disciplined life. Therefore both the leaders and participants seek means of creatively teaching, engaging and implementing the transformative characteristics that proceed from pursuing the spiritual disciplines as the means of character formation into Christlikeness. The DoJo exercises, the tribe meetings, and Scandrette's published works all focus on developing a rationale for first explaining, then engaging, and finally maturing through consistently practicing the spiritual disciplines as an integral part of living in the Kingdom of God.

Yet more than simply practicing the disciplines, Scandrette and Re:Imagine also pursues the experiences and lessons which result from their attempts at following Christ's

example then seeking deeper understanding of both their successes and setbacks. This is done in communal relationship with others and which develops a level of intimacy and transparency between Re:Imagine participants that was noticeable and effectual. Further, Scandrette and the Re:Imagine tribe leaders made clear that their transformative efforts are not solely a self-centered exercise. Rather, Re:Imagine participants seek to live in the theological reality of God's Kingdom in order to first demonstrate and then invite others into the same lived experience. Thus in comparison to the other three groups studied, as a whole, Re:Imagine displayed the most direct and focused attempt to hold one another accountable for regular displays of intentionality in accomplishing their vision of discipleship into the protoevangelical gospel of Jesus. As Willard suggests, people can actually become like Jesus, in both form and substance, if they so choose. Scandrette and Re:Imagine have very intentionally endeavored to pursue that primary objective.

## Holy Trinity Anglican Church Ethnography

### *Ecological Frame*

There are three key ecological forces working to frame the Holy Trinity congregation. The first is found in the unique demographic makeup and religious history of its geographical location. Secondly, the unique history and perspective of Holy Trinity's founding pastor, Todd Hunter, and his attempts to reintroduce the liturgical traditions of the Anglican faith, greatly shapes the congregation as well. Finally, perhaps the most significant ecological force shaping Holy Trinity is the congregations attempts to both recreate and repractice their faith in light of what has been perceived or experienced as either abuses or inauthentic expressions of evangelical theology and ecclesiology in and around the Orange Country area. This section will briefly inspect each of these three key aspects which together shape and structure the Holy Trinity congregation.

U.S. Census Bureau data describes Orange County as a politically conservative, economically wealthy, predominantly Caucasian community with several secluded and exclusive neighborhoods.<sup>780</sup> Positioned around world famous coastal beaches, Orange County contains some of the most beautiful and desirable oceanfront real estate in the United States. As such, Orange County has attained somewhat of a distinct identity separate from that of other communities in and around the Los Angeles area.<sup>781</sup> Politically, culturally and economically, Orange County represents something of an alcove or island of

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<sup>780</sup> U.S. Census Bureau data substantiates these facts. See <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/06/06059.html> (accessed 8-23-2010).

<sup>781</sup> This was talked about often with interviewees and well recognized by both Orange County and non-Orange County residents. There is a high level of prestige and privilege associated with living in Orange County, especially the ocean front communities. Newport Beach, Laguna Beach, and Corona Del Mar carried a similar level of exclusivity as one might hold of Beverly Hills. Movie stars, celebrities and captains of industry are well known parts of the Orange County community.

sorts. Many Orange County residents interviewed for this thesis admitted feeling somewhat segregated from the more politically liberal, economically challenged, multi-ethnic and racially diverse regions of Southern California.<sup>782</sup>

In conjunction with the political and economic environment, the religious environment of Orange County is also one of the more significant forces to shape Holy Trinity. Los Angeles in general, and Orange County in specific, carries a long and deep evangelical history and maintains an influential evangelical culture.<sup>783</sup> Over the years Southern California has incubated several evangelical religious movements and significant evangelical institutions remain headquartered in the area. As a consequence of this profuse history, the evangelical culture is thick within the Orange County population. Interviewees demonstrated a significant level of evangelical acculturation and awareness of mainstream evangelical doctrine. Several interviewees at Holy Trinity also expressed their awareness of, past participation in, and a significant degree of disillusionment with many of these movements and institutions in the area.

Additionally, it appears that many congregants were originally attracted to Holy Trinity specifically due to their awareness of and affiliation with Hunter's history with evangelical movements in and around Orange County. Hunter's three books are highly autobiographical, describing his own journey through the matrix surrounding Southern California evangelicalism. Hunter's publications reveal candid ruminations and experiences, both positive and troubling, with American evangelical religion. Hunter's career has paralleled the growth of evangelicalism in southern California. His ministry

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<sup>782</sup> This observation came from interactions and conversations with Orange County residents both inside and outside of the Holy Trinity congregation. It is supported by its own publications. See Kathe Brockman Tracy, "Orange County's Wealthiest Citizens," *Orange Coast Magazine* Vol.2 (February 1979). Also Rob Kling, Spencer C. Olin, and Mark. Poster, *Postsuburban California : The Transformation of Orange County Since World War II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991)

<sup>783</sup> The religious history of Orange County in specific and Southern California in general is a rich tapestry. For a fuller explanation see Appendix 4.



started during the beginnings of the Jesus People movement in the 1970's with Chuck Smith at Calvary Chapel. Eventually Hunter was instrumental in the John Wimber led Vineyard Church movement. Both of these movements were instrumental in the early CGM era. Hunter also has publically discussed a period in his ministry where he describes becoming somewhat of a nomad, between church homes, and seeking to make sense of the conflicting images and doctrines he found troubling in evangelical theology and ecclesiology.

Hunter's career has afforded him a front row seat of involvement in some of the more significant transitional movements in American evangelical history. Yet he also admits to feeling at times both unwilling and unable to express himself in key denominational meetings with other senior leaders about key theological and ecclesiological issues that troubled him. Feelings of intimidation and insecurity kept him from expressing concerns and critiques of the theological direction and vision. The top-down leadership culture, the resistance to internal critique, conjoined to a more literalist biblicism created a situation where Hunter felt inadequate and ill prepared to fulfill his leadership duties. Thus, early in his career, Hunter left California, entered seminary on the east coast, and hoped to gain the knowledge and confidence he lacked. While at seminary, Hunter was introduced to Willard's theo-ontology and *essentia Dei*. His seminary coursework first introduced him to Richard Foster's work,

...and from Foster I discovered Willard and [Eugene] Peterson. I mean I had read those guys a little bit before but I got serious about it. [In seminary] those three things came together. Theology, therapy and Spiritual formation. And that rescued me. That's 19 years ago. And that rescued me. The combination of those three things. I may have said this in the book... I'll never forget this as long as I live... the first time I met with one of my professor he said "What do you want?" And I said "I want to learn how to stand up for what I know and believe deeply on the inside because right

now... I just can't.”<sup>784</sup>

Hunter's experiences of hesitancy and insecurity to stand against dominating ideologies, traditions and theologies of his evangelical leaders and their organizational structures appears to describe and identify with similar descriptions articulated by many of his congregants.

It is not a coincidence Hunter specifically chose Orange County as the location for his church plant. Having lived in and around Orange County much of his life, Hunter was very aware of the effects evangelicalism had made on the Orange County culture.<sup>785</sup> Largely due to his experience with and awareness of the long-term effects a broad evangelical culture had made on the community, Hunter believed a different ecclesiology was both warranted and needed. He recognized his experience and leadership within evangelical institutions had established a level of credibility that would bode well with those who, like he, were re-evaluating their evangelical faith. Several interviewees validated Hunter's original suspicion. The majority (70%) of interviewees described their experience of Holy Trinity as satisfying a personal desire for increased authenticity, integrity and balance within their Christian life. They also expressed an equal desire for more holistic vision and exemplification of the gospel from their church and its leadership. Hunter states,

I'm hypothesizing that Holy Trinity...for Orange Country California... people burned out on the local mega churches and trying to make church cooler every week...the de-churched... at Holy Trinity they will find something holy, reverent and historically grounded in what we are doing. I've exegeted my culture or I've tried to. I could be wrong. Ask me in five years. But as far as I know I've exegeted my culture for the de-churched and the young un-churched. And they are desiring something more grounded

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<sup>784</sup> Todd Hunter, Research Interview, Interviewed by author, July 13, 2010, Costa Mesa, CA.

<sup>785</sup> Hunter also admits to being attracted to Orange County due to its proximity to extended family in the area.

and authentic<sup>786</sup>

As a result of this cultural exegesis, Hunter and the leaders of Holy Trinity sensed a significant number of Orange County Christians had begun to exit their mainstream evangelical churches while remaining deeply interested in pursuing a more meaningful, effectual and relevant expressions of Christian faith. Interviews with Holy Trinity members largely validate this perspective. Yet interviews also suggest many Holy Trinity congregants underestimated the difficulty of transitioning out of large evangelical churches. The shift away from both the theology, praxis and social or relational structures of their mainstream evangelical churches has exacted a higher emotional toll than initially expected. Many described feelings of guilt, shame, fear, isolation and ostracizing from both friends and family members alike.

Several long-time Orange County evangelicals described the religious culture around them as manifesting three distinct traits that made their transition away from evangelicalism most difficult. The first trait is an overarching inundation of the CGM ethos. The CGM's success of creating overwhelmingly large numbers of megachurches in the area has created an environment of competition between these churches and their leaders. This developed what some perceived as an unhealthy corporate mentality between church organizations that "fight" between themselves for increasingly larger slices of the Orange County "evangelical marketplace."

Secondly, the competitive environment is combined with a theological assumption that "God's blessing" is either a direct or indirect cause or effect of the growth and success of the CGM ethos. This viewpoint tends to "divinely invalidate" any suggestion that the CGM ecclesiological structure, theology or praxis employed in "growing" churches is anything but inspired, endorsed and enabled by divine providence. Hence to oppose or

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<sup>786</sup> Hunter, Research Interview, July 13, 2010.

question any significant aspect of the CGM enterprise is often taken as an attempt to thwart or oppose God's sovereign will and plan. Some interviewees were even accused of outright sinful disobedience and rebellion for questioning either their church's devotion to the CGM, its leadership or praxis. One interviewee commented wryly, "So much for priesthood of the believer."

The third reaction to the evangelical culture described by interviewees at Holy Trinity centered on a growing resistance to religious fundamentalism. Over time interviewees described an increasing level of animosity, separatism and exclusivism between professing evangelicals in and around Orange County and the non-evangelical community at large. This included and was somewhat conjoined with a penchant for right wing conservative political issues as well. Thus if one was not either a republican or an evangelical, interviewees suggested there was the risk of experiencing increasing levels of ostracizing and discrimination.<sup>787</sup> These three tendencies caused many Holy Trinity congregants to realize a reduced ability to represent themselves to their friends and neighbors as "Christians" without inducing in others a common negative stereotype which often preempted non-Christians from either seeking or being open to engaging in personal relationships.

In response, increasing numbers of evangelicals developed an overall sense of malaise and/or disenchantment with evangelicalism, their local churches and the overarching theological positions which funded the same.

I think in hindsight now, the kind of spirituality we were doing [in the CGM]...and I say we because I was a part of it too...in hindsight now it seems really shallow now that we are better able to see what is happening around the globe. Now that the globe is literally in real time on our smart

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<sup>787</sup> Interestingly, some conservatives expressed the exact same complaint albeit in reference to liberalism. Conservatives reported feeling like an embattled minority in light of the prevalence of liberalism within the broader California culture. Orange County appears to act as one of the last sanctuaries for conservatism in California.

phones, with us able to see what is happening in Egypt or Somalia... I think globalization is becoming this meta-prophetic voice that says there is something more important in the world than what kind of car we are driving or the kind of clothes we wear or if we got that promotion we wanted. We needed to stop being so concerned about our own little dramas in life and think about more serious and consequential issues both personally and theologically. So I think that I'm hearing that evangelicals are saying now is...I want something more. There just seems to be a felt need for a more grounded, mature, holistic, broad thing that happens in the liturgy that was not happening in our more consumer driven, "give people what they want" kind of approach to theology and church.<sup>788</sup>

Seeing an opportunity and hoping to make a positive contribution, Hunter believed Willard's view of the protoevangelical gospel could rekindle genuine Christian experience and expression in a location which has previously been an incubator for renewal movements in American Christianity. Hunter is not a demonstrative or dramatic individual given to hyperbole or exaggeration. His views and proposals of renewal are significantly tempered and modest. Yet Hunter is very aware of the inadequate and sometimes anemic status of American evangelicalism in general.<sup>789</sup> He comes to these issues from a position of experience, having once been the national director of two major evangelical organizations and the leader of the Vineyard denomination in the US. This makes Hunter perhaps one of the best-placed evangelicals in the country to watch and commentate on the demise of evangelical theology and practice. His response to these concerns was to seek new means by which radical Willardian theology could again find its way into the practices and doctrines of evangelical churches.<sup>790</sup>

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<sup>788</sup> Todd Hunter, Follow-up Interview, interview by author, February 13, 2011 Newport Beach, CA.

<sup>789</sup> He writes of these themes in his two books *Christianity Beyond Belief: Following Jesus for the Sake of Others* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2010), and *Giving Church Another Chance : Finding New Meaning in Spiritual Practices* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Books, 2010).

<sup>790</sup> In addition to his devotion to Willard's work, Hunter also has a keen affiliation and affection for the works of Eugene Peterson. Thus equal parts Peterson and Willard are found in Hunter's work and ministry. However, neither Willard nor Peterson clash theologically or ecclesiologically on any significant matters. One is more theological (Willard) where the other's focus is more pastoral and ecclesial (Peterson).

This search led him for a time to engage with the leaders of the Emerging Church movement. There, Hunter identified with many of the issues troubling leaders like Tony Jones, Doug Pagitt and Brian McLaren.<sup>791</sup> While still appreciating the work of ECM leaders and their deconstruction of evangelical theology and praxis, Hunter found in Willard's theology a more authentic and realistic representation of the biblical gospel of the Kingdom of God. Using Willard and the pastoral works Petersen, Hunter began to reconstruct a means to reform evangelicalism within the organizations he was leading. This call would eventually lead Hunter to Anglicanism and the development of a church planting organization called Churches for the Sake of Others, (C4SO).<sup>792</sup> Yet Hunter's choice to change his religious methodology rests on agreement with Willard on a single ideological foundation. Hunter agrees with Willard's critique that many current streams of evangelical theology and praxis fall significantly below the call of the New Testament and life in the Kingdom of God.<sup>793</sup> Hunter's books and sermons carefully articulate the belief that joining the life of the Church is a necessary spiritual discipline essential to life in the Kingdom of God. Yet, he realizes modern evangelical theology and practice as experienced by many in contemporary churches has turned an idea of Church participation as a spiritual discipline into a destructive, not a constructive, activity.

To that end, Hunter has endeavored to rediscover, repractice and thus attempt to redeem the place of the religious service and role of the Church as central to the vibrant life of a disciple of Christ. Holy Trinity is Hunter's experimental foray into reforming the discipline of Church fellowship as a transformational exercise that heals the wounds of past

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<sup>791</sup> He discusses these issues in *Giving Church Another Chance : Finding New Meaning in Spiritual Practices* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Books, 2010), 9-19.

<sup>792</sup> Churches for the Sake of Others has a website <http://www.c4so.org/>

<sup>793</sup> This is best articulated in Hunter's first three chapters of *Christianity Beyond Belief*. (Intervarsity, 2010).

ecclesiological malpractice. Hunter is also endeavoring to enrich the entire congregation in tangible ways that offers individuals the opportunity to grow and be formed more completely into the likeness of Christ.<sup>794</sup> It is this desire to reconfigure and re-practice a protoevangelical Christian faith within the Orange County context that represents the single most substantive and formative feature of Holy Trinity.

To create this alternative worship praxis, Hunter began “mining the treasure chest” of Anglican ecclesiological and liturgical practices. This is the focal point of his second book, *Giving Church Another Chance*.<sup>795</sup> Hunter describes his belief that the substantial, meaningful practices of Anglican liturgy can both appeal to and heal many of the wounds of disenfranchised evangelicals in Orange County. His goal is to eschew the traditionally consumeristic worship services currently evaluated primarily for their ability to “feed” or “entertain” the congregation. Hunter is endeavoring to escape the predetermined consumer standards of measuring ecclesiological or sermonizing excellence. Instead Holy Trinity has developed its worship services to educate the mind and transform the heart through the elucidation and implementation of historical Christian practices and a contextualized Anglican liturgy. Hunter does this by teaching the purposes and rationale behind the liturgy while also interjecting the Kingdom theology of Willard and the practical pastoral insights often found in the works of Petersen. Consequently, sermons regularly discuss the essentiality of discipleship to Christ and the character formation that must ensue. As a result the worship service ceases to be an entertaining spectacle and instead seeks to routinely apply in practice, through the use of Anglican liturgical means, the goal of

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<sup>794</sup> This ideology is will laid out in the practices of the church found in *Giving Church another Chance* and *The Accidental Anglican : The Surprising Appeal of the Liturgical Church* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2010),

<sup>795</sup> Hunter, *Giving Church Another Chance*, 2010.

Willard's theology of spiritual formation and discipleship to Jesus into the Kingdom of God.

All of these priorities for Hunter are couched firmly in the realization he is ministering in a postmodern culture that he believes requires a contextualization that modern evangelical theology has largely ignored.

I am really disappointed and fed up that I have had to live almost my whole professional career in a freaking 500 year-old conversation. I'm done with it. I don't want to keep fighting those Reformational theology fights. The way Driscoll and Piper and Mohler do. I just don't want to do that. I don't even think it is important. That will probably get me consigned to hell. But I think our [contemporary] issues are important. Luther was not having to grapple with epistemology the way we are [today]. Maybe a little bit...over authority issues with the Church...but not the way we know it now. So we have different issues. I want to get into *our* game. I think this is where Anglicanism, with its *via media*, allows us to jump into that game easier.<sup>796</sup>

In summary, Holy Trinity has been forged by the sense that evangelicalism in Orange County requires re-practicing. Collectively the congregation sees the need and desires to offer a substitute or an alternative Christian experience within the hegemony of broader evangelical culture. To this end, Hunter has combined the distinct Willardian theology of discipleship and character formation into a life in God's Kingdom into the traditional means of an Anglican liturgy. All these factors combine as the key shaping factors of Holy Trinity's ecology and ecclesiology. One interviewee offered this coalescing statement,

[Christianity] ought to work. If the Orange County version of Christianity is not able to actually change people, change their hearts and transform their character then it's not Christianity. It's a scam, a charade. We need something that works and is real. It's just that simple. And I think that is what we are trying to find, inhabit and re-create at Holy Trinity. And that's why I have hope again. Willard and Todd offer us a view of the Kingdom of God that's worth it. That's really what we're about here.

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<sup>796</sup> Hunter, Research Interview, June 13, 2010.



### *Cultural Frame*

There is a large degree of overlap between the Ecological Frame and the Cultural Frame in the ethnographic analysis of Holy Trinity. The culture of Orange County is a significant factor that extends beyond the Ecological boundaries. However, there are some important features of the Holy Trinity culture that were not mentioned in the Ecological Frame that deserve mention. The evangelical environment of Orange County and Hunter's background combined with his desire to reform Christian expression all combine into the creation of some interesting perspectives and opinions within the Holy Trinity congregation. Three unique results of this combination will now be considered. Although these events may be connected in some way, there was no obvious interrelationship discernable to this researcher. Therefore no analysis or attempt to build a systematic conclusion as to how these combinations of factors effect the congregation will be offered.

First, several interviewees listed Hunter's past connection to, and theological progression or transformation through the Vineyard, Alpha or Calvary Chapel movements as the initial attraction to Holy Trinity. Thus for many, Hunter's original evangelical roots and leadership, not his Anglican leanings, were the most significant initial factors in their choosing to worship at Holy Trinity. However, interviews also suggest that many at Holy Trinity tend to define the church in the negative, describing their congregation as standing against the surrounding evangelical culture and offering a distinct alternative. Several defined Holy Trinity first by stating what the congregation was not. Statements such as "we are not like that" "we don't do things that way" or "we don't believe or value that" represented approximately half of interview responses to questions asking what was unique about Holy Trinity. Additionally phrases such as "tired" "fed-up" "done" and "hopeless"

were used to describe feelings about previous experiences in large denominational churches.

Furthermore, approximately a third of Holy Trinity members interviewed recalled past events occurring in surrounding evangelical churches that were profoundly hurtful and disillusioning. Some of these personal experiences with church leaders and pastors described betrayals of trust, disingenuous or outright misleading statements, fraud, theft and even sexual misconduct and abuse.<sup>797</sup> Since these events occurred in large, nationally renowned ministries, some interviewees had developed a palpable level of skepticism for sizable, program driven, corporate-like religious organizations and churches. One interviewee said poignantly, “We’ve learned the hard way here in Orange County, everything that glitters is certainly not gold.” Hence, in comparison to the other groups researched for this thesis, the postevangelical sentiment of protest was perhaps most prevalent in the Holy Trinity congregation.

A second intriguing discovery was a mild level of uncertainty regarding Hunter’s fairly recent conversion and cross-affiliation with Anglicanism. On the one hand, many in the congregation describe a significant affiliation and valued their rootedness in evangelical theology and practice. Such that, at times, given certain topics or issues, interviewees displayed a fervent desire to defend and support evangelical doctrine and piety. Yet conversely, most interviewees also revealed a notable level of distrust, and even disdain, for the evangelical culture in which they lived. Several admitted, prior to their involvement at

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<sup>797</sup> No effort was made on behalf of this research to substantiate the truthfulness or validity of these claims. The purpose of reporting them here is simply to describe the mental and emotional state of some participants of Holy Trinity, and not to investigate the credibility of their accusations. However, this researcher has no reason to doubt the veracity of these claims. Some of these events were reported in the press. Some were not. However, in order to protect the anonymity of the interviewees, the specifics details of these events were not discussed here.

Holy Trinity, the seeming irresolvable nature of this internal conflict had caused several to consider leaving their faith.

It appears Hunter's routine discussion of this tension in his sermons, which were often cited in the interviews, have been a significant source of reassurance and comfort on this matter. Hunter recognizes the anxiety, and pain of leaving evangelicalism, having experienced some of this tension himself, and considers it one of the more pressing issues that continues to create increasing numbers in the ranks of the "de-churched." Hunter is open about his sometimes turbulent and passive/aggressive past with evangelicalism. One interviewee, who has known Hunter for decades stated, "[Hunter] sympathizes with those who have abandoned their ideals of the church and have left or almost left in an effort to preserve what remains of their faith and their sanity. It's as if he has a real understanding of the value of preserving hope before it's too late."

Thus it seems the exacerbation of shallow Christian ecclesiology specifically found in the Orange County CGM culture is where Hunter and Holy Trinity hope Anglicanism can affect a poignant transition in the experience of Christian life. The inundation of the CGM theology and methodology presents an opportunity for Anglicanism to be recognized as innovative in its attempts at re-contextualizing the faith. Hunter believes a more traditional, liturgical, less personality driven, less demonstrative and individualistic worship style may allow those disaffected by evangelicalism to experience a reconnection to a more meaningful, contemplative and formative faith.<sup>798</sup> This hope appears to have either rekindled or met an existing desire for a more holistic, meaningful and effectual Christian culture within the Holy Trinity congregation. Hunter describes his hope to create a sanctuary where the Kingdom of God is both advanced and manifested in Orange County.

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<sup>798</sup> Hunter describes this well in his conclusion of *Giving Church Another Chance* and also in Chapter 12 of *The Accidental Anglican*.

I think somewhere deep within me...and I think Wimber gets the credit for this...is an understanding that the kingdom of God is preeminent. And the church is derivative. And what brands of churches there are is tertiary. So you've got the action of God creating the church. The church is now divided itself into 37,000 different little brands...I just try to live my life as if its true that the kingdom of God is our highest point of loyalty. So that's why I've been able to easily move from Methodist or Calvary or Vineyard or Allelon or Alpha or evangelical or now Anglican. Because it's all the same kingdom to me.<sup>799</sup>

The second influence on the Holy Trinity culture is the lingering influence of the Vineyard movement and the degree of tension this connection creates with the non-charismatic Anglican contingent within the congregation. Since Hunter was once the president of the Vineyard denomination of churches, he has attracted several ex-Vineyard members to Holy Trinity. Nearly a third of those interviewed have some connection to Hunter through his past role at Vineyard. Therefore, some of the Vineyard ethos and culture still appears to play a significant role within the Holy Trinity congregation. Although it is not within the scope of this research to articulate the Vineyard culture, suffice it to say that interviewees suggest what is similar to the Vineyard ethos that is also at Holy Trinity is the high value of charismatic gifts of the Spirit, a primacy on the authority of Scripture, an appreciation for informality in worship and a high emphasis on the role of the Kingdom of God as the primary focal point of the gospel of Jesus.

On this point, many interviewees mentioned their appreciation for the way Holy Trinity has uniquely blended the Vineyard styled worship atmosphere which makes room for the influence of charismatic expression with the more structured liturgical leanings of Anglicanism. Over half the members of Holy Trinity are recent converts to Anglican liturgical practice. Yet they reveal a significant appreciation for how the liturgy presents worshipers with an opportunity to reflect, contemplate, learn, express and develop a Willardian theo-ontological focus on the Kingdom of God.

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<sup>799</sup> Hunter, Research Interview, July 13, 2010.

As a consequence of engaging in the liturgical practices, many claim an increased ability to maintain a viable connection and vibrant relationship with Christ through the rest of their weekly activities. This intentional effort to effect the transformation of the heart and mind is Hunter's attempt to instill a distinctive Willardian perspective into the liturgical ecclesiology of Holy Trinity. In speaking of the charismatic/Anglican connection Hunter states,

It feels like what I'm doing...rather than what I was trained to do in the Church Growth Movement in the mid 80's... instead of exegeting my culture and trying to deliver to them what they want...I feel like I'm exegeting my culture now more as an apostle in saying "This is what you need." And then saying Anglicanism is what I was called to...so now I'm taking what Anglicanism offers and what my culture needs and thinking...[the culture is] largely and increasingly moral relativists. I don't mean that as a pejorative. But [the culture] needs this prayer of confession. [The culture is] largely biblically ignorant. You actually need to know the story of the Bible. So, I'm actually looking into the Anglican treasure chest as I call it and trying to pull out tools as an evangelist and pastor that have helped me meet these pressing needs.<sup>800</sup>

Thirdly, an overwhelming majority of respondents mentioned they were highly conscious of how young a congregation Holy Trinity is, and that there were many things yet to be discovered in future months and years. There were many "we'll see" comments made by both congregants and leaders alike. This seemed to lead to an overarching sense of adventure, excitement and expectation. On the other hand, there was also a degree of caution in many respondents. In the past, several interviewees put their hopes into a religious organization or individual leaders only to have less than ideal experiences. Several respondents have joined or belonged to religious movements in the past and therefore sense maintaining a level of caution is wise. Nonetheless, Hunter appears to have either earned or obtained from his previous qualifications a significant degree of credibility with everyone

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<sup>800</sup> Ibid.

interviewed. Many asserted their confidence in Hunter as a person of integrity whose leadership they could trust and follow.

Hope for a different future may be the most significant aspect that defines the culture within Holy Trinity. This hope may spring from its status as a new venture that is unique within the Orange County Christian experience. In part, this optimism may also be funded by Hunter's unique ingratiation into the Rwandan Anglican bishopric. Many respondents recognize such a sudden appointment to high office is extremely rare. Several ascribed Hunter's quick ascension as a "work of God." Therefore, by extension, many reported feeling a sense of momentous encouragement and divine providence that appears to undergird much of Holy Trinity's existence, including Hunter's leadership.<sup>801</sup>

At present participants seem to enjoy the fact Holy Trinity is neither rigidly dogmatic regarding theological doctrines nor limited by ecclesiological commitments. Rather the substance that coheres Holy Trinity starts with Hunter himself. His unique journey, through the many aspects of evangelicalism which has landed him in Anglicanism, funds by proxy, the journey of many Holy Trinity congregants. Although much of the current congregational ethos centers or is indirectly attentive to Hunter because of his unique spiritual journey and leadership evolution, there is no sign of a single, personality-based religion at Holy Trinity. This is in large measure, again, due to the nature of Hunter himself. He simply does not appear to consider himself the kind of individual who could or would attempt to dominate a congregation. In discussing this with Hunter, he credited his

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<sup>801</sup> In terms of expecting some sort of historic significance to come from this movement, it would not be unusual for those at Holy Trinity develop such a hope. Christian movements led by a charismatic leader have arisen from within the Los Angeles area in the past. See Appendix 4. The religious phenomenology of Los Angeles is beyond the scope of this research. Yet Holy Trinity displays an ethos that contains a high level of expectation that recreating or re practicing the mainstream Christian expression and practice could have monumental effect on their culture. Respondents reveal that, at least in part, this sober expectation and excitement stems from Hunter's ability and foresight to marry a liturgical structure with "the freedom of God's Spirit" in and through the congregation.

personal relationships to Willard, Peterson and Wimber. These individuals set an example of personal ethics and humility that Hunter readily attempts to emulate.

Hence the effect of Hunter's personal modeling, in conjunction with his explication of Willard's theo-ontology and his proliferation of the *essentia Dei* appears to attract and maintain the overwhelming majority of Holy Trinity congregates. More specifically, many in the congregation desire to understand equally why and how Hunter is practicing Anglican Christianity in order to better gain from their existing Anglican tradition or to learn previously unknown transformative practices. These questions, and the pursuit of their answers, form a culture of anticipation, curiosity, excitement, flexibility and hope.

By and large congregants seem unconcerned with the possibility Hunter would take the congregation in an undesirable direction. Given the level of criticism and skepticism in the congregation for evangelicalism in general, and in light of the many examples of past experiences with unscrupulous leaders in and around the Orange County area, this is a significant reality in the life of the church and one that bodes well for Hunter's character. Yet more importantly, Hunter personal integrity seems to demonstrate to the congregation at large, that the path of spiritual formation he has chosen for himself, and by association has led Holy Trinity toward, is an authentic and effective means of Christlike living. One interviewee stated, "I've known Todd a long time and I trust him. I can't think of anyone I know who is in the "Christianity business" who is more authentic and down to earth than he is. He's the real article."

### *The Process Frame*

Describing the process at work at Holy Trinity proved to be the most complicated part of the ethnographic research. Since Holy Trinity is a relatively new church plant, and was only a year in the making when the research period ensued, few formal processes exist.

