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# Saving Souls and Securing the Socioeconomic Status Quo: A Consideration of Billy Sunday and the Pacific Garden Mission

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**Saving Souls and Securing the Socioeconomic Status Quo:  
A Consideration of Billy Sunday and the Pacific Garden Mission**

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**Research Honors Project**

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## Preface

Part of my course load while on the Urban Studies Program in the fall of 1991 required that I do an independent research project. Given the rich and exciting complexities of Chicago, I found it virtually impossible to choose a topic. However, I had the good fortune to be interning at the Legal Assistance Foundation on Dearborn Street, in the Old Colony Building just south of the El tracks. One night after work, as I made my way toward the stairs to reach the State Street subway, I happened to notice an illuminated cross a few blocks south of where I worked. Impulsively, I went south instead of north. I hesitated as I approached the building, but the person manning the door invited me inside. Once in the door, I turned to my left and felt the mischievous grin of Billy Sunday staring back at me from a portrait on the wall. I knew that I would be back again the next day, confident I had found my research topic for the semester. My observations and experiences at the Mission have since been extended into the paper that follows.

R. Jonathan Moore

" I was a rube of the rubes, a hayseed of the hayseeds. I have greased my hair with goose grease. I have blacked my boots with stove blacking. I have wiped my face on a gunnysack towel. I have eaten with my knife. I have drank coffee out of my saucer. I have said 'done it' when I should have said 'did it;' 'came,' when I should have said, 'come'; 'seen,' when I should have said 'saw.' I am a graduate from the university of poverty and hard knocks, and I have taken post-graduate courses."<sup>1</sup>

With these words, professional baseball player-turned-evangelist Billy Sunday placed himself outside the mainstream of middle-class America's growing urban culture. However, as historian Laurence Moore, notes, "outsiderhood is a characteristic way of inventing one's Americanness." Indeed, as Sunday's fiery blend of evangelism and vaudeville antics reached into the furthest recesses of the nation's religious consciousness, the revivalist found himself at the forefront of the early twentieth century fundamentalist movement. Emerging from his conversion at Chicago's Pacific Garden Mission, Sunday attained the pinnacle of his success between 1908 and 1920. Little interested in developing a comprehensive theology, both Sunday and Pacific Garden Mission came to perceive themselves as metaphorical lighthouses, moral beacons that could lead sinners through the turbulent seas of sin to safe harbor in Jesus Christ. Despite attempting to address social ills through evangelism, the message of Sunday and the Mission tacitly endorsed the socioeconomic status quo by overwhelmingly emphasizing personal spiritual conversion as the sole means of meaningful reform.

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<sup>1</sup>Billy Sunday, "The Three Groups," The Real Billy Sunday, Elijah P. Brown, (New York: m. p., 1914), 249-250. Sunday holds the copyright for the entire book, as well he should. His biographer William McLoughlin notes that about 80% of the material consists of Sunday's own words, and for this reason, citations will refer to Sunday rather than Brown where appropriate.

William Ashley Sunday's leap from obscurity to fame began in Iowa. Young Willie's father died in the Union Army before laying eyes upon his third son, and the boy grew up under the guidance of his mother and grandfather. When the disappearance of his mother's second husband left the family without any money, she was forced to send twelve-year-old Willie off to an orphanage. Here the young Sunday received his first religious training, which consisted chiefly of memorizing Bible passages, but Willie found this sort of exercise less than exciting. As he moved on to high school, William became much better known for his athletic prowess than his religious zeal, actually missing his graduation ceremony to participate in a bucket brigade contest.<sup>2</sup>

Sunday began playing professional baseball after high school and, after leading his Iowa team to the state championship, the Chicago Whitestockings hired him into the big leagues. His breeding as a country bumpkin bothered him in his new city environs, but his remarkable speed quickly overcame his hayseed image; one biographer claims Sunday could run a hundred yards from a standing start in ten seconds flat.<sup>3</sup> Sunday's baseball career lasted from 1883 until 1891, and one successful season he swiped 95 bases.<sup>4</sup>

Sunday's life dramatically changed course early in his professional baseball career with his conversion to Christianity. Especially in light of Sunday's later emphasis during revivals on personal spiritual transformation, his own conversion experience looms as vitally important to consider. In fact,

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<sup>2</sup>William McLoughlin, Billy Sunday Was His Real Name (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), 1-3.

<sup>3</sup>William T. Ellis, "Billy" Sunday: The Man and His Message (Philadelphia: L. T. Myers, 1914), 34.

<sup>4</sup>McLoughlin, 4.

so important was his conversion in 1886 that Sunday later claimed "there is nothing that can be so convincing to a man as his own experience."<sup>5</sup> As with most aspects of the revivalist's life, this event was not without some controversy. Sunday's first authorized biographer, former friend T. T. Frankenberg, wrote that the baseball player's conversion actually happened after he met his future wife, Helen. However, Sunday soon denounced the biography because this--according to a later biographer--spoiled his rich story about how he first encountered the future Mrs. Sunday at a church prayer meeting.<sup>6</sup> It seems even more likely that Sunday disliked Frankenberg's version of the story because it spoiled the compelling narrative of the conversion event itself.

Whether fact, fiction, or some combination of the two, Sunday's account of his conversion experience--as with everything else he did--seems well-scripted for maximum emotional effect. The young Chicago Whitestocking regular and some baseball cronies were out on the town drinking one day, and they passed the corner of State and Van Buren Streets. Having chanced upon a group of men and women from Pacific Garden Mission singing hymns, Sunday relates what happened next with a characteristic flair for the dramatic:

We sat on the curbstone and listened. I had heard those songs from mother back in Iowa . . . and God painted on the canvas of my memory the scenes and recollections of other days and faces. I bowed my head in shame and the tears rolled down my cheeks like rivers of water. When the song was ended, "Where is my

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<sup>5</sup>Sunday, "Wonderful," in Brown, 284-5.

<sup>6</sup>McLoughlin, 49.

wandering boy to-night," the leader, Col. Clarke of Pacific Garden Mission, said, "Come, boys, down to the Mission and listen to the speaking and singing." I arose and said, "Boys, good-by, I'm done with this way of living," and went to the Mission; went every night for two weeks. One night Mrs. Col. Clarke invited me forward to the altar. I went and professed faith in Christ.<sup>7</sup>

Following his conversion, Sunday's behavior changed markedly. He forewent drinking, swearing, going to theaters, and playing baseball on Sundays. He soon began speaking to youth at the local Young Men's Christian Association, telling them about his conversion and how to behave in a morally appropriate manner. In 1891, Sunday became so enthusiastic about his faith that he spurned a \$500 per month contract offer from Cincinnati in order to take a YMCA opening for less than a fourth of the money.<sup>8</sup> After three years with the YMCA, Sunday left to travel with evangelist J. Wilbur Chapman, an apprenticeship that profoundly influenced Sunday. He wrote in 1902 that, "All I am today as an evangelist I owe to Dr. Chapman."<sup>9</sup> While he may have been Chapman's protege in 1902, in the next few years Sunday would burst forth from his mentor's shadow and stamp a most unique form of revivalism upon the American religious scene.

Before examining his later revivalism, however, the role of the Pacific Garden Mission's own form of religion in shaping Billy Sunday's nascent Christianity deserves attention. Conversion stories like Sunday's had been the

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<sup>7</sup>Billy Sunday in The Founding of Pacific Garden Mission: Over Thirty-Five Years Contributed to the Master's Service, Sarah D. Clarke (Chicago: The Bronson Canode Printing Co., 1914), 55-56.

<sup>8</sup>McLoughlin, 6-7.

<sup>9</sup>Clarke, 60.

hallmark of the Mission's religious services ever since it was established as an independent Christian agency in 1877. Founder Sarah Clarke's own conversion experience rivals that of Sunday's in its stark drama. She was at home working on an elaborate scheme of expensive interior decoration, when she received a "soul-penetrating" question: "an audible voice seemed to speak from Heaven, saying: 'WHAT ARE YOU DOING TO DECORATE YOUR HEAVENLY HOME?'"<sup>10</sup> Her husband had a similar revelation:

When on the eve of participating in a questionable business transaction--PROVIDENCE DIVINELY interposed through the remembrance of his sainted Mother's prayers, not only awakening his consciousness to the penalty of such a transgression, but the enormity of sin in God's sight.<sup>11</sup>

Once the two married in January of 1873, they set about trying to bring others to the same God who had spoken so vividly to them. Sarah Clarke relates that saving souls "at once became the all absorbing and consuming passion of my life. . . ."<sup>12</sup> After founding the Pacific Garden Mission six years later, Mrs. Clarke and her husband divided up the work: "we held the fort - Mr. Clarke preached - and I tried to keep crooked men straight."<sup>13</sup>

At the Pacific Garden Mission's very first service, the Clarkes initiated their enterprise by keeping four supposedly crooked men straight, as each came forward at the end of the service to profess faith in Christ. Sarah Clarke considered at least three of these people to be "giving evidence of a definite

