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2 Spiritual propositions

The American evangelical intelligentsia and the supernatural order

Justin K. H. Tse

Introduction: mapping the spiritual geographies of an evangelical intelligentsia

The spiritual geographies of the theological movement known as ‘evangelical Christianity’ are seldom taken seriously, especially among its intellectual elites and their critics. Typically conceived as a ‘conservative’ version of Protestant Christianity – the strand of Christian faith that historically broke with the Roman Catholic Church around the dawn of modernity – ‘evangelical’ Protestants tend to emphasize the literal interpretation of the Bible because its pages reveal the good news – the *gospel*, the *evangel* (the root of the word ‘evangelical’) – of salvation from an afterlife of damnation and a present experience of divine alienation through faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, considered to be divinity in human form. Although such an understanding of the Christian Gospel emphasizes individual faith with few implications for institutional membership, what might be called ‘spiritual geographies’ are often taken in contrast to the ‘sacred archipelagos’ of evangelicalism’s seemingly organized structures, deep-pocketed networks, and scripted realities floating in a sea of secularity (Wilford 2012; Bartolini *et al.* 2017). However, I hope to demonstrate in this chapter that there are evangelical ways of unfolding spiritual geographies that transcend their institutional structures that have not yet been fully explored. In other words, there is a mismatch between the perceived institutional edifices of evangelical Protestantism and the individual spiritualities fostered by its doctrine, and my aim is to explore the spiritual geographies fostered by this disconnect.

In this account of evangelical spiritual geographies, I want to examine the rhetoric of what I call the *evangelical intelligentsia*, the journalists, academics, clergy, and other public intellectuals who either speak as self-identifying evangelicals or as empathetic fellow-travellers offering what Wilford (2012: 7) calls a ‘brother’s account’ of the movement (Worthen 2014; Sutton 2014; Strachan 2015). What is intriguing is that both this intelligentsia and their non-evangelical intellectual critics tend themselves to be shy about discussing their spiritual geographies. Critics of evangelicalism often take the movement to be ideological cover for more cynical materialistic endeavours, a marriage of Christ and ‘cowboy capitalism’ (Connolly 2008), with obsessions about amassing megachurch territory (Connell

2005), imposing their moral values and neoliberal economic ideologies on secular civil society (Hackworth 2013; Han 2011), and bringing about the end of the world (Dittmer and Sturm 2010) – precisely the opposite of a liberating spiritual geography. The response of some in the intelligentsia has been intriguing: their claim is that evangelicalism is barely coherent at present, as it is constantly undergoing re-definition (Bebbington 1988; Miller 1999; Larsen 2007; Hunter 2010).

I want to perform a counter-reading of these intellectuals, then, to show that evangelicalism as a term primarily describes an orientation toward the supernatural, a map of spiritual geographies. I perform a close reading of published online material about two case studies in evangelicalism where seeming ideological disagreements among the evangelical intelligentsia end up displaying how much they actually agree about how to map spiritual geographies: InterVarsity Christian Fellowship's (IVCF) (2016) controversial theological position paper about human sexuality and the 2015–6 dismissal proceedings against tenured political scientist Larycia Hawkins at Wheaton College for quoting Pope Francis's statement that Christians and Muslims 'worship the same God' (Gleim 2016). My central argument is that evangelical Protestants tend to orient themselves toward the supernatural by seeking to understand God, spirits, and spiritual reality by way of propositional sentences that create ideological worlds. What I therefore take seriously is that evangelicals believe in a different plane of existence from the natural one, which can be described as *spiritual* and *supernatural*, but the question is – *how do they articulate these spiritual and supernatural worlds in ideological ways?*

Articulated this way, the spiritual geographies of evangelicals defy some of the common expectations about what holds evangelicals together as *evangelicals*. By examining the controversy at IVCF over its theological position paper on human sexuality, I hope to show that the ideological world created by evangelical propositions about the supernatural may not be based on the inerrancy of the Bible, but instead on a biblical narration of a spiritual world that circumscribes everyday action. I will then use Wheaton College's attempt to fire Larycia Hawkins to highlight the difference between institutional spiritual geographies and intellectual convictions about the supernatural that defy the boundaries of an evangelical institution. Through these episodes, I hope that this paper contributes to the study of spaces of spirituality by showing that evangelical Christianities are not necessarily always institutional impositions of religion but can also lead to ways of being that transcend institutions as well.