Therefore the process evaluation will instead focus on the dynamics that were seen at work which shaped the climate. Consequently, two main shaping features in terms of processes were observed. The first was the need for and cultivation of a volunteer work force. Secondly, and more complicated was Hunter's connection to the Rwandan Anglican Church and his unique perspectives on how to reimagine both Anglican and evangelical ecclesiology. This section will now consider these two features.

As a new church plant nearly every process, from the most philosophical and ideological investigations regarding the purposes of the congregation, down to the weekly set up of chairs, was heavily influenced by or completed because of Hunter's direct involvement. This fact is not intended to convey the sense Hunter struggles with delegating responsibility or leadership tasks. That does not appear the case at all. However, simply due to the lack of personnel, Hunter is required to be intimately involved in nearly every function of the church organization. Just as the research period was starting, Hunter had finally hired a full-time administrative assistant. As time progresses, Holy Trinity will undoubtedly develop systems and structures which are governed by more formal processes. However, until then, Hunter appears to be the main focal point in terms of determining how the values and goals of the congregation are accomplished.

As a result of Holy Trinity's start-up status, there are several basic needs and responsibilities of the church that must be filled by people who volunteer their time and skills. Consequently, every position, save that of priest and the administrative assistant, was filled by a volunteer or part time layperson from the congregation. This included the worship director, the musicians, the youth minister, and associate ministers. In addition to their responsibilities, these individuals also served on a leadership team headed by Hunter. Together they represent the leading committee that gives guidance and focus to the congregation. As a result of the very flat leadership structure, the congregation as a whole



displayed significant levels of buy-in and pride of ownership as to the success and over-all direction of Holy Trinity.

This high level of participation and “sweat-equity” was most evident in the interviews of those coming from non-Anglican backgrounds. There was a sense of empowerment, opportunity and vitality among a broad range of the congregation. Most suggested this was precisely because of the lack of paid pastoral staff. Interviews with the volunteer pastoral staff also expressed gratefulness they were able to minister in an Anglican church without any previous formal training. As a result, there was an accompanying sense of responsibility to steward this opportunity well and provide whatever service or assistance was needed in order for the enterprise to succeed.

However, Hunter’s recent conversion to Anglicanism does provide some ambiguity. Congregants, specifically those from the Vineyard tradition, wonder if pushed, where Hunter might land if made to chose between an allegiance to Anglicanism over his commitment to the Kingdom of God. Ellis Brust, Hunter’s advisor and a long time Anglican priest, admitted to the existence of a steep learning curve for Hunter.

He’s coming into a five hundred year old institution that has been very welcoming to him. But it is not the Vineyard or Calvary Chapel or those kinds of organizations. He is learning that very quickly. And he was already significantly aware of that coming in. I think his instinctive humility has perhaps kept him from being more aggressive in terms of making changes. I think he will learn how to navigate in time and we’ll just have to see how far that goes in terms of change and adaptation. But I will encourage him to step out further than he has so far.<sup>802</sup>

Brust went on to liken Hunter’s position to that of the apostle Paul faced with the Jerusalem church after his conversion. Brust suggested the conflict between the Jewish Christians led by James, the brother of Jesus, Simon Peter and Paul, who was ministering outside

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<sup>802</sup> Ellis Brust, interview with the author, Costa Mesa, CA July, 28, 2010.

Jerusalem in Greco-Roman providences, is similar to that Hunter may be facing currently and will face in the future.

The Anglican institution may struggle understanding and approving of the tactics and contextualization that Hunter feels is necessary to accomplish his goals of establishing 200 church plants on the west coast in twenty years.<sup>803</sup> Hunter is seeking ways to attract, train and support church planters to start new churches in the Western United States. Part of the discussion between these parties has involved to what degree Hunter's roles and responsibilities as bishop requires a level of devotion to specifically promote Anglicanism. This could come in comparison or contrast to Hunter's devotion to Willardian sentiments regarding the Kingdom of God and the proliferation of spiritual formation into Christlikeness through discipleship.<sup>804</sup> This ambiguity in leadership may well attract a kind of individual secure and skilled enough to live without a need for dominating leadership personalities. In fact some stated that Hunter's "laid back" or "relaxed" approach to leadership was one of the more attractive qualities of the church. One long-term follower of Hunter's leadership stated that she sensed many congregants knew Hunter well enough, and reached a level of individual spiritual maturity in their own right to take the risk of another "wild ride" with Hunter. Thus, continuing the innovative, pioneering culture started decades before in the Calvary Chapel and Vineyard movements has forged an environment

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<sup>803</sup> This is the established goal of Hunter's organization Church for the Sake of Others or C4SO. This author attended a weekend retreat of the principle directors of C4SO at Hunter's invitation. Some of the discussions and presentations by Hunter and others, most notably the vision of C4SO, were digitally recorded.

<sup>804</sup> It is not necessary, nor the intention of this author to draw a distinction between the goals of Rwandan Anglicanism and those Hunter has articulated in Willard's theology of the Kingdom of God. Hunter does not see or claim any degree of mutual exclusion in these aims. However, within the overall culture of Holy Trinity, both leaders and congregants showed significant amounts of discussion speculating on where the eventual theological, ecclesiological and practical direction Hunter may take both Holy Trinity and his Anglican bishopric. Hence a state of flux and anticipation tends to season each comment or opinion about why Holy Trinity exists and its purposes and thus appears to effect how and why things are, or are not, done in the congregation at large.

at Holy Trinity that champions the faith required of an often-indeterminate journey with God in his Kingdom.

The highest level of uncertainty and risk appears to surround the question of whether Hunter's counter intuitive instincts that contemporary versions of Anglicanism will be attractive to the postmodern sensibilities of Orange County. In a time when other Anglican and Episcopal churches are struggling, consolidating and closing, Hunter admits to being uncertain his concept of Angli-evangelical praxis will succeed. Further, what level or degree of freedom and inventiveness is allowed, compared and contrasted to the commitment and adherence to official edicts and ethos of Anglicanism and the Rwandan Church, remains an unknown. Hunter's primary commitment to the ethos of the Kingdom of God may be challenged. Many are watching to see how he and Holy Trinity navigate these uncharted waters.

Nevertheless, nearly every interviewee openly recognized and accepted these unanswered questions without complaint or reservation. Thus Holy Trinity may represent the assembly of a congregation willing to accept and even enjoy the volatility associated with the changing conditions of a church plant and the application of a praxis fixed on a Willardian view of the Kingdom of God. Time will most likely reveal if this open acceptance of ambiguity and uncertainty will linger or if a greater degree of stability will be sought, and if so, how quickly that expectation will become a necessity.

In general, interviewees express a significant sense of goodwill with Hunter and the evangelical-to-Anglican journey they are on. Many described being in the "honeymoon" phase of the church where so much is still new and thus exciting. Interestingly, those from an Anglican or Episcopal tradition expressed similar feelings. They sense Hunter was willing and able to change much of what had been longstanding problematic issues within mainline church structures. Thus, overall, the congregation currently displays a "can" or

“will-do” attitude. The overwhelming majority of interviewees stated they were exceedingly grateful for Holy Trinity, liked what they saw and experienced so far and were thus willing to do whatever was necessary to assure Holy Trinity’s continued success.

### *Summary*

Hunter’s experience as a national leader in a global evangelical denomination headquartered in Orange County has created a unique opportunity for him and the Holy Trinity congregation. Together, they are endeavoring to reconsider how Willardian theology can be best applied in an Anglican ecclesial praxis within a deeply steeped evangelical cultural. Using Anglicanism, Hunter is seeking to find a means by which the services of the church can be more effectively used to encourage and equip its member to more fully engage the theo-ontology of the Kingdom of God. Hence, Hunter and his leaders are both reconsidering and reconstructing the priorities, values and activities of the church organization to better align with what they believe is a more integrous vision of the gospel Jesus preached. As a result, Holy Trinity acts as something of a post-attractional, post-CGM prototype inside the megachurch laden environment of Orange County. Hunter states,

One of the huge “Willardisms” for me is his essential ontology. Essentially that the world is a safe place if we will put ourselves in the reign of God. And then that gives us an *a priori* security and safeness from which we can minister. That is just a huge gift to me. What I’d like to think is that that is what empowers me as a minister, and our church as a whole. That most of the time we just aren’t afraid of anything. Honest to God, most of the time I simply don’t want anything and am not driven by anything other than to live in the reality of the goodness of God’s love and care. That reality is a huge result of my now almost twenty-year engagement with Willard and his writings and seeing him model it personally. He just models the kind of gentleness, humility and confidence that you would expect of somebody who is actually connected to God. That has given us a way of being where I can relax. Anxiety and worry are gone...there is a way of doing ministry that is absent the kind of neurosis than normally drives us. And I’m hoping that that is penetrating the zeitgeist, the ethos of our church. That this little baby

church is full of peace.<sup>805</sup>

Hunter suggests the implications of developing an ecclesiology around the peaceful reality where there is nothing to fear from God is an enormous theological and psychological benefit to disaffected evangelicals. The type of neo-evangelicalism predominant in and around Orange Country has long advocated a performance oriented church structure that gauges success by membership roles, doctrinal correctness and a fear of an impending dispensational display of God's wrath. The need to perform in, or conform to such a structure, either personally or corporately, Hunter believes is beginning to show signs of deterioration within the evangelical culture. Therefore the unique role Hunter and Holy Trinity plays in developing and applying Willardian praxis centers on their efforts to revise the traditional evangelical CGM ecclesiology through reinvigorating the use of classical liturgical practices. Their hope is to use the worship services and activities of the church to intentionally exemplify how disciples of Jesus engage living freely in the Kingdom of God. Gone are the "shallow" objectives of numerical growth through a traditional understanding of conversionism and a focus on eliciting "professions of faith."

Instead Holy Trinity sees the services of the church working to both remind and ground disciples of Jesus in the reality of the Kingdom ethos. This focus then prepares the hearts and minds of congregants to engage God in the lived experience of their lives and relationships on a day-to-day basis throughout the week. Such a motive is dramatically juxtaposed to the megachurch culture surrounding them. Yet Holy Trinity prioritizes the Willardian values of emboldening, empowering and equipping disciples of Jesus to manifest the theo-ontological reality of the protoevangelical gospel Jesus articulated. Eschewing the mainstream evangelical activity of inviting friends and neighbors into an entertainment based, consumer driven process geared toward traditional conversionism,

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<sup>805</sup> Hunter, Research Interview, July, 13, 2010.

Holy Trinity endeavors to prepare disciples to incarnate the reality of the Kingdom of God as members of their communities, families, companies and relationships. This is the vision of discipleship evangelism Willard espouses.<sup>806</sup> Hunter states, “Dallas says it best. The church is for discipleship and discipleship is for the world.”<sup>807</sup>

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<sup>806</sup> See page 186.

<sup>807</sup> Hunter, Follow-up interview, February, 2011.

## Association of Christian Character Development (ACCD)

### Ethnography

#### *Ecological Frame*

ACCD's mission statement asserts the organizations goal is to design and deliver “transformational interactions, dramatically affecting the quality and character of life for individuals, organizations, and communities.”<sup>808</sup> As a para-church organization ACCD seeks to “celebrate others and invite them into a lifestyle of transformation through Christian trainings, seminars, workshops, and outreach. Our vision is to transform lives through God’s love, leaving a legacy of forgiveness, faith, and freedom.”<sup>809</sup> Thus, ACCD’s ecological framework is centered on providing the means for these self-described “transformational interactions” through the development, delivery and application of “interactive, educational training programs.”<sup>810</sup> The organization rallies around the implementation of training regimens that create opportunities for participants to contemplate and evaluate the quality and character of their lives. Often these training events result in participants demonstrating an increased level of interest and pursuit of personal spiritual growth and character formation.

To understand the forces effecting the ecological development of ACCD, it is essential to investigate three key factors. First, an understanding of the nature of ACCD’s training system must be achieved. Members of ACCD use the term ”training” to communicate a very complex, ideologically, philosophically and historically laden concept.

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<sup>808</sup> Daniel Tocchini, “Mission of ACCD,” <http://www.accd.org/> (accessed 9-23, 2010).

<sup>809</sup> Daniel Tocchini, “ACCD Brochure,” <http://cloud.accd.org/documents/ACCDBrochure.pdf> (accessed September 26, 2010).

<sup>810</sup> Daniel Tocchini, *Cult Fiction* (P.Chan and Edward, 2003), xiv.

Therefore a careful etymological discussion of the term is appropriate. Additionally, since the organization revolves around the training regimen and its ethos, an investigation into the desired results of the training is required. A historical review of what factors have combined over time to form the ideological, methodological and philosophical basis of the training concept will unveil both the nature or objectives of the ACCD training regimen and the motivating impetus behind the entire organization.

The second and third key factors essential to understanding the ecological framework of ACCD centers on founder Daniel Tocchini's history and experience surrounding the Human Potential Movement (HPM). Tocchini's influence and leadership was paramount to authoring and adapting the intents and purposes of the training regimens. Although Tocchini has modified a plethora of various ideologies and methodologies significantly to form the unique ACCD program, some semblances and connection to the HPM remain. Tocchini's unique reinterpretation and application of Willard's theo-ontology regarding the Kingdom of God and spiritual formation represent the third key theological influence. Tocchini used Willardian theology and his philosophical realism to reshape the training ethos away from the HPM's humanistic objectives. Together, this section will define the ecological foundation of ACCD by offering a thick description of how "trainings" are understood, how they evolved, and finally how Willardian theology has impacted the entire enterprise.

The training structure of ACCD rests on a form of group interaction that social psychologists and psychiatrist define as the Encounter Group (EG) phenomenon.<sup>811</sup> This is a generic term that attempts to describe a fairly vast segment of group therapy methodologies and techniques. Psychologist and sociologist began developing EG

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<sup>811</sup> See chapter 16 of Irvin D. Yalom and Molyn Leszcz, *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy*, 5th ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2005).



methodologies for group therapy research in the mid-1940's and the EG phenomenon appears to have peaked in the late 1980's.<sup>812</sup> Although the intents and purposes of EGs can vary widely in many respects, the literature suggests there are several common methodological similarities, goals, and a shared history. We will first consider the history then move to the common characteristics found in the ACCD's adaptation of the EG methodology.

The genesis of the EG can be traced to 1946 when researchers Kurt Lewin, Ronald Lippitt and Leland Bradford first created what they later termed a "training group" (T-group) in New Brittan, CT.<sup>813</sup> As a result of this early research, Lewin, et. al. would eventually publish a hypothesis of human transformation they called "change theory."<sup>814</sup> Although adapted widely over time, much of Lewin's original discoveries continue to exert tremendous influence on the methodology and ideology of what would eventually become the field of Group Dynamics.<sup>815</sup> As the primary expert on the effectiveness of individual change theory, Lewin would eventually head a US government funded research group known as the National Training Laboratories (NTL).<sup>816</sup>

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<sup>812</sup> The literature on the subject reveals EG's come in varieties of formats and fall under different labels. The EG genre covers the arena of human relations groups, training groups (T-groups), sensitivity groups, and most recently personal growth groups or human potential groups and seminars. Thomas Treadwell and Jean Treadwell, *The Pioneer of the Group Encounter Movement* (Washington, D.C.: US Dept of Health, Education and Welfare, 1971), Jane Howard, *Please Touch; a Guided Tour of the Human Potential Movement*, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970), and Leo Croghan, "Encounter Groups and the Necessity for Ethical Guidelines," *Journal of Clinical Psychology* Vol. 30, 4, (October, 1974), 438-445.

<sup>813</sup> Leo Croghan, "Encounter Groups and the Necessity for Ethical Guidelines," *Journal of Clinical Psychology* Vol. 30, 4, (October, 1974), 438-445.

<sup>814</sup> Kurt Lewin, *Resolving Social Conflicts: Field Theory in Social Science* (New York: Harper and Row, 1948), Dorwin Cartwright, "Some Things Learned; an Evaluative History of the Research Center for Group Dynamics," *The Journal of social issues*. Vol. 12, (1958), 20.

<sup>815</sup> The first official recognition of the field was found in the APA manual published in 1973 under the sub-title Guidelines for Psychologists Conducting Growth Groups.

<sup>816</sup> One of the major objectives for the NTL project was to research and create innovative education systems to reduce the level of racial conflicts then prevalent in the US. Lewin and the NTL would eventually chose to deemphasize the traditional focus of study previously centered on systemic and organizational issues at play in the process of communal change and peruse personal change dynamics. A Marrow, "Events Leading to the Establishment of the National Training Laboratories," *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*

NTL focused on maximizing psychic change through interpersonal interactions between trainers/leaders and participants while in a group setting.<sup>817</sup> Lewin's work also resulted in the development of new innovations and terminology. Concepts such as "unfreezing," "behavioral feedback," "observant participation," and "cognitive aids" still remain important aspects of the EG methodological arsenal.<sup>818</sup> Through the application of these new T-group processes and activities Lewin believed human transformation in mental states, opinions and emotional habitations could occur despite ones ingrained epistemological, religious, philosophical, cultural and psychological ideologies and paradigms.<sup>819</sup> Each of these new techniques was part of Lewin's larger concept of "experiential learning." Also called "on-the-spot" or "here-and-now" learning, T-group participants were often confronted in an objective manner with real-time observations on interpersonal styles and responses to others.<sup>820</sup> This was a marked difference to traditional

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Vol. 3, (1967), 144-150. And Leland Powers Bradford, *National Training Laboratories : Its History, 1947-1970* (Bethel, ME: Bradford, 1974), NTL remains a non-profit behavioral psychology center and makes contributions to the field of organizational effectiveness.

<sup>817</sup> Robert W. Siroka, Ellen K. Siroka, and Gilbert A. Schloss, "Some Contemporary Origins of the Personal Growth Group," in *Sensitivity Training & Group Encounter; an Introduction.*, ed. Robert W. Siroka, Ellen K. Siroka, and Gilbert A. Schloss, (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1971),

<sup>818</sup> Edgar H. Schein and Warren G. Bennis, *Personal and Organizational Change Through Group Methods the Laboratory Approach* (New York: J. Wiley & Sons, 1965), 41-43

<sup>819</sup> K. Benne, "History of the T-Group in the Laboratory Setting," in *T-Group Theory and Laboratory Method; Innovation in Re-Education.*, ed. Leland Bradford, (New York: Wiley, 1964), 80-135.

<sup>820</sup> This is a significant concept in the EG training ethos. "On the spot" is very similar to the "here and now" focus. It is made up of two key factors. First the group members must experience each other in a high degree of spontaneity and honesty. Second the members must self-reflect, in the moment, on the group dynamic as it is occurring. Perhaps the best way to understand this differentiation is the separation of issues, problems or behaviors that may be situated in the past or to normalized behaviors as understood "back home." These past or "normal" self-perceptions of perhaps an reflection of an idealized self and thus are often in contrast to those behaviors that are occurring in the moment of the interactions and activities directly attributable to the events of the group setting. See Stephen Abramowitz and Carolyn Jackson, "Comparative Effectiveness of Then-and-There Versus Here-and-Now Therapist Interventions in Group Psychotherapy," *Journal of Counseling Psychology* Vol. 21,4, (1974), 288-293. Also Irvin D. Yalom and Molyn Leszcz, *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy*, 5th ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2005), 30.

group therapy that often discussed issues, activities or relationships which occurred outside the group context.<sup>821</sup>

Another key aspect to Lewin change theory methodology was the prioritization of “relational feedback” which required the implementation of another new concept termed “observant participation.” Together these techniques required group members to continually monitor and remain cognizant of both the actions of others while also maintaining awareness of their own behavior and internal psychological processes.<sup>822</sup> Perhaps one of the most efficient conceptual insights Lewin discovered in the T-group format was the use of cognitive aids. He discovered that a brief lecture given by a group leader prior to an activity best set up the idea or concept for the entire group to pursue more deeply. An example of a cognitive aid still used today is the popular four-cell personality paradigm illustrated widely known within EG circles as “Johari’s window.”<sup>823</sup> Typically T-group leaders discuss the concepts illustrated in a cognitive aid as a catalyst to deepen interpersonal activity, increase feedback and open self-disclosure in the group.<sup>824</sup>

Although Lewin’s groups ranged in number, the objective was to maintain a group size that allowed participants face-to-face interactions with a group leader while still maintaining a degree of intimate interaction with other group members. Lewin’s T-Groups were also time-limited in duration and therefore often utilized the implementation of what social psychologists call “structured exercises.” Similar to cognitive aids, structured exercises are devices used to accelerate the level and depth of psychological and relational

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<sup>821</sup> For instance feedback exercises required participants to engage in communication exercises that would elicit critique or commentary from fellow group participants regarding real-time relational interactions. Thus feedback, given and received as emotions, experiences or thoughts about how a member was perceived or received by other group members became a central feature of conversation and group interaction.

<sup>822</sup> Yalom and Leszcz, *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy*, 527.

<sup>823</sup> Joseph. Luft, *Group Processes : An Introduction to Group Dynamics*, 3rd ed. (Palo Alto, CA: Mayfield Pub. Co., 1984),

<sup>824</sup> Yalom and Leszcz, 529.

interaction. These structured exercises often elicit a “compressed” feeling or quality to the overall EG experience.<sup>825</sup> Exercises may include the entire group or a more direct one-on-one encounter with a group leader or trainer. Common examples of exercises are the “trust fall” where one member leans back or “falls” into the waiting arms of co-participants. Another version of the “fall” exercise is the “lift” exercises where participants lift a member over their heads or form a cradle where they gently rock the participant back and forth. Other exercises include a leader-led visualization narrative, or some form of group game.<sup>826</sup> Structured exercises within EG’s tend to create a more intense group dynamic which more rapidly builds a heightened sense of self-awareness and an increased ability to engage issues that arise from the exercises in the “here-and-now.”

All of these T-group techniques were centered on the primary goal of “unfreezing.” This is a term Lewin used to describe “the process of disconfirming an individual’s former belief system” in order to create a measure of liminal space whereby a participant can discover a motivation through which the process of transformation can occur.<sup>827</sup> Each of these inventions, feedback, cognitive aids, and observant participation led to the ultimate objective of “unfreezing” previously calcified and hardened interpersonal and/or group affiliations, associations and ideological paradigms.<sup>828</sup> The T-group structures proved

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<sup>825</sup> In interviews with both Tocchini and ACCD participants the term “compressed” here is intended to convey the concept of heightened mental and emotional awareness in a short period of time. Interviews with participants reveal descriptions of the EG experience as “dense” “heavy” or “intense” due to a concentrated focus on psychological factors and experiences which previous to the training exercises were largely unconsidered and/or outside their conscious awareness. When participants are challenged to focus their attention and energy on understanding attitudes, actions and emotions previously left unchecked and therefore engaged in with little conscious effort, there appears to be an accompanying sensation of impenetrable thickness to the quality and measure of their psychological experiences. Some experience this thickness as an “avalanche of emotion.”

<sup>826</sup> See Appendix 3 for more information regarding the illegal activities of some HPM founders.

<sup>827</sup> Ibid. Schein and Bennis, *Personal and Organizational Change*, 41-43

<sup>828</sup> K. Benne, “History of the T-Group in the Laboratory Setting,” in *T-Group Theory and Laboratory Method; Innovation in Re-Education.*, ed. Leland Bradford, (New York: Wiley, 1964), 80-135. Glen Rupert, “Employing the New Age: Training Seminars,” in *Perspectives on the New Age*, ed. James R. Lewis and J. Gordon. Melton, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 127-135.

successful in helping individuals transcend long held racial, religious and psychological habits, the reduction of interpersonal conflict, emotional stress and increased relational and social well-being.<sup>829</sup>

In time Lewin would incorporate and combine insights from psychologists such as Carl Rogers<sup>830</sup> and Fritz Perls,<sup>831</sup> to form a distinct EG ethos. As news of Lewin's research traveled in academic circles new research grants were made.<sup>832</sup> Researchers took note of how successful the T-groups had been in “unfreezing” long held, deeply ingrained, and often negative beliefs and attitudes.<sup>833</sup> The implications of such research evoked from some researchers suggestions that humanity had at last discovered a potential means to form more perfect relational unions and social structures.<sup>834</sup>

Many of these rosy scenarios came from a growing segment of the field of humanistic psychology labeled the Human Potential movement (HPM).<sup>835</sup> Scholars suggest the most direct link to the origin of the HPM can be found in the rising popularity of

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<sup>829</sup> Schein and Bennis, *Personal and Organizational Change*, 41.

<sup>830</sup> See Carl R. Rogers, *Carl Rogers on Encounter Groups* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), Carl R. Rogers, *Client-Centered Therapy, Its Current Practice, Implications, and Theory* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1951), Donald K. Fromme, *Systems of Psychotherapy : Dialectical Tensions and Integration*, (New York: Springer, 2010), 284-290.

<sup>831</sup> See Appendix 3 and Magda Denes-Radomisli, “Gestalt Group Therapy: Sense in Sensitivity,” in *Group Process Today: Evaluation and Perspective*, ed. Donald Milman and George Goldman, (Oxford, England: Thomas, 1974), Steven Finando, “The Effects of Group Type on Change of Self Concept,” *Small Group Behavior* Vol. 8,2, (May, 1977), 123-134. Irvin D. Yalom and Modyn Leszcz, *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy*, 5th ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2005), 470-1.

<sup>832</sup> Cornelius Sanders, *Group Behavior and Personal Reaction Patterns; a Participants View of the Processes of Change At a Management Human Relations Course* (Gravenhage, Germany: Commissie Opvoering Productiviteit van de Sociaal-Economische Raad, 1963),

<sup>833</sup> M. A. Coghill, “What Happens in a T-Group?,” *The Personnel Administrator* Vol. 13, (1968), 41-48.

<sup>834</sup> Richard G. Weigel, “The Marathon Encounter Group-Vision and Reality: Exhuming the Body for a Last Look,” *Counseling Psychology Journal: Practice and Research* Vol. 53,3, (2002), 186-198.

<sup>835</sup> Richard L. Batchelder and James M. Hardy, *Using Sensitivity Training and the Laboratory Method; an Organizational Case Study in the Development of Human Resources* ([New York]: Association Press, 1968), 128.

humanistic psychology after WWII.<sup>836</sup> Often referred to as the “third force” of psychology, humanistic psychology traces its roots to a number of sources but draws most heavily from the works of Abraham Maslow.<sup>837</sup> A segment of humanistic psychology, often those interested in the industrial or commercial applications of humanistic psychology, attempted to combine the T-group/EG ethos of Lewin, Rogers, and Perls into a more fully developed school of philosophical and psychological thought.<sup>838</sup> This became the foundation for the HPM and its connection to the New Age movement.<sup>839</sup>

Several factors combined to form this growing pseudo-psychological industry. The commoditization of the therapeutic experience made humanistic psychological theory, EG’s and the HPM the forerunner of the billion dollar a year “self-help” industry.<sup>840</sup> Commoditization, coupled with a lack of regulatory oversight, increasing public demand for greater levels of social and political freedom, and the increasingly powerful anti-institutionalism within the counter culture movement of the 1960’s, all coalesced into the rapid establishment of the HPM. A cadre of entrepreneurial advisors, writers, gurus, guides and speakers eventually rose in prominence. Certainly not all, but many of these leaders chose to create personality driven organizations which exploited the legitimate EG/T-group

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<sup>836</sup> Kristine Beyerman Alster, *The holistic health movement* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1989), 36-44. Also Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture : Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998), 49-51, Peter B. Clarke, *New Religions in Global Perspective : A Study of Religious Change in the Modern World* (London: Routledge, 2006), 27.

<sup>837</sup> See Appendix 3 for a more detailed connection between Maslow and the Human Potential Movement.

<sup>838</sup> Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture : Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998), 50-51. and also Roy Wallis, “Betwixt Therapy and Salvation: The Changing Form of the Human Potential Movement,” *Sickness and Sectarianism* Vol. (1985), 23. Lawrence D. Plumb, *A critique of the human potential movement* (New York: Garland Pub., 1993), 4

<sup>839</sup> See Appendix 3 for a more detailed description of the human potential movement and its connection to the New Age movement.

<sup>840</sup> Matthew. Archibald, *The Evolution of Self-Help*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), Mary B. Ballou, *Psychological Interventions : A Guide to Strategies* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1995), 56.

methods as a means to financially benefit from the increasingly radicalized humanistic and transpersonal therapies, seminars and awareness groups.<sup>841</sup> Commoditization also led to the lowering of professional standards and the introduction of pseudo-scientific pop-psychology.<sup>842</sup> This created a HPM culture that normalized the acceptance of unquantifiable claims tied to a stable of unqualified and incompetent pseudo professionals hoping to benefit from increasing their share of a growing economic opportunity.<sup>843</sup>

One such group with links to ACCD was Mind Dynamics. Started by Alexander Everett in 1968, Everett used adaptations of the T-group/EG research to gather a significant following. Although Mind Dynamics was only in business a short time, and closed after accusations of fraud, it has been linked as a significant forerunner to what has been termed “large group awareness trainings” that were modeled off Lewin’s work at the NTL.<sup>844</sup> Soon after Mind Dynamics opened, Everett joined forces with William Penn Patrick, owner of a corporate leadership and sales training company called Leadership Dynamics.<sup>845</sup> This proved to be partnership gone wrong. Both were accused of fraud and charged by several

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<sup>841</sup> Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties : Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States, C. 1958-C. 1974* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), Peter Finkelstein, Brant Wenegrat, and Irvin D Yalom, “Large Group Awareness Training,” *Annual Review of Psychology* Vol. 33, (1982), 515-539.

<sup>842</sup> Harold Burt, “Pseudo-Psychology,” in *Applied Psychology*, ed. Harold Burt, (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1978), 38-63. And Daniel Hogan, *The Regulation of Psychotherapists: A Study in the Philosophy and Practice of Professional Regulation*, vol. 1 (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1979), 5.