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 11.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 15.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 12.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 20.



work of grace." Clarke wrote later that she took these conversions as "an indication of God's approval" for the Mission's work.<sup>14</sup> So successful did the Mission reputedly become that later, Sunday's friend and biographer Elijah P. Brown claimed that at Pacific Garden Mission, "there has never been a service where some one did not respond" to the invitation to accept Christ.<sup>15</sup> In fact, the famed revivalist Dwight L. Moody, suggested the Mission be named after the notorious Pacific Beer Garden, which formerly occupied the Mission's first location.<sup>16</sup> Moody, as Sarah Clarke is quick to point out in her autobiographical history of the institution's first 37 years, once proclaimed it the "greatest on earth."<sup>17</sup>

The testimonial of an ex-convict, included in Clarke's Mission history, illuminates a great deal about the character of the Mission's services. Like Sunday, criminal Dick Lane passed by Pacific Garden Mission one day and heard the strains of singing wafting out onto the downtown streets. Curious, Lane entered, and found the service inside unlike the penitentiary preaching with which he had become so familiar. Here at the Mission, other former criminals arose to profess their faith, and Lane felt kinship with them. Ironically, however, it took the testimony of a former cellmate to convince him of the truth:

[W]hen a nice looking man testified from the platform, I recognized him as a man that had served time with me . . . and I knew he was on the square and must be telling the truth, so when

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 21

<sup>15</sup>Brown, 38.

<sup>16</sup>"Pacific Garden Mission," Townsfolk (Chicago), January 1941.

<sup>17</sup>Clarke, 41.

the invitation for prayer was given, I raised my hand before I knew it, and was overpersuaded to go forward for prayer. . . ."18

In addition to giving somewhat humorous credence to the assumption of honor among thieves, this narrative demonstrates the most historically ascertainable characteristic of this turn-of-the-century "Hobo Church,"19 namely the use of personal testimonials as a tool to facilitate conversions. Even at the thirtieth anniversary celebration, part of the ceremony consisted of testimonials. The Chicago Tribune recounted that the "house was crowded with old time converts, many of whom at the conclusion of the services told what the mission had done for them."20

Former criminals and other undesirables often made discipline difficult at these Mission services, especially after Col. Clarke died. Sarah Clarke noted that often "it took the wisdom of Solomon to separate the drunken men and keep that crowd in order."21 Nevertheless, such difficulties did little to deter her from sharing her faith; in fact, Mrs. Clarke made three visits a day to bring "a story of good cheer and an admonition regarding better things" to prisoners in the Cook County jail.22 Also, sometime during 1910, Sarah Clarke helped establish the Pacific Garden Mission for Girls, the first and only

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18Ibid., 67.

19"Noted Man at Hobo Church Greeted by Former Convert," Chicago Tribune, 28 August 1907.

20"Mission Is Thirty Years Old (Crowd Gathers at Pacific Garden's Abode, 100 Van Buren, and Celebrates Its Birthday)," Chicago Tribune, 16 Sept. 1907.

21Clarke, 20.

22"Twelve Thousand Nights Spent Saving Unfortunates; Chicago Mission to Celebrate Thirty-Second Anniversary," Chicago Tribune, 16 January 1910.

institution to address the spiritual and physical needs of destitute, female Chicagoans.<sup>23</sup>

What guided Clarke in her socioreligious service, or a sort of Pacific Garden Mission "theology," probably can be better ascertained from poetry and pictures rather than prose. Sarah Clarke performed so much work on her own because in 1892, "the Recording Angel summoned Mr. Clark to his Eternal Mansion."<sup>24</sup> However, in his "Ode to My Beloved Wife on My Sixty-third Birthday," a rambling and extremely sentimental piece written in 1890, Col. Clarke expressed some sense of how he and his wife perceived their original urban mission:

In living thus for others, dear,  
We've found a solace sweet,  
As we have tried to lesson some  
The tramp of weary feet;  
And caused some aching hearts, I trust,  
More cheerfully to beat. (29)

We've worshiped not in churches grand,  
Or sat in cushioned pews,  
But we have told to sinful men,  
The Gospel! *Blessed news*. . . .(30)

But then, dear wife, I trust we leave,  
A little brighter place,  
In some once darkened hearts on earth,  
(Before they saw our face),  
Which more than *wealth* or *fame*, my dear,  
May benefit our race.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Clarke, 26.

<sup>25</sup>Col. Robert Clarke in *ibid.*, 29-31.

Nowhere is there a more developed articulation of what the Clarkes wanted to accomplish on earth. The Colonel's simplistic ode, then, also looms as important as much for what it does not say as for what it does. At no point in the midst of Clarke's story of personal sacrifice and Gospel proclamation is there mention of doctrine, nor is it mentioned anywhere else in the extant writings of the Mission's founders. Both Sarah and the Colonel had experienced dramatic religious conversions outside the denominational context, removed from doctrines and creeds, and this de-emphasis on dogma assisted in privileging conversion as the stamp of right religiosity.

Even more can be learned about the early Mission's "theology" from its anniversary booklets, and especially from their artistry. The Pacific Garden Mission apparently viewed the world through Moodyesque eyes, for it was the famed revivalist Dwight L. Moody who perceived the world as a "wrecked vessel," and God had given him a Gospel lifeboat and said, "Moody, save all you can."<sup>26</sup> The cover of the Mission's 1906 report captures this spirit, colorfully portraying several men in a lifeboat, one poised at the prow, readying to cast a long rope of salvation to a drowning man who is floating on the swells below. The caption underneath reads: "Over 10,500 Nights, Throwing Out the Lifeline in the Notorious Levee District." The report claims that the Mission "has the largest continuous [sic] of wicked men and women, of any Rescue Work. . . ."<sup>27</sup> This imagery reappears throughout the Mission literature, including the 1915 annual statement: "Pacific Garden Mission is doing a work peculiarly its own. It is not a haven for 'star boarders' or

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<sup>26</sup>George Marsden, Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth Century Evangelicalism 1870-1925 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 37.

<sup>27</sup>Twenty-nine Years of Rescue Work, 29th annual report (Chicago: Pacific Garden Mission, 1906), cover.

'summer tourists,' but a harbor for wrecked and ruined lives and thousands of such have found shelter and victory here."<sup>28</sup>

These verbal and artistic pictures vivified premillennialism, a prevalent fundamentalist world view, in a theological nutshell. Premillennialists, like Moody and apparently the Mission, felt a profound cultural pessimism, taking the evidence of rampant immorality and injustice as signs that the end was near. Only when the end did in fact arrive, with Christ's return to earth to establish his millennial kingdom, would conditions improve. With the world viewed as a wrecked vessel through this premillennial lens, reform and secular kinds of social service held no real power to change a declining world. Instead, Christians needed to evangelize so there might be more in the secure lifeboat when Christ finally returns.<sup>29</sup>

The Mission workers probably did not articulate premillennialism in formal, sophisticated terms, but that world view certainly informed their work, which subsumed all else under the umbrella of winning converts. Successful stories of the Mission's evangelistic rescues permeate its early literature. Testimonials fill one pamphlet, and the titles provide a flavor for the Mission's penchant for the dramatic: "Saved by a Kiss," "A Converted Infidel," "The Apostle of Love," "A Hard Nut Cracked," and "A Foxy Young Man."<sup>30</sup> As the titles indicate, these people--like Sunday and the Clarkes--turned around selfish and errant lives by accepting Christ's saving grace. The drama inherent in such turn-arounds apparently sustained itself during the Mission's services as well, especially in music. Charles M. Alexander, cited as

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<sup>28</sup>Thirty-Ninth Annual Statement, (Chicago: Pacific Garden Mission, 1915), 3.

<sup>29</sup>Marsden, 125-6.

<sup>30</sup>Twenty-nine Years, 6-14.

"The FAMOUS EVANGELISTIC SINGER," lauded the Mission's hymnody: "The songs I learned and heard there seemed to go deeper in the heart than anywhere else. . . . Chicago would not seem Chicago without Pacific Garden Mission."<sup>31</sup> Nor would Billy Sunday the baseball player have become Billy Sunday the "baseball evangelist" without Pacific Garden Mission.

That Sunday's conversion took place explicitly outside the traditional institutional church, within this context of Pacific Garden Mission, seems crucial to note, given his pandenominational version of Protestant revivalism. In fact, denomination held no importance in Sunday's nascent Christianity, and he admitted that he would have belonged to virtually any church that his future wife Helen belonged to at the time because he was "hot on the trail of Nell."<sup>32</sup> The doctrinal emphases of the institutional church, while Sunday and Mission staffers would likely have agreed with them, were virtually unimportant; all propositions took a back seat to the experience of spiritual transformation.

Above all else, his dynamic tactics and evangelistic methodology comprised much of what distinguished Billy Sunday from all previous revivalists. While one of his less credible critics likened Sunday's tabernacles--constructed especially for him in each revival campaign--to "vast wooden circus temples,"<sup>33</sup> this actually was not far from the truth, given the highly entertaining performances that occurred inside. Sunday's spiced up his oratory with physical acrobatics, including a baseball-player's slide into the home plate of the pulpit, standing and ranting from the pulpit, or an

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 14.

