

THE BORN-AGAIN FRIAR:
AMERICAN EVANGELICAL APPROPRIATIONS OF SAINT FRANCIS OF
ASSISI, 1972-2013

by

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Abstract

Beginning in the late twentieth century, some evangelical Protestants in America turned to historic Catholic saints as inspirational exemplars of Christian faith. A surprisingly diverse range of American evangelicals appealed to Saint Francis of Assisi because he was perceived as a quintessentially authentic Christian. Saint Francis provided historical justification for some of these evangelicals' own ideals of Christian discipleship, and served as an example for inspiration and emulation as they navigated contemporary American culture and the evolving evangelical movement.

This thesis examines a range of American evangelical appropriations of Saint Francis of Assisi from 1972 to 2013, focusing on several sub-groups or movements within American evangelicalism. This examination of the evangelical reception of Saint Francis of Assisi contributes to a deeper understanding of evangelical Protestant interactions with Catholic spirituality, while also illuminating changing evangelical conceptions of what constitutes true Christian faith.

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Introduction

John Michael Talbot, a young musician and spiritual seeker, converted to Christianity through a vision of Jesus in a Holiday Inn hotel room in 1971. He joined the growing countercultural evangelical Jesus movement, becoming an early pioneer of the contemporary Christian music scene in America. Facing a divorce a few years later, the folk artist turned to the inspiration of Saint Francis of Assisi and the counsel of a Roman Catholic priest. As a result, he converted to Catholicism, sold his possessions, donned a brown habit, and founded an integrated monastic community in Arkansas.¹

Talbot was not the lone admirer of Saint Francis to have emerged from evangelical Protestantism in America. For Talbot, following Saint Francis meant embracing fully the Roman Catholic faith. Other evangelical admirers of Saint Francis stayed within the Protestant fold. Talbot later noted the paradox of Saint Francis' wide appeal among non-Catholics:

It is ironic that Francis, who was fervent in his obedience to the Roman Catholic Church, has been looked upon by both Protestant and Catholic reformers as a primary inspiration to return to the pure roots of the Gospel of Christ from which the early apostolic church first received the strength to grow and flower . . . many who have sought to return to the purity of the early apostolic and truly catholic church of the New Testament have found in Francis of Assisi an example, a prophet, and a friend.²

Talbot's admiration of Saint Francis as a link to what was perceived as true, authentic, New Testament-like Christianity anticipated a growing interest in the saint among American evangelical Protestants. This thesis tells the story of the afterlife of Saint Francis among American evangelical Protestants in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

¹ Mark Allan Powell, *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Christian Music* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), 921; Don Cusic, ed., *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Christian Music: Rock, Pop and Worship* (Santa Barbara, ABC CLIO, 2010), 428.

² John Michael Talbot, "Foreword," in *Francis: A Call to Conversion*, ed. Duane W. H. Arnold and C. George Fry (Grand Rapids: Cantilever Books, 1988), 10.

Research Question and Thesis Statement

Some recent scholarly studies have examined developments in American evangelical Protestant spirituality during the twentieth century; however, few have paid attention to the evangelical Protestant relationship to Roman Catholic saints and the idea of sainthood. Protestants since Luther have questioned Catholic adoration of holy men and women of the past. The connection of sainthood with Catholic practices of veneration and prayer made them further suspect to Protestants wary of any mediating force between a believer and Christ himself. During the late twentieth century, however, many American evangelicals Protestants demonstrated growing interest in pre-Reformation, and even post-Reformation, Catholic saints and mystics. Some evangelical Protestants in America turned to Saint Francis of Assisi and other historic Catholic saints as inspirational exemplars of Christian faith. How can scholars make sense of the evangelical appropriation of Saint Francis?

In this thesis I argue that a surprisingly diverse range of American evangelicals appealed to Saint Francis of Assisi because he was perceived as a quintessentially authentic Christian. Saint Francis provided historical justification for some evangelicals' own ideals of Christian discipleship, and served as an example for inspiration and emulation as they navigated contemporary American culture and the evolving evangelical movement.