Gospel sexuality: moving beyond inerrancy with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship's theological position paper on sexuality

On 6 October 2016, *TIME* Magazine reported that IVCF was asking employees who did not agree with its new theological statement on sexuality to self-disclose their positions so that IVCF could begin with them the process of 'involuntary termination' by 11 November. Specifically at issue, *TIME* argued, was any position that differed with IVCF's proposition 'that any sexual activity outside of

a husband and wife is immoral' (Dias 2016). Interviewing former IVCF staff worker Bianca Louie, the *TIME* reporter found that she and ten others had formed a queer collective within IVCF and that the word on the street was that IVCF was purging its staff members of those who privately held that same-sex marriage did not contradict biblical teaching.

What made this debate distinctively evangelical was that both sides relied on the veracity of spiritual propositions to make their case. What makes it interesting is that the conversation seems to have progressed beyond an obsession about the inability of biblical truth to be in error. Historically, struggles over inerrancy have animated evangelical hostilities over gender and sexuality from the 1970s to the 1990s. Over this period, some of the founders of the Evangelical Women's Caucus (EWC) disclosed that they were in fact lesbians, leading to widespread distrust among others in the intelligentsia regarding what was being called *evangelical feminism*, a reading of the Bible that emphasized the equality of women and men in creation (Cochran 2005; Ingersoll 2005). What was striking about that era of backlash, the anthropologist Andrea Smith (2008) has noted, is that it was not really about sex, but about biblical inerrancy, the question of whether every proposition in the Bible is scientifically true.

On the surface, it might seem that IVCF is shutting down the latest iteration of this intra-evangelical debate with an inerrancy argument. Indeed, there are still struggles over inerrancy within evangelicalism; for example, several high-profile faculty were recently fired from Westminster Theological Seminary because their writings on Scripture did not neatly conform to inerrancy standards especially around the Genesis creation stories (Pulliam [Bailey] 2008; Withrow 2014). Moreover, reports of the IVCF sexuality policy rollout revealed that such a seeming emphasis on inerrancy engendered some very scandalous practices. *Religion Dispatches* published a piece shortly after the *TIME* article detailing some of the misuse of such theologies of sexuality by some IVCF staff. Particularly jarring was the opening hook, the story of Michael Vasquez, an IVCF staff worker at the University of Utah who had reported in 2013 to his supervisor that he was gay. Vasquez told the press that what happened next was as traumatizing as it was bizarre: his supervisor at first met with him to pray for his homosexual orientation to be taken away, and when nothing else seemed to work, instructed him to watch straight pornography. With what was now being called a 'purge' at IVCF, *Religion Dispatches* reporter Deborah Jian Lee (an ex-evangelical herself) suggested that such self-reporting would not only result in emotional trauma, but also a process of termination that would be less than gracious (DJ Lee 2016).

However, the framework of inerrancy is arguably insufficient for capturing the spiritual geographies in the offending document in question. Titled 'A Theological Summary of Human Sexuality,' the authors of the paper pitch their position on sexuality by appealing to how evangelicals understand sexuality as part of the larger spiritual reality of God's grace: 'As men and women created in the image of God, relationships with family, friends, and spouses bring us the deepest joy of human experience. God's common grace is given to all people (Matthew 5:45) and evident in every sector of life. He designed the sexual relationship between

a husband and wife to be enjoyed as a meaningful experience.’ This ‘theological foundation – grounded in the character of God’ becomes the matrix whereby ‘human sexuality’ – ‘that particular aspect of God’s creation gift where, in marriage, we engage in physical sexual intimacy that is personal, self-giving, and spiritual in nature’ – can be understood in the ‘theological categories’ of ‘(1) creation, (2) fall, (3) redemption, and (4) restoration’ (InterVarsity Christian Fellowship/USA 2016: 1).

The document’s authors then explicate each point by drawing from the Bible a picture of a larger spiritual reality of divine grace and redemption, in effect mapping IVCF’s perception of spiritual geographies. The creation of God, they argue, is premised on a self-giving love that became translated through the words of Jesus in the New Testament through the Greek word *agape*, an orientation of self-sacrifice and other-directed love required of all Christians whether they are single or married. Deviations from this spiritual geography of *agape* love and grace-filled creation are described as ‘The Fall: Not the Way It Is Supposed to Be’:

We live in a world where the common experience of sexuality is broken and distorted to some extent, sometimes to the extremes of manipulation, abuse, and violence. There is a striking difference between ‘knowing’ one’s spouse and using, abusing, or neglecting one’s spouse. We have a sense that it is not intended to be this way. How did we drift so far from the Creator’s grand design for human relationships? How did we move from self-sacrifice to self-gratification? How did we move from meaningful sexual intimacy to casual sex?