<sup>32</sup>Sunday, quoted in McLoughlin, 6.

<sup>33</sup>Edward Garstin Smith, Billy Sunday (Chicago: By the author, 20 W. Jackson Blvd., 1918), 4.

occasional tossing of chairs.<sup>34</sup> The sheer entertainment value of such wild stage performances contributed heavily to his meteoric rise in national popularity.

However, in assessing his impact in early twentieth century American religion, descriptions of Sunday's crazed physical antics must give way to a more comprehensive examination of what he actually communicated. Just as the Mission privileged the conversion experience over all else, Sunday's revivalism also showcased the spiritual transformation as the centerpiece of Christian life. In attempting to bring about such conversions in his energetic revivals, Sunday would, according to one biographer, "shoot into the audience volley after volley of gospel hot shot, until many before him pale and tremble with conviction."<sup>35</sup> He accused his audiences of not living an upright Christian life, of having "moral curvature of the spine."<sup>36</sup> According to Sunday, his listeners' "spiritual batting average is not up to God's league standard."<sup>37</sup> In convincing his audience of their moral decadence, Sunday's stridency sometimes made it seem that he was trying to scare potential converts down the proper Christian path. Shaming his audiences with their own ethical ineptitude, Billy Sunday alternately cajoled and pleaded with his listeners to renounce immoral living and accept Jesus Christ into their hearts.

While Sunday's antics remained the central focus of the campaigns, Sunday's revivals coupled his animated sermons with sentimental music,

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<sup>34</sup>All descriptions taken from throughout McLoughlin.

<sup>35</sup>Brown, 108.

<sup>36</sup>Sunday, "The Three Groups," in Brown, 254.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

milking the maximum emotion from both sentimental and martial songs. His songleader, Homer A. Rodeheaver, combined good looks with an emcee-like demeanor in establishing immediate rapport with most audiences, often telling anecdotes instead of saying prayers before each song. His hymns reflected his own nondoctrinal optimism, helping to bridge the gulf between religious and popular tunes.<sup>38</sup> So deftly did Rodeheaver manipulate revival audiences into the palm of his ingratiating hand that the New York Times described Rodeheaver as "one of the most expert masters of crowd psychology in the country."<sup>39</sup>

However, it was Sunday who drew virtually all of the attention, including criticism for his decidedly untraditional, outrageous tactics. In his defense, Sunday often quoted his evangelistic forerunner, Charles Grandison Finney: "God Almighty may use any method or means or individual that he pleases in order to promote a revival."<sup>40</sup> Sunday even went so far as to assert that the "preacher who can't make his preaching interesting has no business in the pulpit. . . ."<sup>41</sup> Sunday, at least in this case practiced what he preached; to call him "interesting" would be a gross understatement.

Much of Sunday's success also stemmed from his ability to capture the audience's attention by speaking to them in common language, but comments like "Let us talk with Jesus for a minute"<sup>42</sup> ruffled the feathers of many

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<sup>38</sup>McLoughlin, 81-87.

<sup>39</sup>Qtd. in McLoughlin, xix.

<sup>40</sup>Qtd. in Gordon Langley Hall, "The Ballplayer," chapter in The Sawdust Trail: The Story of American Evangelism (Philadelphia: Macrae Smith Co., 1964). 141.

<sup>41</sup>Sunday, "Wonderful" in Brown, 276.

<sup>42</sup>Sunday, "The Three Groups" in Brown, 244.



clergymen who felt the deity should be addressed only in formal terms. His ability to slangify Biblical stories and themes hardly endeared him to these more somber officials. In relating the disciple's betrayal of Christ, Sunday wrote that "Judas bought a ticket for hell for thirty pieces of silver, and it wasn't a round-trip ticket either."<sup>43</sup> Such expressions became the rule rather than the exception, to the delight of his audiences but to the consternation of his critics. One vociferous Sunday opponent wrote that "One can hardly describe this buffoon without the use of slang. He slings slang. He galvanizes religion. He puts on ignorance the uniform of fanaticism."<sup>44</sup> However, Sunday relied on Christ himself to defend his homey methodology, noting that Jesus spoke so that the people could understand him: "No man had to take a dictionary with him when he went to hear the Sermon on the Mount. He illustrated His thought and made plain what His meaning was by the most wonderful word-pictures."<sup>45</sup> In other words, according to Sunday, Jesus "put the cookies on the lower shelf."<sup>46</sup>

This conscious attempt to place the religious cookies within easy reach of his audience in part represented a strident anti-intellectualism which became part and parcel of the conservative reaction to modernist threats; in fact, this eventually became the most important unifying factor in religious conservatism by 1920.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, religious historian George Marsden notes

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>Smith, Billy Sunday, 4.

<sup>45</sup>Sunday, "Wonderful," in Brown, 276.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

<sup>47</sup>Marsden, 92.

that fundamentalism set itself apart from other similar movements with its militant antimodernism.<sup>48</sup> Sunday became perhaps the most vociferous voice in a movement of "co-belligerents united by their fierce opposition to modernist attempts to bring Christianity into line with modern thought."<sup>49</sup> Sunday had no interest in or knowledge of sophisticated theology,<sup>50</sup> believing it to be detrimental to Christian faith:

It is the most common-sense thing in the world, this religion. You say you don't understand it. You don't have to understand electricity to ride on a street car, do you? You don't have to understand it to send a telegraph message, or talk over the telephone. So do what God tells you in religion, whether you understand it or not, and you will get results that will convince and satisfy you.<sup>51</sup>

In addition to assailing the intellectual elite, Sunday saved some of his most pointed criticism for the institutional churches, the very people who had called for his revivalism in the first place. He expressed a special distaste for those church members who acted little different from their secular counterparts; because of these hypocrites, Sunday said, "Hell is so full of church members that their feet are sticking out of the windows."<sup>52</sup> In another sermon, Sunday lashed out again: "I sometimes doubt whether the

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 4.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 130.

<sup>51</sup>Sunday, in Brown, "Extracts from Sermons," 124.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 125.

church needs new members one-half as much as she needs the old bunch made over."<sup>53</sup> Sunday also hurled invective at those within the church who criticized his wild tactics of evangelism. In one sermon, he railed: "I don't expect one of these ossified, petrified, mildewed, dyed-in-the-wool, stamped-on-the-cork, blown-in-the-bottle, horizontal, perpendicular Presbyterians or Episcopalians to shout 'Amen!' but it would do you good to loosen up."<sup>54</sup>

Sunday pulled no punches in expressing his opinion about the lack of spiritual enthusiasm in mainline Protestantism, and his observations revealed an important crisis in turn-of-the-century denominational churchdom. After 1890, the public life of the nation "became more and more divorced from its traditional religious undergirdings,"<sup>55</sup> causing traditional denominations to suffer a membership crisis during the early twentieth century. A lack of enthusiasm may have been part of the problem. Sunday placed much of the blame for society's increased irreligiosity on those who had traditionally upheld the religious order; in assessing the situation, Sunday said, "There wouldn't be so many non-church goers if there were not so many non-going churches."<sup>56</sup> Those within the institutional church may have disliked the messenger, but they found his message all too close to the truth, making it difficult to quarrel with the response Sunday received from America at large. So although the more staid clergy often harrumphed at his tactics and his theological shallowness, his phenomenal success soon forced them to tolerate

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<sup>53</sup>Sunday, "The Three Groups," in Brown 247.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 248.

<sup>55</sup>Smith, Seeds of Secularization, 50.

<sup>56</sup>Sunday, "Some of Sunday's Sayings," in Brown, 170.

his distasteful sensationalism and swallow his unorthodox style in the hope of swelling their membership rolls once again through revival.<sup>57</sup>

According to statistics kept on those converted at Sunday's revivals, his evangelism proved extremely successful, surpassing the numbers of Moody's converts. However, these impressive figures purporting to assess numbers of "conversions" were often grossly inflated. Though many churches lauded Sunday for increasing membership, just as many urban churches experienced little or no increase in overall attendance. People from out of town often comprised a bundle of Sunday converts, who would then return home. A good number were young children who were not yet old enough to officially join a church. Many included in conversion statistics already belonged to a church, and only came forward at Sunday's urging to become "reconsecrated" in the faith. Other converts failed to pan out due to false addresses.<sup>58</sup> Often people came forward to shake Sunday's hand more than once.<sup>59</sup> If all these people were extracted out of Sunday's impressive number of conversions, the total people who were genuinely new and earnest converts to Christianity remained quite small. In the final analysis, it seemed that "the surrender was more likely to be a surrender to Sunday's charm than to Christ."<sup>60</sup>

Part of Sunday's charm, in the eyes of the middle class, was his message of socioeconomic stasis. Like most religious and financial conservatives of his day, Sunday also wanted to keep religion and any institutional forms of social service separate, and this became even more imperative as advocates of the

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<sup>57</sup>McLoughlin, 192.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., 199-205.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 102.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 27.