American evangelical Protestants from across the evangelical spectrum found inspiration in Saint Francis of Assisi, appropriating the saint for different purposes. Evangelical Protestant advocates for the adoption of classical spiritual disciplines and pre-Reformation Christian traditions esteemed Saint Francis as an inspiring guide to transformative Christian spirituality that drew on Christian traditions throughout the centuries. Some charismatic evangelicals appealed to Saint Francis' miracles to validate their

own experiences and to serve as a template for mystical encounters. Politically progressive and environmentalist evangelicals saw Saint Francis' love for the poor, connection to nature, and committed discipleship as a model for their own life, politics, stewardship, and mystical connection to the poor. Writers associated with *Christianity Today* and other prominent evangelical Protestant institutions with roots in the mid-twentieth-century neo-evangelicalism saw Saint Francis as a committed, biblicist disciple of Christ, contrasting their interpretations of the saint with what they viewed as the misguided and innocuous versions of Saint Francis as portrayed in popular American culture and the writings of progressive evangelicals. New monastic evangelicals appealed to Saint Francis in their protests against the politics of the religious right and popular megachurch evangelicalism, upholding Saint Francis as an example for their own monastic-style community and mission to the poor. In a similar vein, leaders in the so-called emergent or emerging church movement invoked Saint Francis' example to navigate new conceptions of church and spirituality that they saw as more appropriate to "postmodern" sensibilities, a task for which they felt dominant evangelical spirituality and church culture was inadequate. These evangelicals, representing diverse movements and trends within the American evangelical landscape, found in Saint Francis a model for their own Christian life in contemporary America.

Many evangelical Protestant interpreters of Saint Francis saw him as a true, "authentic," Christian. A number of these evangelicals highlighted his continuity with a "pure" earlier Christian age. Others considered him to embody biblical obedience, true mysticism, or Christ-like love for the poor and creation. While separatist fundamentalists dismissed Saint Francis because of his Catholicism, other evangelical skeptics of Saint Francis' poverty nevertheless admired his sincere faith and obedience to Christ. Within the

variety of responses, a picture emerges of Saint Francis' heartfelt, holistic, authentic discipleship.

Saint Francis served as a model for many of his evangelical admirers, who sought to follow in his footsteps, if selectively, whether in prayer, mysticism, obedience to scripture or monastic community. These evangelical Protestants turned to Saint Francis' example to navigate and advocate for changes in evangelical spirituality, church life and politics. Many evangelicals saw Saint Francis as showing an alternative to patterns of evangelical spirituality and thought that had dominated American evangelical Protestantism in the twentieth-century. Saint Francis also inspired evangelicals to seek alternatives to widespread American cultural norms of consumerism, environmental disregard, and moral and religious relativism. For these evangelical Protestants, Saint Francis was a model for true Christianity in a changing modern world.

Evangelical Protestant appropriations of Saint Francis of Assisi are significant because they point to profound shifts both in the blurring of religious boundaries between evangelical Protestants and Roman Catholics, and in the changing criteria for what evangelicals considered to be authentic Christianity. For earlier generations of American evangelicals, particularly those shaped by the fundamentalist experience, Saint Francis' Roman Catholicism and monasticism made him suspect. Beginning in the late twentieth-century, however, some evangelicals readily approached Saint Francis as someone who exemplified the ideals of what they considered to be authentic Christianity, alongside or even above traditional evangelical heroes, such as the Protestant reformers, missionaries, and evangelists. Many evangelical Protestants felt themselves free to adopt ideas and figures from across Christian traditions for their own faith.

This softening of religious boundaries coincided with another shift in how some American evangelical Protestants conceived of true Christian faith. To generalize, it appears that where older generations of evangelical Protestants valued committed belief, evangelism, and biblical truth (through a Protestant hermeneutical lens), later American evangelicals became increasingly interested in values such as authenticity, discipleship, and holistic spirituality. A full examination of this shift is beyond the scope of this study, but changing values encouraged some evangelicals to seek a “new” model for Christian faith in Saint Francis.