(InterVarsity Christian Fellowship/USA 2016: 6)

The authors then list a variety of ways that the original creation of sexuality has become spiritually broken, including in sexual abuse, divorce, premarital sex, lust, adultery, and pornography. However, the longest section is on same-sex relationships, which is broken down into ‘attraction,’ ‘identity,’ and ‘behaviour’ (InterVarsity Christian Fellowship 2016: 12–14). Regretting that ‘many Christians have not loved same-sex-attracted people as we ought’ – a failure in its own right to live out the matrix of grace prescribed by God’s original creation – the document insists that ‘God’s intention for sexual expression is to be between a husband and wife in marriage,’ which means that ‘every other sexual practice is outside of God’s plan and therefore is a distortion of God’s loving design for humanity’ (InterVarsity Christian Fellowship 2016: 12). IVCF posits a tension in spiritual prescriptions of God’s creation: to follow the matrix of love with regard to those who are attracted to persons of the same sex and identify as such while insisting that that same grid of grace means that practicing same-sex sexual acts deviate from the original created order. The narrative of redemption, then, posits that in such a world that has deviated from the order of creation, God sent his Son to die and rise again so that all creation might be restored to the original matrix of self-giving *agape* and other-directed sacrifice.

At face value, these spiritual geographies may seem standard for evangelicals: they are derived from biblical exegesis, they adopt a propositional approach to

spiritual geographies, they propose a moral order that protests against the fallenness of creation (2016: 13). But IVCF does not rely on the blunt instrument of biblical inerrancy. Resonating with the work of evangelical theologian David Fitch (2011), IVCF describes an emphasis on the narrative arc of the Gospel that can be read through Scripture but does not have to be beholden to its every jot and tittle, one that moves from creation to fall to redemption to restoration. What is being proposed is a mapping of evangelical spiritual realities within the big supernatural picture of the Gospel in Scripture, not the scientific veracity of every jot and tittle of Scripture. No wonder, then, that IVCF vice president Greg Jao says that the policy is ‘about the authority of Scripture, which leads us to read Scripture in a certain way’ through this matrix of redemption but never uses the word *inerrancy*. The propositions form a story, allowing Jao to point out the lived tensions in this spiritual geography:

I remember talking with a student who says that it was at InterVarsity that I was first loved and cared for deeply enough that I could admit to myself after years of denial that I had same-sex attraction, and it was at InterVarsity that I encountered Jesus in the Scriptures and gave my life to him, and it’s in InterVarsity that I feel that I can lay my sexual identity before Jesus and let him guide me, which in her case, she says, ‘I’m choosing chastity because that’s what Jesus calls me to, and I’m doing it with joy.’

(CBN News 2016)

Here, Jao maps InterVarsity’s orientation toward the spiritual order. Like Fitch, the central proposition is that the order of creation is founded on the love that opened this student up toward self-discovery, but because those same sets of spiritual propositions proscribe the sexual behaviour that would be part of her identity, she sacrifices her sexual orientation to maintain this evangelical *spiritual* orientation.

Discounting as it may be of nonheteronormative sexual practices, the IVCF position paper on sexuality illumines how IVCF is trying to insist on its reading of a spiritual geography, one created by grace and premised on *agape* self-giving love. Yet it is that same matrix, with the same propositions, that its opponents within the same intellectual circle contest this mapping. As Bianca Louie told the *TIME* reporter who broke the story:

I think one of the hardest parts has been feeling really dismissed by InterVarsity. . . . The queer collective went through a very biblical, very spiritual process, with the Holy Spirit, to get to where we are. I think a lot of people think those who are affirming [same-sex marriage] reject the Bible, but we have landed where we have because of Scripture, which is what InterVarsity taught us to do.