<sup>843</sup> Richard Behar and Ralph King, “The Winds of Werner,” *Forbes* Vol. 136, 13, (November, 1985), 42-48, Glen Rupert, “Employing the New Age: Training Seminars,” in *Perspectives on the New Age*, ed. James R. Lewis and J. Gordon. Melton, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 127-135,

<sup>844</sup> Ibid. 54. Large Group Awareness trainings are related though not identical to Encounter Groups. William Van Buskirk and Dennis McGrath, “The Culture Focused T-Group,” *Public Administration Quarterly* Vol. 17, 3, (1993), 316-338.. See Irvin D. Yalom, *The theory and practice of group psychotherapy*, (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 486. And Carl R. Rogers, *Encounter groups* (London: Allen Lane, 1971),

<sup>845</sup> Michael York, *Historical Dictionary of New Age Movements* (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2004), 121, 68. Espy M. Navarro and Robert. Navarro, *Self realization : the est and Forum phenomena in American society* (Philadelphia, PA: Xlibris, 2002),

state and federal agencies on multiple criminal and civil counts.<sup>846</sup> Yet when Mind Dynamics and Leadership Dynamics folded several of the trainers who had been trained and worked with Penn Patrick and Everett spun off their own HPM organizations. Two of the key trainers in Mind Dynamic/Leadership Dynamic enterprise were John Hanley and John Paul Rosenberg.<sup>847</sup> In 1972 Hanley started a HPM firm called Lifespring and Rosenberg would later change his name to Werner Erhard and develop a similar organization called Erhard Training Systems or more popularly known as est.<sup>848</sup> Dan Tocchini, founder of ACCD, was trained at Lifespring by Hanley. Both Erhard and Hanley are still in the HPM business and their organizations can be found on the web.<sup>849</sup>

Tocchini's connection to the HPM is significant and has played a key role in the history and formation of ACCD. Tocchini's professional education came during the zenith of the HPM. As a result both he and ACCD have come under significant scrutiny over the years regarding these associations, to the point where public accusations of cult affiliation were made against ACCD. Tocchini self-published a book on the controversy and presents a well documented defense. He unashamedly admits ACCD trainings currently use the techniques developed by Lewin, Perls, Rogers and Maslow which originated not from the HPM but the T-group/EG structure and the NTL.<sup>850</sup> Many of the activities, processes, pedagogy and events within ACCD seminars titled Breakthrough and Discovery are directly connected to EG methodology. However, ACCD and Tocchini take great pains to

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<sup>846</sup> See Appendix 3. John Ankerberg and John. Weldon, *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs* (Eugene, Or.: Harvest House Publishers, 1996), 259-309. Paul. Heelas, *The New Age Movement : The Celebration of the Self and the Sacralization of Modernity* (Oxford ; Cambridge, Mass., USA: Blackwell, 1996), 72.

<sup>847</sup> Michael York, *Historical Dictionary of New Age Movements* (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2004), 121, 68.

<sup>848</sup> Ibid.

<sup>849</sup> The Forum and Lifespring can be located at <http://www.lifespringnow.com>. Erhard's company is now called Landmark Forum and is at <http://www.landmarkeducation.com/>. (both accessed 1-09-2011).

<sup>850</sup> Tocchini, *Cult Fiction*.



make explicitly clear the goal and objectives of the ACCD seminars are significantly different than those of Lifespring, EST and other HPM organizations. These goals are so different in fact Tocchini states the organizations have become diametrically opposed.<sup>851</sup> Yet Tocchini recognizes ACCD is often caught up in the assumption of “guilt-by-association” due to their affiliation with similar methodologies, while maintaining a distinct and significantly different philosophy and objective.

This opposition brings forward the third most significant forming event in the ACCD ecological structure. Willard’s theology significantly influenced ACCD’s philosophy and methodology. Tocchini’s early Lifespring training originally centered on the early T-Group/EG models that applied a Lewinian, Maslowian, Rogerian and Gestalt ideological and theoretical platform. However, Tocchini recalls the HPM began to shift its philosophical foundation away from Rogers, Maslow and Lewin toward the existential phenomenology of philosopher Martin Heidegger.<sup>852</sup> While at Lifespring, Hanley enrolled in an unaccredited PhD program to study the effects of Lifespring training on participants. As part of his research, Hanley used several Lifespring employees to study and write research papers on Heideggerian existential phenomenology.<sup>853</sup>

As one of Hanley’s researchers, Tocchini realized a Heideggerian shift toward existential phenomenology would significantly alter the focus of the Lifespring organization. He believed the application of Heideggerian philosophy would change the focus from helping participants discover and achieve their present potential toward a training ethos that advocated transcendental constructivism. This position advanced the

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<sup>851</sup> This is revealed in the articles on the ACCD website. See Daniel Tocchini, “Controversy FAQ Interview-Full Version,” <http://www.accd.org/index.cfm/pages/456> (accessed 12-23, 2009).

<sup>852</sup> Daniel Tocchini, “Research Interview” interviewed by Author, Newport Beach., August, 31 2010.

<sup>853</sup> Not long before Hanley’s research, Erhard also made a Heideggerian shift in his now infamous enlightenment experience while traveling over the Golden Gate Bridge. George D. Chryssides, *Exploring New Religions* (New York: Continuum Intl Pub Group, 2001), 303-314.

idea of the human ability to create, and thus recreate, one's own experience with reality solely through the assumption of the power believed to be posited intrinsically within human consciousness.<sup>854</sup> Tocchini believed this marked a dramatic philosophical and ontological move away from his belief in the realist positions of Husserlian phenomenology. It also paved the way for even greater degrees of trainer abuse, narcissism and nihilism which were already prevalent concerns in other HPM organizations.<sup>855</sup> Tocchini resisted this shift and eventually left Lifespring to develop the ACCD model.

For two years after leaving Lifespring, Tocchini worked to recapture and renovate the T-group/EG methodology into a Christocentric model. During this period, Tocchini credits Willard's *Spirit of the Disciplines* as a key work that helped him reshape both his view of the training objectives, contributed to his own personal spiritual formation and provided a platform for his realist understanding of the Kingdom of God. Willard's philosophical connection to Aristotelian realism and Husserlian phenomenology in relationship to his theological articulation of a protoevangelical gospel helped Tocchini form a training platform which highlighted the protoevangelical worldview as more than an existential phenomenon but a representation of an experiential reality. Thus, at the very genesis of the ACCD organization, Tocchini reconfigured his Lifespring training in an attempt to form a biblically based, doctrinally orthodox ministry organization focused on assisting participants to better capture and incarnate a Willardian protoevangelical, theological vision of God's Kingdom in discipleship to Christ.

Two years after leaving Lifespring, Tocchini presented his new training regimen at a weekend retreat. After completing the training the overwhelmingly positive feedback

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<sup>854</sup> For an interesting constructivist epistemological definition see Gerard Delanty, *Social Science : Beyond Constructivism and Realism*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 53.

<sup>855</sup> Tocchini, Research Interview, August, 2010.

suggested Tocchini had realized his goal of adapting the T-Group/EG format to benefit Christian spiritual transformation and development. By 1992, continued demand for training seminars led Dan and his wife Aileen to “formalize the ministry and persevere in the development of biblically-grounded experiential trainings.”<sup>856</sup> Eventually the Tocchinis created an infrastructure to support ongoing training events throughout California. Currently ACCD is chartered as a 501(c)3 California corporation that is overseen by the Tocchinis and a board of directors. The original training program Tocchini created has now been presented all over the globe and has accumulated over 30,000 graduate participants.<sup>857</sup>

The ACCD training contains each of the distinguishing characteristics of a T-group/EG described above. Although each training is distinct in the manner in which the exercises are applied given the uniqueness of each group, the overall agenda of the training sessions consistently includes all of the identifying characteristics of the T-group/EG model. ACCD uses adapted gestalt therapy, structured exercises, feedback, group dynamics, observant participation, cognitive aids, and on-the-spot-here-and-now experiential learning schemes. Each of these techniques are used in the effort to “unfreeze” existing ideological paradigms and perspectives, creating a liminal space for participants to reconsider their lives and redirect their efforts toward a transformational change. The ACCD model is significantly Rogerian in that the objectives for the transformative goal remain client led and centered. However, the use of gestalt necessitates the leader/trainer play a highly visible and directive role in the processes of deconstructing some long-held opinions or perspectives.

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<sup>856</sup> Daniel Tocchini, “History of ACCD,” <http://www.accd.org/> (accessed 9-23, 2010).

<sup>857</sup> Ibid.

Although mentioned previously, it is important to note Tocchini significantly altered or tailored the application and objective of many of Lewin's, Perls' and Rogers' techniques in the ACCD training. For example, depending on the category or situation, ACCD training may de-emphasize or over emphasize the use of a structured exercises, or perhaps how a trainer uses gestalt therapy as a means of engaging an issue where appropriate and depending on the specific circumstances and objectives required of an individual or group. Despite this tailored individuality, some degree of commonality between the ACCD training regimen and the EG's training structure remains. Whatever level of similarity exists, there also appears an equal and perhaps even greater degree of divergence from EG norms when considering ideological or philosophical ends. A greater discussion of these aspirations will be provided in the section discussing the ACCD culture.

In summary, the trainings themselves, how they came to be, their constitution and what they endeavor to provide all combine to forge the ecological framework of ACCD. That much of the training ideology originated in conjunction with the rise of the HPM has a distinct historical significance for ACCD. Yet, from the inception of his organization, Tocchini's goals have been uniquely separate from that of other HPM organizations. ACCD's seminars endeavor to equip and train participants to refocus their attention away from the individualistic, self-aggrandizing tendencies of humanistic philosophies that prioritize individualism and ego gratification. However, ACCD also seeks to alter the effects of theological platforms like fundamentalist evangelicalism that tend to promote high degrees of ideological certainty, individualism, separatism and ethnocentric monoculturalism. The ACCD trainings endeavor to "unfreeze" these often deep-seated worldviews and insert the possibility of a Willardian perspective centered on spiritual transformation and Kingdom life. Although Tocchini employed several exercises within ACCD training that were similar, if not identical, to those offered organizations labeled as

either “new age” or “cultish,” the intents and purposes of these exercises are focused on entirely different ends. The ACCD trainings are not designed to proliferate the humanism, constructivism or narcissism often associated with the HPM and its leaders, nor do the trainings advocate or support the conservative evangelical fundamentalism of ACCD’s most vocal critics.

This position of “in-between-ness” and his historic connection to Lifespring, has forced Tocchini to defend his theology and methodology continuously over the past two decades. He regularly justifies the purposes of the organization and responds to accusations of cultish affiliations and aspirations. Therefore, since the history, creation, development and opposition to the ACCD training programs have been integral in both the life of the organization and in Tocchini’s own personal history, the cultural framework has equally been shaped and affected by these forces as well. It is to the investigation of the culture of ACCD that we now turn.

### *Cultural Frame*

The primary and most pervasive and culturally forming quality of ACCD is their unique understanding of personal freedom and its responsible use. The entire organization, which includes the trainings, trainers, literature and interpersonal interactions and relationships of participants, all focus on varying manifestations of this same pursuit; the endeavor of facilitating increasing freedom of the will and thus unlocking the positive, creative potential and destiny of each individual. The pursuit and attainment of this freedom of will is inextricably tied to a corresponding value placed on restructuring or transforming the habits of thought, feeling, and bodily responses which inhibits freedom. Central to this pursuit is the idea that one must be free of the demands, temptations or compulsions of the bodily impulses, physical desires, intellectual thoughts, emotional responses, and relational

needs to the point where what the individual will desires can be accomplished. Thus personal freedom is attained when the physical, intellectual, spiritual, relational and/or psychological hurdles that have previously thwarted the will from actualizing its intents and purposes are overcome or removed.

Since the pursuit of freedom of the individual will stands out as the single coalescing force that shapes the culture, rituals, trainings, values and relationships this section will consider how ACCD understands human freedom, transformation and will. Also, a brief consideration into the perceived differences articulated between Husserlian and Heideggerian phenomenology mentioned earlier is in order to better describe how ACCD views the action and power of the will. This pursuit will differentiate ACCD's intents and purposes of their Willardian/Christocentric worldview as contrasted to those articulated by the HPM.<sup>858</sup> Additionally, it is necessary to understand what methodology is used to encourage and facilitate the achievement of transforming of the will and the development of increasing degrees of self-awareness and self-determination. This investigation will also examine how ACCD's commitment to personal freedom funds their concerted efforts and devotion to the concept of "unfreezing."

In some form or another, each of the training activities ACCD provides is directed toward providing the opportunity to first experience and then achieve what existential benefits freedom of the will would provide. This value marks ACCD as a significantly Willardian focused organization; one which endeavors to institute Willard's concepts of spiritual formation and transformation he articulates most prevalently in *Renovation of the Heart*. ACCD has assumed the role of providing a complete methodological platform for the application of Willard's theo-ontological view of the human condition and its potential.

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<sup>858</sup> This concept of Heideggerian influence in religion and ontology is a complex subject handled well by Stanley J. Grenz, *The Named God and the Question of Being : A Trinitarian Theo-Ontology*, (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 111-120.

The trainings sessions are focused on facilitating the experience of Willard’s view of “repentance” which then leads to the potential for “renovation” of each constituent part of the self (mind, body, relationships, soul). As these parts become more integrated and aligned with the will, existential freedom is progressively achieved. “Unfreezing” allows participants to first admit, then uncover where, and possibly why, misalignment occurred and how to reestablish integration.

The philosophical basis for this approach to human transformation starts with Tocchini’s understanding of Husserl’s realist philosophy. Tocchini contends both Husserl and Willard advocate for the human ability to increasingly achieve knowledge of reality. As mentioned earlier Willard’s realist position holds knowledge of the world, including the metaphysical and the supernatural, is possible while allowing for appropriate degrees of human error and misconception.<sup>859</sup> Certainty, for Willard, is not essential for the integrity of the realist position. Still Willard’s epistemological position contends that persons attain knowledge of the world “when we are representing it (thinking about it, speaking of it, treating it) as it actually is, on an appropriate basis of thought and experience.”<sup>860</sup> ACCD applies this realist epistemological position to personal character, asserting persons can both pursue and increasingly discover who they are, even the depths of their nature, and thus attain a profound understanding of the internal motives, intents, desires and purposes underneath their individual behaviors and choices.

Additionally, like Husserl and Willard, ACCD proposes the path of attaining knowledge requires the arduous search for the nature and essence of things “as they are, in

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<sup>859</sup> See Chapter three pages 237-255.

<sup>860</sup> KCT, 15.

and of themselves.”<sup>861</sup> To accomplish this the concepts of “bracketing” and “*epoche*,” although not explicitly articulated in the trainings themselves, are routinely embedded in the training ethos.<sup>862</sup> ACCD seminars intentionally create something of a temporary social microcosm with its own rules and norms, where for several hours or a few days, participants are encouraged to set aside (bracket) many of their preexisting existential assumptions, predispositions and perceptions of their lives. This would include prejudices, habits, beliefs, emotions, etc. and the many corresponding or accompanying consequences of the same. The objective of this bracketing is to encourage *metanoia*; the intentional contemplation, consideration and discussion of existing behaviors, attitudes, and their underlying motives, which have previously gone either unperceived or uninspected. As these motives, attitudes, etc. come under closer consideration and deconstruction, participants are presented an opportunity to engage the “real” impetus of their actions and attitudes as opposed to what they have assumed or projected as their intents and purposes guiding their lives.

This is the step where ACCD’s application of Tocchini’s view of Husserlian realism is most directly applied to the ethos of the training regime and its objectives. Participants are challenged to consider the possibility the life they live is in fact the life they have chosen to create. Thus the present, lived reality of one’s life is largely, but not exclusively, the resulting sum of both the many and various choices made over their lives and the motivations behind those decisions. Therefore, in order to change the direction or to pursue transformation, an accompanying conscious realization of the need, purpose and desire to

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<sup>861</sup> Willard discusses this concept in several places. Perhaps the most direct handling is in Dallas Willard, “The World Well Won: Husserl’s Epistemic Realism One Hundred Years Later,” in *A Hundred Years of Phenomenology*, (Boston, MA: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002), 69-78.

<sup>862</sup> See pages 245-246.



change the choices and decisions, which can eventuate in a different outcome, must be achieved.

This is the fulfillment of Willard’s understanding and definition of repentance (*metanoia*.)<sup>863</sup> Willard proposes the act of repentance is best accomplished through an accurate inventory of ones life which leads to a point of metacognition where reconsideration of ones values and priorities can occur.<sup>864</sup> The subjects of reconsideration would include all the ideologies and defense mechanisms that may have developed in the ongoing creation of ones worldviews. Depending on the individual, these ideologies may vary from as vast a subject as teleology or ontology down to the intimate perceptions one has of their own body or family relations. Yet regardless of the scope or level of reconsideration, Willard proposes that contemplation of the driving forces that lead ones life is the first integral step necessary for beginning a life lived in the theo-ontological reality of God’s Kingdom.<sup>865</sup> Therefore this concept of repentance is in essence the same goal of the EG concept of “unfreezing.”

However, the objective of the repentance as conceived in a Willardian/ACCD framework is quite different when compared to the philosophical proposal within an existential constructivist position of Martin Heidegger highlighted in many HPM

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<sup>863</sup> Willard concept of metanoia is also presented in other works. See Brian D. McLaren, *The Secret Message of Jesus : Uncovering the Truth That Could Change Everything* (Hovel, 2006), 108-109. Jay E. Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling: More Than Redemption* (Grand Rapids, MI: Ministry Resource Library, 2010), ch. 13.

<sup>864</sup> Metacognition is a relatively new term used in educational psychology which describes the consideration of what and how one is thinking about their thinking. Metacognitive knowledge refers to acquired knowledge about cognitive processes, which is then used to control and direct new thinking and thought. See Vincent. Yzerbyt, Guy. Lories, and Benoit. Dardenne, *Metacognition : Cognitive and Social Dimensions* (London: Sage Publications, 1998),

<sup>865</sup> Willard interprets the New Testament description of Jesus and John the Baptist’s message of “repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand” as an encouragement toward a metacognitive investigation of ones assembled worldview or “personal kingdom” in light of the very different ideological reality envisioned and offered in the Kingdom of God. Willard, *KCT*, 157. And *DC*, 15-33.

methodologies.<sup>866</sup> Tocchini suggests Heideggerian philosophy is used in the HPM to elevate the idea “one creates or constructs their own existential worth or value simply by changing their internal thoughts. Therefore what one values, professes, theorizes, thinks, hopes or desires to be true of their existential reality is given highest priority.”<sup>867</sup> The Heideggerian structure creates an imperative and priority on corrective thinking, and therefore focuses intently on what subjects or aspirations one places the mind upon. This priority comes from the presumption that what one thinks about, and how one thinks about certain key concepts such as self existence and reality, are the primary creative forces that produce a commensurate level of flourishing one desires. This idea could be summarized in the axiom, “if you think “it”... “it” will come.”

In contrast, Tocchini argues a Husserlian position requires the ability to both describe and understand the actual observable effects of ones life as the means by which flourishing can and should be measured. The HPM’s application of Heidegger’s existential phenomenology suggests that developing and maintaining positive theoretical or transcendental aspirations for human life is the primary objective, (otherwise known as “the power of positive thinking”).<sup>868</sup> Husserl’s position argues the best means to measure human flourishing is the gathering of actual evidence to assess the degree of alignment and attainment of stated values and priorities. Both Willard and Tocchini believe such an inquiry will provide a fairly accurate picture of the inconsistency or conflict that exist

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<sup>866</sup> The effect of Heideggerian philosophy on the new age movement is well documented. See Peter Wilberg, *From New Age to New Gnosis: The Contemporary Significance of a New Gnostic Spirituality* (Sussex, UK: Gardner), 67-70. Kay Alexander, “Roots of the New Age,” in *Perspectives on the New Age*, ed. James R. Lewis and J. Gordon Melton, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992),30-48. Julian Young, *Heidegger’s Later Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge Univ Pr, 2002), 126.

<sup>867</sup> Tocchini, Research interview, August, 2010.

<sup>868</sup> This phrase comes from the popular self-help book by Norman Vincent Peale, *The Positive Principle Today : How to Renew and Sustain the Power of Positive Thinking* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1976),

between one's stated values and beliefs and the lived experience evidenced in the results of actual choices and behaviors demonstrated in community.

How this realist philosophy plays out in the culture of the ACCD organization is perhaps best illustrated in a typical example from an ACCD seminar. As previously mentioned the ACCD seminars create an environment, a liminal space, where philosophical, intellectual, theological and cultural investigation can occur. This is often accomplished through the employment of structured group exercises.<sup>869</sup> An ACCD trainer will first introduce a topic in a short lecture presentation (cognitive aid) that sets the parameters and methodological or philosophical justification of the forthcoming exercise. Attendees are then invited to voluntarily participate in something of a brainstorming session. Questions and answers are written on large pieces of paper or blackboard visible to the entire group. Given the answers and direction of the conversation and the interactions of group participants, the trainer will typically ask more directed, probing questions of some group members.

Typically one or more participants will suggest an insight or opinion in a comment or question that reveals a potentially deep and meaningful assumption. The trainer will often stop the group exercise at that time and ask that individual to stand. It is here where the participant has a choice to enter what is called the "hot seat." This is a situation where the entire group witnesses an interaction between a single participant and the trainer in a one-on-one probative conversation. This trainer/participant interaction (gestalt therapy) can be emotionally rigorous, intellectually challenging and relationally confrontational, depending upon the rigidity of the belief, conviction, fear or level of defense built around any certain behavior, belief or perception. These questions are both exploratory and

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<sup>869</sup> A good explanation of the psychological and cognitive restructuring that is occurring in these EG settings can be found in John Thompson, "Voting Games and Belief Reorganization," *Simulation and Gaming* Vol. 8, 1, (1977), 121-131.

deconstructive of both the conscious or unconscious ideas upon which premises and assumptions are built and behaviors rest. The goal is to deconstruct whatever intellectual, social, theological, emotional or psychological processes or events have combined to construct, justify and then defend a potentially problematic belief or behavior currently displayed in the participant's life (here-and-now therapy).

The process is somewhat similar to what most counselors or therapists might perform in a normal counseling session. What appears significantly different is the speed and depth at which “layers” of justification, defensiveness, fear, shame, etc. are first exposed, analyzed and then at least temporarily resolved. Once the process of inquiry disarms (unfreezes) the defense mechanism and reveals the underlying but guarded belief or need, the trainer often offers alternative perspective, ideas, opinions or viewpoints previously outside the realm of consideration or possibility. This line of questioning routinely “opens up” a horizon of possibility and appears to fuel new thoughts and the reestablishment of an emotional or intellectual imaginary. Participants often commented after the training, the effect of these “hot seat” interactions were often accompanied by a significant sense of increased personal freedom an “opening up” of new insights, and the accompaniment of the empowerment of the will.

In ACCD terminology, the result of “unfreezing” often leads to this experience of “opening up.” This term describes the processes of reducing or eliminating the intellectual, emotional and psychological myopia that often surrounds long-standing, unchecked systems of interpersonal belief, internal dialogue or the assumption of social norms. These systems of defense are commonly termed “rackets.” Although not specifically limited to theological or doctrinal systems of beliefs, ACCD trainings do specifically target and challenge the level of integration or disintegration present within stated philosophical, ideological and theological values and beliefs and their accompanying “rackets” which

result in behavioral outcomes. As a result religious affiliations and assumptions are often included in the deconstructive mix.

Whether a participant states or affirms a religious position or not, the training is designed to measure or bear witness to the level or degree of disintegration between displayed behaviors compared against what participants claim are their core values and aspirations. Additionally, the “here-and-now” focus places increased value on the evidence of displayed behavior over and against what a participant may profess is or is not pertinent regarding the importance or relevance of their particular religious heritage, affiliation or doctrine. This deconstruction of actual vs. idealistic perceptions of the self is a key factor in the training methodology. As a result, many religious participants find it increasingly difficult, often struggling more than non-religious participants; to accept the possibility their profession of faith has been markedly ineffective or impotent in key areas of their lives.

Interviews of training participants from evangelical backgrounds revealed being troubled by three consistent themes revealed in the training experience. First, the feedback they received from other training participants regarding their observed behavior was often shocking and “brutally honest.” Second, many evangelicals discovered how unattractive their overall lifestyle and belief systems appeared to non-evangelical outsiders. Third, the contrast between their stated beliefs regarding the Christian faith and its values, compared to the experiences of others, revealed a disturbing gap in integration. Many evangelicals bluntly articulated their shock at discovering the level of hypocrisy between how others experience them as a direct result of their displayed character in comparison to their stated Christian values. Interviews also revealed confessions of guilt and sorrow resulting from the troubling realization that the assumption of an evangelical system of faith simply did not translate into the presence of a Christlike character evidenced by others. Despite what

was professed about the centrality of love, forgiveness, grace, etc. the training environment provided often-distressing feedback regarding the absence of these virtues in their “real” behavior.

Here the effect of Willard’s articulation of the sin management system of the “right” was poignantly revealed. Several evangelical interviewees communicated sadness that their previous concept of Christianity largely stopped at the profession of accurate beliefs about Christian doctrine. The shock and sorrow appeared to stem from the realization years of evangelical teaching and enculturation had created the false premise that profession of belief alone was somehow powerful enough to change their nature or character. At the same time, the ACCD training was also able to point toward the benefits of “unfreezing” the ideological and theological frameworks of the past and the hopeful future of newfound freedoms.

This was perhaps the most significant theological result witnessed in the ACCD seminars. As a result of the trainings evangelical participants regularly reported feeling released from the limitations of past ideological constructs and therefore better prepared to consider new possibilities for their lives. They connected the trainings with a new found ability to experience a deeper sense of peace, intimacy with God and openness in their relationships. The most common testimonial provided by “graduates” of ACCD training was an overall amazement at their ability to recognize and probe new alternatives for living and thinking about life in the Kingdom of God that were previously unforeseeable inside their traditional evangelical worldviews. The trainings were routinely credited for providing an opportunity to “look” beyond previous emotional, intellectual and relational limits imposed by their evangelical worldview. These extraordinary changes in long standing theological, psychological and relational habits were commonly termed “breakthroughs.”

The second most often described effect of the ACCD trainings was the realization gained as to the power and influence underlying unconscious beliefs or positions have on external behavior. Participants discussed how novel it was for them to realize the superseding effect unwitting assumptions maintained on their lives. The training environment placed an unrelenting focus on discovering and exposing the nature of motives and assumptions and the power these play in relation to the will. Realizing the strength and force of the will to overcome past motives and assumptions enabled participants to experience the possibility of reshaping and transforming their lives to achieve the integration of the values they profess.

In summary then, the ACCD training creates a culture which values and pursues “real” states of affairs that can be discovered by human beings through a rigorous search for the “truth.” This process of inquiry attempts to first “bracket” all outside forces that limit or prevent authentic introspection and analysis of both the causes and effects of personal choice and behavior. The training platform then assists participants in discovering how “things come before the mind” (phenomenological process) and how those things affect the experiences and interpretations of life. The probative effects of gestalt therapy and the EG methodology creates a setting to catalyze the reconsideration of personal belief systems, assumed knowledge, and their consequences. The result is often an increased sense of existential freedom of the will. This freedom is achieved in two steps. First, one becomes able to consciously discern and evaluate the choices available for their life. Secondly, freedom requires the capacity to engage that choice. Thus the ACCD culture rests on the value, pursuit and attainment of two key characteristics of Willardian theology. These characteristics are encompassed in the concepts of repentance followed by the restoration and empowerment of the human will.

### *The Process Frame*

During the timeframe when the research was conducted on ACCD the organization was in a significant state of flux due to a restructuring. As a consequence, the Tocchinis and the ACCD board of directors were both deconstructing and reconsidering a significant degree of both the leadership structure, product mix and administrative processes of their organization. However, in interviews with key long-term members of the organization, one thing appears constant regarding the dynamics and flow of activity that shapes the process frame of the ACCD organization. For the length of time Tocchini has been at the helm of ACCD, the organization has remained something of an iconoclastic learning and research organization both internally as well as externally. Consequently, Tocchini's creative, inventive, risk taking, enthusiastic personality and work style remains a constant influence throughout the organization. He maintains and encourages the idea of ACCD being a place where cutting edge transformative exercises and experiences are researched, discussed and implanted in the organization as much as they are advocated to prospective participants. Therefore this section will consider the ways ACCD applies this integrative process and how it forms a unique creative process.

Similar to Willard, Tocchini maintains the position that most modern models of Western education do not provide students the opportunity to learn “naturally” through experience. Instead the intellectualized modern bias places students in the position “to memorize concepts [which leaves the student] without a context to figure out how to apply them in life.”<sup>870</sup> According to Tocchini, the proclivity has also taken precedence within theological institutions and churches as well. He writes,

[At ACCD] we believe the monumental rise in spiritual hunger the last twenty years has been empowered by a deep dissatisfaction with over

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<sup>870</sup> Tocchini, Research interview. August, 2010.



rationalized scientific and dogmatic religious approaches to living, comprised of formulas, strict definitions and explanations dehydrating life of its mystery. Doctrinal explanations (scientific as well as religious) that produce a certitude about whether or not there is an unknowable God that Jesus reveals, has spawned a robot-like believer serving one or the other world views. Searchers bent on confirming what they already know, are prone to annihilate the splendid wonder that exploring the meaning of life. Somewhere in the journey of life most of us discover a deep desire to live from our hearts what we dream in our heads. Modern institutions of education barely scratch our desire for this congruity, with a variety of curriculum that feeds the rational mind but otherwise dances around the issues of the heart as if they are not as concrete as the ideas we use to navigate the world we live in. Through our culture's scientific and therapeutic approach to life, mastering the invisible is reduced to such terms as "learning soft skills" or "best practices." It is as if we have forgotten that it is the wind that blows the branches on the trees and now instead we insist that the branches are stirring the wind up. We exchange the rich journey of exploration for the data of "knowing how" or "knowing the right way" pretending that leaning on our own understanding will somehow provide the character required to make the challenging decisions that transform survival to fulfillment and distinguish a sage from a fool.<sup>871</sup>

The above quote comes close to describing the nature of the creative process undergirding the ACCD organization. ACCD's processes are organized around the continual investigation into how to better facilitate the acquisition of knowledge about the essential qualities and factors inherent to the Kingdom of God. This requires the organization and its leaders to engage in continual reconsideration, deconstruction, reinvestigation and recreation of the internal workings and relationships of the organization, its offerings and trainings, and its systems. Therefore, like its participants, the ACCD organization has an "in process" feel to it.

As a way to illustrate the "in process" ethos, it is instructive to consider a recent memorandum sent to key stakeholder in the organization. In this memo Tocchini asked the question, "Who are we?" then lists several items which he states do not define the organization. The list included the concept of ACCD as neither a social network, a para-church organization, an emerging church, nor training company. All of these descriptions,

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<sup>871</sup> Ibid

in Tocchini's view, fall short of accurately describing the essence of the organization. What best describes ACCD, in Tocchini's view, is the concept of an academy. He writes,

After a lapse during the early Roman occupation, the Greek *Akademia* was re-founded as a new institution of some outstanding Platonists of late antiquity who called themselves "*successors*" (*diadochoi*, of Plato) and *presented themselves as an uninterrupted tradition reaching back to Plato.*<sup>872</sup> (emphasis original.)