Social Gospel tried to merge the two. The Social Gospel, a varied movement mostly indigenous to American Protestantism, began to take flight in reaction to urban conditions at the turn of the twentieth century. Perhaps above all else, the movement's advocates sought to take seriously Christ's example and teaching in attempting to apply his message of salvation to the social, economic and political institutions in American life.<sup>61</sup> In part, the Social Gospel advocates felt that preaching the gospel as a sort of "fire insurance from Hell" was not quite enough; to dole salvation out on an individual basis ignore the fact that "a corrupt social system is damning them by the thousands."<sup>62</sup> While often associated--and correctly so--with liberal theology, the Social Gospel coalesced primarily around action rather than doctrine. George Marsden notes that the movement's "only test of truth was action."<sup>63</sup> In many ways, the Social Gospel became a progressive "crusade for justice and righteousness in all areas of the common life."<sup>64</sup>

It was the Social Gospel's perceived de-emphasis of God's transcendence and the realities of sin and evil that brought criticism from neo-orthodox theologians,<sup>65</sup> and those same aspects probably led revivalists like Sunday to articulate an opposition to the movement. Sunday's sermons, as previously mentioned, often depended on confronting his audiences with the harsh

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<sup>61</sup>Ronald C. White, Jr. and C. Howard Hopkins, "What Is the Social Gospel?" in The Social Gospel: Religion and Reform in Changing America (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1976), xi-xix.

<sup>62</sup>William E. Hordern, A Layman's Guide to Protestant Theology, revised edition (New York: Collier Books, 1968), 85.

<sup>63</sup>Marsden, 91.

<sup>64</sup>White and Hopkins, xii.

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*, xvii.

reality of personal sin. Often, in fact, his descriptions of the consequences of sexual sin became so horrifying that men fainted.<sup>66</sup> If this part of Christianity became muted, which Social Gospel advocates sometimes did, then Sunday would have lost much of his ability to effect his audience. So Billy Sunday would have undoubtedly agreed--at the very least, for reasons of self-preservation--with his lesser known revivalist contemporary, John Marvin Dean, who wrote bluntly at the beginning of his book Evangelism and Social Service: "There is no social gospel."<sup>67</sup>

Despite opposition to the Social Gospel's version of reform, Sunday's revivals were frequently viewed as catalysts for social and civic reform.<sup>68</sup> With Prohibition, this perception was quite accurate. Sunday spewed some of his worst rhetoric at the "red-nosed, buttermilk-eyed, beetle-browed, peanut-brained, stall-fed old saloon keeper. . . ."<sup>69</sup> However, this was the only instance in which Sunday advocated an institutional reform, and even in this case, it was in the name of individual moral correction.<sup>70</sup> In contrast to his image as a social reformer, the evangelist's message placed more emphasis on the individual rather than society as a whole. Sunday advocated change, but

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<sup>66</sup>McLoughlin, 188.

<sup>67</sup>John Marvin Dean, Evangelism and Social Service (Chicago: Griffith & Rowland Press, 1913), 1. While this work clearly denies legitimacy to the Social Gospel, Dean also goes on to insist that social service is inherently Christian. He seems to be trying to bridge the gap between liberals and conservatives on this issue, affirming an omnipotent God while approving the healing powers of man. Nevertheless, he probably is best described as, in George Marsden's categorization, an "optimistic premillennialist." Dean seems dedicated to preserving the world order while denying that man himself can ever truly overcome evil.

<sup>68</sup>McLoughlin, 224.

<sup>69</sup>Sunday, "Extracts from Sermons," in Brown 125.

<sup>70</sup>McLoughlin, 232-3.

not a radical one. Indeed, William McLoughlin notes that Sunday championed a "progressive orthodoxy," one that "had just the right flavor to attract those interested in reforming the current state of affairs without making any basic changes in national institutions."<sup>71</sup>

This exemplifies a characteristic of religious conservatives in Sunday's era, that of a profound ambivalence toward American culture. Sunday and other fundamentalists continued to emphasize Christian ethics and practice as the sole hope for redeeming society, while at the same time denying any real possibility for society to morally succeed by clinging to a premillennialist perspective.<sup>72</sup> Such views may seem frustratingly illogical, but fundamentalists are not necessarily unique in making paradoxes part of their theology. For, as historian Laurence Moore notes, "Religious people have come to hold conflicting notions, and the contradictions do not bother them. This is common and should not surprise us."<sup>73</sup> Sunday certainly fit this fundamentalist mold, firmly believing, as his revivalist predecessor Dwight L. Moody did, "that individual conversions would eventually bring social reform"<sup>74</sup> while still thinking of the world as a wrecked vessel.

However, in attempting to throw out the Gospel lifeline and reel in conversions, Billy Sunday--to borrow George Marsden's clever phrase--let sleeping dogmas lie, emphasizing conversion over doctrine. Because of this, the appropriateness of attaching labels to Sunday such as "fundamentalist," which is often used to indicate belief in a specific set of doctrines, must be

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<sup>71</sup>Ibid., 36.

<sup>72</sup>Marsden, 149.

<sup>73</sup>Moore, 145.

<sup>74</sup>Marsden, 37.

considered. The term "fundamentalist" historically has been a murky one with many possible associations, and definitional clarity must be established in order to accurately describe Sunday and his 'theology.' The label often lumps together various sets of people; as historian Laurence Moore puts it, "no matter how one defines Fundamentalism, one risks joining together in Christian fellowship a lot of people who would prefer to remain apart."<sup>75</sup>

Modern scholarship attempts several different means of delineating fundamentalists. Often researchers limit the doctrinal litmus test to just two criteria, belief in Biblical literalism and a spiritual conversion experience. Others take a more sociological approach, trying to create a category of fundamentalists based upon denominational affiliation.<sup>76</sup> However, neither of these means are appropriate for assessing the meaning of "fundamentalist" in Sunday's era, for the term's definition has narrowed considerably since the 1920s.<sup>77</sup> Therefore, to delineate the historical movement based on this narrow set of modern criteria becomes ineffective at best.

The origin of the term "fundamentalist" can be traced to Curtis Lee Laws, editor of the Baptist Watchman Examiner, who applied the adjective to those prepared "to do battle royal for the Fundamentals."<sup>78</sup> Here, Laws and fundamentalists primarily concerned themselves with doctrine, not society or

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<sup>75</sup>Moore, 151.

<sup>76</sup>Clyde Wilcox, "Fundamentalists and Politics: An Analysis of the Effects of Differing Operational Definitions," Journal of Politics 48 (August-November 1986), 1042. Wilcox notes that each method creates a different set of fundamentalists. Using a doctrinal litmus test identifies those fundamentalists outside the denominational context, but it fails to distinguish between fundamentalists and evangelicals. On the other hand, using denominational affiliation as a distinguishing characteristic minimizes disputes within denominations and ignores those fundamentalists outside denominations.

<sup>77</sup>Marsden, 4.

<sup>78</sup>Qtd. in *ibid.*, 159.



politics. The origin of the Fundamentals themselves emerged from the Presbyterian General Assembly, who in 1910 proposed that the church accept five "essential" doctrines:

- 1) the inerrancy of Scripture
- 2) the Virgin Birth of Jesus Christ
- 3) the substitutionary atonement
- 4) Christ's bodily resurrection
- 5) the authenticity of miracles

The Assembly had not intended for these five propositions to be an original creed, but belief in the Fundamentals soon became a litmus test of theological correctness, a means of separating the conservative wheat from the modernist chaff. Premillennialism later replaced the authenticity of miracles as the final fundamental.<sup>79</sup>

Billy Sunday, and in fact those at the Pacific Garden Mission as well, would have agreed with these five (or six) Fundamentals.<sup>80</sup> Indeed, in 1935, Billy Sunday received perhaps a significant stamp of fundamentalist approval when he accepted an honorary doctorate of laws degree from Bob Jones College. (Hall 148). However, tagging Sunday as "fundamentalist" in this sense presents real definitional problems. If fundamentalism is construed primarily as a movement concerned with doctrinal determination of Christian authenticity, a trait that customarily defines the fundamentalist phenomenon, then Sunday must be excused from the central discussion of the larger

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<sup>79</sup>Ibid., 117-120.

<sup>80</sup>Sunday certainly believed in Biblical literalism; ironically, however, in one of his lengthiest and most popular books, Great Love Stories of the Bible, Sunday employed a rather creative poetic license in translating Biblical courtships into modern, colloquial tales of wooing and winning. The inerrancy of Scripture apparently did not protect it from Sunday's attempt to put all the cookies on the lower shelf.

movement. Such a definition based on doctrinal concerns would mask Sunday's predominant emphasis on evangelism and spiritual transformation.