(Dias 2016)

Read via Fitch (2011), Louie’s comments are in fact far more conservative than IVCF. IVCF is attempting to elevate the conversation beyond inerrancy and toward

an explicit discussion of the spiritual geographies proposed by the redemptive arc of Scripture. Not only does Louie appeal to a process of spiritual discernment – one that is presumably premised on the same sort of self-giving love that enables the formation of a community like IVCF – but she emphasizes that it is the very words of Scripture, not only its narrative matrix, that have informed her understanding of how sexuality should be mapped as part of an evangelical spiritual geography. Louie, in other words, is claiming the evangelical high ground on both narrative and inerrancy. So too, Vasquez – the University of Utah staff worker traumatized by attempts to pray the gay away and use pornography while at it – continues to share a similar theological understanding of space:

Just doing life with college students is enough to bring change to campus. . . . Just to acknowledge the inherent dignity in LGBT students on campus will transform their lives and their experience of the Kingdom. So, whether it's through a formal ministry or not, my desire is simply to see students encounter Jesus, no different as it was when I was on InterVarsity staff.

(DJ Lee 2016)

The end goal here is that this spiritual geography is circumscribed by a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, whose self-giving love is worth the encounter of students regardless of Vasquez's institutional affiliation. It is, after all, not IVCF but Jesus himself who goes beyond creating the world to redeeming it from its fallenness, which means that he personally encounters students whether inside or outside of IVCF to make their world from 'what it is not supposed to be' to what it is supposed to be. At heart, then, the debate over IVCF's articulation of the supernatural world presents a map of spiritual geographies that can be exported even outside of the institution. What remains consistent between the institution and its dissenters, though, is an insistence on propositions in this narrative account of the Gospel.

Dismissing Larycia Hawkins: race and the spiritual limits of interreligious solidarity

A similar analysis can be applied to the ideological fissures among the evangelical intelligentsia on the question of race. In 2015, the dismissal proceedings at Wheaton College in the Chicago area against tenured political scientist Larycia Hawkins divided evangelicals. News of this case rippled across the evangelical intellectual world because Wheaton is an evangelical liberal arts college that became such a bastion for the neo-evangelical movement in the 1940s that some even dared to call it the 'evangelical Harvard.' Indeed, the spiritual geographies from which the dismissal originated are seldom noted, as what is remarked upon more often is the fact that Hawkins was the only African American woman to be teaching at Wheaton – and as further point of fact, there were only five black faculty in total, including her. Her firing evoked the sociological analysis delivered by Emerson and Smith (2001) that American evangelicalism remained divided by

race in an unconscious way – not because white evangelicals tended to be consciously racist, but because their propensity toward individual spiritual practice often did not account for the structural reasons behind poverty and marginalization. Of course, as Deborah Jian Lee (2015) has recently reported, there are also more nefarious accounts of open racism behind closed doors: Lee highlights how the historian Randall Balmer (2006) discovered in a closed-door meeting with evangelical political operatives of the Religious Right that their movement for moral values touted the story of abortion as the reason for which they mobilized, but in fact they got together to oppose the desegregation of schools. As such studies and stories have widely circulated among the evangelical intelligentsia, Hawkins's dismissal raised questions about race and gender within evangelicalism itself, especially as earlier that same year, IVCF had endorsed the Black Lives Matter movement at their annual conference in Urbana, Illinois (InterVarsity Christian Fellowship 2015).

Hawkins's dismissal was triggered by a Facebook status update on 10 December 2015 in which she advocated her 'embodied solidarity' with Muslims in the face of American Islamophobia, as 'theoretical solidarity is not solidarity at all.' Hawkins outlined her plan for her 2015 'Advent Worship' as she prepared for the coming of Jesus Christ during the Christmas season: 'I will wear the hijab to work at Wheaton College, to play in Chi-town, in the airport and on the airplane to my home state that initiated one of the first anti-Sharia laws (read: unconstitutional and Islamophobic), and at church.' For Hawkins's readers, this was an invitation to 'all women into the narrative that is embodied, hijab-wearing solidarity with our Muslim sisters – for whatever reason,' and she lists off the following as invitees to her embodied solidarity: Muslims who do not 'wear the veil normally,' atheists and agnostics who find 'religion silly or inexplicable,' Catholic and Protestant Christians 'like me,' and those who already cover their head in worship 'but not a hijab.' All of this was prefaced by a theological justification: 'I stand in religious solidarity with Muslims because they, like me, a Christian are people of the book. And as Pope Francis stated last week, we worship the same God' (Gleim 2016).