He goes on to describe that ACCD consists of "successors of Jesus" who currently exist inside a severely individualistic, consumeristic and post-Christian society. Thus Tocchini sees ACCD like the Greek concept of *akademia*, as serving the function of refocusing Christianity, (the philosophy of Jesus as it were) back on the core, protoevangelical principles of the gospel and the life Jesus advocated in the Kingdom of God. Therefore the concept of an academy, or even the more contemporary idea of a society, would perhaps best describe the intention of ACCD's creative process. This bent toward creativity and openness to ideas is also consistent with the focus of the trainings themselves. There is a continual encouragement toward the rigorous inspection of one's actions, attitudes and motives. As such ACCD is integrated and aligned around the same philosophy advocated by the trainings it provides.

Another result of this creatively open, "in processes" sentiment is the establishment of a significant level of good will between the trainers and the organization. As independent contractors, the trainers have the freedom and are encouraged to offer perceptions, ideas and feedback for adapting and improving the trainings. More importantly, interviews with trainers suggest Tocchini has instilled an expectation for transparency and a willingness to both give and receive feedback on a personal level. This creates an environment of trust and experiential learning that proceeds from the leadership level across the entire organizational

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<sup>872</sup> Daniel Tocchini, Personal email to Author, "Memorandum on Association for Christian Character Development; 2011 Vision and Plan," (November 6, 2011)

structure. This is essential for integrity in the organization. Tocchini suggests that he and the trainers must “eat their own cooking on this stuff or its not real.”<sup>873</sup>

Therefore as trainers engage and relate to one another, and continue to develop their skills, while mutually edifying and sharpening one another, there is a deeper experiential base that builds better trainers and results in more effective training sessions. Tocchini realizes that the ways activities and tasks are accomplished in ACCD is a direct indicator if the overarching philosophy of transformation and maturity is both alive and well in the organization as a whole. The trainers represent Tocchini’s litmus test for the strength or weakness of the ACCD culture and are therefore act as a “canary in the coal mine.”

Therefore he spends a tremendous amount of attention to their training and development. Here Tocchini is seen to recognize and apply the key component of leadership development Willard describes in both *Renovation of the Heart* and again in *Knowing Christ Today*.<sup>874</sup> Willard argues that for any substantive and credible change to occur in people’s lives, they must be able to see others demonstrating the positive results of the proposed alternative.

For both Willard and Tocchini, this represents the crux and power of what “witness” encompasses in the Christian experience. For ACCD the credibility of the training largely rests on the trainer’s ability and willingness to guide, mold and shape the training environment. This allows participants to “witness” the relational effects of the training as they are being trained. This can only occur if the effect of the training is first actively present in the life of the trainer. The power and influence of this kind of affective knowledge of the Kingdom of God is what Willard suggests is essential, and often lacking, in Christian leaders and pastors. Valuing the role and influence of modeling transformation

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<sup>873</sup> Tocchini, Research Interview, August, 2010.

<sup>874</sup> See KCT, 200-210.

through leadership, Tocchini endeavors to ensure he and his trainers first participate in, before they advocate for, the theo-ontological reality of God's Kingdom.

### *Summary*

From the beginning, Tocchini's focus for ACCD has been to provide training programs that assist participants in discovering the unvarnished reality of their lives. In deconstructing and evaluating actions, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, hopes, fears and wounds, ACCD assists those who are willing to discover the truth about the existential reality of their own personhood. Such a process is identical to that described by Willard's understanding of *metanoia* or repentance. Through the employment of innovative EG techniques, ACCD trainers assists participants with "reconsidering their considerations" on a vast arena of often deep-seated and intimate motives, beliefs and biases. The training sessions also create an environment where healing, insight and reconstruction of new beliefs can reshape ones worldview.

As such, ACCD's ethos has focused intently on Willard's vision of the protoevangelical message of Jesus. Tocchini's use of the critical realist perspective has radically adapted the transcendental constructivism and humanistic egocentrism of the HPM. In its place ACCD offers a means of entering the theo-ontological reality of God's Kingdom through a rigorous process of introspection and transformation. For evangelicals who attend the trainings the intensity of the *metanoia* process can be threatening and even hostile to their established religious paradigm. Reconsidering the assumptions and manipulations in longstanding evangelical dogmas such as the power of a "profession of faith" or the consumeristic, individualistic rights incumbent on church membership can be deeply unsettling.

The deconstructive aspect of the training provides an opportunity for all participants, not just evangelicals, to face the gap between one's stated beliefs and the actual product of their daily lives. For many, such a realization can evoke initial feelings of humiliation, anger, disillusionment or sorrow. However, as the trainings progress a new paradigm of life in the Kingdom of God is offered and experienced. This builds a corresponding desire to pursue deeper change and more freedom. With this new awareness, ACCD graduates also describe a renewed sense of hope and excitement that the truth of the protoevangelical gospel Jesus offered is still attainable albeit through significantly different means than previously considered. Thus a mixture of sadness with a reconstructed sense of hope for change is often expressed.

Tocchini is very cognizant of the troubles many evangelicals experience in his training sessions. He suggests the level of indoctrination that has occurred in mainstream evangelicalism makes it difficult for trainers to “unfreeze” such long-standing, socially reinforced theological positions. Tocchini notes evangelicals are often resistant to even consider the possibility their previous understandings or approaches to the gospel may be incomplete, flawed or improved upon. This is where the ACCD training reveals its true value for evangelicals. The exercises are routinely able to achieve what a more frontal, logical or reasoned approach to theological or dogmatic issues could not accomplish. As evangelicals begin to see and experience both the harsh realities and unexpected truths within their imperfect theological, ecclesiological and relational biases, a sudden and sometimes dramatic shift is experienced. As evangelicals encounter and practice the theontological reality Willard and Tocchini articulate, many participants reported feeling an “awakening,” “breakthrough,” “epiphany,” or even a “rebirth.” Such terms are exactly the kinds of language often used to historically and biblically describe the conversion experience.

Simply put, evangelicals routinely stated the experience of the Kingdom of God they encountered in the training settings was significantly larger, more grand and grace filled reality than they previously thought possible. ACCD appears to have found a way of creating an environment where individual constructions and assumptions of reality, even evangelical constructions, can be safely and systematically investigated then compared against lived experience. In this process the façades or masks which hide or defend these constructions of reality are slowly peeled away, presenting the opportunity to experience and come to grips with new possibilities and opportunities. When the courage to face reality is achieved, one is also able to determine if and to what degree one's self-image is an accurate representation of their actual self. Both Tocchini and Willard suggest it is in this sometimes harsh and vulnerable state where the heart is revealed, religiosity is abandoned and when true growth and progress toward Christlikeness can begin.

In very tangible and experiential ways ACCD is able to elicit very similar results as those of early EG and T-Group settings. In relatively short periods of time ACCD participants are able to shift and realign long-standing, deep-seated beliefs and assumptions which have often created obstacles preventing a more joyful, integrated and holistic Christian experience. The nature and potential of that full and empowered kind of life has been a pursuit of Tocchini's for the last thirty years. In that respect, ACCD's objectives can be seen as somewhat analogous to those of the HPM. Yet ACCD seeks to discover and guide others into achieving more than their highest and best potential. Tocchini believes such potential is best realized through incarnating the protoevangelical gospel. He states helping people find the possibilities of living in the theo-ontological reality "as a citizen of God's Kingdom in a discipling relationship to Christ, learning to live in the reality of that

truth and freedom... that's what we are all about. Pursuing truth and reality. That's the nature of freedom. And the truth really does set us free!"<sup>875</sup>

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<sup>875</sup> Dan Tocchini, Follow up Interview, interviewed by author, February 12, 2011.

## Oak Hills Church Ethnography

### *Ecological Frame*

The ecology of Oak Hills Church has been most directly impacted and formed by two key decisions. The events leading up to these choices, and their repercussions, have served to significantly alter the direction of the Oak Hills organization, its leadership and congregation. The first key decision came in 1990 when the Oak Hills elders and senior pastor Kent Carlson sought to transition the congregation from a more traditional, evangelical church to pursue a CGM, “seeker-driven” structure and ethos.<sup>876</sup> For ten years Oak Hills emulated and applied the CGM strategy as modeled by the Willow Creek/Bill Hybels organization and its various emissaries. Eventually Oak Hills became a growing, successful, northern California version of the Willow Creek model to the point Hybels himself attended the dedication ceremony of their new facility.

However, within a year of Hybels visit, Oak Hills experienced its second fateful decision. In the summer of 2000, at a retreat at Donner Lake in the Sierra Mountains, Carlson, the pastoral staff and elders chose to expressly reject the Willow Creek ecclesiology and theology. Moving away from the CGM/seeker-driven ethos, Oak Hills chose instead to advocate and exemplify a Willardian theology and praxis. This dramatically shifted the focus of the congregation from a consumeristic ideology and theology toward a pursuit of the protoevangelical gospel, the theo-ontology of Kingdom of God and discipleship to Christ. These two decisions represent the most compelling and significant events that shaped the ecological framework of Oak Hills.

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<sup>876</sup> The term “seeker-driven” is used often to describe a church which has placed a primary value on reaching non-churched groups (seekers) with the evangelical salvation gospel. See pages 125-128.



The intricacies that led up to these decisions are provided in Appendix 5. Although the events leading up to the transition from the CGM ecclesiology are both interesting and relevant, what is most significant to this thesis are the specific events which led to the application of Willardian theology. This section will therefore investigate the specific events surrounding these two decisions and the subsequent entre of Willardian theology into the Oak Hills congregation.

During the decade leading up to the new millennium, Oak Hills accomplished their objective of restructuring their congregation into a Willow Creek modeled church. The process of transitioning Oak Hills into a CGM-styled congregation required Carlson and his leadership group to eventually reconfigure nearly the entire structure and focus of their traditionally-leaning Baptist church. Almost every activity Oak Hills engaged in was redirected toward meeting the desires, felt needs and expectations of a non-churched demographic. Carson writes that Oak Hills bought into the CGM paradigm with “total and almost reckless abandon.”<sup>877</sup> And they were good at producing the Willow Creek styled worship service. They employed what was termed in seeker-church circles the “Disney formula”—a reference to the highly successful Disney films which attract audience by making people laugh and cry during the same event.<sup>878</sup>

As a result, for a time, Oak Hills came to be recognized as the “hot church” or the “place to be and to be seen” in Folsom, CA.<sup>879</sup> Their numerical growth was accompanied by financial strength and facilitated the creation of a new worship center designed specifically around technological, musical and theatrical aesthetics. The new structures enabled more variety and higher quality drama and musical presentations, increased the

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<sup>877</sup> Carlson and Lueken, *Renovation of the Church*, 22.

<sup>878</sup> Ibid. 24

<sup>879</sup> The terms “hot church” or “place to be and be seen” were used in multiple conversations with staff, elders and long-term members as they recalled the early days of the “seeker-driven” era.

entertainment value of their services which in turn attracted large audience. Thus Oak Hills had attained what many in the marketing field term as “critical mass.”<sup>880</sup> The growing audiences emboldened a sense of success and significance throughout the organization and the community.

By 1999-2000 three significant factors came together that would forever changed the direction of Oak Hills and the lives of its leaders. Interviews with elders and pastors described these three factors as a) the ironic influence of Lyle Schaller’s *The Very Large Church*, b) Mike Lueken’s attendance of Willard’s doctoral seminar at Fuller Theological Seminary and c) Carlson’s increasing disenchantment with some more traditional evangelical dogmas and doctrines. The confluence of these events initiated and sustained the dramatic transition of the ecology, theology and structure of the entire Oak Hills congregation. Carlson reflects in hindsight that he, co-pastor Mike Lueken and the elders were like “cars progressively moving toward each other... about to crash into one another in the parking lot.”<sup>881</sup> The result of the convergence of these factors, some of them years in the offing, finally led to the rejection of the CGM model.

The start of these events can be traced to what is commonly referred to as the “Donner Party” retreat. Interviews with those in attendance at the retreat provided a consistent representation of events. Each interviewee recalls a collective recognition, attained in a supernatural fashion, that Oak Hills should halt their involvement in the CGM model. Credited to a “move of the Holy Spirit” attendees gained almost simultaneous

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<sup>880</sup> Critical mass, similar to the concept used in nuclear fission, is a socio-dynamics term used to describe the amount of momentum required in a social system to generate self sustaining growth. It is the stage marketing efforts desire to achieve. It is the moment where the concept, idea or result of the product or service gains enough popularity and favorable acclaim in the public awareness that the product continues to gain market share without overt marketing efforts. Critical mass is then the point where the inertia of goodwill alone essentially advertises the product for itself. Malcolm McDonald, *Malcolm McDonald on Marketing Planning : Understanding Marketing Plans and Strategy* (Philadelphia: Kogan Page, 2007), 290. And Phillip Ball, *Critical Mass: How One Thing Leads to Another*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004).

<sup>881</sup> Kent Carlson, “Research Interview” interviewed by Author, Folsom, CA., February 19, 2011.

awareness that to continue in the CGM ecclesiology would serve only to exacerbate the selfish ambition of their leader, a corporate capitulation to their consumerist culture, surrender to narcissistic individualism and a succumbing to the forces of market-based capitalism. Ironically, this awareness was attained in concert with a book Carlson and Lueken had assigned to the elders as a discussion starter.<sup>882</sup> Schaller's book on church growth was initially intended to spark creative insight and discussion on developing Oak Hill's internal structure to accommodate more growth. Using Schaller example, Carlson and Lueken hoped to better facilitate organizational alignment and motivate their lay leaders to greater levels of commitment to further expansion.

Paradoxically, the book created just the opposite reaction. Schaller's third chapter deals with the issue of American consumerism, its implications on the Christian church and the evangelical gospel. His overt advocacy to leverage the existing, deeply embedded consumeristic desires in congregants to benefit church growth caused Lueken, Carlson and the elders to experience significant and increasing degrees of unease. Along with their discomfort came an increasing disillusionment and conviction regarding how closely tied the CGM ideology is to consumerism in general. Schaller's book also articulated a view of the purposes of the church that specifically challenged Lueken and Carlson's biblical interpretations on the subject. Yet it was Schaller's encouragement to not resist, but encourage, the individualistic trends of American capitalism and its consumeristic forces that became a significant catalyst for their reconsideration of the entrepreneurial methodology inside the CGM. "We found that chapter so offensive and difficult and antithetical to the gospel the more we kept talking about it."<sup>883</sup>

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<sup>882</sup> Lyle E. Schaller, *The Very Large Church* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000),

<sup>883</sup> Carlson, Research Interview, February 19, 2011.

The second event that worked to loosen the grip of the CGM/Willow Creek ideology within Oak Hills was the addition of Willardian theology. Shortly before the elder retreat, Lueken attended Willard's doctoral seminar. Lueken describes this event as his "conversion" experience.<sup>884</sup> In personal interviews with Lueken he recognizes Willard's two-week class radically changed both his thinking and experience of Christianity. Returning to Oak Hills he states,

I knew that as I was sitting in that class... after I got past the euphoria of what [Willard] was saying and then after I assimilated the euphoria of who [Willard] was, I immediately went to [thinking] we've got to do something different. I was going to do the best I could to let people know [Willard's teaching] was revolutionary and we can't just go on with business as usual after this.<sup>885</sup>

For Lueken, everything he had come to understand about discipleship and the purposes of the church had changed. Willard's theology has affected Lueken's vision of the gospel, his theology of the Kingdom of God, the goal of discipleship, and the accompanying ecclesiological impacts of these realities. Lueken continues,

ML: That class was everything to me in terms of this whole [transition]. That class... when I look at my life... and my spiritual life... that class was a massive turn down a road that I didn't have a clue what it was. I only knew I needed to go down that road. And that came for me... the whole impetus of the [transition from the CGM] came as a result of those two weeks. And the preceding required reading for the class altered my center. And made me realize I don't think I'm ever going to be the same after this.

Author: So tell me some more about that... what was it that dramatically shifted that you came to an awareness of?

ML: The Gospel.

Author: Which you're telling me you previously did not know?

ML: I didn't know it that way. I didn't know it that way. And I had not heard it that way. And I had not preached it that way. I'd not read about it that way. And I'd not seen it embodied that way. One of my prevailing thoughts in the class was... and I loved my seminary training... I thought it

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<sup>884</sup> Carlson and Lueken, 52.

<sup>885</sup> Mike Lueken, "Research Interview" interviewed by Author, Folsom, CA., February 23, 2011.

was...I've always loved the classroom environment and do pretty well at devouring the stuff and I enjoyed the rigorous road that it was...But my recollection when I was listening to [Willard] in the classroom was...I don't think anybody put it as bluntly, as clearly, as strait forward about the gospel of the kingdom...I don't have any recollection of that being in my seminary training. But I sat in Willard's class and it was like I felt and saw my seminary training flying out the window. And the dollars that went with it. And I wasn't regretting that. It's just that it had that kind of over-haul feeling to it. I had the feeling that what I was getting from [Willard's theology] was undoing me, disassembling me, disassembling structures in me. And the [process] was crushing me and everything within me was saying, "crush me more."<sup>886</sup>

Returning from Fuller, Lueken was excited about the conversations that would ensue with Carlson and the rest of the Oak Hills leadership. Simultaneously, Carlson was also engaging some deep personal and corporate reflections on his own spirituality and questioning some traditional tenants of evangelical theology and practice. Carlson's early Christian formation relied heavily on the writings of C. S. Lewis and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Thus early on he recognized in Lewis' work a very different vision and articulation of the Christian gospel than that presented in what Carlson often refers to as the "evangelical sub-culture."<sup>887</sup> A healthy curiosity, doubt and desire to investigate those beliefs and traditions handed-down to him has remained a consistent part of Carlson's intellectual and spiritual engagement since his conversion. Although many events over several years worked together to create a shift in Carlson's thinking, Schaller's book served to unabashedly reveal an underbelly in the CGM ecclesiology that Carlson simply could no longer ignore.

Eventually Carlson came to the conclusion that preserving traditions of either theological or evangelical doctrine was less important than pursuing and discovering the truth of Jesus' original message. The pursuit of truth itself, not the emotional security which often accompanies certitude, became his main desire and objective. Subjects that

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<sup>886</sup> Ibid.

<sup>887</sup> Carlson, Research Interview, February, 2011.

have traditionally been deconstructed by many writers and leaders in the Emerging church began to attract Carlson's attention. Although Carlson does not associate himself specifically with the ECM per se, Carlson's beliefs, doubts, questions and investigations align significantly with many proponents of the Emerging Church. Issues such as atonement theory, the nature of salvation, the purposes of the church, the role of anthropomorphism in evangelical dogma and practice, the effects of modern epistemology, methodology and political conservatism in evangelicalism, are all concerns that have progressively gained traction in Carlson's heart and mind over the years and deepened over time.

Combined with his reconsideration of Oak Hills' attractional purposes, Carlson's growing recognition of his own contributions and culpability to the formation of a rather narcissistic and individualistic culture, and Lueken's recent experience with Willard, found both pastors in a seismic theological and ecclesiological shift. Each of these issues came to a peak after reading Schaller's book and discussing it with the staff and elders at the Donner retreat. Carlson remembers the moment his heart shifted away from the CGM ethos.

KC: At the retreat, in the process of talking about [Schaller's book] my memory is that I was talking for quite awhile...and I was...did you see the movie "Unforgiven"? Do you remember that scene at the end where he's just about to kick some butt and he's drinking that bottle and this guy gives a litany of things that he had done...you know...I heard you killed this person and that person... and he's drinking that whole bottle? It was a little like that...I was talking about what was driving me. I was doing an inventory, a little stream of consciousness, out loud, about how important all this stuff was to my own self-desire and how my need for attention was motivating me.

Author: So are you describing your narcissism there? These are the [narcissistic] things that are driving me to implement the CGM and I've pulled these people along with me?

KC: Sure. Sure.

Author: What was that like to confess that?

KC: Well I'm not a shame-based guy. I'm not that kind of guy. My insides are not like that. I didn't expect myself to be perfect. But it's also true that I didn't think I was confessing anything that... frankly... I'm not expecting everyone else to be confessing as well. It's like I'm being honest but everyone else should be honest too. But it's striking me that I had a sense from God that... there was no rebuke. But what I did sense is Him saying "OK. We are done with that." And obviously it took time to change. But the manacles of that [way of doing church] were unlocked... What I mean by that is "we are done with that kind of [narcissistic] motivation now and let's go on to something more healthy."<sup>888</sup>

The confluence of these three key factors, the Schaller book, Lueken's experience with Willard, and Carlson's deconstruction of the CGM ecclesiology combined to cause the leadership at Oak Hills to arrive at the fateful observation they could no longer remain as they were. Elders recalled how unexpectedly and drastic their perspectives changed. So drastic was the change that, in hindsight, the elders and leaders now perceive much of the CGM ethos, at it's worst, is "consumeristic" "unbiblical" "pagan" and in many ways "an alternative gospel." Plainly stated, a majority of those interviewed at Oak Hills now hold the view that the CGM ethos tends to proliferate a worldview significantly different than that articulated by Jesus and conveyed throughout the New Testament.<sup>889</sup>

Almost immediately Oak Hills began the process of reshaping its congregational ethos and leadership structure toward a Willardian view of the protoevangelical gospel. Their primary motive and goal became the creation and encouragement of disciples of Christ, living in the Kingdom of God. Yet the shock of such a drastic transition, and costs of the changeover continue to reverberate deeply within the organization to date. The

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<sup>888</sup> Carlson, Research Interview, February, 2011.

<sup>889</sup> This sentiment came through in over 70% of interviewees when asked to explain in their opinion what makes Oak Hills unique. Many conveyed the idea Oak Hills is unique in that it is distinctly not like other "health and wealth" or "entertainment churches" which articulate either a false or flawed understanding of the gospel, the purposes of the church or the hope of the Christian life. Oak Hills, post-2000 was considered markedly unique because of its focus on the Kingdom of God and character formation through discipleship to Christ.

ongoing toll of this transformation has equally shaped the ecological framework of the organization, its leaders and members. We will now consider three of these continuing effects.

The first significant cost that came in transitioning away from the CGM was a significant drop in regular attendance at the Sunday morning service. Turnout dropped by more than half as the change was implemented. According to several elders, from the highest attendance in the Spring of 2000 to the lowest point in the Summer of 2005, Oak Hills' Sunday worship service attendance fell from approximately 1200 to less than 500. More concerning, about the same percentage of long-time members, including founding members, with deep roots and significant emotional and relational ties, began leaving the church. This caused a considerable degree of angst and doubt among the pastoral staff and elders, leaving many to wonder whether the new strategy was worth the potential loss of the entire church organization.

Secondly, the transition was made quickly and thoroughly. Each aspect of the church and every ministry program came under reconsideration to determine its efficacy and alignment to the new ethos focusing on spiritual transformation and discipleship. As a result most programs were changed. Some were eliminated. Once known in the community for its breadth and depth of ministry programs and services, Oak Hills faced an identity crisis. The elimination or change to their "product mix" caused those originally attracted to Oak Hills for specific programmatic benefits and services to look elsewhere. Further, the pastoral personnel charged with developing and running these programs, at times found the rationale and motivation for change difficult to understand and comply with. The eventual replacement or elimination of staff only served to exacerbated the level of uncertainty.

Third, financial concerns became a pressing issue. After having moved into a new facility in December of 1999 and incurring the debt obligations and budgetary expenditures



to both maintain and staff a church over 1000, the shrinkage in tithes and offerings put much of the fixed expenses in jeopardy. Personnel were laid off, changes were made in compensation and budget excesses were eliminated. Interviews with current Oak Hills members suggest that outsiders were spreading maligning rumors during this transition. Members and leaders of other local churches in the area, only marginally connected with Oak Hills and thus not informed of the philosophical changes occurring in the culture of the church, openly speculated the church was in a state of fiscal freefall and suffering from a leadership void. Surrounding churches began to benefit from the membership flight away from Oak Hills. Thus a sustained period of doubt and angst hovered over the congregation. This only worked to exacerbate the fiscal shortfall.

Contrary to the rumors, Carlson, Lueken and the elder board members acted in concert to implement and accomplish the transition. What occurred at the Donner retreat served to congeal the imperative nature of converting the entire organization toward a more holistic Willardian praxis.<sup>890</sup> Nevertheless, the painful reality of experiencing hundreds of people leaving the church, and dozens of longstanding relationships and friendships coming to an end, took more of a toll than could have been imagined at the time. However, as a result, those who remained and withstood the overarching burden of change readily admit that period remains the fundamental force that has shaped, and continues to shape Oak Hills Church for the better.

### *Cultural Frame*

After describing the events above, it seems understandable that Oak Hill's cultural frame could best be defined in the negative; as a church that no longer perpetuates or yields

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<sup>890</sup> Interviews with elder board members revealed a clear recollection of remaining astutely clear about the direction they were headed and the purposes behind their decisions to alter their course.

to the consumeristic desires of either the broader culture or the CGM ecclesiology. However, positively, Oak Hills defines itself as a church devoted to experiencing and articulating the transforming power of Jesus' protoevangelical gospel and life with God in his Kingdom. They endeavor to share the opportunity of character renewal to their immediate community and then secondarily to the world at large. Thus, Oak Hills does not "desire to simply attract a crowd. But we are passionate about transformation."<sup>891</sup> It is this transformative endeavor which they believe is the primary means through which people discover and engage in "the reality of God in their lives. We believe that this was the core message of Jesus. Jesus wanted us to know that the actual experience of His gracious rule in our lives is available to anyone who follows Him."<sup>892</sup>

As a result, Oak Hills attempts to funnel every endeavor toward this transformative end. "Everything we do at Oak Hills is seen against the backdrop of this singular vision. To be a church where people are being transformed by the power of God."<sup>893</sup> This statement was evidenced in action at multiple and various events, activities and interviews. The sermonizing, hymnity, sacred rituals such as the Eucharist and baptisms, all mentioned or highlighted the essential importance of character transformation that leads to a life of joy and contentment in the Kingdom of God. This formational focus represents the most singular defining characteristic through which Oak Hills defines itself.

Initially, the values of pursuing and developing Christlike character formation may not seem significantly different than those stated by any normal evangelical church. In statement form, these values may actually be very similar if not identical to many

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<sup>891</sup> Kent Carlson and Mike Lueken, "Oak Hills Values," [http://www.oakhills.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=16&Itemid=30](http://www.oakhills.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=16&Itemid=30) (accessed Jan. 30, 2011).

<sup>892</sup> Ibid.

<sup>893</sup> Ibid.

evangelical organizations. What appears different in Oak Hills is the simple but very intentional alignment and application of these values throughout every aspect of the organization. In nearly every setting this researcher witnessed the subject of spiritual formation was a primary if not the central theme. In all retreats, business meetings, planning groups, small-group gatherings, theological training sessions, corporate meals, staff gatherings, with laity or clergy, in official or unofficial church functions, the explicit agenda or conversational focus would eventually land on the progress of, struggles with or intentional activities required for individual spiritual formation and the pursuit of God's Kingdom. Any event that allowed for relational contact and engagement, no matter how mundane, seemed to eventually become focused on discovering a means of growth and maturity toward a more Christlike character. This myopic focus on the protoevangelical ethic and the creation of an ethos to support formational development presents the single sustaining and systemic force that drives the Oak Hills organization.

Secondly, Oak Hills appears to represent a place where several disaffected evangelicals have gathered and found considerable degrees of comfort and support. Several interviewees described church situations prior to attending Oak Hills that involved situations and circumstances that led to significant crisis of faith or degrees of doubt and loss of hope. Not unlike interviews of Holy Trinity congregants, Oak Hills members described experiencing prolonged bouts of depression, considerable anger, and sustained periods of abstinence from all religious activity. Some even described the experience of "losing faith." For many Oak Hills provides renewed hope that their past encounters were not indications of future outcomes. Words that were used to describe their experience at Oak Hills ranged from "saved" "rescued" "delivered" and "healed."

It is important to note, none of these individuals expressing a pained history with evangelicalism were new or recent converts to Christian faith. Instead the overwhelming

majority of these “saved” responses came from long-term Christian devotees with significant histories in previous evangelical churches. These responses were not describing a “conversion” experience as understood in the conversionist doctrines articulated in traditional, mainstream evangelical terms.<sup>894</sup> Instead interviewees described a felt need to be “saved” from the negative effects of conservative evangelical religion or what one respondent called the “the evangelical machine inside the religious sub-culture of American Christianity.” Thus a common theme in participant interviews was an appreciation for Carlson and Lueken’s openness to discuss the co-opting of the protoevangelical gospel and its objectives by a more anthropocentric religious agenda and the creation of a historically unorthodox Christian expression inside some forms of American evangelical religion.

Ironically, the Oak Hills culture showed no overt evidence of being anti-evangelical. Although there was evidence of a minority group of postevangelical sentiments within the congregation, as a whole, Oak Hills has maintained a significant number of self-identifying evangelicals on the elder board, in the pastoral staff and within its membership at large. Thus evangelicalism, and its specific doctrinal distinctives, appears to play a continuing role in defining the cultural makeup of Oak Hills. This reveals something of a surprising dichotomy in the organization. To some degree, participants appear to understand how and why the wider evangelical culture has had negative effects on a significant number of their group. As a result, evangelical affiliation is not trumpeted publically out of deference for those who may suffer from negative experiences and retain emotional scars. The terms evangelical, evangelicalism or conservative Christianity were never used in a public way during the research period. Yet there was also a desire both

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<sup>894</sup> See Conversionism pages 85-87.

within the leadership and the congregation to stay vaguely connected to a larger, rather nebulous definition and understanding of evangelical distinctives.

As a result, it was unclear to this researcher to what degree Oak Hills is or is not a self-classified evangelical or postevangelical organization. Interviewees who recognized Oak Hill's evangelical heritage suggested the group endeavors to provide an environment that represents only the best of evangelical theology and affiliation, seeking to eliminate the worst. As a consequence, Oak Hills has become a safe place for those recovering from some degree of disenchantment or disillusionment with evangelicalism or Christianity in general. Furthermore, interviewees appreciated the lack of accentuation on doctrinal distinctives or denominational affiliation. These delineators were often viewed as evoking separatistic, exclusionary and antagonistic responses.