Assessing Billy Sunday's version fundamentalism more appropriately rests with a definition based upon evangelism rather than doctrine. For many fundamentalists, doctrine did become enormously important; for Sunday, it did not. A lack of doctrinal emphasis does not revoke his fundamentalist credentials, however. As William Hordern notes, the "heart of fundamentalism is in its concern for salvation,"<sup>81</sup> which became the driving purpose of Sunday's revivals. Preferring to steer clear of doctrinal controversy, Sunday contented himself with promoting personal salvation through Christ's atoning love. In relentlessly pursuing this goal, the raucous preacher gave voice to a larger conservative movement and can comfortably be called "fundamentalist."

Sunday's inherently fundamentalist message had profound and disturbing impact once projected into the larger culture. Some Protestant leaders criticized Sunday's brand of Christianity as a kind of 'department store religion,' an antiquated kind of theology.<sup>82</sup> William McLoughlin notes that this often confusing eclecticism, "taken at face value, could and did mean all things to all men."<sup>83</sup> Sunday's economic ideology became a perfect example of this eclecticism. While attacking the rich, often vociferously, Sunday seemed to be a voice for economic justice. In his sermon "Under the Sun," the evangelist dealt extensively with King Solomon's inability to satisfy himself with all the education, pleasure, and wealth available. In applying

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<sup>81</sup>Hordern, 60.

<sup>82</sup>McLoughlin, xxiii.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., 221.

the lesson to contemporary urban America, Sunday reported: "To find starvation of the most awful kind to-day, don't go down into the slums, but go to the people who are enormously wealthy."<sup>84</sup>

However, despite such an apparent indictment of the wealthy, Sunday rarely exercised his pulpit power to name names or specific instances of economic exploitation. Instead, his criticisms usually emerged only in vague, uncertain terms, and little wonder: many of his supporters ranked among the nation's wealthiest. William McLoughlin writes that the list of those on Sunday's New York revival campaign committee "read like a page out of the social register or from the list of the two hundred families controlling the American economy."<sup>85</sup> Sunday himself soon joined the financial elite due to his enormously successful revival campaigns: in 1912, Dun & Bradstreet rated Billy Sunday's worth at over \$1.5 million.<sup>86</sup> Sunday did not forget his spiritual roots, either, providing another indication of his rapid scaling of the financial ladder. Though his contribution to the Pacific Garden Mission in 1906 was only \$10, by 1915, he Sunday could afford to donate \$500.<sup>87</sup>

This ability to succeed financially became just as important for Sunday in his revivalist success as his conversion capabilities. In everything he did, Sunday employed the tactics of the businessman, from his natty suits to his pre-revival advance teams sent to drum up support through advertising.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>84</sup>Sunday, "Under the Sun," in Brown, 263.

<sup>85</sup>McLoughlin, xxiv.

<sup>86</sup>McLoughlin, 115-6.

<sup>87</sup>Comparison between the lists of financial contributors in Twenty-nine Years of Rescue Work and Thirty-Ninth Annual Statement.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., 21-24.

Instead of taking an offering only at the end of his revivalism campaigns, as predecessors such as Moody had done, Sunday began taking collections from the first day, assuring everyone the collections would stop once the revival's expenses were met. Often, his team appealed to civic pride in an attempt to see which city would most quickly raise the necessary money. Personal contributions often were solicited quietly from many of Sunday's aforementioned wealthy supporters. Some of this private money paid off revival debts, while other contributions augmented the free-will offering on the revival's final day, which went for Sunday's salary.<sup>89</sup> In these ways, it became evident that the "genius of Sunday's organization in producing [converts] was equaled only by its genius in extracting money."<sup>90</sup> Even as early as 1905, McLoughlin notes, "Sunday's revivals were now business enterprises. . . ."<sup>91</sup>

Since the evangelist became so adept at employing business techniques in making revival campaigns so successful, it is hardly surprising that Sunday held up the contemporary businessman as the best model for Christian virtue. Just as Sunday early on noted the importance of advertising in ensuring success for his revivals, so he encouraged churches to take a clue from the business world: "We make our store windows blaze with electric light, and keep them that way, even on dark days, and yet allow so many of our churches to look like a London fog on prayer meeting night."<sup>92</sup> Sunday even thought the crucifixion event wonderful in part because of the glorious

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<sup>89</sup>Ibid., 110.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., 105.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., 29.

<sup>92</sup>Sunday, "Extracts from Sermons," in Brown, 128.

publicity surrounding the event.<sup>93</sup> His songleader Rodeheaver also caught the spirit, often telling his choir to "go at it like selling goods."<sup>94</sup>

To hold Sunday himself responsible for elevating the businessman in this way would paper over the fact that he was preaching precisely what his audiences wanted to hear. During Sunday's era, "church members themselves, especially the more successful businessmen among them, had come to feel that the churches could profit by taking a few hints from the world of commerce."<sup>95</sup> One acerbic critic noted, quite perceptively, that "severest moral indictment incident to Billy Sunday is not against Billy himself, but lies against those people who make such a career possible. Sunday Merely supplies a demand."<sup>96</sup> In 1912, by virtue of his enormous popularity and success, Sunday had indeed become "a symbol of the American way of life."<sup>97</sup>

A large part of that American way of life, of course, included business, and Sunday did all he could to preserve it. Sunday and the nation's financial elite subscribed to an individualistic notion of economic success, a that acknowledged only a "deserving" poor, a class unable to escape its lowly status because of a refusal to assimilate to American life and morals. Such an emphasis on individual responsibility for social evil traces its intellectual roots, as did the fundamentalist movement at large, back to a nineteenth century interest in Scottish Common Sense Realism. This school of thought

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<sup>93</sup>Ibid., "Wonderful," in Brown, 279.

<sup>94</sup>Qtd. in McLoughlin, 82.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid., 192.

<sup>96</sup>Smith, Billy Sunday, 2.

<sup>97</sup>McLoughlin, 224.

emphasized democracy over aristocracy, common sensibilities over intellectual elitism, and free-will individualism over Darwinian determinism, making it "the American philosophy."<sup>98</sup> By perceiving individuals as beings perfectly free to make moral choices, this philosophy bred an understanding of socioeconomic problems not in terms of institutional unfairness, but rather in terms of individual moral failures.<sup>99</sup> With this attitude, the status quo became something of a divine mandate, which no good Christian would want to change in any comprehensive structural fashion.

Not surprisingly, Sunday's philosophy, coupled with his astounding financial success, engendered a great deal of criticism. Because the wealthy backed his revivals, McLoughlin mentions as a possibility the "ulterior motives on the part of this particular class of society toward the lower classes."<sup>100</sup> In light of this, social radicals suspected Sunday of being a tool in a conspiracy against the workingman, a way for Big Business to get more work for the same amount of money. Some saw Sunday as a strikebreaker, preaching passivity and productivity that created workers at the mercy of ruthless, profit-driven bosses.<sup>101</sup>

However, although "Sunday's moral fist-waving provided no real threat to the basic inequalities and underlying values of the competitive laissez faire system" upon which politicians and businessmen thrived,<sup>102</sup> Sunday's

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<sup>98</sup>Marsden, 14.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid.

<sup>100</sup>McLoughlin, 109.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., 234-235.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid., 230.

motives could hardly be described as devious. Nor could a conscious, repressive agenda be ascribed to most businessmen who found Sunday's message to their liking. William McLoughlin asserts that such businessmen were sincere in their wish for the conversion of the lower classes, so that they might become "respectable" Americans and better workers: "To these men Sunday's doctrines constituted the vital core of American democracy and the divine assertion of the social mobility of the deserving individual."<sup>103</sup>

This aversion to comprehensive institutional change as the best means of social reform was hardly unique to Sunday among religious conservatives during the twentieth century. Indeed, although the evangelical commitment to social reform can be viewed as a natural outgrowth of enthusiasm for revival, this reformist impulse has always remained secondary to revival itself. True social reform, in the minds of most fundamentalists, including Sunday, sprang from the newly converted hearts of believers, who would then shift their selfish energies toward addressing the needs of others. Because of this emphasis on conversion rather than institutional overhaul, any social programs initiated by fundamentalists remained quite conservative in character, especially before the turn of the century. Religious conservatives instead mostly relied upon religious indoctrination through education and an aggressive promulgation of the Good News.<sup>104</sup>

Some clues to Billy Sunday's eventual decline in success and popularity after 1920 reveal themselves with an examination of his role in the context of this larger conservative movement. Once fundamentalism emerged between 1920 and 1925 as a movement distinct from its predecessors, the movement

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<sup>103</sup>Ibid., 253.

<sup>104</sup>Marsden, 12-14.

went on the anti-modernist offensive on two fronts: theology within the denominations, and public schools and evolution.<sup>105</sup> In the heyday of his career, Sunday had defined himself as quintessentially American by preaching rural Christian virtues against the evils of the secular city; during this period, his was the loudest voice of conservative Christianity. However, after having long preached the virtues of Christian unity from outside the context of the institutional church, Sunday could not be a key player in the denominational battles for theological supremacy.