This study uncovers other supplementary observations that are not fully explored, but nevertheless deserve mention. First, the varied responses of evangelical Protestants to Saint Francis uncover the increasingly politically, spiritually, theologically and ecclesiastically fragmented American evangelical world in the last decades of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century. Second, the diversity of evangelical interpretations of Saint Francis is shaped by the emergence of several new approaches to evangelical spirituality in the twentieth century, and the declining hold of Keswick, or “Higher Life,” holiness spirituality that dominated American evangelicalism decades earlier. Third, evangelical admirers of Saint Francis often brought evangelical values and hermeneutical habits, such as biblicism and historical literalism, to their interpretations of the saint. Fourth, evangelical Protestants have their own admired figures analogous to saints. Bonhoeffer’s influential idea of costly discipleship particularly shaped evangelical perceptions of Saint Francis, providing a lens for evangelical sainthood more generally. Fourth and finally, evangelical Protestant appeals to a medieval saint demonstrate an increasing historical awareness among many evangelicals, and in some cases a primitivist impulse toward an idealized Christian past

Scope of the Study

This thesis concerns identifying and understanding the appropriation of Saint Francis of Assisi by American evangelical Protestants between 1972 and 2013. Saint Francis of Assisi is selected because he is among the most well-known saints outside the Bible for American evangelicals,³ and is an easily recognizable figure for many contemporary Americans. Saint Francis is also someone for whom interpreters may find varied and contradictory meanings, thereby shedding light on the interpreters themselves. This examination of American evangelical Protestant interest in Saint Francis contributes to a deeper understanding of evangelical approaches to and appropriations of Catholic saints and spirituality.

The year 1972 marked the release of Franco Zeffrelli's film *Brother Sun, Sister Moon*, which popularized images of a simple, peace-loving, hippie-like Saint Francis. The film impacted a number of evangelical Protestants. The 2013 election of Pope Francis elicited a flurry of response from evangelical Protestants, leading some to connect him with the saint whose name he bears.⁴ Evangelical reactions to Pope Francis and his relation to the saint of Assisi warrant their own examination; these responses will only be touched upon briefly in the epilogue of this thesis. These events mark meaningful bookends for the timeline of this study.

This thesis examines books, articles, music recordings, art and videos by American evangelical Protestants who significantly engaged with Saint Francis of Assisi. I have attempted to be comprehensive in including a wide range of evangelicals. While an analysis of evangelical views of Saint Francis bears similarities with a "lived religion" approach to

³ For pre-Reformation saints, only Saint Augustine, Saint Patrick, and Saint Joan of Arc might rival the popularity of Saint Francis in American evangelical culture.

⁴ See the Epilogue of this thesis.

history, which examines the experience of faith in the lives of believers, this thesis is also a history of evangelical Protestant movements and leaders.⁵ The faith of evangelical laity may not always correspond to the ideals of pastors and teachers, but American evangelical Protestantism, with its influential parachurch ministries and prominent leaders, cannot be understood only on the level of popular piety.⁶ The books and writings of evangelical elites have played an important role in fostering evangelical identity.⁷ Most of the evangelicals examined in this thesis are leaders, pastors, writers and publishers of varying degrees of influence and education. They represent networks of varied, and often interrelated, movements or sub-groups within American evangelical Protestantism. This thesis is organized around how figures representing these different movements approached and adopted Saint Francis for their own purposes.

Methodologically, this thesis is a work of history, not theology. Critical comments toward evangelical theological positions surface only when useful for uncovering historical forces, trends, and religious and cultural changes. Likewise, my intent is not to debate the way evangelical Protestants present Saint Francis. There are nearly as many versions of the “authentic” Francis as there are of Jesus, who, as Albert Schweitzer noted, is reshaped by

⁵ In his social analysis of New Monasticism, Wes Markofski rightly claims that “Decoupling the study of everyday lived religion from the study of leaders and movement elites can obscure the relational structure and social processes through which different agents within the evangelical field construct their distinct-yet-related religious and political standpoints and strategies of action.” Wes Markofski, *New Monasticism and the Transformation of American Evangelicalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2-15), 77.