Instead, Oak Hills is seen to place the highest value on the individual and accepts each person's particular history and makeup. Such a position presented a significantly different experience than that described as typical within those churches previously attended by interviewees. As a result individuals described feeling appreciated and respected based solely on their humanity and not due simply to their inclusion into socially acceptable religious groups with particular beliefs and correct doctrinal positions. This sentiment represents a clear postevangelical, postmodern leaning. Perhaps Oak Hill's hybrid-evangelical stance is an indication of what kind of evangelical faith and praxis will emerge as a result of postevangelicals beginning to reconsider their inherited evangelicalism viewed in light of the protoevangelical vision Willard offers.

### *The Process Frame*

Oak Hills strives to be an organization that endeavors to holistically incarnate the Kingdom of God within their specific context of Folsom, CA. As a consequence, the

majority of the activities and conversations observed, and all of the interviews, demonstrated a keen awareness and pursuit of a theo-ontological understanding of the Kingdom of God. Routinely, questions were asked and statements made such as, “How would this work within the Kingdom of God?” and, “What is the Kingdom perspective on this issue?” or “That does (or does not) look like the Kingdom.” Additionally, each of the sermons attended during the research period, and roughly 70% of sermons downloaded from the Oak Hills website directly referred to an aspect or perspective related to the Kingdom of God. Thus Kingdom language and Kingdom ethics habitually appeared as part of both the sermonizing and relational interactions within the Oak Hills community. More significantly, it was this Kingdom ethic that has become the standard by which the motives and actions of the organization are measured. Elder meetings attended during the research period revealed a significant penchant for seeking to discern if an activity, program, or decision is in compliance with the Kingdom ethos, as they understand it. Only then is a decision made or activity pursued. Additionally, not only the motive to engage an activity is measured against this Kingdom ethic. So too is the manner in which such an activity is to be accomplished.

However, more than an instructional reference point, Lueken and Carlson continue to demonstrate a vigorous search for how the Kingdom of God could be identified and encouraged in the workings of Oak Hills. This process of self-reflection regularly directed their personal managerial and leadership styles. An example of this overarching ethic was demonstrated in a board meeting attended by this researcher. The board was discussing how to proceed in developing a severance package to a long-term employee being laid off due to budgetary shortfalls. The elders and pastors felt it necessary and appropriate to find a way to honor and appreciate the service and dedication of their colleague through the means of a severance agreement. In the end, a decision was arrived at, but only after all elders agreed

the arrangements conformed to the kinds of provision indicative of an organization they believed was devoted to “Kingdom” principles of fairness, love and appreciation.<sup>895</sup>

Further, the Kingdom ethos at Oak Hills encourages the open introspection of one’s shortcomings and struggles. An example of this probative priority was witnessed in a Sunday evening small group meeting led by Carlson. The group was assembled specifically to focus on formational issues and to provide mutual support toward these efforts. One of the means used to pursue spiritual formation was a book study and group discussion. The conversations that ensued revealed many personal and poignant discussions and revelations about individual issues and struggles related to transformation. Yet in addition to the book study, Carlson and the group also volunteered to work with a group of underprivileged children at a local elementary school. While the group’s efforts were honorable, several of the issues being faced in their attempts to help these children from “at-risk” families produced frustrating results. Consequently, the interest of some in the group was dwindling. Others experienced a rise of some long-standing biases held against the poor.

Carlson took this opportunity to dive into these deep-seated assumptions about poverty, parenting and cross-cultural/multi-culture barriers; issues which can be emotionally charged, politically polarizing and therefore divisive. As such, these kinds of subjects can often be ignored or overlooked in many social settings, including the church. Yet since the group was gathered specifically to engage the issue of spiritual formation, these longstanding beliefs and emotions were exactly the issues Carlson and the groups intended to excavate.

These two brief examples reveal the overarching focus of how things are accomplished at Oak Hills. The Kingdom of God, and the transformation of the individual

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<sup>895</sup> It is important to note, the terms, although confidential, seemed to this researcher extremely gracious and generous, more so than any other agreement encountered in other religious or non-profit organizations.

heart into a more Christlike state is the underlying motive within every activity, program and relationship. Not only does this ethic represent how things are done at Oak Hills it also reveals why activities, decisions and objectives are accomplished in the Oak Hills organization as well.

### *Summary*

Of the four organizations studied in this thesis, as a whole Oak Hills represents the most wide-ranging, holistic and aggressive implementation of Willardian theology studied thus far. In general it appears Oak Hills has chosen to focus on the entirety of Willardian theology. In conversations with the leadership and congregants, Oak Hills seeks to both understand and apply every aspect of the protoevangelical vision of Jesus throughout the entire organization. No aspect and no individual in the Oak Hills organization is immune from reformation in light of a concerted effort toward discipleship to Christ and life in the theo-ontological reality of God's Kingdom. In fact, after the ethnography period, Lueken, Carlson and several elders continued communication with this researcher in an effort to discern where Oak Hills might continue their growth and pursuit of a more Willardian based ecclesiology.

Furthermore, as a result of Oak Hills' holistic alignment around Willardian theology, in some fashion, each of the aspects described in the other ethnographies were also demonstrated in the Oak Hills organization. Oak Hills exhibits a strong desire to creatively discover how to more fully incarnate a biblical view of discipleship and accountability. Such a desire is very similar to the goals and objectives of Re:Imagine. In fact, Oak Hills was applying Scandrette's Have2, Give1 experiment just as the ethnography research period was ending.<sup>896</sup> Additionally, like ACCD, the leadership of Oak Hills

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<sup>896</sup> See page 287.



demonstrates a very intense personal pursuit of *metanoia*. The process of transitioning from the CGM ecclesiology required prolonged and often painful reconsiderations of past traditions and beliefs that were radically altered based upon the new theological perspective present in Willard's protoevangelical vision. Thus the leaders of Oak Hills have garnered first hand experience with how both individual and corporate repentance can occur within a CGM congregation. Finally, like Holy Trinity, Oak Hills is endeavoring to reshape their liturgy and ecclesiology to eliminate the consumeristic influences of the CGM legacy. Instead of creating entertainment venues, Oak Hills is structuring their services to equip and empower disciples of Christ to change their world. In total, Oak Hills represents perhaps the most well developed or mature representation of Willardian theology and praxis to date. Yet more importantly Oak Hills is an example of a mainstream evangelical congregation which has been able to survive the transition from a CGM ecclesiology and thrive again in a Willardian vision of the gospel.

Oak Hills still has several obstacles to overcome. First, with hundreds of members, Oak Hills has struggled to withstand the significant amount of naysayers within their own congregation who originally resisted, and still resist, the shift away from the CGM model. Therefore the task of maintaining enthusiasm and community in a group with divisive voices and opinions is a challenge. Secondly, as the church progresses through the financial and personnel changes attached to their philosophical shift, the difficult task of maintaining the commitment and focus to the protoevangelical gospel may become more difficult. The temptation to reengage some degree of the CGM ethos appears to be an ever-present, hovering enticement. The subtlety of the consumeristic, individualistic propensity can become easily disguised and couched in grand theological terms with honorable aspirations. The subject and methodology of evangelism continues to carry equal degrees of interest, complexity, concern mixed with opportunity. Thus maintaining accountability, honesty and

transparency between the leaders on their goals and objectives will be a key aspect toward Oak Hills continued success.

As co-senior pastors Carlson and Lueken are perhaps best equipped to maintain the type of honest and transparent relationship required to continually monitor the direction, vision and values of Oak Hills in light of the protoevangelical gospel they both aspire to achieve and incarnate. Sharing the responsibilities of pastoring a church, although unique and specific to these men, is perhaps the most tangible and demonstrative symbol to the Oak Hills congregation of the necessity and potency of the Kingdom of God. This relationship, played out in the public arena of the congregation, validates that transformation and discipleship are not just words or phrases on the Oak Hills mission statement. Rather the congregation is able to see and experience how their leaders are growing, changing and being formed by God, and one another, in the many and various arenas of their personal and professional lives. Thus the value and commitment to intimate trusting personal relationships is equally a key aspect to the Oak Hills culture and perhaps one of the lesser-known but indispensable aspects of Willardian theology, praxis and leadership development.

Like the other three organizations studied in this thesis, Oak Hills functions as something of a prototype. However, Oak Hills is unique in that it has exemplified how a large, established evangelical congregation has coalesced the intentions and means of Willardian theology demonstrated in the other ethnographies into a single collective effort. As a result of the length of time devoted to this transformation, the substantial resources available to a congregation of their size, and the alignment of purposes between all centers of influence, Oak Hills represents a model of how Willardian theology can reform longstanding evangelical traditions in ecclesiology and theology. Thus Oak Hills has the

potential to become something of a facilitator or conduit through which other congregations can find assistance in their search for a more authentic and holistic Christian expression.

### *Analysis of Ethnographies*

As was mentioned in the introduction and methodology chapter, the final stage of the practical theological methodology requires reflection and analysis. Swinton, Browning, Fowler note, practical theology and its practitioners seek to correct, enlighten and guide the Church catholic in its progress toward a more faithful and effective theology and praxis.<sup>897</sup> Likewise such analysis and contemplation are essential steps toward benefiting the ecclesial environments from which this research springs. Hence what remains to be discussed in this chapter are the possible implications that emerge from the ethnographic research. Therefore this section will offer some insight and analysis on the possible consequences and benefits arising from the ethnographic data.

The independent, empirical, socio-religious research projects referenced in the introductory chapter of this thesis suggested that contemporary American evangelicalism might be ripe for a vigorous and courageous reconsideration of its theology and praxis.<sup>898</sup> The sum of this ethnographic research suggests the nature and objective of postevangelicalism is pursuing that very objective. The ethnographic interviews reveal four key areas, or themes that bracket the postevangelical impetus. These four identifying features are protest, religious freedom, holism and authenticity. Following the description of these four identifying themes a discussion will pursue how and where Willardian theology might act as a guide to both postevangelicals and evangelicals alike.

#### *Protest*

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<sup>897</sup> See page 48-51.

<sup>898</sup> See pages 6-11

The ethnographic data suggests that the definition that earlier scholars and writers used to define postevangelicalism remains largely accurate. Dave Tomlinson, Robert Webber and Roger Olson's descriptions of the post-evangelical/post-conservative phenomenon suggested these groups carried much if not all the same theological history, doctrinal impetus and Christian worldview as that of their mainstream evangelical forbearers.<sup>899</sup> Yet at the same time, postevangelicals offer a corrective protest to the excesses of modern evangelicalism. This research validates those original positions. The ethnographic data in this thesis validates earlier claims that postevangelicalism remains largely dedicated to Bebbington's four historical evangelical distinctives. However, postevangelicalism also represents a progressive, evolutionary step away from significant neo-evangelical theological doctrines.

What might be a new discovery is where the postevangelical protest to neo-evangelical theology has become most concentrated. This research suggests the most significant postevangelical protest is found in its departure from the neo-evangelical doctrine of God. Postevangelicals consistently articulated vehement resistance to the stereotypical wrath-filled, distant and legalistic deity commonly depicted in many traditional evangelical interpretations of the Hebrew Scriptures and more clearly defined in premillennial dispensationalist views of Revelation. Postevangelicals described such depictions of God as maintaining a violent disposition, an unloving, petty character and an overarching unimaginative impotence in dealing with evil. As a result postevangelicals developed a deep insecurity and theological cognitive dissonance regarding God's trustworthiness. The publication of Rob Bell's recent book on Hell, which provides an

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<sup>899</sup> Tomlinson, *The Post Evangelical*, 1995. Roger Olson, "Postconservative Evangelicals Greet the Postmodern Age," *The Christian Century* Vol. 112, no. 15 (May 1995), 480-483. Robert Webber, *Ancient-Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003). Willard wrote the forward to Tomlinson's US edition of *The Postevangelical*.

excellent commentary on these issues, has apparently tapped into the nature and essence of this very significant and controversial theological transition.<sup>900</sup>

Here Willard's *essentia Dei* schema plays a central role in reestablishing confidence that the God Jesus is articulating and manifesting in the New Testament is both good, loving and trustworthy despite what religious authorities might state about him. In attempts to replace these traditional views of God, postevangelicals have also applied Willard's more Trinitarian perspective to their doctrine of God. They have also appreciated Willard's Christological priority in biblical hermeneutics. As a result many interviewees have developed an interpretive grid that tends to view the Scriptures through an overarching ethic of love that compliments their interest in the life of Jesus and the first deeds of the first century church.

In short, interviews regularly revealed a deep desire to uphold the "good news" of Jesus. But in doing so there was an equal demand for an explicit and overt demonstration that in fact the divine message the gospel represents must in every form represent an ultimate form of "goodness." Hence interviewees routinely expressed a desire for clarity on one central feature of the gospel; exactly who is this God of love? In contrast to the evangelical answer that has historically pointed to lists of ominous deeds ascribed to God in the Scriptures, postevangelicals are increasingly and defiantly pointing to Jesus.

Secondly, this research suggests the postevangelical protest is a maturing phenomenon, one which is steadily growing beyond the early stages of pure dissent and rejection of all things evangelical. A maturing postevangelical ethos, marked by more than inflammation, rejection, and separation, has an opportunity to advocate for a positive alternative. Willard's protoevangelical vision, his a doctrine of God based on the *essentia*

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<sup>900</sup> Rob Bell, *Love Wins : A Book About Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2011),

*Dei* and a theo-ontological perspective of God’s Kingdom, together form an affirmative theological construct from which praxis can be developed. Willard’s protoevangelical faith appears to offer a match to the deeply held postevangelical longings to rediscover or renew a more radical or rooted form of Biblical faith.

The ethnographic research also suggests that postevangelicals endeavor to not only protest but reaffirm and reestablish those periods of evangelical history which focused on sanctification, spiritual formation, discipleship, social engagement and communal living. Like the early movements of the Great Awakenings, the postevangelical protest is not institutional, tending to work instead in conjunction with a desire to affect the broader culture through grass-root efforts, in small communities. There is a resistance to the Faustian propensities of previous generations that tended to form huge multinational organizations for world mission/evangelism endeavors and nationwide political agendas. Instead postevangelicals desire to recapture small-scaled one-on-one and relational focused activism that is less acculturated, dogmatically driven and therefore more organic in nature. As one postevangelical suggested, “Jesus’ revolution happens best when it focuses on changing one heart at a time.”

### *Religious Freedom*

Postevangelicals also desire to dialog freely about the nature and effect of their religious ideas, doubts, failures and questions without fear of reprisal or punishment. To this end, much has been written in postevangelical literature and many interviewees discussed the concepts surrounding the benefits of engaging in a new “conversation” about their Christian faith. Connected to the desire for liberation to openly discuss their faith, postevangelicals seek to reopen dialog and discourse on topics previously considered “non-negotiable” or off-limits to more conservative evangelicals regarding Christian doctrine.

The need to dialog without trepidation and the creation of an open learning environment was a palpable desire demonstrated in all the ethnographic interviews.

Many interviewees discussed a past or present reaction to the rather narrow theological education they received while in evangelical churches. This lack in focus or intention to adequately engage the postevangelical intellect has produced a desire for more than indoctrination into evangelical faith. Instead, there appears to be a yearning for a more universal education than the previous modern leaning evangelical epistemology would allow.<sup>901</sup> Yet the freedom postevangelicals seek is more than simply the ability to engage their questions intelligently and honestly. There is also a desire to free themselves from the power and hegemony of evangelical religious institutionalization. Evangelicalism has become an increasingly politicized movement in the past thirty years. The consistent connection with right-wing Republican political policy has created the concern that Republicanism, nationalism, patriotism and evangelicalism are at times so closely tied as to appear indistinguishable. Thus the postevangelical protest merges with their desire for freedom in seeking to unhinge the tenets of their Christian faith from allegiance to any secular political ideology or policy.

Similarly, postevangelicals seek to free themselves from any racial or ethnic homogeneity and bias. This includes perceived evangelical biases against women and homosexuals. While the issues of racism and misogyny have long and troubling connections to conservative evangelicalism in America, much progress has been made in the last century. However, many postevangelicals consider the treatment given to GLBT persons by key evangelical leaders in very visible positions of authority as yet another example of inappropriate and un-Christlike discrimination reminiscent of previous eras.

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<sup>901</sup> Again, herein lies an apparent connection to their Protestant legacy. Protestant reformers, Pilgrims and Pietists all desired the freedom to practice their faith inside a hostile religious culture.

This is not to suggest all or even most postevangelicals advocate GLBT lifestyle choices. Rather, postevangelicals tend to consider sexuality as only one aspect of a persons existential makeup and not the only or even the most significant, overriding feature. Hence postevangelicals display the desire to incarnate a level of kindness and graciousness that would be attractive to any person regardless of their lifestyle, race, sexual orientation or religious preference.

Finally, postevangelicals desire to be free of the hegemony of the religious elite. Significant numbers of interviewees mentioned the pained effects of being even loosely associated with the brand of faith demonstrated by many popular evangelical leaders. The most common complaint was both the real and perceived hypocrisy of nationally renowned personalities who publically confront and/or condemn certain behaviors of “outsiders” such as homosexuality or abortion while ignoring other equally egregious conduct in their own ranks. This tendency for what could be termed a form of “sin profiling” often came to the forefront in many conversations and descriptions of why many had either left or been hurt by evangelicalism in the past. Instead of public decrees against certain sins to the neglect of others, postevangelicals sense the necessity to respect the freedom of human will and its ability to choose without the accompanying need to persuade by means of condemnation or damnation. Instead, simply modeling an attractive alternative life was paramount in the postevangelical ethos.

### *Holism*

The most common and consistent priority articulated by interviewees in all four ethnographies was the desire to integrate their faith and practice into a more holistic human experience. The possibility of a holistic Christian faith was also one of the most common descriptors of why Willardian theology was most desirable. Postevangelicals seek to eliminate the evangelical separations of faith and reason, church and work, culture from



sub-culture. There is an overarching desire to “experience” God intimately both individually and corporately and to regularly engage God in such a way as to be formed in every area of life and living. An abundance of interviewees suggested Willard’s protoevangelical theology and theo-ontology taps into this holistic desire and positions life in the Kingdom of God and the way of Jesus as offering a whole life to its fullest capacity.

Interviews also routinely covered the importance of integrating the mind, body, heart, soul, relationships, community, and vocation into the formation of a single personality. It appears many interviewees are deeply effected by societal structures, including their churches, which they feel have worked to fracture or segment their interpersonal selves. Many discussed the forming of different “lives.” There is a work life, a home life, church life, social life, and parental roles, spousal roles, adult-children roles, friendship roles; all of which tend to compete for either attention or dominance. What Willard’s holistic view of the gospel seems to offer is a single life, integrated and consistent in all its various identities and responsibilities.

### *Authenticity*

Finally, the ethnographic research revealed that postevangelicals seek to radicalize or root their Christian experience in the visceral reality that empowers the kind of life they read about in the New Testament. There was a consistent description of weariness regarding the “over-promised and under-delivered” nature of modern evangelical faith and practice. This appears to be also a protest against the examples of noted evangelicals such as Enron CEO Kenneth Lay or the more recent events surrounding evangelical pastor Ted Haggard. Both were mentioned in interviews repeatedly and appear to be infamous examples of the dualistic hypocrisy that remains an ever-present possibility or reality in the lives of celebrated evangelical leaders.

In response postevangelicals seek to be unleashed from the empty performance legalisms that linger in evangelical brands of faith and pursue instead both a personal and communal experience of transcendence in the “Kingdom of God.” Thus a full and abundant life in the Kingdom of God, not membership in the local church, denomination, or even participation and belief in evangelicalism itself, is the goal of postevangelical faith. Such a life, commonly described as “heavenly” that comes “from above” and is “naturally supernatural” is the substantive end of the Christian enterprise postevangelicals seek.<sup>902</sup>

Yet such a life, to many postevangelicals, is routinely resisted by mainstream evangelicalism. One interviewee suggested the analogy of the motion picture *The Truman Show* as a good description of the inauthentic environment created in many evangelical churches and organizations. She suggested conservatives appear more focused on maintaining the illusions of evangelical life so younger evangelicals are not attracted to the “real” world outside of their particular subculture. The fear stems from a concern that the world outside the evangelical socio-religious structure would be too tempting to resist. The motion picture *The Matrix* was another common analogy used to describe this phenomenon. Although very different in content, the similarity between the *Truman Show* and *The Matrix* are the ideas of a real vs. a contrived world, oppressive abuse of power and the juxtaposition these realities have on the movies fictional characters. These movies were also used to exemplify the totalitarian power of evangelical theology to create a worldview that postevangelicals struggled to escape from in their attempts to find a more authentic form of life.

This kind of authentic life would include the religious freedoms and a holistic, integrated personal and communal expression of Christian faith mention earlier. As the

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<sup>902</sup> Each of these phrases are both in Willard’s work and were well represented in each of the ethnographic studies. See appendix 6.

main characters in each of these movies depict, the vision of a different kind of life required the engagement of the imagination and the use of the arts to dream and probe the limits of what a new reality could be. Therefore in certain instances some interviewees found themselves describing their vision of the Kingdom of God as a present reality, here and now, a “heaven on earth” that is often vehemently opposed and purposely hidden by the very religious systems advertising its availability. One respondent stated,

Yes. That is exactly what I’m describing and it is also in part what I experience. Why else would Jesus ask us to pray that God’s will would happen here just as it is in heaven? There are two realities happening. Now... there are days and moments where I absolutely experience what I believe heaven is and always will be. But a lot of the time, especially in church, I feel like I’m in the Matrix and I can’t get out.

### *Lingering Questions*

There were several discoveries encountered in the process of researching the ethnographies that defied explanation and contravened this author’s expectation. Perhaps the first was the level of theological conservatism among the younger interviewees. This research did not gather demographic or age data. However, simply through observation, the younger participants in general tended to give the most conservative or traditional evangelical responses. This was most notable in Re:Imagine. Adding further complexity to this finding was the stereotypically liberal nature of the San Francisco culture. One might expect those participating in a postevangelical organization in San Francisco to be fairly liberal on the whole. The data disputed this assumption.

Secondly, a significant percentage of the interviews elicited deep emotional responses to certain questions. The level and breadth of these reactions appears to have revealed a degree of either past trauma, or significant appreciation for one’s current state in light of their past. The depth and number of emotional responses across all ethnographies was most unexpected. The specific questions that probed their current ecclesial context and

what they most appreciated about Willard's theology seemed to elicit the most reaction.

Further research should be pursued regarding the cause and effect of inter-congregational emotional trauma.

Third, the leadership dynamic in each organization also revealed unexpected results. Coming into the ethnographies there was an anticipation that these organizations, built around a protesting theology that largely resisted the institutional norms of evangelicalism would be comprised of mostly strong-willed, pioneering, activist leaders who were willing and able to endure the difficulties of cutting new ideological paths. Although strong leaders were encountered, there were far fewer than expected. Further, most of those demonstrating strong leadership traits held paid ministry positions. Instead of attracting leaders, these congregations and organizations appeared to be comprised of a plethora of very quiet, peaceful, supportive members who were more than willing and happy to compliantly follow the lead of others. In that regard, it was surprising to find organizations in transition to demonstrate no higher a percentage of pioneering leaders than may be found generally in any congregational setting.

Additionally, it was surprising to find nearly all the key desires, sentiments and concerns of the ECM also present in very conservative leaning organizations. Of the four ethnographies, Oak Hills was the most established and had the longest association with denominationalism and conservative evangelical theology. Both the senior pastors had received their theological training at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, a roundly conservative evangelical seminary and were well versed in the tenets of Biblicism, Crucicentrism, Activism and Conversionism. Yet despite their long association with conservatism, and despite maintaining all the "trappings" one would associate with a conservative evangelical congregation (a large building complex, a fairly large staff, a broad stable of religious programming, etc.) Oak Hills congregants and their leaders also

represented a significant affiliation with the overarching desires of the ECM and their accompanying critiques.

However, unlike the ECM Oak Hills engages this conversation as evangelical insiders, casting their concerns and apprehension as members of the mainstream evangelical community. This appears to create a level of intellectual tension that forces progression in praxis and theology within the Oak Hills leadership. Like Scandrette's early cohort who met to reimagine the gospel in light of their postmodern context in San Francisco, Carlson and Lueken also are attempting to engage topics of concern individually, avoiding the temptation to provide rote answers to issues and questions provided in previous eras. Hence it appears the initial desire of the ECM to recontextualize the gospel outside of the conservative evangelical milieu may now be developing into something of a grassroots movement interspersed within the very organizations and institutions originally critiqued.

Lastly, and perhaps most surprisingly, those encountered in the ethnographies that had the highest level of theological education, both in seminaries or Christian universities, appeared to experience the most difficulty, and displayed the most resistance to Willardian theology. Since there was no specific question on the survey to handle this demographic, this can only be gauged by conversations with participants who volunteered their educational background. Since very few individuals encountered during the ethnographic research expressed struggling with Willard's theological platform, it was fairly easy to pursue common traits with those who did express concern or difficulty. With these individuals, approximately two thirds had attended seminary and/or were currently or had in the past been in professional ministry of some kind. What makes this fact interesting is that Willard's works are often discussed as almost unapproachable to the average layperson. Therefore it is assumed by many that theological education is almost a

prerequisite to fully appreciate his works. However, the opposite appears to be true in the small samplings of these four ethnographies.

### *Summary*

The ethnographic data in combination with the quantitative analysis significantly and meaningfully connects Willardian theology as providing considerable influence in the development of theology and praxis in the four subject organizations. Interviews and discussions about Willard's work as a whole can be broadly placed into two general categories. Some interviewees considered Willard a restorationist; a voice calling evangelicals back to their original roots, where Christians are encouraged to restore their confidence in the contemporary applicability of Jesus' brilliance brought to bear in every day situations. As a restorationist, Willard appears to be seen counteracting the deadening effect of modern theology's focus on doctrine, propositional faith statements and systematic theologies to the detriment of spiritual transformation and discipleship. To these individuals Willard appears to validate their views that dead legalisms are as damaging to contemporary Christianity as Pharisaism was to first century Judaism. Hence many are bolstered by Willard's critique of doctrinal-centrism, and the forms an externalism it creates, which often chokes the life out of vibrant faith and practice.

Still others see Willard's views as presenting an entirely different gospel and therefore a call for a reformation of evangelicalism. Those carrying this perspective sense that it is not the method of theological inquiry that needs change but rather a new vision of American Christianity in total. The misapplication of such critical concepts as grace, spirituality, salvation, discipleship, eternal life, the role of the church and its authority, carry deeply imbedded conceptualizations within the evangelical ethos. Therefore, to change or alter these concept and their meanings, in some opinions, necessitate a radical

reform of the entire enterprise. For some reformists, the potential of such a drastic change inspires substantial levels of fear and anxiety, to the point where many resist the possibility simply in order to ignore the consequences the idea alone creates. Still other reformers feel compelled to reconstruct the current manifestation of Christian faith in an attempt to recapture the heart of what they consider to be the message of Jesus.

There are certainly indications in Willard's work to justify both the restorationist and reformist viewpoints. However, as was mentioned in the introduction, as tempting as it may be to conflate Willard's views to some form or manifestation of contemporary evangelical theology or praxis, it is the opinion of this author that Willard's protoevangelical vision calls progressives and conservatives to move even farther beyond their current boundaries and aspirations. It is to these implications and the possibilities therein where this thesis now concludes.

# CONCLUSION



This thesis has added to the knowledge of its field by accomplishing four overarching goals. The first goal was achieved in both the introduction and the second chapter. Collectively they described the evolution of key historical and theological events that together formed the current contexts of contemporary American evangelicalism and the transformational flux wherein postevangelical and Willardian theology have arisen. The second goal was accomplished in chapter three with the first organization of Willardian theology. Key aspects of this organization were the *essentia Dei*, theo-ontological perspective of the Kingdom of God, and the pneumatological priority that together form a schematic hermeneutical lens through which to best grasp the overarching thrust of Willard's theological corpus. Chapter three also discussed how Willard's philosophical realism engages the trappings of postmodern epistemology and suggested Willard presents a potential remedy for some of the difficulty and confusion that has plagued postevangelical theological pursuits thus far. The third goal of this thesis was accomplished in chapter four. The collection and analysis of the ethnographic research described the unique issues and insights from four ecclesial groups applying Willardian theology and praxis. The ethnographic research also identified the four postevangelical values of protest, religious freedom, holism and authenticity, commonly understood as integral aspects of a genuine and faithful Christian expression. Finally, this thesis provided insight and direction for those evangelical groups endeavoring to reform, originate, correct, add or adapt their current theology and praxis. Overall this thesis has imparted explanation and understanding into the nature and attractiveness of Willard's protoevangelical theology as interpreted and applied in postevangelical contexts.

The remainder of this thesis will offer analysis and opinions on four significant issues or insights that have arisen. The first insight lies in categorizing the postevangelical

phenomenon as a historically Protestant and theologically evangelical enterprise. The second and third issues are tied to the obstacles postevangelicals may face in applying Willard's protoevangelical vision. The first of these obstacles is related to Willard's description of systems of "sin management" ie. the socially constructed goals and priorities used to determine religious piety and effectiveness. A discussion will pursue the potential threats such systems pose to postevangelical objectives for transforming mainstream evangelical theology and praxis. Closely related and conjoined with the "sin management" problem is the potential for a continuation of sectarian separatism. Finally, the fourth key insight deals with the theoretical analysis of the potential Willard's protoevangelical theology holds for effecting positive change for the future. This chapter ends offering suggestions on areas where further research would be beneficial.

*Postevangelicalism-A Continuation of the Protestant Evangelical Enterprise*

Some of the more central pursuits of this thesis have focused on articulating what the postevangelical vision of Christian faith amounts to, where it comes from, where it is going and why. As mentioned earlier, some notable conservative evangelicals have disowned the postevangelical movement, seen it as a threat to traditional evangelical orthodoxy and tied a scarlet "H" around the movement. In a doctrinal-centric system like conservative evangelicalism it appears the only unpardonable sin is found in merely the accusation, not so much the actual guilt, of doctrinal heresy.<sup>903</sup> This research found no evidence of such heretical claims to historically developed evangelical priorities and proclivities. Conversely, the overwhelming majority of postevangelicals encountered in this research described their religious journey as a visceral, potent, vibrant, and dangerous endurance contest of pursuing Jesus, the Christ. This journey appears to be both as

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<sup>903</sup> See Pages 9-15, 135-156.

demanding and costly, as it is transformative and invigorating. Therefore this researcher saw no reason in terms of theology and praxis for invalidating postevangelicalism as anything but a contemporary contextualization of a historically orthodox understanding of life in the Kingdom of God.