After World War I, Laurence Moore notes that "theologically conservative Protestants began to step self-consciously into outsider roles."<sup>106</sup> Sunday, quite simply, failed to step with them. Even from outside the denominational context, fundamentalism coalesced into institutions like the World's Christian Fundamentals Association around which conservatives could rally. In doing so, these independent organizations probably borrowed, or at least diluted, some of Sunday's dynamic thunder. Additionally, as the self-conscious defender of all things truly "American," Sunday could hardly shed this sort of patriotism and begin attacking what he had long tried to uphold. His success had come from giving voice to an American majority seeking to come to terms with the upheaval of the early twentieth century. This placed him on the inside of the country's religious consciousness, at the forefront of conservative religiosity. So while fundamentalist strength peaked in 1925,<sup>107</sup> Sunday found himself outside the arenas of action, steadily alienated from the mainstream of his own movement after 1920.

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<sup>105</sup>Ibid., 164.

<sup>106</sup>Moore, 163.

<sup>107</sup>Marsden, 183.



While Sunday may have been marginalized from within the fundamentalist movement, he was hardly immune from the stigma of intellectual bankruptcy attached to religious conservatives after the Scopes trial. Following that debacle, Marsden notes that "it became increasingly difficult to take fundamentalism seriously."<sup>108</sup> After World War I and certainly after the Scopes trial, it appears that the American public felt similarly disenchanted with Sunday's revivalism. This is hardly astonishing. In the aftermath of Scopes, fundamentalism increasingly became identified with rural backwardness,<sup>109</sup> a trait that Sunday had happily attributed to himself throughout his career in order to better rail against the evils of urban turpitude. However, Sunday came on the religious scene in the middle of a social transition; by the middle of the 1920s, the United States population had become increasingly urbanized. After the Scopes trial, "to condemn the city was to condemn America."<sup>110</sup> Associated with a perspective increasingly considered ignorant by a shifting American population, Billy Sunday's theology became a liability rather than an asset.

Furthermore, Scopes served to confirm the modernist mantra that fundamentalists were "people who militantly and irrationally clung to the past in a vain attempt to stave off inevitable cultural changes."<sup>111</sup> Sunday was certainly one of those people since the beginning of his career in evangelism. During the first 20 years of the century, the American public bought his recipe of nineteenth century theology, in part because he played

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<sup>108</sup>Ibid., 191.

<sup>109</sup>Ibid., 188.

<sup>110</sup>McLoughlin, 254.

<sup>111</sup>Marsden, 185.

upon the middle class's innate fear of change. Sunday dedicated his revivalism to preserving and upholding his version of American cultural virtues. However, once fundamentalists consciously defined a siege mentality against that larger culture following the Scopes trial, Sunday's "theology" was in trouble. By 1920 and even more so by 1925, the culture at large began to accept turbulent change as inevitable, and Sunday thus became a voice with diminished authority and appeal.

Sunday's death in 1935 marked the end of his personality cult, but it hardly signified the death of his "theology"; in fact, his emphasis on conversion over doctrine has persisted in the institution where he first encountered it. The modern Pacific Garden Mission's "theology," and even the imagery used to communicate that vision, seems to have changed little since the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1947, Mission's 70th anniversary literature asserted that, "Today, as in 1877, the old Lighthouse still stands, majestic and unmoved against the turbulent seas of iniquity, firm in the knowledge 'Only what's done for Christ will last.'"<sup>112</sup> More tellingly, the Mission's 1950 statement revealed that social service still remained a means to an end, that of conversion: "Often we have seen souls, tempered hard in the forge fires of sin soften to the gospel message after we have offered freely of our Christ-centered hospitality."<sup>113</sup>

As the Mission's resources expanded, so did the breadth of their services. Most of the Mission's current programs had been established by 1950. During this year, they serviced over 30,000 military men in their Serviceman's Center, complete with a canteen and a library. Mission staffers

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<sup>112</sup>Seventieth Anniversary Tract (Chicago: Pacific Garden Mission, 1947), 1.

<sup>113</sup>Out of the Night!, 73rd anniversary souvenir book (Chicago: Pacific Garden Mission, 1950): 17.

handed out at least 150,000 tracts expounding the virtues of life in Christ. In the "Converts Club," people who had been converted at the Mission gathered together for fellowship and Bible study. From there, one could move on to the "Fisherman's Club," which discussed the methodology of soul-winning, helping the believer to "secure the proper equipment" for witnessing to others.<sup>114</sup> Those who finally secured the proper equipment could then join "The Flying Squadron," which was composed of a revival team that would be dispatched to the spiritually starved at a moment's notice.

This emphasis on evangelism extended to the newly established women's division, where "soul-winning is the constant watchword."<sup>115</sup> After all, the pamphlet claims, "women and girls need Christ, too. . . ."<sup>116</sup> During this year, the Mission also established its medical and dental clinic, where clients could receive free services, but even in this context, the Mission looked beyond the physical needs to the spiritual. The director, while acknowledging the important physical healing taking place, seemed more grateful for the possibilities that his clients' health provided: "It softens their hearts and makes them open. In order for God to reach a man, his heart must be open."<sup>117</sup>

To better enable the opening of even more hearts, Pacific Garden Mission moved to its present Chicago location in 1955, after spending over

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>117</sup> Robert Seaver, "Clinic on S. State St. Offers Medical Care to Skid Row Men," Chicago Tribune, 14 September 1955; Richard Philbrick, "Skid Row Mission to Dedicate Addition," Chicago Tribune, 8 November 1959.

\$650,000 to renovate an old hotel.<sup>118</sup> Located at 646 South State Street, the Mission could be just another nondescript, converted factory building sandwiched between an open lot and a magnet school, just south of the bustling Loop business district. However, in this increasingly run-down area, the Mission unabashedly announces its presence with a large cross that boldly juts out from the structure's side. Brilliantly illuminated at night, the arms of the cross are inscribed with a message of hope for city dwellers: "JESUS SAVES." Above the shining cross, another lighted sign beams out: "Christ died for our sins." Even more revealing, painted on the Mission's south facade in large black letters is the Mission's core message. The purposeful, capitalized words, set against a snowy white background, remain ready to reach out and arrest the wandering eyes of passers-by: "For the WAGES of SIN is DEATH . . . But the GIFT of GOD is ETERNAL LIFE through JESUS CHRIST, our LORD (Romans 6:23)."<sup>119</sup> All of this creates the effect of a moral beacon in the midst of a secular urban darkness, which is precisely the point. As one of last year's newsletters illustrates: "Often called the Old Lighthouse, Pacific Garden Mission continues its high-wattage beaming forth of the Gospel light to impoverished people while at the same time meeting their material and physical needs."<sup>120</sup>

In addition to these electrifying displays, Pacific Garden Mission continues its stated aim of evangelism in almost imperceptible fashion, even as the visitor approaches the building to enter. Someone always opens the

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<sup>118</sup>"Pacific Garden Mission to Expand Its Open Door," Chicago Sun-Times, 9 December 1955.

<sup>119</sup>Observations made by the author on his first visit to Pacific Garden Mission, 30 October 1991.

<sup>120</sup>PGM News, July 1991, Vol. 55:7.

door for those entering and leaving the building. While the Mission maintains that this is simply a means of providing an unemployed client with a part-time, wage-earning position, the whole notion of opening a door seems to command a metaphorical significance as well. Aside from Christian notions of service and humility, this very task acts as an appropriate metaphor for Pacific Garden's aggressive emphasis on Christ's redemptive power. Once the Mission staff opens the physical door, then it becomes possible for Christ--working through the staffers--to open the door to a hardened heart.<sup>121</sup>

Further observation of Pacific Garden Mission's service to the homeless confirmed just how committed the staff was to opening that figurative door; in fact, the Mission's evangelical zeal permeates every aspect of its social service. For a homeless person to receive any food or shelter, (s)he must sit through one of the Mission's rousing chapel services. Held three times each day in a large, gymnasium-like auditorium, the worship hours are led by energetic preachers who target their message toward the destitute, seemingly uninterested population seated before them. The morning and afternoon services consist of brief testimonials and daily devotions, while both the attendance and the energy level picks up considerably for the evening service. Sharply at 7 p.m., the "Praise & Testimony" meetings begin.<sup>122</sup> Potential worshipers are encouraged to come in and "warm your heart in a revival-like atmosphere."<sup>123</sup> These nightly services are replete with hymns

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<sup>121</sup>Staff worker, Pacific Garden Mission, interview by the author, Chicago, Illinois, 19 November 1991. When pressed about whether or not opening the door is designed to create a deeper meaning beyond the superficial service, the staffer responded with a shrug and a smile, "Well, that works pretty well, doesn't it?"

<sup>122</sup>Mission staffer, interview by the author, Chicago, Illinois, 19 November 1991; observations by the author at Mission services, 14, 19 and 21 November, 12 December 1991.