⁶ George Marsden likens the structure of evangelist-led parachurch organizations to competing medieval fiefdoms. George Marsden, “Introduction: The Evangelical Denomination,” in *Evangelicalism and Modern America*, ed. George Marsden (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1984), xiv.

⁷ Daniel Vaca’s dissertation skillfully demonstrates the symbiotic relationship between late-twentieth-century American evangelicalism and the growth of the Christian book industry; Christian books helped to define and direct evangelical belief and practice. Daniel Vaca, “Book People: Evangelical Books and the Making of Contemporary Evangelicalism” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2012), 262. James Bielo also notes the impact of books on reinforcing evangelical subculture. James S Bielo, *Emerging Evangelicals: Faith, Modernity and the Desire for Authenticity* (New York: NYU Press, 2011), 9.

each age and each individual interpreter.⁸ I leave judgment of these interpretations to the discerning reader.

While evangelical Protestantism is transatlantic in origin and global in scope, this thesis is limited to the study of American evangelical Protestants. Where essential, I reference occasional Canadian, Latin American and European evangelicals, but the focus remains on American evangelicalism. Some evangelical admirers of Saint Francis are unfortunately excluded because of this American scope.⁹

Most historic American black churches that share theological kinship with white evangelicals exist in parallel subcultures that do not easily cross.¹⁰ This thesis explores influential evangelical networks that have been dominated by white, middle-class, male leaders. There are, however, some notable leaders of colour in these networks, such as civil rights leader and Christian community development advocate John Perkins. This study includes Perkins' brief comments on Saint Francis, and the voices of some evangelical women who have engaged significantly with Saint Francis. Nevertheless, because such voices have often been marginalized within American evangelicalism, this thesis primarily deals with white, and mostly male, American evangelical figures.

⁸ Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest for the Historical Jesus*, trans. W. Montgomery (Mineola, Dover Publications: 2005), 4.

⁹ In the early twenty-first century, new monastic leaders from Canada and the United Kingdom wrote extensively on the significance of Saint Francis of Assisi. See Chapter Five, footnotes 42 and 61 of this thesis. Ajith Fernando, the Sri Lankan director of Youth for Christ, is another non-American evangelical admirer of Saint Francis. Fernando sees Francis' life as an example of Jesus' offer of the fullness of life. For some Christians who encounter God, the un-full life becomes unlivable, as happened to Francis; "he did not miss the riches he gave up." Ajith Fernando, "The Supremacy of Christ," in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, 3rd ed, ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorn (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1999), 176.

¹⁰ See Milton G. Sernett, "Black Religion and the Question of Evangelical Identity," in *The Variety of American Evangelicalism*, ed. Donald W. Dayton and Robert K. Johnston (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 143; William H. Bentley, "Bible Believers in the Black Community," in *The Evangelicals: What They Believe, Who They Are, Where They Are Changing*, rev. ed., ed. David F. Wells and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975), 128-141.

Definitions

Some definitions are in order. Defining the term “evangelical” is a point of contention among scholars. David Bebbington’s influential “quadrilateral” describes evangelical Protestantism by a consistent set of characteristics amid the variations within evangelicalism across several different centuries, countries, and cultures: biblicism (belief in the normative authority of the Bible), conversionism (the need for a “born-again” experience, whether immediate or gradual), activism (the belief that the gospel requires action, often in the form of evangelism), and crucicentrism (the saving significance of Christ’s death on the cross).¹¹ Bebbington’s study on British evangelicalism focuses on the different ways changing cultural contexts reshape expressions of evangelicalism. Standing apart from Bebbington’s emphasis on cultural change, however, the quadrilateral may not accurately address the sociological, cultural, and religious parameters of evangelicalism.¹² One necessary qualifier to the quadrilateral is the fact that evangelicalism is a distinctly Protestant movement.¹³