Frequently, postevangelicals conjoin these descriptions of their faith with powerful and poignant emotions that together build a sense of revolutionary newness and originality to their endeavors. Perhaps there are many aspects of the postevangelical phenomenon that are patently original. However, as progressive as their endeavor may feel to them, or initially appear to outsiders studying their cause, the historiography of this thesis reveals that many of the postevangelical ideals and pursuits are not new. In fact, in significant ways, the postevangelical protest is very reminiscent of Protestant reformers throughout previous centuries who also longed to recapture a more classically orthodox Christian faith.

When considering the works and ministries of Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, Jacob Arminius, John Knox, Philipp Spener, the Moravians, John Edwards, John and Charles Wesley, and moving into the more contemporary expressions of the Barton Stone-Alexander Campbell Restoration Movement or the Jesus Movement of the 1970's, each of these historically orthodox Protestant reforms can be viewed as largely motivated to reestablish what was believed at the time were the core teachings and ideals of Jesus. Additionally, each of these leaders sparked a movement around a belief the gospel of Jesus Christ had become obscured within a confusing or impotent form of acculturated civil religion.<sup>904</sup> These leaders offered unique remedies for retrieving a rootedness in the gospel message and a desire for a more authentic Christian faith. In response to the theological

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<sup>904</sup> Hunter, *American evangelicalism*, 13-19.

authorities of their time, these leaders lobbied to renovate the institutions and the dogmas they believed progressed far afield from the heart of the message Christ first articulated.

A much larger project would be required to establish this connection more completely. However, this thesis has shown how these Christian movements culminated in various “renewals and awakenings” that restructured the established systems of authority and the theological doctrines that accompanied them. Likewise, postevangelicals seek nearly identical goals of their Protestant forbearers. As such postevangelicalism carries many of the same identifiers and similarities to other Protestant reformational movements in American history. Certainly postevangelicals are protesting, rebelling, and perhaps even seeking a theological revolution. Yet, the position that such a movement can be dismissed out of hand as altogether heretical is problematic lest all Protestant activities of the past be placed under similar ignominious condemnation.

If postevangelicalism is in fact heretical, much more serious and honest theological inquiry is required to validate such a claim. Any declaration of heresy by authority figures threatened by competing claims that call into question the very religious hegemony that funds their authoritarian structure strains credulity and integrity. Insecure authority is no authority at all. Perhaps more to the point, this research suggests postevangelicals remain steadfastly tied to the biblicist, activist, crucicentrist and conversionist priorities that have historically defined American evangelical religion. The question is not if postevangelicals are essentially evangelical in their practice of Christian faith, but rather how and why they pursue these key tenets. There is a commitment to recapture the vital *euangelion* of Jesus they believe has become lost and confused in the trappings of the modern era. Hence, this author believes postevangelicalism serves as a prophetic voice that seeks to regain, not abolish, a level of integrity to the entire evangelical enterprise.

It may pose a problem that many postevangelicals do not appear to know their connection and affiliation to their Protestant history. One question left unanswered is whether a better awareness of this history would significantly alter the postevangelical protest and its overarching desire to separate from the institutions and heritage from which it proceeds. Examining the lessons of past evangelical movements and their leader's perpetual advocacy for theological reformation may hold valuable insights and guidance toward the pursuit of a more vibrant Christian faith.<sup>905</sup> The ethnographic research of the four ecclesial groups revealed that an appreciation for the lessons of Christian history—replete with insights into monastic practices, spiritual disciplines, benevolent leadership, ancient liturgies and mysticism—has much to offer contemporary contexts and may provide tried and true templates for accomplishing the postevangelical's reformation-like objectives. In like manner, Willard's theological vision is not new but rather a retelling of a very old, established and orthodox Christian perspective now diversified throughout several Christian traditions. Finding these treasures amidst both the history and diversity of the Church catholic is perhaps a new opportunity for postevangelicals and should be considered a viable, positive means through which their objectives can be achieved.

### *Overcoming Systems of Sin Management*

Secondly, this author believes the postevangelical movement currently rests at a critical juncture in its development. No longer benefiting from the excitement and energy of being a “new” movement, and continuing to face the cumulative effects of more than a decade of unyielding conservative critique may have caused postevangelicals to struggle finding and articulating a clear, positive theological, epistemological and ecclesiological

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<sup>905</sup> Martin Luther's advocacy for “*semper reformanda*” is a perspective that would bode well for traditional evangelicals to reconsider in their approach to the postevangelical movement. See Robert McAfee Brown, *The Spirit of Protestantism*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), 44.

platform. How the postevangelical protest will progress in future years is difficult to predict. Yet it is the opinion of this author that two significant hurdles must be avoided if Willard's protoevangelicalism is to take deeper root within postevangelical circles. These two obstacles are tied to the temptations of forming a sin management system that advocates liberation and toleration, and a tendency toward sectarian separatism. We will also consider how Willard's protoevangelical vision provides a means of overcoming these potential complications.

The first hurdle postevangelicals must avoid is any reincarnation of a strain of deadening self-righteousness that stems from early forms of 20<sup>th</sup> century evangelical fundamentalism. The historiography in chapter two described the Billy Graham/post-WW II neo-evangelical efforts to pursue independence from fundamentalist dogmatism and separatism. Yet despite their attempts, neo-evangelicals were also responsible for the creation of a highly exclusive, homogenous, doctrinally rigid, evangelical sub-culture and the polarizing political arm of the religious right.<sup>906</sup> Ironically, if postevangelicals apply the same ideological contempt to their perceived religious opponents, the chains that held previous generations from achieving their goals will again rise to hinder current generations from attaining a different future.

As mentioned in chapter four, the ethnographic research revealed the lingering presence of emotional wounds that resulted from being subjected to the deadening legalisms of evangelical fundamentalism in past church settings and personal relationships. It is impossible to predict exactly how postevangelicals as a group will continue to deal with their trying, and sometimes traumatic, evangelical past. However, if postevangelicals chose to defend themselves against conservative dogmatism by requiring certain socially

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<sup>906</sup> This is discussed on pages 117-120.

acceptable forms of belief or action in order to gain acceptance and blessing into their particular genre of faith, they could become guilty of exacting the same kind of exclusionary religiosity they abhor. It is unclear exactly what requirements might become essential in such a postevangelical “litmus test.” However, what the ethnographies did make clear is that many postevangelicals are hesitant to open their ranks to mainstream evangelicals. Open-armed hospitality is often reserved until an acceptable level of theological progressiveness can be discerned.

Yet any exclusivity, even if unconsciously imposed, would reveal a significant level of irony and hypocrisy in light of the overarching postevangelical values of authentic community and generosity. Such hypocrisy would be most evident in the selective application of intolerance reserved only for those perceived to hold conservative, intolerant or narrow-minded beliefs. Thus a form of reverse discrimination would be rationalized and considered either necessary or acceptable. If theological cliques form, complete with insider/outside language and the requirement to prove an appropriate level of affiliation or rejection to watershed ideological or theological positions, postevangelicals could become guilty of perpetuating the same legalistic dogmatism as that of their fundamentalist forbearers.

One can understand that many postevangelicals remain reticent of allowing the kind of deadly religiosity that caused so much pain in their past to reenter their newly formed communities. However, legalism is not monolithic, nor is it confined to the conservative or fundamentalist worldview. In their attempts at eliminating conservative legalism, postevangelicals have the potential of forming an equally deadening liberal legalism. Any attempt to create a system of “sin management,” whether progressive or conservative, that determines acceptability and orthodoxy based upon the presence or absence of certain socially contrived definitions of “sinner” and “saint,” is indicative of a “shibboleth”

religion. Such religions necessitate and evaluate the ability of their members to perform up to certain standards to attain group admission and approval. Just as the presence or absence of religious identifiers such as circumcision or the consumption of sacrificed foods threatened to divide first century Christians, new generations of emerging Christians, in their efforts to shrug off the burdens of the past, could too hastily create yet another form of the “sin management” or “shibboleth” systems of their own, albeit from a liberal perspective. This author suggests that postevangelicals must guard against asserting new “shibboleths” such as tolerance, environmentalism, ecumenicism, social constructivism, and the advocacy and proliferation of pluralism as the new platform of essential beliefs necessary to gain acceptance into postevangelical circles.

Furthermore, interviews and interactions with postevangelicals throughout the length of this research project suggests that any demonstration of conservatism—whether political, religious, cultural, economic or social—tends to elicit a knee-jerk reaction of stereotyping, stigmatization and little of the tolerance or grace abundantly showered on every other ideology or philosophy. In such an environment, even those individuals diligently struggling to leave the legalism of a fundamentalist past can be marginalized and ostracized despite their desires to change. Ironically, intolerance is allowed and accepted for those believed to be unable or unwilling to accept and condone people and behaviors “just as they are.” Hence, displays of intolerance against the intolerant are increasingly considered permissible and at times compulsory.

If tolerance is to remain a premier postevangelical bulwark, and not simply an application of a postevangelical “sin management system,” it must be universally applied to all contexts and encompass all worldviews. The views of the conservative, and the majority, must receive equal consideration and toleration given to the minority and progressive positions. The absence of tolerance is most noticeable, and its presence most



effective, in the face of intolerance. Toleration is a non-factor when surrounded by like-minded individuals or in one's home community. The essence of tolerance is manifested only when conflicting views, ideas, agendas and wills of strangers come into closer proximity. Separation and segregation creates homogeneity, not a healthy community with increasing levels of unity and loving-kindness which postevangelicals claim as a chief aim. All must be extended hospitality if inclusivity is a virtue. Thus postevangelicals must consider how to protect against any systematic over-reaction to conservative legalism that could swing the pendulum too far in the opposite direction.

Further, the effect of such a swing could result in two significant outcomes. The first would likely involve a reduced appreciation and focus on the importance of *dikaiosune*. The second result might be demonstrated in a reconceptualized understanding of the essence of agape love. Both moves would potentially miss Willard's protoevangelical standards. The postevangelical suggestion that agape demands unconditional approval, toleration and therefore accepting everyone "just as they are" or "right where they are at" can appear at the outset as a welcoming and hospitable attitude and demeanor. However, agape love does not necessitate or assume the proposal one will never—or should never—change and mature. In fact, such transformation and development is often the direct outcome or result of the application of agape.

Here the employment of a postmodern hermeneutical game of constructivism and pluralism could eviscerate any standard by which to judge substantive change in either personal or corporate transformation. Unconditional love, and its manifestations of longsuffering, patience, forgiveness and unending positive regard, are not dependent on—and are very different from—the totalitarian concept of approval. Universal, unconditional acquiescence resists the need or value of transformation, discipleship and obedience to the way of Christ that any biblically dependent definition of agape must

include. Satisfaction with the status quo of one's spiritual life and character is also contradictory to the protoevangelical values of *dikaiosune*. Further, any protest against fundamentalist legalism demands the presence of a standard from which change toward communities of agape can be measured and pursued. Hence redefining agape into a socially accepted and more politically palatable definition of approval could undermine the very reform postevangelicals seek.

Willard's articulation of protoevangelicalism endeavors to avert the "sin management" traps by avoiding either religious system of condemnation (conservative) or approval (progressive) to focus on the individual human heart. To accomplish this vision, Willard places a premium on developing Christlike integrity of character, first personally, then communally, doctrinally and finally institutionally. Here is where a proper definition of agape is central. Willard's definition of divine love describes a God that is unwilling and incapable of approving or passively allowing any individual to remain "as they are" or "where they are at." This point is crucial and may be where postevangelicalism loses traction with Willard's view of the protoevangelical gospel. Willard argues personal change, growth, progress, and maturity are paramount in the teachings of Jesus. Further, Willard sees God's love as a force of overwhelming encouragement and beneficence that compels change, not stubborn stagnation or complacency. Yet God's love of human beings is constant regardless of, or in spite of, one's status or condition, not because of it. Willard's view of agape enables the individual to recognize change is needed, encourages the decision to change, empowers the efforts and means that effect change, and provides the empathy to journey with others in the process of change.

The result is an ethos that values, accepts and loves every individual for who and what they are at present, while equally loving them toward the attainment of their potential. In light of God's holiness, there is no room for the assumption that any person's present

state is necessarily beneficial or incontrovertible. Change for the better is always possible and assumed. The concept of repentance or *metanoia* requires such a condition. For Willard, God's agape character and action compels change, repels evil, and treasures the truth even about one's own personality flaws, wounds, temptations and travails. Agape and grace do not turn a blind eye or offer acceptance and toleration to deep systemic issues of the heart. Instead agape and grace create the possibility and expectation of healing, growth, redemption and transformation toward existential freedom of both the will and the soul.

### *Sectarianism*

The second threat to a more widespread application of Willard's protoevangelical vision would be an increasing level of sectarian separatism inside postevangelical circles. Similar to the issues proceeding from the concerns of applying a "sin management" system just discussed, this hurdle also proceeds from a continuing reaction against the lingering effects of legalistic fundamentalism. Starting with their neo-evangelical predecessors, conservatives continue to seek ways of making their pre-millennial dispensationalism, penal substitutionary atonement theories and biblically literalist theology attractive to the broader society. The strategy thus far appears to come in the form of corporate-styled marketing efforts, CGM ecclesiology and the proliferation of political conservatism. Postevangelicals on the other hand, seek to separate themselves from what Todd Hunter called the endless "500 year-old debates," and instead seek to engage issues they feel are more integral to their postmodern era.<sup>907</sup>

These seemingly separate visions have resulted in often-contentious battles over competing claims for authority and tensions that disturb the peace within existing evangelical congregations. In an effort to stem the level and amount of dissent in their

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<sup>907</sup> See Todd Hunter's quote on page 304.

ranks, several large evangelical denominations have now begun to divide or segregate their congregations across theological and generational lines, under the auspices of “church planting” strategies.<sup>908</sup> Since neither group (conservative or progressive) appears able nor willing to change and adapt to the degree that would make cohabitation possible, denominations are increasingly choosing to simply segregate one group from the other. What has traditionally been called a church “split” is now considered a church “plant.” Most often the progressive or younger generation of church members are provided ample funding for a few years and encouraged to form their own congregations elsewhere. Ironically, such strategies are couched as the latest and most effective means of achieving The Great Commission.<sup>909</sup>

Mainstream evangelicalism, like most large modernist institutions, tend to place a high value on convenience, often seeking the path of least resistance and the benefits of efficiency. Each of these features are significant in a corporate business model that is driven by streamlining organizational alignment, increasing efficiency and universal compliance with set objectives; all of which are reasonable and necessary goals where appropriate. Yet seeking to eliminate the difficulty and effort required to confront conflicting goals and objectives can actually extinguish the very impetus required to motivate and inspire positive change.

In matters of the human heart and the Church, pursuing what appears in the moment as either easier or most “efficient” path is not always the best choice when character formation and systemic change are the goals. Furthermore, perpetuating another sectarian divide along either generational or theological lines under the guise of a church planting

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<sup>908</sup> Rodney Harrison, Tom Cheyney, Don Overstreet, Elmer L. Towns, Ed. Stetzer, *Spin-Off Churches : How One Church Successfully Plants Another* (Nashville, Tenn.: B&H Academic, 2008), Ed. Stetzer and Warren. Bird, *Viral Churches : Helping Church Planters Become Movement Makers* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010).

<sup>909</sup> Ibid.

agenda is a false façade that undermines the authenticity postevangelicals desire. Facing conflict while remaining engaged and committed to others inside existing congregations, despite the frustrations produced from a clash of opposing goals and objectives, must become a priority if postevangelicals are to experience the relational and communal authenticity they seek. On the surface postevangelicals appear to benefit from such denominational acquiescence to their needs and desires. However, serious consideration need be given to whether dividing a congregation is simply another covert capitulation to sectarianism, denominationalism and the continuing influence of consumerist culture. Such motives would appear to be antithetical to the postevangelical ethos.

Overall, postevangelicals must pay close attention to any inconsistencies that exist between their stated values and how these values are pursued.<sup>910</sup> The temptation to create sin management systems that give preference to any non-conservative views, the redefinition of unconditional love to unconditional approval, and the propensity to split congregations across generational lines could stall or prohibit the religious freedom, holistic faith and authentic community postevangelicals desire. That each of these hurdles originated in their fundamentalist past remains a splinter in the postevangelical heart and mind. Wounds from this painful history, and its legacy of effects, must be exposed and healed before the protoevangelical gospel can complete a new vision of a God worthy of the claim, “than that being which nothing greater can be conceived.”<sup>911</sup>

Fortunately, Willard offers assistance in these areas. In regards to the issues of sin management, Willardian theology speaks to and provides hope for preventing yet another sectarian schism inside American evangelicalism. As a corrective to both the “shibboleth”

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<sup>910</sup> This dissimilarity in the postevangelical ethos may also provide insight into why something of a theological stalemate has occurred in the formation of a widely accepted and positive postevangelical theological platform.

<sup>911</sup> David S. Hogg, *Anselm of Canterbury : The Beauty of Theology* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2004), 103.

religions of conservatives or liberals, Willard advocates for Farley's *theologia habitus* and highlights the pursuit of experiential knowledge of *dikaiosune* as a primary objective for any orthodox evangelical theological pursuit. In this light, neither the conservative or progressive evangelical position demonstrates an unflawed move toward the goodness and rightness of life in the Kingdom of God since both seek some measure of separation or segregation one from the other. The "shibboleth" requirements of each evangelical camp highlight and emphasize certain acceptable beliefs or behaviors that serve effectively to discriminate and self-promote. *Theologia habitus* requires more than orthodoxy or orthopraxis. For Willard and Farley, orthopraxis (right-experience) is reestablished as an essential aspect of Christian faith.

Additionally, Willard suggests the gospel of Jesus and life in the Kingdom would allow for the realization of the "other" as a means of revealing the hidden motives and flawed perspectives of the idealized self. Further, it is in the act of facing the "other" where the idealization of self, and its tendencies toward preservation, deification, isolation and resistance to the often painful truth of one's selfish nature, can finally be overcome. The cross establishes the means through which all attempts at managing outcomes toward selfish, myopic ends finally cease. Only through death to self can resurrection to a new way of life be discovered. The gospel is the presentation of this opportunity to realize a new self, and a new theo-ontological reality of God's Kingdom that proceeds from a trustworthy and benevolent King. Such a life pursues the effects of *dikaiosune*, and progressively loses the fear of others and the temptation to assume control of life's many uncertainties. Thus confidently following the way of Jesus in constant conversational relationship is welcomed as the most beautiful and best alternative possible. In view of such a reality, the ideas of separation, division, manipulation or complacency are so unattractive as to be inconceivable.

What post- and conservative evangelicals may not yet realize is that the conflict with their “opponents” actually could represent the catalyst for a radical openness to see their own ambitions and fears more clearly. This engagement with the “other” can facilitate a new awareness that lies closer to the truth about themselves and the splinter of fundamentalism that resides deeply in both. This of course is in part the great opportunity that motivates postevangelical pursuits. Yet, as beneficial as these values are, they must not come on the backs, or at the expense, of others. Willard’s theo-ontology allows both parties to see the “other” as a gift, not an oppressor. The brilliance inherent with the seemingly counterintuitive command to love one’s enemies or bless those who curse is found not because of, but in spite of these troubling, tragic and all too often events. It is in these difficult situations where agape finds its richest opportunity to both reveal and revolutionize the human heart. Pursuing this line of theological reflection and spiritual development is an arena where postevangelicals stand the greatest chance of experiencing the authentic, holistic transformation they seek.

*A Disciple Forming Ecclesiology From A Hope-filled Soteriology*

Therefore, as mentioned earlier, Willard’s protoevangelical theology offers correction to both the progressive post- and conservative mainstream forms of American evangelicalism. Each in its own way is highlighting and accentuating a modicum of religious acts or beliefs that work to deem one either acceptable or orthodox within his/her own theological systems. Conversely, Willard suggests discipleship to Jesus and his articulation of the Kingdom of God, and its ethos, is the process through which humanity can accomplish its best potential. Authentic Christian disciples are not primarily or essentially dedicated to either postevangelical or evangelical distinctives and priorities. Rather, disciples or apprentices are simply those who have intentionally decided to “be” with Jesus in order to become capable of doing what he does, becoming emblematic of

what he is, and manifesting in their lives the kind and type of metaphysical and ontological reality he knew.<sup>912</sup>

Willard describes this process as the renunciation of the self-directed will, which leads to the process of transformation into Christlikeness. “Christian spiritual formation rests on the indispensable foundation of death to self and cannot proceed except insofar as that foundation is being firmly laid and sustained.”<sup>913</sup> Jesus illustrates this concept many times, most commonly seen in his use of irony to describe one’s need to lose their life in order to find it, or the need to pick up one’s cross in order to live in a Christlike manner. The idea of giving up one’s established worldview—which includes all assumed religious traditions and propensities—in order to find true life, communicates the need to renounce the overarching desire to govern or manage one’s own existence. Willard writes, such a person,

...will for the first time be able to do what they want to do. Of course they will be able to steal, lie, and murder all they want-which will be none at all. But they will also be able to be truthful, and transparent and helpful and sacrificially loving with joy, and they will want to be. Their life will be in this way caught up into God’s life. They will want the good and be able to do it, the only true human freedom.<sup>914</sup>

Therefore, the purpose of discipleship is to engage the process and means used to become capable of doing and becoming likened to the master, and discovering his “way” is not only good and trustworthy but also best. As such disciples are those who are rescued (saved) from the devolving, destructiveness of self-obsession, pride and fear. Consequently, they are becoming people increasingly capable of placing their confidence in Jesus, their master and teacher of life.

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<sup>912</sup> DC, chapter 8.

<sup>913</sup> ROH, 64.

<sup>914</sup> ROH, 65.



This project and its aim is therefore far grander a notion than the small and often petty arguments regarding the doctrines, dogmas, liturgies or socially approved religious activities which can become paramount in either evangelical or postevangelical discussions. Instead Willardian theology seeks to highlight the all-encompassing, beautiful, hopeful and purposeful reality Jesus revealed and made possible two millenia prior. The *protoeuangelion* re-focuses and re-introduces the kind of life one should find,

...in every respect—wise, beautiful powerful, and good—that they would constantly seek to be in [God’s] presence and be guided, instructed and helped by him in every aspect of their lives. For he is indeed the living head of the community of prayerful love across all time and space.<sup>915</sup>

For Willard, discipleship to Jesus is the essence of Christian faith, not devotion or professions of belief in various theological interests, atonement theories, premillennial eschatology, church growth ecclesiologies, culture wars or liberation movements. Instead,

The very heart of the gospel, the really good news (gospel) for humanity is that Jesus is now taking students in the master class of life. The eternal life that begins with confidence in Jesus is a life in his present kingdom, now on earth and available to all.<sup>916</sup>

Thus, Willard’s presentation of the protoevangelical message of Jesus offers the opportunity to be rescued or saved into a life as “children of light” in God’s eternal Kingdom, now and forever.<sup>917</sup> The concept of “Children of light” carries both an eschatological, soteriological and ecclesiological meanings in Willardian theology. The eschatological perspective advocates,

According to the biblical picture the function of human history is to bring forth an immense community of people from every nation and tribe and tongue and people (Rev, 14:6) who will be a kingdom of priests under God (Rev. 1:6, 5:10, Exodus 19:6) and who for some period of time in the future, will actually govern the earth under [God]. They will also, beyond that, reign with him in the eternal future of the cosmos, forever and ever (Rev.

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<sup>915</sup> DC, 273.

<sup>916</sup> DC, vxii

<sup>917</sup> ROH, 218.

22:5)...What the human heart now vaguely senses should be, eventually will be in the cosmic triumph of Christ and his people....And those that have taken on the character of Christ—those children of light in Paul’s language—will in eternity be empowered by God to do what they want, as free creative agents. And it will always harmonize perfectly with God’s own purposes.<sup>918</sup>

This author believes many of the postevangelical wounds resulted from years of teaching and preaching exactly the opposite of what the above quote describes. As a result, postevangelicals began to search for a more robust soteriological understanding which exceeded the reductionistic theological proposals that limited salvation to eternal existence in heaven after death, or escapist rapture theories and premillennial dispensationalism. Their difficulty in finding such a soteriology, combined with the ostracizing and condemnation that accompanied their search, caused some to feel the need to give up or turn their backs on their entire evangelical heritage. In the midst of this crisis, increasing numbers of postevangelicals see Willard as playing a crucial role in helping them reimagine their faith, find new hope, and a new concept of Christian salvation they feel is worthy of a God of love.

Finally, Willard posits that the soteriological reality of the protoevangelical gospel must be manifested first in and through the Church. The culmination and hope of Willardian theology in total is to empower an ecclesiology that centers on the intentional formation of citizens living in the Kingdom of God. Therefore, congregations should look and feel much like hospitals. Places where people gather to find healing, restorative and therapeutic assistance to regain the functionality of their intended destiny.<sup>919</sup> The Church is therefore positioned as a place where “lenses are cleaned,” so to speak—where reality is progressively engaged, truth comes into increasing relief, freedom is experienced and

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<sup>918</sup> Ibid.

<sup>919</sup> ROH, 234.

potential achieved. Thus, the Church represents people, gathering in all stations of the journey toward Christ-likeness, requiring assistance with various needs and ministering in various capacities.

Willard envisions such activities can and should be organized and accomplished through the local church that is led and directed by pastors and teachers who cast a vision for the Kingdom of God and manifest its presence in their own lives. Willard often states, “Discipleship is for the church. Disciples are for the world.”<sup>920</sup> Thus the Church is to carry on the work of Jesus himself; presenting the unique knowledge of the *essentia Dei* and the *missio Dei* as a total and holistic worldview. Willard believes that such a worldview represents a gift of knowledge to the world at large. A Church, focused on discipleship would form individuals who are able to,

...step forward into leadership and the professional life with the character and strength to translate the highest ideals into reality. And Jesus tells us that the way into all of the intelligent well-being and well-doing is through becoming his apprentice, right where we are, in kingdom living. We learn to lead our lives with him, thereby learning to live our lives as he would if he were we.<sup>921</sup>

Such a Church would also be a gift to all humanity. It has the unique responsibility and privilege to prepare leaders and teachers to share the experiential knowledge of Jesus and his Kingdom, first individually, then corporately to the world. If the Church would also embody the agape virtues and faith commensurate with a vital knowledge of God’s competency to reign over all the earth, evangelization would be naturally self-fulfilling. This is what Willard views as the dream or intention of God’s will; to share His creative goodness without restraint to everyone who can possibly stand it. This joint participation of the faithful with God represents a symbiotic relationship of mutual dependence likened to

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<sup>920</sup> Ibid.

<sup>921</sup> Ibid.

the Trinity. This relational picture, Willard asserts, is the model for what kind of relations we can and should pursue in our ecclesial communities.

The sufficiency of Christ to all is the basis of our efforts in gathering and service...the ministers, pastors, teachers and others should with time and experience, expect to receive from Christ with them profundity of insight, sweetness and strength of character, and abundance of power to carry out their role in the local group. The minister does not need tricks and techniques but need only speak Christ's words with Christ's character standing within the manifest presence of the Holy Spirit.<sup>922</sup>

### *Summary*

Therefore, as a summative review, Willard's view of the protoevangelical message of Jesus presents a soteriological and ecclesiological vision that would re-center both post- and traditional evangelical theology around the nature, availability and pursuit of a good God reigning over a transformative Kingdom. Evangelization of this hopeful message, the cornerstone of evangelicalism, in Willard's view, should point toward the present and future theo-ontological and soteriological reality Jesus made available to all persons. Any reductionistic perspective of a gospel focused solely or primarily on eternal life in heaven after death, but has little if any redeeming qualities for contemporary life and existence, is not only less than what Christ offers, but counterproductive. Willard makes the very stark point that confidence in Jesus' provision for sin is a very different matter than a wholesale commitment to an eternally relevant Christocentric worldview. Therefore, in a definitive way, Willard understands acceptance of and entrance into the theo-ontological reality of the Kingdom of God as both the salvific message and the sum total of salvation itself. Such a protoevangelical view seeks to correct most of the essential postevangelical concerns regarding mainstream evangelical theology previously stated. The Kingdom of God can triumph over all opposing "kingdoms" including those religious kingdoms established

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<sup>922</sup> ROH, 247.

under similar sounding, but often antithetical, objectives and ends. Willard's theology represents a clear and poignant warning to modern evangelicalism's tendency toward self-idolatry under the guise of personal piety or populist forms of religiosity.

Ironically Willard is attractive to postevangelicals largely due to his theological application of his philosophical realism. Surprisingly and unexpectedly postevangelicals appreciate Willard's protoevangelicalism largely because he allowed them to retain much if not all their past evangelical or theological categories. The key to the attractiveness of protoevangelicalism is not that it offers a replacement to a modern epistemology, theology or ontology. Rather, Willard provides a more appropriate lens (a realist perspective) through which postevangelicals can reconceptualize the very same objects and subjects which have been the cause of their angst. The result is a feeling of redemption or a salvaging of beliefs and ideas which are equally as precious as they have been painful. Postevangelicals appear relieved to discover their evangelical heritage has not been completely dysfunctional or totally ill conceived. Much of this anxiety is eliminated after realizing that the gospel of Jesus was not failing them, only modern evangelicalism, and they are not the same. Metaphorically, Willardian theology has provided a good lens cleaning, or perhaps corrective lenses, from which to gain a new, more realistic perspective on some very old evangelical concepts. His protoevangelical perspective provides a new vision that has increasing numbers of postevangelicals moving toward a brighter and more hopeful future.

However, simply articulating or spreading knowledge of Willard's protoevangelical theology will likely not generate a new future for American evangelicalism. Huge numbers of evangelicals and postevangelicals alike have already read his works and give mental assent to his theology. Unfortunately however, familiarity and agreement with Willard is too often the beginning and end of their engagement with his work. The process of

*metanoia* too often stops at agreement. Yet agreement is not the most crucial aspect involved in change. To adapt Mark Noll's concept of the "missing" evangelical mind, the new scandal in evangelicalism may be found in the well-worn path of giving intellectual ascent to a revolutionary or attractive theological platform, while never intending to apply or practice any of its truths. However, theological change is not to be forced. It has to be chosen. There is nothing inherent to Willard's works that can upend a will set on maintaining the status quo. This is true even if the status quo is to value the ethic and pursuit of change while never intentionally engaging the activities necessary to actuate change.