<sup>123</sup>Visit Pacific Garden Mission (Chicago: Pacific Garden Mission, n. d.).

and piano music not unlike the sentimental strains which first attracted Billy Sunday to the Mission. During the service, successful sinners-turned-Christians--many of whom used to sit out in the audience as one of the homeless--share their life stories, emphasizing the desolation of life before Jesus, and then urge those in the audience to change as well.<sup>124</sup> These dramatic testimonials seem to follow a pattern of redemptive spiritual transformation similar to Sunday's own dramatic story.

At the end of each service, the Mission leader urges the homeless men to come forward and profess faith in Christ. Many of the homeless people appear to pay little attention to the service, often talking among themselves or even dozing.<sup>125</sup> Cramped into closely packed folding chairs for 30 to 45 minutes, squabbles--the kind Sarah Clarke had difficulty in controlling some ninety years ago--break out among the audience members.<sup>126</sup> One particular homeless man, a frequent guest at the Mission, resented the coercive attendance at the services. He particularly disliked the minister's Sundayesque emphasis on man's individual sin as the root of all evil; as the client put it, "They be talkin' to you like you got a tail."<sup>127</sup> Indeed, many homeless men leave the services feeling more guilty and morally defective than spiritually uplifted.

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<sup>124</sup>Observations were compiled during four experiences at Pacific Garden Mission: 14, 19 and 21 November 1991; 12 December 1991.

<sup>125</sup>Ibid.

<sup>126</sup>Mission staffer, interview by the author, Chicago, Illinois, 19 November 1991. Although the author viewed no such arguments during his observations, he was assured by all the staffers within earshot that he was "just lucky."

<sup>127</sup>Client interview, Legal Assistance Foundation of Chicago, 1 December 1991.

These services occur three times a day before each meal, and the homeless men seeking food and shelter must sit through the religious ritual before they are allowed to eat or sleep. Many of the Mission's clients resent this, but they endure it just the same in part because there are few other places to go. After each service, the homeless are herded downstairs to the cafeteria for meals. Pacific Garden Mission provides over 30,000 free meals per month, and the busy winter months often increase this figure. The people must leave the Mission after both breakfast and lunch, during which time the Mission's staff cleans and prepares for the next rush.<sup>128</sup>

Following the evening meal, however, the homeless men are provided a place to sleep for the night. First-time "guests" (the term used by the Mission) are given a ticket that guarantees them a bed for the next two weeks; all they must do is show the ticket after dinner each night, and they are ushered upstairs to shower and sleep. The tickets are disbursed on a first come, first served basis, so many homeless people arrive quite early for the evening service, hoping to receive a bed ticket. After the 250 beds are filled (and they usually are, especially in the winter months), the others are given blankets to sleep on the auditorium floor.<sup>129</sup> Whether in the auditorium, the dormitory, or even in the shower, inspirational messages unavoidably leap out from every corner. Adding to the message from Romans painted on the

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<sup>128</sup>The number of meals served averaged about 30,000 per month for 1990; the monthly PGM News newsletters from 1991 provide the numbers for its corresponding month a year previous.

<sup>129</sup>Mission staffer, interview by the author, Chicago, Illinois, 19 November 1991. A former homeless addict, the staffer "graduated" from the Mission's Old Lighthouse Bible Institute after six months of study. Having served primarily as tour guide and assistant to the public relations director, it is important to note his position toward the lower end of the Mission's administrative hierarchy.

Mission's exterior, John 3:16 ("For God so loved the world . . .") is embossed in similarly bold style in the auditorium. Each Scripture reinforces Christ's unassailable salvific power, available to all those who will confess their faith in Him.<sup>130</sup>

Similar themes flow from the Mission's weekly radio program, "Unshackled," which beams out to over 880 stations worldwide.<sup>131</sup> The program, in the Mission's own words, "features true dramas of men and women who have been transformed by Christ."<sup>132</sup> Pacific Garden Mission hires professionally trained actors, all of whom are seasoned "Unshackled" veterans, to play the different roles in each weekly melodrama. While the curious public is embraced any day of the week, the Mission especially encourages visitors to come on Saturday so they can sit through a taping of "Unshackled." The radio plays have proven popular enough for the enterprising Mission to create a series of videos from past "Unshackled" programs. In "Out of the Night," a businessman "goes from 'three martini' lunches to personal disaster and finds a new life at the Mission."<sup>133</sup> Another video, this one taken directly from an old radio play script, chronicles the "story of a Skid Row derelict's meeting with Christ" and when first released, the film supposedly "established a new standard of realism in Christian films," at least according to a Mission flyer.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>130</sup>Observation by the author, 30 October 1991.

<sup>131</sup>Inside the Mission's front door is a huge world map, with a colored pin for each broadcast outlet. As of December 1991, the map had exactly 885 pins.

<sup>132</sup>PGM News, August 1991, Vol. 55, 8.

<sup>133</sup>Pacific Garden Mission Presents . . . (pamphlet), (Chicago: Pacific Garden Mission, n. d.).

<sup>134</sup>*Ibid.*



Pacific Garden Mission further spreads the good news in other ways besides "Unshackled" and the homeless shelter. Curiously, the Mission has its own public relations director, who schedules group visits, provides visitors with information packets, arranges guided tours, and handles general written and telephone inquiries from the public.<sup>135</sup> The Mission has a rotating staff of "spiritual counselors" who try to assist the substance abusing clientele in overcoming addictions through some sort of spiritual counseling.<sup>136</sup> Revival teams are dispatched to interested churches to recreate the Mission's emotional services, and it even has Jewish and Arabic outreach programs. In addition, Pacific Garden Mission has its own established Bible program for residents interested in following through with their acceptance of Christ. Residents who want to continue study can enter a four-month program at the Old Lighthouse Bible Institute, after which they become "certified ministers" to carry forth and testify to the Mission's message of salvation.<sup>137</sup> Along with the homeless shelter itself, these comprehensive, multifaceted services help propel the Mission's message of salvation in Christ.

Perhaps most illuminating is the literature printed by Pacific Garden Mission. It publishes a bimonthly newsletter, the PGM News, which is targeted primarily at potential funding sources, detailing the scope of its mission and the huge number of people it serves. The statistical categories

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<sup>135</sup>Edward Jollif, Public Relations Director of Pacific Garden Mission, telephone interview by the author, Chicago, Illinois, 11 November 1991.

<sup>136</sup>Staff worker, Pacific Garden Mission, interview by the author, Chicago, Illinois, 19 November 1991.

<sup>137</sup>Ibid. Indeed, as an example of the seriousness with which the Lighthouse 'graduates' take their charge to witness, all visitors--including the interviewer--cannot escape the Mission without having been asked: "Do you believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior?"

seem designed to appeal directly to potential contributors, most of whom are religious conservatives. In the PGM News, sandwiched among statistics for "Attendance," "Overnight guests," and "Free meals" is a category that sums up the Mission's self-admitted measure of success: "Professions of faith in Christ."<sup>138</sup> Statistics for this category vary widely, from an average of almost 1500 per month in November and December 1990, down to around 800 per month during the summer of 1991.<sup>139</sup> While the Mission does not dismiss the importance of feeding and sheltering the homeless, it does emphasize conversion over all else. One staffer highlighted the importance of this category by asking rhetorically, "What good is it to feed and shelter someone if, once they die, they are only going to end up in Hell?"<sup>140</sup>

This comment, while shocking to some, serves to highlight that fact that the premillennial eschatology of Sunday and Moody is alive and well in the 1990s. The world is still a wrecked vessel in the eyes of the Pacific Garden Mission, and the Old Lighthouse is concerned primarily with lighting the way to salvation, not to socioeconomic mobility. One of the Mission's pamphlets reflects this perspective in describing the the Bible's restorative powers: "The WRITTEN WORD -- the cure for all things: Spirit, Soul, & Body." The order seems to be purposeful: spirit, soul, *then* body. Though serving the homeless involves maintaining the body, this list certainly indicates the most important goal of healing the spirit and soul first.<sup>141</sup> For the modern Mission, even the

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<sup>138</sup>These categories and their accompanying numbers appear each month under the heading "Outreach Facts & Figures" on the back of PGM News.

<sup>139</sup>Statistics studied come from the period beginning in January 1990 and ending October 1991.

<sup>140</sup>Staffer, interview by the author, Pacific Garden Mission, Chicago, Illinois, 19 November 1991.

bodies of their clients are wrecked vessels, certainly worthy of concern, but only as a means of providing a more lasting salvation.

It is not much of a stretch to argue that this philosophy negatively affects the quality of the Mission's service. One particular homeless man resented that the Mission seemed to be the only place he could get three meals a day, because he clearly disliked going there. The man's health had suffered because of the poor hygienic conditions in the Mission's dormitory; he acquired a tick while sleeping in a supposedly deloused bed, and he also had yet to recover from a foot rash caught while taking a shower. Also, he thought very little of the food served there. According to him, for breakfast, the usual fare is "burnt coffee, spoiled bread, cold oatmeal that sticks to the bowl." For lunch, you receive "just soup that tastes like a lot of starch," and in the evening, baloney sandwiches on stale bread. Each meal tantalized the man more than it satisfied him, he said, and he usually leaves more hungry than when he came.<sup>142</sup> Needless to say, this man is not among Pacific Garden Mission's compilation of "Professions of Faith in Christ." Given these conditions, one has to wonder about the Mission's real effectiveness, even as it continues to churn out impressive monthly statistics. However, to do so would not take into account the Mission's own definition of success, measure in the number of conversions.