¹¹ David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 1989), 2-3. Bebbington’s broad definition enables him to apply his quadrilateral to the British evangelical context as well as to the American context. His use of the criteria also allows for the inclusion of African-American Protestants, Pentecostals, Charismatics, and others who may not consistently define themselves as evangelical. David W. Bebbington, “Evangelicalism in Its Settings: The British and American Movements since 1940,” in *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, the British Isles, and Beyond, 1700-1990*, ed. Mark A. Noll, David W. Bebbington and George A. Rawlyk, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 367.

¹² “At the beginning of the twenty-first century,” Mark Noll rightly claims, “there are very few generalizations that apply to all American evangelicals.” This lack of consensus includes, for Noll, conversionism. Mark Noll, *American Evangelical Christianity: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 24. Molly Worthen likewise contends that when Bebbington’s quadrilateral becomes removed from the context of Bebbington’s own study, it often functions in a static way. Worthen uses inclusive criteria to identify “a constellation of Protestant traditions that often disagree about matters of dogma, about frankly almost everything except the divinity of Christ, but who seem to have been part of the same conversation over the centuries.” Molly Worthen, “Defining Evangelicalism: Questions that Complement the Quadrilateral,” *Fides et Historia* 47, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2015): 83. While Worthen’s idea of an evangelical “conversation” is perhaps too vague, she rightly highlights problems of identifying universally uniting evangelical characteristics.

¹³ An Angus Reid poll of evangelical belief based on Bebbington’s quadrilateral in both Canada and the United States yielded the results that significant numbers of Roman Catholics were found to be “evangelical.” Mark A. Noll, “Noun or Adjective? The Ravings of a Fanatical Nominalist,” *Fides et Historia* 47, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2015): 76-77; Mark A. Noll, “Religion in Canada and the United States: Comparisons From an Important Survey Featuring the Place of Evangelical Christianity,” *Crux* 34, No. 4 (December 1998): 14. John

While recognizing the quadrilateral describes a historic core of evangelical belief, I opt to use sociological definitions for late twentieth-century American evangelicalism. Drawing on Wittgenstein, Robert Johnston's metaphor of an evangelical "extended family" effectively accounts for both the variety and kinship in American evangelicalism.¹⁴ Johnston's family metaphor is promising in its breadth, in that it acknowledges the truly porous borders of evangelical identity as well as a measure of shared evangelical history.¹⁵ Mark Noll likewise aptly identifies an evangelical "network of networks."¹⁶ Evangelical networks of media organizations, denominations, parachurch ministries and other institutions comprise one of the most significant identifiers of American evangelicalism in the late twentieth century.¹⁷ This thesis proceeds from an understanding that evangelicalism in America comprises a diverse Protestant movement held together by institutional networks, largely shaped by common history and beliefs. Given the fragmentation of evangelical networks and the changing nature of evangelical beliefs (including the reshaping or even

Stackhouse critiques the criteria used by this survey as insufficiently clear or precise, especially in regards to specifically Protestant beliefs. "[I] wonder whether the Angus Reid survey really found evangelicals within Roman Catholicism... or instead simply lumped in faithful, fervent Catholics who believed what every Catholic is supposed to believe." John Stackhouse, "Who are the Evangelicals: Some Appreciative Reflections upon the Mark Noll/Angus Reid Report," *Cruce* 34, No. 4 (December 1998): 26-27. One problem with polls that base questions of evangelical belief on Bebbington's quadrilateral is that they accept a historically consistent set of beliefs as normative for defining evangelical beliefs of those surveyed. A more complex, multi-level approach is that of Lyman Kellstedt, which layers evangelical belief, denominational and institutional association, and self-identification. Lyman Kellstedt, "Simple Questions, Complex Answers: What Do We Mean by 'Evangelicalism'? What Difference Does it Make?" *Evangelical Studies Bulletin* 12, no. 2 (Fall 1995): 1-4.