Key to change is the human heart. Willard's words or insights, as poignant and instructive as they may be, cannot change evangelicalism or evangelicals no matter how widespread agreement or advocacy of his views may become. Ironically, that is the final focus of all his works. The lone qualifier of an orthodox faith is evidenced in the manifest presence of a heart and life full of agape love. In Willardian theology, that alone is the demonstrable proof of the presence and power of the *protoeuangelion* Jesus describes.

#### *Future Research*

At the risk of over-simplifying the findings of this thesis down to a single point, postevangelicals may simply be looking for, hoping to experience, and endeavoring to form a Christian religion that relates to and worships a God in whom is found the quintessential characterization of divine love. They believe only such a God is worthy of their devotion, emulation and glorification. Thus finding and/or forming mutually dependent communities that pursue and manifest this agape love appears to be the deep longings behind the postevangelical journey. Likewise, each of the organizations studied in this thesis was either uniquely formed or reformed around this central motif. Various levels of angst,

rebellion, etc. come to the fore when this expectation is not met or appreciated. The dilemma that arises when postevangelicals do not sense, experience, hear or intuit that church environs are meeting this agape-ethic must be studied further. What factors are working together to form these preexisting desires, the underlying longings that spawn them, the expectations they create, and how to best address them are critical questions for social scientists and theologians alike to better understand and properly address.

Secondly, this research suggests that significant tumult lies behind the impetus of the postevangelical quest. Some of their angst comes from the fact these evangelical “children” are essentially exposing failures and fissures in their “parents and grandparent’s” evangelical theology and praxis. This creates an awkward, sometimes shocking and very emotional ecclesial and/or familial experience. Rocky and even violent transitions appear to be a consistent phenomenon within both Protestant and evangelical history. Studying the transformative events currently occurring in ecclesial groups may hold keys to future generations being better able to develop succession plans and smoother generational transitions.

Another issue at play in the postevangelical conundrum is the postmodern search for a “home”; a theological and epistemological space where a sense of belonging is cultivated through common experiences, encouraging discussions and a welcoming receptivity to the pursuit of new ideas. It is hard to argue against such a seemingly wholesome and attractive endeavor. Yet certain aspects of postmodernity and postmodernism can be considered oppositional to traditional concepts of Christian orthodoxy and the institutions that represent and defend the same. If one is to compare the so-called “evils” of both postmodernism and modernism, certainly positive and negative contributions can be found in each. Yet a uniquely Christian theological perspective should not measure “evils” of

modern theology compared to the “innovations” of postmodern theology in an attempt to create a place where one feels epistemologically or culturally “at home.”

Instead Christian theologians must engage the modern-postmodern progression in light of two goals simultaneously. There must be a development and articulation of a postmodern worldview that includes a contextualization of a robust Christian gospel. However, this objective must be pursued while at the same time remaining critical of the same postmodern epistemological tendency toward social constructivism juxtaposed against the nature of divine revelation and the Scriptures. These are not singular, mutually exclusive and divorced endeavors but rather must become conjoined, plural tasks and pursuits. Neither the modern nor postmodern theologian should feel totally “at home” in either of their theories or praxis. *Metanoia* is as appropriate in the academy as it is in the Church. There should remain an active and vibrant dialectic on these issues as we progress through this cultural and theological transition. Postmodern Christian theologians must therefore resist the longing for creating their own “safe place” and in the process deny or ignore the effects postmodern constructivism can inflict on a valid Christocentric or Logocentric worldview.

Lastly, a much more serious and concerted effort in the academy must be given to the current evolution of contemporary evangelical theology and praxis. There are now a growing number of evangelicals who have heard or sensed something unique, different and hopeful in Willard’s articulation of the gospel and have taken his challenge to reconsider all their previous considerations. Perhaps for some, the pain of staying the same began to outweigh the fears of journeying into the unknown. The result of this willingness to engage the process of change has resulted in new insights, experiences and testimonials that articulate a profound level of satisfaction, appreciation and renewed dedication to the life



Jesus describes. This phenomenon deserves more investigation, discussion and consideration.

Whether or not Willard's protoevangelical impetus will continue to grow and positively affect larger numbers of evangelicals or postevangelicals is impossible to predict. What does seem likely is that in the near future, increasing numbers of Christians will continue to search for something other than what is currently offered and articulated in the mainstream. Willard is highlighting the veracity and accessibility of the original message of Jesus that initially made a lasting transformative impact on first century disciples. Periodically over the past two millennia similar renewal, reformational and revival movements have been able to incarnate and manifest a form of Christianity so powerful and enduring as to alter the course of human history significantly for the better. One can hope and pray for such a renewal in contemporary Christian religion. The hope of protoevangelicalism suggests such a manifestation of divine grace and life is not only possible. It is imminent.

And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come.  
And let him that is athirst, Come. And whosoever will, let him take the  
water of life freely.

Revelation 22:17 KJV

# APPENDIX

*Appendix 1*

**Participant Questionnaire**

Introduction- I'm going to ask you a few questions. The first group is going to focus on some concepts. I want you to simply tell me what comes to your mind when you think about these words or phrases. If you don't like the terminology or wording of the questions or if the question does not capture the way you understand or imagine the subject, please feel free to use your own wording to reframe the question to best suit your experience. I simply want your honest reflections. Do you have any questions?

**Part One: Background**

1. What does it mean to you to be a “follower of Jesus?”
2. Describe in your own words what the term “Kingdom of God” means to you?
3. What does it mean to “grow” or “develop” spiritually? How does one do that?
4. Tell me what these concepts mean to you:
  - a. Salvation
  - b. Worship
  - c. Bible
  - d. Church
  - e. Community
  - f. Discipleship
5. Who or what has most helped you understand what Christianity is all about?

**Part Two: Context**

1. Why do you participate with \_\_\_\_\_?
2. How would you describe \_\_\_\_\_?
3. What do you get out of your involvement in \_\_\_\_\_?
4. In your opinion why does \_\_\_\_\_ exist?
5. Is there anything unique about \_\_\_\_\_? If so, in your opinion what makes \_\_\_\_\_ unique?

*Appendix 1a*

**Leader Questionnaire**

Introduction- I'm going to ask you a few questions. The first group is going to focus on some concepts. I want you to simply tell me what comes to your mind when you think about these words or phrases. If you don't like the terminology or wording of the questions or if the question does not capture the way you understand or imagine the subject, please feel free to use your own wording to reframe the question to best suit your experience. I simply want your honest reflections. Do you have any questions?

**Part One: Background**

1. What does it mean to you to be a "follower of Jesus?"
2. Describe in your own words what the term "Kingdom of God" means to you?
3. What does it mean to "grow" or "develop" spiritually? How does one do that?
4. Tell me what these concepts mean to you:
  - a. Salvation
  - b. Worship
  - c. Bible
  - d. Church
  - e. Community
  - f. Discipleship
5. Who or what has most helped you understand what Christianity is all about?

**Part Two: Context**

6. Why did you either start or accept the position at \_\_\_\_\_?
7. Are there any specific needs that you are trying to meet for people at \_\_\_\_\_?
8. In your opinion why does \_\_\_\_\_ exist?
9. Is there anything unique about \_\_\_\_\_? If so, what makes \_\_\_\_\_ unique?

**Part Three: Leadership**

10. What theologians have had a significant influence on you and your ministry?
11. Describe the specific role Dallas Willard and his work has played in both your ministry and personal spiritual life. What difference has his perspectives made in each?
12. What criticisms are accurate about the Emerging/Emergent Church? What criticism do you feel are inaccurate?
13. What are the primary responsibilities of a leader in your church?
14. What role does postmodernity play in the context of your faith?
15. Why do you think people struggle with change or transformation?

*Appendix 2*

<http://www.reimagine.org/community/vows>

**Vows**

**To Creator, obedience**

**To Creation, service**

**To each other, community**

*In all things, love*

*In all things, love*

**With possessions, simplicity**

**For life, prayer**

**In our world, creativity**

*In all things, love*

*In all things, love*

As a group we are committed to a deliberate approach to making a life together in the Way of Jesus. We reviewed the Gospels and identified seven themes based on how Jesus lived and what he taught: service, simplicity, creativity, obedience, prayer, community, and love. Through common vows we make our desire to follow the way of Jesus concrete and tangible. A vow is a solemn promise made before God and people to take or refrain from a specific action. A vow expresses sentiment, intention and a commitment to specific practices.

*"For you have heard my vows, O God;  
you have given me the heritage of those who fear your name...  
Then will I ever sing praise to your name  
and fulfill my vows day after day." (Psalm 61:5,8)*

When a group of people make promises together they are able to support and encourage one another in their resolutions. We see making common vows as an earnest attempt to obey Jesus in the details and direction of our daily lives. Our specific commitments, practices and rhythms are continually evolving because we see each year as a new phase of this experiment. Below is a summary of our current commitments to God and one another:

1. **Obedience.** We recognize Jesus as our teacher and authority, and wrestle with how to surrender to the way of love in every detail of our lives. We submit ourselves to one another in love and strive to keep our vows to God and our commitments to one another.

- We are obedient to the 10 commandments and the law of Love.
- We meet with a trusted mentor or peer-mentor to talk about personal growth at least 6 times a year (a personal growth plan should be written on your own or with your

mentor).

- We seek community discernment on major life decisions (change of vocation, marriage, relocation, personal crisis, etc) through a listening meeting.

2. **Service.** We are made to collaborate with our Maker in caring for all of creation. We recognize the sacredness of work and use the capacities of our minds and bodies to serve others with our talents and skills according to the needs of the place where we find ourselves.

- We give priority in our schedules to serve one another and, as our season of life allows, the forgotten and marginalized.
- We do our work with dignity, to provide income and fulfill our true vocation, in ways that promote equality, sustainability and justice in our world (directly and indirectly).

3. **Community.** We seek to practice forgiveness and reconciliation, honor, encouragement, humility, and hospitality in all of our relationships. We are committed to taking the journey of faith in solidarity with our sisters and brothers around the world.

- We are active in projects and family meetings.
- We participate in Sunday night SEVEN gatherings.
- We practice regular hospitality by welcoming people into our homes, lives and events.

4. **Simplicity.** We acknowledge the abundant provision of our Maker and seek to live in trust, radical contentment, and generosity within an empire of scarcity and greed.

- We live by a budget that reflects sustainability and intentional conscientious priorities. We share these budgets in a yearly members meeting.
- We give away at least 10% of our income (5% to the common work of SEVEN and 5% to the charities of our choice).
- We collectively take an inventory of our belongings and evaluate what to keep, share, sell or give away on an annual basis.
- We live by a schedule that allows for our mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional selves to be replenished and available (weekly Sabbath, room for spontaneity, pace of life, conscientious commitments, etc.).

5. **Prayer.** We seek the fruitfulness and guidance of the Spirit that comes from being centered and surrendered to the will and presence of our Creator. We practice rhythms of prayer, study, silence, and solitude that help us remain open to the voice and power of the Spirit.

- We create space in our schedules to pray twice a day.
- We take an annual two-day silent, contemplative prayer retreat.
- We participate in communal prayer once a week.

6. **Creativity.** We seek to be awakened in our imaginations and actions, inspired by the epic story of God's kingdom and creation, and connected to our cultural context. We want to live artfully, taking risks, experimenting, and using the language and mediums of our culture to explore the unfolding story of God's kingdom together.

- We cultivate divine imagination by reading the scriptures daily with our family or

household.

- We seek to find God through intentional and reflective interactions with nature and culture.
  - We create cultural artifacts (recipes, poems, paintings, songs, stories, etc) and share them with each other 6 times a year, recognizing their importance as signposts of our journey.
  - We practice body and mind disciplines (exercise, sleep, healthy eating, rest, etc.) that promote health and sustainability.
7. **Love.** We acknowledge that love is the greatest force in the universe, and in every dimension of our lives we seek to cooperate with the reign of God's love.
- We actively seek to meet one another's needs.
  - We seek reconciliation in all relationships, past and present.
  - We seek unity, cooperation, and goodwill with groups and individuals seeking God in the way of Jesus, both locally and globally.

*Appendix 2a*

***Brief Biography of Re:Imagine Founder and Director Mark Scandrette***

As director and president of Re:Imagine Mark Scandrette has a long and substantial history within the American evangelical religion. Scandrette admits his Christian upbringing played a significant role and had an enduring impact on his search to recontextualize his Christian experience. Born and raised in the politically, socially and religiously conservative area of the Midwestern United States, Scandrette describes his family of origin as maintaining religiously pietistic and fundamentalist leanings within the Free Methodist tradition. Just before Scandrette was born, his parents experienced a religious awakening that he describes as a “spiritual renaissance.”<sup>923</sup> This event caused his parents to reconsider and shift many of the more fundamentalist legalisms and dogmatic beliefs they had been raised to believe.

My parents would say that they moved from being conservative religious folks to having a “born again experience” where a personal relationship with Jesus was emphasized over religion and the moral legalism of their upbringing. (i.e. No movies, no drinking, no jewelry, no dancing, etc). My parents redefined their faith around what they believed to be the deeper essence of Christianity—a personal relationship with Jesus. They continued to be quite pious and devout in practice—but with much more graceful attitudes towards the pietistic issues of their parents’ generation.<sup>924</sup>

Eventually, his family would join the Navigators, a conservative evangelical discipleship group devoted to a structured form of spiritual formation founded by noted leader Dawson Trotman.<sup>925</sup>

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<sup>923</sup> Mark Scandrette, “Interview With Mark Scandrette” interviewed by Charles Erlam, San Francisco. November 19, 2008. Many of these quotes come from three primary sources. First, this author recorded several conversations with Scandrette beginning in December 2009, ending March, 2011. Also Scandrette provided some background data from an unpublished interview transcript attained conducted by Charles Erlam on November 19, 2008 in San Francisco, CA. Finally, there are several email correspondences from December 2009 through June 2011.

<sup>924</sup> Scandrette, Email correspondence with the author June 21, 2011

<sup>925</sup> Trotman began one of the first and largest entrepreneurial parachurch ministries in 1933. He originally began to teach navy sailors through discipleship directed bible studies on board Navy ships in southern California. He focused on small groups and scripture memorization and used the principle of spiritual multiplication as a means to evangelize new converts. Eventually Trotman would team with Billy Graham in an attempt to apply his discipleship techniques to the Graham crusades. Patrick McIntyre, *The*



After fulfilling his military service, Scandrette's father moved the family to Minnesota. There the Scandrettes began to minister in the urban inner cities neighborhoods, attempting to build relational trust and community with their surrounding neighbors. Mark remembers several occasions when someone in need of shelter was brought into his home, often drunk, dirty and hungry. Such attempts at reaching out to multi-cultural and diverse ethnic communities made a lasting impression on Scandrette's vision of the Christian life. In recalling these events Scandrette remembers his parents struggling to find ways of integrating what they believed about the gospel of Jesus into a "little dysfunctional inner city church" where it was the norm to reject "anyone living outside their narrow zone of comfort which really meant anyone not very like themselves."<sup>926</sup> In many ways this early experience shaped Scandrette's perspectives on the outward ecclesiology and praxis of the local church juxtaposed against the Biblical gospel narratives. It would serve as a constant reminder that religious groups who professed belief in the Christian creeds could and would oppose those attempting to apply these same creeds in their everyday lives.<sup>927</sup>

In my early life I felt I had to work hard to somehow reconcile the sincere but possibly naive faith of my family and culture with the second culture of a progressive urban and diverse context. Those two streams and my quest to integrate them could be seen as a defining narrative stream in my life's journey—and my work through 20 years of ministry—wanting to exist somehow in both worlds—with their divergent ethos, values, language and mores.<sup>928</sup>

As a teen Scandrette engaged in a strict, ritualized religious life. He remembers reading, memorizing and studying Scripture two to three hours a day, often rising before dawn to pray. Both he and his father also became intrigued by the teachings of then popular preacher and teacher Bill Gothard.<sup>929</sup> Gothard's discipleship course Basic Youth Conflicts

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Graham Formula: Why Most Decisions for Christ Are Ineffective (Mammoth Springs, AR: White Harvest Publishing, 2006), 55-66. The Navigators, "About Us," History, <http://www.navigators.org/us/aboutus/history> (accessed 7-10, 2010) and Martin I. Klauber and Scott M. Manetsch, *The great commission : evangelicals and the history of world missions* (Nashville, Tenn.: B & H Publishing Group, 2007), 123.

<sup>926</sup> Scandrette, Erlam Interview, 2008.

<sup>927</sup> Scandrette, Follow-Up Interview, November, 2010.

<sup>928</sup> Scandrette, email correspondence with the author, June 21, 2011.

<sup>929</sup> Mark A Noll, "Evangelicalism," in *A Companion to American Thought*, ed. Richard Wightman Fox and James T. Kloppenberg, (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 1995), 222.

became a source of inspiration and guidance.<sup>930</sup> What intrigued Scandrette about Gothard’s methodology was the intentional focus on very practical applications for a more pious life through the application of spiritual disciplines. Scandrette recalls Gothard’s praxis presented a “way of life” associated with the teaching and ethics of Jesus and not only a doctrinal or theoretical focus.

It was more than doctrine and theory, which was great but it also said... hey... get up at 5 am in the morning and pray. Get some exercise and eat a healthy diet. Memorize large passages of Scripture. Even though it was funky for a teenager at the time, at least there was something to do! You could feel really devout. I feel like it answered some of my early monastic longings, while remaining inside the evangelical stream.<sup>931</sup>

It was this desire to apply the internal principles and beliefs of Christian theology and doctrine that remained a central thrust of Scandrette’s vision of Biblical Christianity. He began to recognize how Gothard’s encouragement towards spiritual disciplines led to an increasing ability to effect the kind of personal piety and character represented in Christian theology but rarely emphasized or applied in practical ways within the evangelical culture.

At 19, Scandrette quit college, married his high school sweetheart Lisa, and moved to Minnesota. There he took a position as the regional director of the mission organization, Child Evangelism Fellowship, (CEF). During this period, while running CEF, Scandrette began to “play around” with what he terms “some restorationist, communal experiments.”<sup>932</sup> While ministering to at risk youth at CEF, he and a small group of fellow Christians began a slow process of “seriously examining the New Testament, literally as a guide for Christian practice.”<sup>933</sup> They hoped to discover the original intents and purposes of the first century church and the means to recapture a contemporary expression of similar quality. This was Scandrette’s first foray into what became a life-long reconsideration of evangelical theology and practice.

One of the gifts my dad gave to me was an ongoing critique of our religious and cultural traditions. He always tended to be a gadfly—against church building projects, large programs and often at least asking the question, “what if” and “maybe there is a different way.” His patience with my

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<sup>930</sup> Rich Poll, “Exegeting Bill Gothard; Three Christian Apologist Evaluate the Conference Speakers Life and Teachings,” Christianity Today, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2003/march/35.77.html> (accessed 8-22, 2010).

<sup>931</sup> Scandrette, Erlam interview, 2008.

<sup>932</sup> Ibid.

<sup>933</sup> Scandrette, email correspondence, June, 2011.

difficulties with Christianity during my adolescence is probably one of the reasons that I didn't leave the faith as a teenager—because he taught me that it was ok to question assumptions—and he communicated a sense that the church and Christian culture were far from the life of Jesus and the origins of the early church.<sup>934</sup>

### *Appendix 3*

## **Attributes of the Encounter Group Therapy and the Human Potential**

### **Movement Related to ACCD**

Similar to Lewin's work mentioned in the ethnography of ACCD, Carl Rogers, the well-known creator of "client-centered" therapy is also credited for contributing significantly toward the evolution of EG. He is given credit for coining the term "basic encounter groups." Not directly connected with Lewin, Rogers' encounter groups were similar to T-groups in their emphasis on self-understanding and attitude change as participants engaged with one another. However, for Rogers the counselor acted as more of a guide and less an active participant or instigator of action than in Lewin's T-groups. Yet Rogers shared Lewin's goals of personal growth in relationship skills and transformation of actions and attitudes but with the client and not the counselor/trainer setting the priority and agenda. Like Lewin however, Rogers also valued here-and-now learning and attempted to take advantage of the benefits available in the group dynamics process.

Another common methodology in the EG setting is the application of Gestalt therapy. Founded by Fritz Perls, Gestalt therapy often attempts to develop a means of engaging psychological issues such as existence, self-awareness, responsibility, contingency and wholeness or integration of a person's social and physical reality. Perls believed the most effective way to engage these issues was through direct confrontation of the denial systems which surround and protect many of these intrapsychic biases and beliefs. He developed activities and exercises that could breakdown and deconstruct the defense mechanisms and structures. When defense mechanisms are effectively reduced or neutralized, gestalt therapy advocates the introduction of new possibilities or perspectives which endeavor to reconstruct ideological paradigms into the newly created void

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<sup>934</sup> Ibid.

What is commonly understood today as the Human Potential movement is based closely on Maslow's theories first presented in a 1967 lecture entitled "The Farther Reaches of Human Potential"<sup>935</sup> and later enfolding his earlier writings *Toward a Psychology of Being*. The HPM gathered interest during the tumultuous counter culture revolution exploding onto the American society in the 1960's.<sup>936</sup> Maslow's iconoclastic theories regarding the nature of humanity presented a significantly positive view of human nature. Maslow's main premise proposed human impulses were intrinsically good, and the human potential for creativity is significantly broader than previously imagined. Maslow triumphed spontaneity, adventure, risk, and non-conformity. Ironically, this view was contrarian to two widely popular views of the time within Freudian psychology and conservative Christianity. Not typically ideological bedfellows, Maslow's positivism offered a hope-filled view of human nature and began to overtake or outpace the more limiting and skeptical theories offered within the disciplines of psychiatry, psychoanalysis and religious doctrines of fundamentalist Christianity. Hence, Maslow's theories sparked a significant sense of optimism and hope to anyone chafing against the norms of middle-class conformity. A sort of "Maslowian revolution" took shape in the broader culture. Assuming his emphasis on the inherent goodness of human impulses and spontaneity, the HPM sought to take the training methodology of the EG ethos as the means to transform individual perceptions of both themselves and their worldview into a more Maslowian perspective on life and living.<sup>937</sup> Transitioning from the previous negative view of human nature and poor self-image toward a more positive and potential laden philosophical position, the T-group/EG techniques merged with HPM philosophy in something of a collision course toward what would eventually be seen as the start of the New Age movement.<sup>938</sup>

Another key element that worked together to shape the HPM was an offshoot of humanistic psychology called transpersonal psychology, what some have termed a "fourth

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<sup>935</sup> Roy Wallis, "Betwixt Therapy and Salvation: The Changing Form of the Human Potential Movement," *Sickness and Sectarianism* Vol. (1985), 23-51.

<sup>936</sup> Abraham H. Maslow, *Toward a psychology of being*. (Princeton, N.J.: Van Nostrand, 1962), and C. H. Miller, "The Human Potential Movement: Implications for Psychoanalysis," *American Journal of Psychoanalysis* Vol. 37, (1977), 99-109.

<sup>937</sup> Ibid.

<sup>938</sup> Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture : Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998),

force” in psychology.<sup>939</sup> The transpersonal approach highlighted segments of the humanistic Maslowian theories but more specifically probed “the recognition, understanding, and realization of unitive, spiritual, and transcendent states of consciousness.”<sup>940</sup> As transpersonal psychology matured, attempts to describe and integrate spiritual experience within modern psychological theory were made.<sup>941</sup> New theories attempted to better understand a variety of spiritual phenomenon such as mysticism, religious conversion, altered states of consciousness, trance and the effects of spiritual disciplines and practices. Transpersonal, holistic psychology captured the attention and was widely advocated by noted scholars Carl Jung and Stanislov Grof.<sup>942</sup>

Hence, for the first time, popular psychology in the form of transpersonal and humanistic psychology began to develop a closer affiliation with popular religion.<sup>943</sup> Organizations such as Esalen, a California study center examined the relationship between eastern and western psychology, religion and philosophy.<sup>944</sup> Esalen became one of the largest HPM centers in the country, at one time attracting over 25,000 people per year. Their conferences attracted notable speakers such as Paul Tillich, Eric Fromm, Rollo May, as well as Rogers, Perls and Maslow.<sup>945</sup> Esalen also became a well-known destination for the more radical, bodily awareness therapies that endeavored to get participants “in touch with latent abilities, hidden talents

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<sup>939</sup> Roger N. Walsh and Frances E. Vaughan, *Beyond Ego : Transpersonal Dimensions in Psychology* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1980), and later Roger N. Walsh and Frances E. Vaughan, *Paths Beyond Ego : The Transpersonal Vision* (Los Angeles, CA: J.P. Tarcher/Perigee, 1993), Ronald S. Valle, “The Emergence of Transpersonal Psychology,” in *Existential-Phenomenological Perspectives in Psychology : Exploring the Breadth of Human Experience : With a Special Section on Transpersonal Psychology*, ed. Ronald S. Valle and Steen. Halling, (New York: Plenum Press, 1989),257-268.

<sup>940</sup> D.H. Lajoie and SI Shapiro, “Definitions of Transpersonal Psychology: The First Twenty-Three Years,” *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* Vol. 24, no. 1 (1992), 79-98.

<sup>941</sup> David Brian Perrin, *Studying Christian Spirituality* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 233-235.

<sup>942</sup> Brant Cortright, *Psychotherapy and Spirit : Theory and Practice in Transpersonal Psychotherapy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 82-88.

<sup>943</sup> Daryl H. Stevenson, Brian E. Eck, and Peter C. Hill, *Psychology & Christianity Integration : Seminal Works That Shaped the Movement* (Batavia, Ill.: Christian Association for Psychological Studies, 2007), 69-70., Joel Kovel, *A complete guide to therapy : from psychoanalysis to behavior modification*,(New York: Pantheon Books, 1976), and *History and spirit : an inquiry into the philosophy of liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991),

<sup>944</sup> Bruce L. Maliver, *The Encounter Game* (New York: Stein and Day, 1973), 40-46.

<sup>945</sup> Eugene. Taylor, *Shadow Culture : Psychology and Spirituality in America* (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 1999), 238.

and undeveloped capacities for excellence and pleasure.”<sup>946</sup> Esalen growth and popularity represented the widening interest and investigation into the mixture of religion, psychology, human potential, eastern mysticism, and pagan rituals. Each of these constituencies collided in the counter-cultural revolution of the 1960’s which engulfed much of Northern California specifically the San Francisco Bay Area coast.<sup>947</sup>

Additionally, an “evangelistic” ideal developed within the growing HPM culture. Proponents suggested their new ability to unleash the “power within” could direct society towards assisting others to release vast amounts of previously untapped, hidden potential. HPM advocates often preached how the net effect of actualizing all human potential would bring about significant and sustained social transformation in mass.<sup>948</sup> However, as humanistic and transpersonal psychology grew, and more aggressive and untested therapies were offered to the public, increased criticism of the unregulated nature of this type of psychological inquiry splintered the field and formed distinct divisions within the discipline.<sup>949</sup>

By the late 1970’s EG/T-group techniques gained significant popularity inside the HPM as individuals and groups more fully recognized the power Lewin, Rogers and Perls tapped in the EG/T-group methodology. However, contrary to the research based genesis of the EG which traced its roots to valid studies in the behavioral sciences, the HPM remained largely unregulated, entrepreneurial endeavors which often attracted hedonistic tendencies and aberrant therapies. This lack of standards allowed more experimental, aggressive and less scientifically valid applications of the humanistic and transpersonal psychological perspectives into therapies offered to the public. Controversial activities such

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<sup>946</sup> Esalen member and leading proponent of body awareness therapies makes these claims in his subtitle of his book, William C. Schutz, *Joy; Expanding Human Awareness* (New York: Grove Press, 1967),

<sup>947</sup> The counter culture era of Berkley, Oakland, San Francisco, Marin Country and Santa Cruz is a widely documented social phenomenon. Tom. Brokaw, *Boom! : Talking About the Sixties : What Happened, How it Shaped Today, Lessons for Tomorrow*, Brian. Balogh, *Integrating the Sixties : The Origins, Structures, and Legitimacy of Public Policy in a Turbulent Decade*, (University Park, PN.: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), (New York: Random House, 2008), James. Brook, Chris Carlsson, and Nancy J. Peters, *Reclaiming San Francisco : History, Politics, Culture : A City Lights Anthology* (San Francisco, CA: City Lights Books, 1998),

<sup>948</sup> Richard G. Weigel, “The Marathon Encounter Group-Vision and Reality: Exhuming the Body for a Last Look,” *Counseling Psychology Journal: Practice and Research* Vol. 53,3, (2002), 186 and F. H. Stoller, “Marathon Group Therapy,” in *Innovations to Group Psychotherapy*, ed. George Michael Gazda, (Springfield, Ill.: C. C. Thomas, 1968),42-95.

<sup>949</sup> Hans A. Baer, *Toward an Integrative Medicine : Merging Alternative Therapies With Biomedicine* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2004), 4

as Rolfing, transcendental meditation, nude therapy, primal scream therapy, and others drew increased scrutiny from the psychological establishment and a call for more strict ethical guidelines.<sup>950</sup> Therefore as a group the T-group/EG methodology and training increasingly became more available to those with little or no scientific training, psychological expertise and oversight and therefore potentially less altruistic or benevolent intentions for how the training would be applied. The premier effect of the HPM on the EG ethos was a loosening of ethical standards and the blurring of moral questions concerning if and when transformational methodologies should be applied, and to what effect.<sup>951</sup> There was also a critique of the HPM for a lack of detailed empirical research to validate their sometimes astounding claims.<sup>952</sup> Additionally, the Maslowian desire to “get more out of life” fit well with the growing influence of post-war American capitalism.<sup>953</sup>

By the mid-80’s, in largely due to mounting accusations against HPM organizations and their leaders for financial impropriety, fraud, malpractice and coercion, organizations utilizing T-group/EG methods came under greater scrutiny.<sup>954</sup> Some training participants accused trainers of using EG methodology and techniques to create cult-like environments where leaders deconstructed participant’s ideological paradigms and reconstructed them for

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<sup>950</sup> Daniel Hogan, *The Regulation of Psychotherapists: A Study in the Philosophy and Practice of Professional Regulation*, vol. 1 (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1979), 5. Leo Croghan, “Encounter Groups and the Necessity for Ethical Guidelines,” *Journal of Clinical Psychology* Vol. 30, 4, (October, 1974), 438-445. Arthur Asa Berger, *Agitpop : Political Culture and Communication Theory* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1990), 65-76. G William Barnard, “Diving Into the Depths: Reflections on Psychology as Religion,” in *Religion and Psychology: Mapping the Terrain*, ed. W.B. Parsons and D. Jonte-Pace, (2001), 297-318.