There does exist a modern Christian alternative to the methodology of Pacific Garden Mission, the Salvation Army's Freedom Center. The Mission

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<sup>141</sup>The Written Word: The Cure for all Things (Chicago: Pacific Garden Mission, n. d.). Apparently to gain an accurate account of the tract's effect, former nonbelievers can "vote" in one of two categories on the back and send it to the Mission. One can either mark "I have confessed Christ as Lord and Saviour," or "I have not confessed Christ but I would like to know more about God's way of salvation."

<sup>142</sup>Client interview, Legal Assistance Foundation of Chicago, interview by the author, 1 December 1991.

and the Freedom Center each constitute indispensable tiles in contemporary Chicago's wide mosaic of services for the homeless, but huge differences exist between them in both philosophy and methodology. In direct contrast to the Mission's emphasis on addressing the spiritual before the physical, the Salvation Army program for homeless substance abusers tends to place worldly needs and coping skills far above conversion. Ron Vander Kooi, the Freedom Center's Consulting Sociologist for Research/Planning and Specialist in Housing and Homelessness for the Center, drew this distinction without prompting. When asked just how much the Salvation Army's religion permeated its alcohol rehabilitation program for the homeless, Vander Kooi replied: "Well, certainly we're a Christian organization--probably not as much as we should be--but we're a streetwise denomination. We try to heal the body before we can heal the soul. *Not like Pacific Garden Mission* or some place like that" (author's italics).<sup>143</sup>

By choosing Pacific Garden Mission as the organization against which to define the Salvation Army, Vander Kooi explicitly sharpened the dichotomy between each group, one that extends well back into the late nineteenth century. The historical Salvation Army grew out of the Holiness movement near the end of the nineteenth century, bringing with it a more practical outlook than that of premillennial dispensationalists. The Army emphasized a profound personal experience of consecration, an infusion of Spiritual power, and tireless dedication to difficult Christian service, particularly among the poorest of the poor.<sup>144</sup> Coincidentally,

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<sup>143</sup>Ron Vander Kooi, interview by the author, Chicago, Illinois, 18 November 1991.

<sup>144</sup>Marsden, 83.

it was the successful efforts of "well-run missions like the Pacific Garden Mission in Chicago," which predated the Army's social service activities, that helped encourage Army soldiers to begin social service efforts.<sup>145</sup> Initially, the Army's theology bore a striking resemblance to that of the Mission and Sunday, requiring "but one thing of converts: love--love for Christ, love for the Scriptures as His literal instructions, love for the lost and dying souls of the unsaved, and love for one's fellowmen."<sup>146</sup>

However, even in the 1880s, the Salvation Army tempered its zealous evangelism with more "practical activities on their behalf as well."<sup>147</sup> This desire to address practical concerns undoubtedly is the major difference between the modern Salvation Army and the Pacific Garden Mission. The Freedom Center's contemporary rehabilitation program is patterned after that of Alcoholics Anonymous, which involves admission of a higher power, the 'required religion' basically ends there. In providing transitional housing for up to eighteen months for adult male alcoholics, the Salvation Army staff strives to foster a sense of real community that--although certainly loving and concerned--is not coercively Christian. The overall environment is quite positive, with annual sobriety awards and continual support group meetings. Counseling focuses not on salvation, but on practical means of coping with addiction and alcoholism. Bible studies are available but not required, and residents feel minimal pressure to join if they do not wish to do so. The Freedom Center does hold chapel each Sunday, and residents are required to

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<sup>145</sup>E. H. McKinley, Somebody's Brother: A History of the Salvation Army Men's Social Service Department 1891-1985, Studies in American Religion Vol. 1 (Lewiston/Queenston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1986), 5.

<sup>146</sup>Ibid., 4.

<sup>147</sup>Ibid., 6.

attend this or another service. However, Vander Kooi readily admits that no one takes attendance on Sunday morning, and residents are rarely called upon to prove attendance at an outside service.<sup>148</sup>

The Freedom Center's chapel services--for those residents who do attend--differ markedly from those at Pacific Garden Mission. Where the Mission sometimes hammers away at themes of personal sin (probably to facilitate religious conversion among the audience), the Salvation Army's service concentrates upon upbeat messages with more immediate connections. Since the composition of the Army's audience is more stable and more familiar, the atmosphere resembles more the community church service than a revival. Emphases are practical and positive, integrating the need for healing both body and soul through comfort and truth in Christ. The chapel attenders appear to share more concern for each other and are more familiar in their relations, undoubtedly due to the stability of the Center's population.<sup>149</sup>

Vander Kooi, a devout Calvinist, admits to being somewhat uncomfortable 'watering down' his organization's religion in these ways; however, he is unequivocally comfortable with the Freedom Center's program and its success. Shrugging his shoulders when shown the statistics from Pacific Garden Mission, Vander Kooi asserts simply, "We provide services for the whole person." He believes firmly that one must feed the physical needs of the homeless before the spiritual can be addressed.<sup>150</sup> Although the Freedom Center has no documentation of "Professions of Faith in Christ,"

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<sup>148</sup>Ibid.

<sup>149</sup>Ron Vander Kooi, telephone interview by the author, 3 December 1991; observation by the author, 6 December 1991.

<sup>150</sup>Ron Vander Kooi, interview by the author, Chicago, Illinois, 18 November 1991.

Vander Kooi does boast of seeing few of his former residents return to the streets.

This seems to be a comfortable trade for the Freedom Center to make. Indeed, this attempt at balancing evangelism and practical social service characterizes the Army's history. In the late nineteenth century as Army social workers tried to help men overcome alcoholism, they relied upon the same imagery as the Pacific Garden Mission, calling upon members to throw out the gospel lifeline to the repentant sinner's outstretched hand. Beyond this simple desire for converting unbelievers, however, theology meant little to early Army soldiers, and even that desire was subordinated to a more practical social service.<sup>151</sup> The rate of men who stayed sober always greatly superseded the rate of those same men who experienced a religious conversion as a result of Army efforts.<sup>152</sup>

The Freedom Center's community of nurture and practical care goes far beyond the efforts of both Sunday and the contemporary Mission in making a long-term social impact. The failure of the Mission, it seems, is this emphasis on the process of religious transformation at the expense of everything else. The Mission tries desperately to kick open the spiritual door of the unbeliever's heart, but too often the convert goes back out the physical door misapprehending what has supposedly happened. In an increasingly complex society with a disintegrated religious historical consciousness, the specialized vocabulary of conversion and salvation must sound somewhat exclusive and foreign to those clients already literally excluded from the

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<sup>151</sup>McKinley, 8-9.

<sup>152</sup>Ibid., 212.

larger mainstream. Furthermore, by ministering solely to the spiritual needs of a physically, economically and politically deprived homeless clientele, the Pacific Garden Mission is effectively assuring that they will never go out of business. Once converted, the assumption seems to be that the client will be fine and the Mission's mission is accomplished, leaving clients with no social support structures, and a very understated sense of community and nurture, which is perhaps the greatest strength of institutional churches.

His overwhelming emphasis on spiritual transformation became an important reason for Sunday's inability to affect these institutional religious communities in the long term. Once people came forward to shake his hand, Sunday thought his hard work to be finished. He geared his antics and message toward short-term goals of entertainment and the processes of Christian initiation, with little or no substantial follow-through. In one of his sermons, Sunday lauded Christ as a wonderful Savior "because He can save so quickly. Quicker than thought He can give you life. It is only, look and live."<sup>153</sup> A hardly surprising perspective, especially given his own speedy spiritual transformation. However, Sunday failed to recognize that people needed more than just a handshake from the pulpit to turn their lives around. They needed a community in which to develop and nurture and faith they had just professed, and Sunday's self-defined role did not include providing that context.

It is crucial to note that, in the final analysis, neither Sunday nor the Pacific Garden Mission defined success in terms of either the social or religious viability of their converts. Instead of trying to ensure that the spiritually transformed could continue to grow in faith, Sunday and the

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<sup>153</sup>Sunday, "Wonderful," in Brown, 284.



Mission relied solely upon conversion statistics as a self-designated measure of legitimacy. As long as Pacific Garden continues to churn out "Professions of Faith in Christ" by the thousands per month, the financial support from those who share the Mission's definition of success will continue. What to make of Pacific Garden Mission's endurance is difficult, given its staid adherence to Sunday's simplistic recipe of "old-time religion" as the panacea for increasingly complex urban problems. Since the modern Mission appears to provide the same basic religious ingredients as Sunday once did, one has to wonder if the Pacific Garden Mission's recipe has not ossified into a rather tasteless recipe of inefficacy.

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