Hawkins was immediately placed on administrative leave, which eventually snowballed into dismissal proceedings even though she had tenure. Although Hawkins taught political science (not theology) and even though she had tenure (which should have made firing her difficult), all Wheaton faculty are required to sign a statement of faith with propositions from which they cannot deviate, highlighting again an evangelical propositionalist approach to spiritual geographies. The theological debate between Hawkins and Wheaton thus became a sparring match over that statement's propositions. Following a letter sent to her on 15 December questioning her commitment to exclusively worshipping the Christian God in an evangelical Protestant way, Hawkins responded with a rigorous point-by-point treatise defending her faithful adherence to Wheaton's statement of faith. A close reading of Hawkins's reply (as I shall show) reveals that the school not only questioned her statement that Christians and Muslims worship the same God, but also whether she was sufficiently Protestant as opposed to being Catholic

because she had invoked Pope Francis and called for Protestants and Catholics to share in the ‘embodied solidarity’ of wearing the hijab.

In her response, Hawkins does three things. First, she reviews the evangelical scholarly literature on whether Christians and Muslims worship the same God (which means that this has been a matter of scholarly contention for some time), finds both yes and no answers because Muslims deny the Christian conceptions of the three-personedness of God and the deity of Christ but affirm with Jews and Christians that there is only one God, and concludes that ‘my statement is not a statement on soteriology or Trinitarian theology, but one of embodied piety. When I say that “we worship the same God,” I am saying what Stackhouse [one scholar in the evangelical intelligentsia’s discussion of Muslim-Christian relations] points out, namely that “when pious Muslims pray, they are addressing the One True God, and that God is, simply, God.”’ Second, she addresses the contention around calling Muslims her ‘brothers and sisters’ by affirming the common creation story among Jews, Christians, and Muslims that all are descended from the same common humanity bearing God’s image, so this statement is ‘in full agreement with the Wheaton College statement of faith, identifying each person as an image-bearer of God.’ Third, she argues that Wheaton’s objections to her Catholic sympathies because of Protestant-Catholic disputes around the Eucharist and the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary are misplaced because there are disagreements about these theological conceptions among Protestants themselves (Nazworth 2016).

Still, that Wheaton College filed dismissal proceedings against Hawkins in January 2016 suggested that her rigorous propositional reply explicating her understanding of spiritual geographies did not sufficiently overlap with the school’s institutional understanding of the supernatural map. As a *New York Times Magazine* report describes it, tensions had always been there between Hawkins and the Wheaton administration, especially with Wheaton’s provost Stanton Jones; one memorable account in the article has Jones accusing Hawkins of endorsing Marxism in her laudatory account of black liberation theology in a faith-and-work integration paper required for all tenure-track faculty (Graham 2016: 53). Dissatisfied with Hawkins’s theological rebuttal on the Muslim question, Jones recommended her dismissal in early January 2016, triggering campus-wide protests that put Hawkins’s face on the front cover of the *Wheaton Record* for its 14 January 2016 issue and resulted in the faculty pushing back *en masse* on the administration for dismissing their colleague. In the face of a disciplinary hearing in February, Hawkins held her own press conference at the United Methodist Church’s Chicago Temple flanked by an interreligious group of faith leaders in Chicago. With Wheaton sufficiently embarrassed, the school suddenly pulled back from firing Hawkins, just as Hawkins decided to leave the school; the result was a ‘reconciliation’ farewell event described as emotional for all parties involved, during which Wheaton administrators, faculty, students, and staff said good-bye and conveyed their regrets to Hawkins. Hawkins currently works as the Abd el-Kader Visiting Faculty Fellow at the University of Virginia’s Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture.