<sup>951</sup> Leo Croghan, “Encounter Groups and the Necessity for Ethical Guidelines,” *Journal of Clinical Psychology* Vol. 30, 4, (October, 1974), 438-445. Richard G. Weigel, “The Marathon Encounter Group-Vision and Reality: Exhuming the Body for a Last Look,” *Counseling Psychology Journal: Practice and Research* Vol. 53,3, (2002), 186-198.

<sup>952</sup> Ibid. Also Richard G. Weigel, “The Marathon Encounter Group-Vision and Reality: Exhuming the Body for a Last Look,” *Counseling Psychology Journal: Practice and Research* Vol. 53,3, (2002), 186-198. Frank Vernallis, “Review: A Scream Away From Happiness,” *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research and Practice* Vol. 10, 4, (Winter, 1973), 363-364. Herbert Streaun, “A Critique of Some of the Newer Treatment Modalities,” *Clinical Social Work Journal* Vol. Fall, (1981), 155-171. Bruce W. Scotton, Allan B. Chinen, and John R. Battista, *Textbook of Transpersonal Psychiatry and Psychology* (New York: BasicBooks, 1996), 9-10.

<sup>953</sup> Arthur Asa Berger, *Agitpop : Political Culture and Communication Theory* (New Brunswick, N.J., U.S.A.: Transaction Publishers, 1990), 65-76

<sup>954</sup> Kenneth M. Cinnamon and Dave Farson, *Cults and Cons : The Exploitation of the Emotional Growth Consumer* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1979),

self-promoting purposes and financial gain.<sup>955</sup> Several accusations were investigated by the news media.

One of Mind Dynamics key clients was Holiday Magic a multi-level marketing and cosmetics company owned by William Penn Patrick. Patrick would later have financial interest in all three entities. Both Mind Dynamics and Holiday Magic were later investigated by the State of California, the Federal Trade Commission and the Securities and Exchange Commission as a pyramid scheme.<sup>956</sup> Both companies were charged and found guilty of deceptive trade practices and a settlement was reached to a class action suit. Patrick's death in 1973 and mounting legal troubles closed both organizations. What connected these organizations was the training seminars required of their "customers" or salespeople which employed EG/T-group methodologies. A Time magazine article in 1973 detailing the criminal charges of Patrick and one of his mentee's Glenn Turner, reveals that a motivational course entitled, *Dare To Be Great*, was required of franchisees. Recruits to Holiday Magic and Turner's Koscot Cosmetics, were gathered into what were described as "leadership training" sessions which apparently were very similar if not identical to LGAT like settings. Trainers would then prod would-be investors or salespeople into joining pyramid schemes through the manipulating training exercises in order to convince participants to make financial investments. What became obvious to regulators was the product advertised, either soap or cosmetics, was not the source of income. Rather the memberships into the distributorships were the sole generator of revenue. The trainings were primarily used as tools in a coercive sales presentation designed to overcome and

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<sup>955</sup> Staff reporter, "In the News," *Sales Management* Vol. 109, (1972), 148. Maxwell. Boas and Steve Chain, *Big Mac : The Unauthorized Story of Mcdonald's*, Andrew I. Malcolm, *The Tyranny of the Group* (Totowa, N.J.: Littlefield, Adams, 1975), 169-171. (New York: Dutton, 1976), 157. Yecheil Klar, Richard Mendola, Jeffrey Fischer, Roxane Silver, Jack Chinsky, Barry Goff, "Characteristic of Participants in a Large Group Awareness Training," *Journal of Counseling and Clinical Psychology* Vol. 58, 1, (1990), 99-108. Jane Howard, *Please Touch; a Guided Tour of the Human Potential Movement.*, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970), Robert Hann, "Werner Erhard's Est.: A Religious Movement," *Quarterly Review* Vol. 2, 3, (Fall, 1982), 78-95. Charlotte Faltermayer and Richard Wodbury, "The Best of Est?," *Time* Vol. 151,10, (March, 1998). Harriet S. Mosatche, *Searching : Practices and Beliefs of the Religious Cults and Human Potential Groups* (New York, N.Y.: Stravon Educational Press, 1983),

<sup>956</sup> See National District Attorney Assoc, "Economic Crimes Digest," Vol. 2, (1980), 162. McGeorge School of Law, "Holiday Magic Fraud," *Pacific Journal of Law* Vol. 15, (1983), 886. Robert DeMuro, *Holiday Magic Inc. An Anatomy of a Scam*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers Univ Pr, 1982). Andrew I. Malcolm, *The Tyranny of the Group* (Totowa, N.J.: Littlefield, Adams, 1975), 169-171. Espy M. Navarro and Robert. Navarro, *Self Realization : The Est and Forum Phenomena in American Society* (Philadelphia, PA: Xlibris, 2002), Staff reporter, "Swindles: Battling the Biggest Fraud," *Time* Vol. (July 16, 1973). Staff reporter, "The Power of Positive Eyewash," *Forbes* Vol. (December 1975). 22. Dirk Mathison, "White Collar Cults: They Want Your Mind and Your Money and Six of Your Friends. A Look At the New White Collar World of Cults Where Personal Growth Means Brainwashing," *Self Magazine* Vol. (Feb. 1993).



eliminate buyer objections or emotional resistance to the product offered. Patrick and Turner were generating significantly more revenue from the sales seminars than the actual products they offered to the public. Thus claims of “bait and switch” tactics, emotional and physical abuse were leveled against both the use and design of the “training” regimen. What was not in dispute was that the methodology was effective albeit for immoral and illegal ends. Hanley appears to have been charged with mail fraud.<sup>957</sup>

In addition, the larger organizations employing adapted EG methodologies such as EST, Lifespring and other groups such as L. Ron Hubbard’s Church of Scientology began to defend themselves against claims of cult status from evangelical Christian leaders and institutions.<sup>958</sup> Perhaps the height of this awareness came when the popular news program *60 Minutes* interviewed Erhard on national television in 1991. The expose uncovered several accusations of Erhard’s inappropriate sexual and criminal activity.<sup>959</sup> As a result, Erhard left the country, transferred his organizations to others and largely went into seclusion.<sup>960</sup> Lifespring and Hanley have also has been accused of illegal activity and received negative publicity for lawsuits regarding the creation of psychotic episodes in participants and even wrongful death.<sup>961</sup>

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<sup>957</sup> Rex Stockton, Renate Rohde, and James Haughey, “The Effects of Structured Group Exercises on Cohesion, Engagement, Avoidance and Conflict,” *Small Group Research* Vol. 23,2, (May, 1992), 155-168. Morton A. Lieberman, Irvin D. Yalom, and Matthew B. Miles, *Encounter Groups: First Facts* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), Frank Vernallis, “Review: A Scream Away From Happiness,” *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research and Practice* Vol. 10, 4, (Winter, 1973), 363-364. Herbert Streaan, “A Critique of Some of the Newer Treatment Modalities,” *Clinical Social Work Journal* Vol. Fall, (1981), 155-171. Sandra C. Paivio and Leslie Greenberg, “Resolving Unfinished Business: Efficacy of Experiential Therapy Using Empty-Chair Dialogue,” *Journal of Counseling and Clinical Psychology* Vol. 63, 3, (June 1995), 419-425. Marvin Kaplan, “Uses of the Group in Gestalt Theory,” *Psychotherapy, Theory, Research and Practice* Vol. 15, 1, (Spring, 1978), 80-89. James F. Guinan, “Playing Games With Games People Play: Contributions of Gestalt Theory to Individual Counseling,” *American Psychological Association Convention*, Ohio, (September 3-7, 1971).

<sup>958</sup> There are a great number of Christian publishers who began to produce significant numbers of books during this period of the late 1980’s and early 1990. For instance David Jeremiah and Carole C. Carlson, *Invasion of Other Gods : The Seduction of New Age Spirituality* (Dallas, TX: Word, 1995), Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture : Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998), Timothy Miller, *America’s Alternative Religions* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), and John Ankerberg and John. Weldon, *Cult Watch* (Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 1991),

<sup>959</sup> Jane Self, *60 Minutes and the Assassination of Werner Erhard* (New York: Breakthru Publishing, 1992),

<sup>960</sup> Stephen Ornes, “Whatever Happened To.Est?,” *Discover* Vol. 28, 7, (July, 2007).

<sup>961</sup> Jeremy Main, Charles A Riley, and., “Trying to Bend Managers Minds,” *Fortune* Vol. 11, (November, 23 1987). Marc Fisher, “Inside Lifespring,” *Washington Post Mazagine* Vol. (October 25, 1987). Margaret Thaler. Singer, *Cults in Our Midst* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 204, 236. Irving. Hexham, Karla O. Poewe, and J. I. Packer, *Understanding Cults and New Religions* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1986),

*Appendix 4*

**Attributes of the History of Orange County Evangelical Movements Related to  
United Trinity Anglican Church**

The Azusa Street Revival, beginning in 1906 and continuing for the next nine years was a historic Pentecostal revival meeting that took place in the Los Angeles area<sup>962</sup> Led by William J. Seymour, an African American preacher the Azusa Revival began in a gathering of Los Angelinos on April 14, 1906, and continued until roughly through 1915. Today, the revival is considered by historians to be the primary catalyst for the spread of Pentecostalism in the 20th century. Another Pentecostal movement in Los Angeles centered on the preaching and leadership of Aimee Semple McPherson (1890–1944).<sup>963</sup> An evangelist known as "Sister Aimee," McPherson founded the Foursquare Church movement out of a longstanding tent revival in 1927. Los Angeles remained her center of operations and her Angelus Temple which seated 5,300 people was opened in Echo Park in 1923. McPherson was a celebrity, participating in publicity events, such as weekly Sunday parades through the streets of Los Angeles. In addition to the Foursquare denomination, McPherson also established L. I. F. E. Bible College. Currently, Dr Jack W. Hayford, a nationally renowned preacher, theologian and author has been the president of the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel since October 1, 2004. Hayford is founder of The Church on the Way in Van Nuys, California, and Living Way Ministries. He is also the founder and chancellor of The King's University in Van Nuys, CA and the Hayford Bible Institute.

In near by La Mirada, CA the Bible Institute of Los Angeles (BIOLA) was created in 1913. Dr. Samuel H. Sutherland became president in 1952, and with his leadership the college obtained regional and professional accreditation. Additionally, many new programs of study were introduced, including Talbot Theological Seminary.<sup>964</sup> Biola would later develop Rosemead school of psychology in 1977. Several radio preachers from the LA

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<sup>962</sup> See Gary McGee, "William J. Seymor and the Azusa Street Revival," *Enrichment Journal* Fall, (1999):

<sup>963</sup> Silvia Anne. Sheaffer and Martin E. Marty, *Aimee Semple Mcpherson*, Spiritual leaders and thinkers (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2004)

<sup>964</sup> See <http://www.biola.edu/about/history/>(accessed 3-15-2011)

area gained nationwide acclaim. One of the most popular was Charles E. Fuller who began preaching on the radio in the 1930's on a show titled the *Old Fashioned Revival Hour*.<sup>965</sup> Fuller also founded the Gospel Broadcasting Association in 1933 and Fuller Theological Seminary in 1947. Fuller's program would grow to air in 182 countries delivering gospel music programming along with Fuller's teaching. The program was so successful the Encyclopedia of American Gospel Music refers to Fuller as holding, "a special place in gospel music history because of its enormous global impact in spreading the melodies and spiritual songs of Western Christianity around the world." Fuller Seminary is widely considered one of the premier learning institutions for Christian thought and the largest multid denominational Christian seminary in the world.<sup>966</sup> Other less notable institutions and movements in and around the Orange County area include Vanguard University, (then known as Southern California Bible College) founded in 1950. Vanguard is an Assemblies of God university and became the first four-year college in Orange County.

Most important to this thesis and the Holy Trinity historiography are the movements starting in the turbulent 1960's. The "Jesus" movement led in part by Lonnie Frisbe and Chuck Smith of the Calvary Chapel movement was founded on the Orange County beaches. The Vineyard charismatic movement of the early 70's led by John Wimber came out of Fuller Seminary. In 1963 Mariners Church began as a small group of Christians who met for Bible studies in homes in the Newport Beach area. Mariners currently averages 9,000 in attendance per week, making it the 58th-largest church in the United States but only the second largest church in Orange County.<sup>967</sup> Additionally, the self-help, "power of positive thinking" movement began with the publication of Norman Vincent Peale's book of the same name in the 1950's. Peale's philosophy became a part of the religious culture in 1960's and led to the creation of Crystal Cathedral in Orange County.<sup>968</sup> Founded by author and television preacher Robert Schuler, The Crystal Cathedral, built in 1980, was at the time the largest religious structure in the state of California. Schuler still periodically hosts "The Hour of Power." Now in syndication, Schuler's program was once the most watched

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<sup>965</sup> WK McNeil, *Encyclopedia of American gospel music* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 75-6.

<sup>966</sup> Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 1995.

<sup>967</sup> Erika Chavez, "Pastor Celebrates 30th Year At Mariners Church," *The Orange County Register*, 4-18-2008.

<sup>968</sup> Charles H. Lippy, *Being Religious, American Style : A History of Popular Religiosity in the United States*, (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1994), 145.

religious program in America. A student of Schuler's, and a graduate of Fuller Seminary, Rick and Kay Warren started their church in 1979. The Seeker sensitive/Purpose Driven movement of the 90's was sparked out of Warren's megachurch Saddleback Church in Lake Forest. Saddleback is the largest church in Orange County with approximately 20,000 weekly attendees spread over 10 different locations. Saddleback is listed as the eighth largest church in America.<sup>969</sup>

Orange County is also the home of TBN-Trinity Broadcast Network, currently the world's largest religious television network. TBN hosted by Paul and Jan Crouch televises a Pentecostal brand of prosperity gospel all over the world.<sup>970</sup> Along with TBN, Benny Hinn Ministries is also headquartered in Orange County. Hinn is reported to live in the exclusive town of Newport Beach. Hinn's church, World Healing Center, is located in Long Beach.<sup>971</sup> From his broadcast center in Orange County, Hinn's "This Is Your Day" show is one of the most-watched Christian TV programs in the world, with viewers in 190 countries. In the U.S., it runs on purchased air time more than 200 times each week on 80 stations. The shows are translated into Spanish, Romanian, Norwegian, Italian, Hindi and Tamil. Thus all of these national and global evangelical organizations and ministries, either headquartered or centered in and around Orange County has greatly effected the culture and makeup of Holy Trinity Anglican Church.<sup>972</sup>

Orange County has also been an incubator for a segment of the ECM. Zander's first foray into the ECM was started in West Covina, Ca. Fuller Seminary has sponsored many seminars and arranged their degree programs to pursue the effect of postmodernism on American culture and the church. Gibbs and Bolger are both Fuller professors and provided the first scholarly review of the Emerging Church phenomenon.<sup>973</sup> Pastors and church

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<sup>969</sup> <http://www.outreachmagazine.com/magazine/recent-issues/3762-The-2010-Outreach-100.html>

<sup>970</sup> <http://www.tbn.org/about-us> 7-27-2010

<sup>971</sup> William Lobdell, "The Price of Healing," *The Los Angeles Times*, July 27, 2003.

<sup>972</sup> Several scholars discuss the significance of the rise of evangelicalism and its effects on Southern California. See George Marsden, *Evangelicalism and Modern America*, ed. George Marsden (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), 26. George Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1995). Mark A. Shibley, *Resurgent Evangelicalism in the United States : Mapping Cultural Change Since 1970* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1996), 83-90. Richard G. Kyle, *Evangelicalism : An Americanized Christianity* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 2006), 285-6.

<sup>973</sup> See page 135-156. Also Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 2005. Other Fuller professors have also written theological guidance to the movement. See Ray S Anderson, *An Emergent Theology for Emerging Churches* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2006),

planters like Erwin McManus of Mosaic in Los Angeles, founding pastor Mike Erre of Rock Harbor, a plant of Mariners Church in Costa Mesa, and Jim Belcher of Redeemer Church in Longbeach, have each engaged the ECM conversation and written extensively about both their sympathies and concerns with the direction of the movement.

Yet there is also a significant presence of Christian fundamentalism within Orange County and the broader LA area. Perhaps two of the more obvious fundamentalists would be Chuck Smith, Sr. who had a very public separation with his son Chuck Smith, Jr. over many of the issues surrounding the Emerging church conversation.<sup>974</sup> The second vocal critic of the Emerging movement would be John MacArthur, senior pastor of Grace Bible Church for over thirty years and founder of Master's College and Seminary. Although located in Sun Valley, outside of Orange County, several interviewees referred to MacArthur as one of the more notable fundamentalist voices in S. California evangelicalism.

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<sup>974</sup> Chuck Smith, Jr. would eventually write a seminal book entitled *The End of the World as we Know it*. Chuck Smith, Jr. has written about his departure from some of his father's doctrine. There was a significant amount of blogging done on this subject at the time. <http://calvarychapel.pbworks.com/Chuck-Smith-Jr-Responds-to-CCOF> and [http://tallskinnykiwi.typepad.com/tallskinnykiwi/2006/05/the\\_chuck\\_smith.html](http://tallskinnykiwi.typepad.com/tallskinnykiwi/2006/05/the_chuck_smith.html). Also see Chuck Smith Jr., *The End of the World-- as We Know it* : Clear Direction for Bold and Innovative Ministry in a Postmodern World, 1st ed. ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 2001).

*Appendix 5*

***History of Oak Hills Transition from CGM Ecclesiology***

In August of 1990 the elders of Oak Hills, then led by founding pastor Kent Carlson, attended a “Leadership Summit” conference at Willow Creek Church in the suburbs of Chicago. There Carlson and the elders heard Hybels and others encourage conference attendees to expand their efforts to reach unchurched/non-believing people groups within their respective communities. The message was compelling and convincing. As a result, the leaders of Oak Hills sensed “God’s leading” to more actively develop their outreach endeavors. As a means toward this end, the Oak Hills leadership team, later called the “Chicago Seven,” chose to employ the highly effective Willow Creek “seeker-driven” model of church growth and evangelism.<sup>975</sup>

As discussed earlier, part of the primary measurements of success in the Willow Creek/CGM endeavor is the evidence of consistent numerical growth in worship service attendance and the increased size of the church organization overall. Carlson, the staff and elders accepted and applied these metrics energetically. The challenge of growing the church through an intentional focus on attracting the non-churched segment of their community inspired and energized the entire organization. Carlson’s leadership skills and talents were well suited to grow a large church organization. His entrepreneurial abilities were fueled by the creative outlet the CGM goal-oriented structure provided.

Theologically, Carlson and other Oak Hill leaders justified their activities under the assumption Oak Hills was endeavoring to fulfill the sacred evangelical call of the Great Commission in Folsom. To this end they utilized all the modern marketing techniques, contemporary music and more pragmatic sermonizing prototypical of the CGM ethos.<sup>976</sup> By attracting non-churched people groups through entertaining worship services and needs based programming, Carlson and others assumed that in time, attendees would hear, see or experience the Christian message and eventually convert to Christianity. Carlson and the staff defined “conversion” during this period in a very traditional, neo-evangelical,

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<sup>975</sup> Kent Carlson and Mike Lueken, *Renovation of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Intervarsity, 2011), 20. Hybels and his Willow Creek Association offer a multitude of recourses to churches who desire to implement their attractional church model. These resources can be viewed at the website <http://www.willowcreek.com/index.asp?sess=on> (accessed 2-22-11).

<sup>976</sup> See page 120-129.

Bebbington-esque context.<sup>977</sup> Focus on spiritual transformation, character development and discipleship to Christ was not a primary priority during this period, nor was spiritual maturity a measurement used to determine their overall success. As one leader reflecting on this period suggested, Oak Hills measured success and significance in accomplishing their objectives in terms of “budgets, buildings and butts.”<sup>978</sup> The fiscal solvency, size and quality of the facilities, and the size of crowd attracted to the Sunday morning service were the overwhelmingly determinative factors considered to quantify achievement. Leaders reflect on this period with mixed emotions. They recognize how difficult it was, given their assumption of the CGM/Willow Creek ethic which measured achievement singularly in terms of the size and growth of an audience, to imagine that their efforts were anything but a “blessed and pleasing activity in the sight of God.”<sup>979</sup>

The most fundamental change came in the restructuring of the Sunday morning worship service. Like Willow Creek, Oak Hills assumed the best means to reach the non-churched contingent would be to construct a “hour-long theatrical production” which included music, drama, personal testimonies and sermons that promised not to “put you to sleep.”<sup>980</sup> A common phrase came to be used in describing the goal of the Sunday morning service, “We promise not to bore you.”<sup>981</sup> The purpose and focus of sermons centered on topical issues which were “relevant” and applicable to the everyday lives of people whether they were Christ-followers or not. The use of cutting edge technology, drama, music, theatrical sets, volunteers who served as “ushers” to help people find seats in a routinely packed crowd of spectators—all these features intended to impress upon attendees that Oak Hills, and by extension the Christianity they advocated, offered adherents a high-quality, tailored, significant, yet entertaining and relevant Christian worldview.

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<sup>977</sup> Thus Oak Hills emphasized the professions of faith as a key declaration of personal acceptance of the atoning sacrifice of Christ for individual sin followed by a life of commitment to the moral teaching of Jesus and membership in the church. See chapter two pages

<sup>978</sup> Oak Hills staff, Interviewed by author, March 2, 2011, Folsom, CA.

<sup>979</sup> Interviews with elders, Interviewed by author, March 4, 2011, Folsom, CA

<sup>980</sup> Carlson and Lueken, *Renovation of the Church*, 20

<sup>981</sup> Manuel Lutz, interview by author, March 2, 2011, Folsom, CA. The phrase was also mentioned in other congregational interviews. Lutz remembers the focus of the worship service moved away from believer-centric gatherings for previously acculturated members of the Oak Hills/evangelical culture. Eventually the worship service took the form of a more inclusive, open, culturally neutral venue that sought to both welcome and entertain a wider constituency.

Current Oak Hill members recall feeling relieved they no longer had to suffer through boring worship services or apologize to their visiting neighbors for some offensive comment made in a sermon. Many recalled the excitement and pride they felt in being able to invite their friends, neighbors and colleagues to such a “successful” church. One long time member stated, “There was nothing to be afraid of because there was nothing really substantial, controversial or polarizing that was ever communicated. It was all sanitized, watered down. But as fun and exciting as it was to see all these people...that’s just not the gospel.”

In 1997, during this growth and expansion era, Oak Hills hired an associate pastor Mike Lueken to their staff. Originally intending to plant a sister church of Oak Hills in nearby Rocklin, Lueken chose instead to accept a position as a co-teaching pastor. By this time, seven years into the Willow Creek transition, Oak Hills had more than doubled, moved into a new location, was in the construction phase of a new worship facility and was experiencing exponential numeric growth. However, the attractational Sunday morning service was not the only event occurring at Oak Hills during this period. Lueken began to fulfill a role of what Carlson termed the “backend” of the Willow Creek model. This endeavor sought to “turn non-churched people into a community of fully developed followers of Christ.”<sup>982</sup> Hence, Lueken became responsible for a separate mid-week service called “New Community.”

This was a non-seeker oriented event utilizing more traditional teaching models that sought to instill doctrinal truths of the Christian faith and encourage spiritual growth and maturity. However, unknown at the time, the presence of New Community served to highly bifurcate the attractational objectives of the church. The ideological difference between the goals of the New Community gathering, compared to that of the Sunday worship service, eventually helped illuminate the presence opposing objectives. Attracting non-believers to the church with interesting sermons and entertaining music came to be recognized as an altogether different goal than that of advocating discipleship to Jesus as the central focus of the New Testament gospel. In time this ideological and theological paradigm clash came into increasing relief.<sup>983</sup>

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<sup>982</sup> Carson and Lueken, *Renovation of the Church*, 25.

<sup>983</sup> Carlson and Lueken describe this at length in their explanation of the consumeristic impetus in the CGM model. For a more detailed perspective on this view see ch. 5.



In addition, as Oak Hills progressed toward the new millennium, a “creeping sense” began to envelop the leadership regarding the performance demands of their Sunday services.<sup>984</sup> The impetus placed on reaching non-churched peoples created some unhealthy and unsustainable habits. The creative energy and time required to fashion a high quality, entertaining service became a “monster” that required “care and feeding” to maintain.<sup>985</sup> Carlson reflects maintaining a commitment to build a large “consumer” driven, “entrepreneurial” church requires,

... constant feeding. When we structure a church around attracting people to cutting edge, entertaining, interesting, inspirational and always growing services and ministries, there is simply no room for letting up. Once we have communicated to the masses that if they come to our church, they’ll be surprised, then we have this never-ending burden to surprise people every week. There is no resting.<sup>986</sup>

However, it was obvious Oak Hills was increasingly proficient and highly capable of attracting larger and larger crowds. Carlson remembers worship pastor Manuel Lutz stating hauntingly that Oak Hills had become so efficient and effective at creating attractive and entertaining worship services, it seemed as if “we don’t even need God to do this.”<sup>987</sup> This blatant realization began to create increasing levels of discomfort within the leadership, most poignantly in Carlson. Moreover, the tedious nature of the ongoing demand to fulfill their end of an unwritten contract with their religious consumer began to take its toll. This created an increasingly evident tension and eventual internal conflict for Carlson and the staff which would eventually be dealt with at the Donner retreat in the summer of 1999. It is there where the Ecological framework begins in the Oak Hills ethnography.

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<sup>984</sup> Ibid, 27.

<sup>985</sup> Ibid, 24.

<sup>986</sup> Ibid, 27.

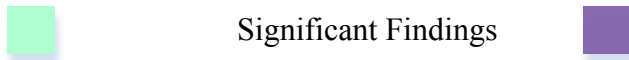
<sup>987</sup> Ibid, 24.

Appendix 6

<i>Overall Totals</i>	Inter-ST. Dev.	Follower of Jesus	KOG	Growth	Salvation	Worship	Bible	Inerr	Infall	Church	Commtty	Linked	Discipleship	Author/Willard	AVG.
Holy Trinity	17.1%	60.0%	65.0%	45.0%	65.0%	80.0%	65.0%	60.0%	100.0%	90.0%	70.0%	60.0%	70.0%	70.0%	69.2%
ACCD	17.9%	90.9%	63.6%	63.6%	81.8%	36.4%	63.6%	36.4%	100.0%	63.6%	90.9%	90.9%	72.7%	72.7%	71.3%
Oak Hills	14.6%	80.0%	85.0%	75.0%	60.0%	85.0%	70.0%	35.0%	100.0%	90.0%	55.0%	60.0%	80.0%	85.0%	73.8%
Re:Imagine	17.7%	56.3%	62.5%	87.5%	62.5%	56.3%	68.8%	68.8%	93.8%	68.8%	81.3%	87.5%	75.0%	56.3%	71.2%
Total Avg. Response	16.8%	70.1%	70.1%	67.2%	65.7%	68.7%	67.2%	50.7%	98.5%	80.6%	71.6%	71.6%	74.6%	71.6%	71.4%
Std. Deviation	n/a	16.5%	10.7%	18.0%	9.9%	22.5%	3.0%	17.0%	3.1%	13.9%	15.4%	16.9%	4.2%	11.8%	1.9%

Participants 67

= Significant finding over the mean = Significant finding below the mean



- Overall 71.4% of participant’s responses articulated a Willardian theological perspective on the topics surveyed.
- ACCD revealed the highest finding on identifying Willard’s definition of being a “Follower of Jesus. (90.9%) This may be due to ACCD’s intense focus on transformation in their training programs which are more intensive than the activities of the three other groups.
- Oak Hills reveals a significantly higher score on the Kingdom of God question. This may be due to the degree of consistent usage of the term in both Carlson and Lueken’s weekly sermons.
- A significant difference was found between both Re:Imagine and Holy Trinity’s answers on the definition of spiritual growth. The difference seems to be the relative youth of Holy Trinity as a church plant as opposed to the high level of focus on spiritual growth in Re:Imagine organization wide from it’s inception.
- ACCD’s definition of salvation is a key component to their breaking through to evangelicals articulating or coming from a context where the “gospel of the right” is heavily articulated.

- ACCD’s lack of focus on worship is due to their organizational resistance to being considered a “church.” It also follows that since ACCD is not a formal church organization their views of the Bible and their definition of “church” would also be less consistent to a Willardian definition. However, ACCD presented significantly higher understandings that “church” is best defined as a community and not an institution. Correspondingly, participants at Oak Hills, which does consider itself a traditional church and is the oldest of the organizations studied, appeared to give more traditional evangelical definitions to the concept of “church.”
- A higher percentage of “Emerging” or postevangelical Christians representative of the Re: Imagine participants were in agreement with Willard’s articulation of the arguments surrounding inerrancy. This data would appear to support the common assumption that most “postmodern” views of the biblical texts would be considered to be errant at some level.
- In terms of unaided identification of Willard as a key author or teacher in understanding the nature of Christianity, Re:Imagine and Oak Hills both present significant variance in their responses. Although Re:Imagine participants were significantly higher in their advocacy of a Willardian view of spiritual growth and inerrancy, only slightly more than half of respondents named Willard unaided when asked to list key authors or teachers in the area of Christianity or theology. This seems to stem from the lack of importance given to “experts in the field.” As Scandrette suggests, Re:Imagine places highest value on the lived experience of the participant, not on the written or vicarious experiences or wisdom of authority figures. This would coincide with the postmodern proclivity to doubt authority figures and their potential abuses of power. Oak Hills however has invited Willard to their church and had him speak to both the church at large and to their leaders. Thus Oak Hills participants were highly aware and very complimentary of Willard and his works.
- Overall Oak Hills was the most “Willardian” organization studied and Holy Trinity the least. This is most likely due simply to the degree of time given to the ingratiation of Willard’s theology in the two contexts. Holy Trinity is a relatively new church plant where as Oak Hills is over 25 years old.

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