While it may be tempting to regard this case solely as one of institutional racism and sexism – and given Hawkins’s prior clashes with the administration, it cannot be denied that race was a factor in her struggle – what is perhaps more fascinating here is how much the spiritual geographies outlined by both Hawkins and Wheaton are approached purely propositionally. At issue is a set of propositions about the spiritual world, Wheaton’s statement of faith. In twelve sentences, the statement’s propositions provide ‘a summary of biblical doctrine that is consonant with evangelical Christianity,’ reaffirming the ‘salient features of the historic Christian creeds, thereby identifying the College not only with the Scriptures but also with the reformers and the evangelical movement of recent years’ and defining ‘the biblical perspective which informs a Wheaton education’ by casting ‘light on the study of nature and man, as well as on man’s culture’ (Wheaton College 1992). For all of the contention around Hawkins’s supposed interreligious inclusivity and Catholic sympathies, her approach to ‘Advent Worship’ in her Facebook post is based on the proposition that Muslims are part of a common humanity with whom everyone should stand in ‘embodied solidarity’ during their persecution. The citation of Pope Francis is not an entry into sacramental communion with him, but an affirmation of his proposition that Christians and Muslims worship the same God. In so doing, Hawkins’s propositions describe a spiritual order in which what is shared is a common humanity that transcends religious identity politics and institutional conformity. That Wheaton saw this as threatening indicates that their propositions present a supernatural world in which religious identities matter in order to safeguard their institution from incoherence. The fissure between Hawkins and Wheaton, then, is over what evangelical spiritual geographies are for: a spiritual identity politics (as for Wheaton) or a supernatural pathway to a common humanity regardless of institutional affiliation (as for Hawkins)?

In other words, the Larycia Hawkins case highlights difference between these two spiritual worlds dividing the evangelical intelligentsia, much as they agree that supernatural truths should be approached propositionally. As I noted above, the conflicts between Hawkins and Jones do not originate with this assertion of ‘embodied solidarity’ with Muslims, but from Hawkins’s usage of black liberation theology in her required faith-and-work integration paper. It was not just Hawkins’s identity as the only black woman on Wheaton’s faculty that made trouble for her; it turns out that her understanding of the spiritual world was constituted by a sensibility that racialization is a form of oppression that needs to be named for the sake of supernatural restoration. For Jones, the naming of such oppressive racial and class projects evoked a kind of Marxism from which he had to defend his spiritual world. In so doing, it is in fact Jones’s spiritual geographies, not Hawkins’s, that are constituted by identity politics, a need in this case to be clear about what evangelicals as an institutional group believe about the nature of God and his relationship to the world. Framed this way, it becomes clearer that neither Emerson and Smith’s (2001) sociological analysis about evangelical colourblindness as a symptom of evangelicals’ individualistic spirituality nor Balmer’s (2006) revelation that the Religious Right was a coalition to preserve racial segregation applies here. Instead, this is a new fight among the evangelical intelligentsia

over the constitution of the supernatural order, while using the same propositional language, with regard to whether Hawkins's evangelical spiritual map, propositionally evangelical as it is, should be bounded to an evangelical institution like Wheaton's, for a major part of an evangelical *institution's* mapping of the supernatural order is to preserve its own institutional identity, whereas Hawkins is advancing a spiritual geography that transcends institutional boundaries.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I hope to have shown that despite the evangelical intelligentsia's attempt to nuance the increasingly bizarre political images associated with evangelicals in the popular imaginary, what is more interesting about evangelical Protestantism in the United States is the intelligentsia's own spiritual geographies. Evangelicalism is premised on an *orientation* to spiritual geographies known as *propositionalism*. My contention is that the fractures among an evangelical intellectual class can also be chalked up to approaches to spiritual geographies that include politics. An analysis of these recent debates shows that the contentions within this intelligentsia have been intellectually productive, as many have moved beyond characterizing their stances with the old fundamentalist and evangelical ideological tropes of biblical inerrancy, suspicion toward Catholic teachings, and individualizing practice. Instead, new propositions are being used, and therefore new debates are being had about the worlds being built through evangelical convictions. While some of these debates are being had at the institutional level, the stakes over which these contentions are being had is over geographies of the spiritual that transcend institutions through individual practices of faith.

Such debates add to a broader understanding of spiritual geographies because evangelicalism is often taken to fall under the category of geographies of *religion*, an institutionalized form of theology that may or may not point to supernatural realities (Wilford 2012; Bartolini *et al.* 2017). In this chapter, I hope to have demonstrated that evangelicalism is better characterized not as a set of institutions, but as a *network of intellectuals* who sometimes reinforce and sometimes undermine their own institutions, and at the heart of their debate is the constitution of a supernatural order that is not easily institutionally boxed in. As a popular evangelical catchphrase goes, 'I don't have a religion; I have a relationship!' The intelligentsia might cringe at such folksiness, but as I have shown, their debates are articulating what that relationship is by positing that one's personal relationship with a spiritual world is premised on the veracity of propositions, not necessarily by institutional affiliation. It is this discursive distinction that marks this intellectual circle as evangelical, showing that what appears to be their fragmentation may in fact be their greatest marker of spiritual coherence.

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