¹⁴ Robert K. Johnston, "American Evangelicalism: An Extended Family," in Dayton and Johnston, *The Variety of American Evangelicalism*, 255.

¹⁵ Johnston talks of more central and more marginal members of the evangelical family; he uses example of a daughter-in-law as a marginal member of a family who may not share central family characteristics. Johnston also includes a theological qualifier; the central members of a family share common commitments to the gospel of "personal faith in Christ," scripture, evangelism and social activism. Johnston, "American Evangelicalism," 257, 261, 269.

¹⁶ David Van Biema and Richard N. Ostling, "In the Name of the Father," *Time* 147 no. 20 (May 13, 1996): 66.

¹⁷ Baylor University historian Elesha Coffman usefully posits evangelicalism as "a subculture defined primarily by its consumption of curated books, media, college degrees, VBS curricula, and other religious products." Elesha Coffman, "How Evangelicalism Built its Brand Loyalty," *Christianity Today*, web only, June 2015, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2015/june-web-only/how-evangelicalism-built-its-brand-loyalty.html>.

abandonment of some of Bebbington’s characteristics by some in American evangelical networks),¹⁸ latitude will be used in selecting figures in this study.¹⁹

“Neo-evangelical” refers to a post-fundamentalist movement in the 1940s and 1950s galvanized by the leadership of Harold Ockenga, Carl F. H. Henry, Charles Fuller, Billy Graham and others. Often calling themselves simply “evangelicals,” these leaders sought a theological and cultural middle ground between fundamentalism and liberalism. They formed many of the now dominant evangelical institutions in the decades after the Second World War.²⁰ These usually theologically Reformed figures often presented themselves as the leaders of the evangelical movement, which in reality was much broader.

I define terms for other evangelical movements and trends, such as new monasticism, prosperity gospel, and the emerging church, in the chapters concerning those themes.

“Appropriation” is a loaded term as of late, conjuring up images of insensitive cultural stereotyping and imitation. I use the term not in this pejorative sense of cultural

¹⁸ Scot McKnight’s comments that Brian McLaren has rejected Bebbington’s evangelical characteristics, whether fair or not, are a case in point. Scot McKnight, “Rebuilding the Faith from Scratch: Brian McLaren’s ‘New’ Christianity is not so much Revolutionary as Evolutionary,” *Christianity Today*, March 2010, 66. Bebbington’s quadrilateral does not accurately describe some participants in American evangelical networks in the late twentieth and early twenty-first, who nevertheless share in American evangelical history, culture, networks and conversation.

¹⁹ The Quaker Richard Foster, the Anglican Mark Galli, and the self-consciously “post-evangelical” Brian McLaren appear in the pages that follow. All have deep connections with evangelical networks and institutions.

²⁰ Chapter Five of this thesis offers a more detailed discussion of the history of the neo-evangelicals. Some scholars have questioned the very label “evangelical” as an arbitrary construction of neo-evangelicals. To these scholars, this contemporary alliance of diverse Protestants is shaky at best. They contend that the adoption of the label “evangelical” led to an arbitrary reading back of modern evangelical values into the past. Donald W. Dayton, “Some Doubts about the Usefulness of the Category ‘Evangelical,’” in Dayton and Johnston, *The Variety of American Evangelicalism*, 245-251; D.G. Hart, *Deconstructing Evangelicalism: Conservative Protestantism in the Age of Billy Graham* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004); Linford Fisher, “Evangelicals and Unevangelicals: The Contested History of a Word, 1500-1950,” *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 26, no. 2 (Summer 2016): 184-226. These scholars helpfully highlight dynamics in evangelical self-definition. In light of their criticism, care needs to be taken not to project modern evangelical values back into past Protestant movements. However, the claims of these scholars fall short on two fronts. First, evangelicals in the late twentieth-century are largely in theological continuity with evangelical Protestants of earlier eras. Second, granted neo-evangelical identity construction, something “evangelical” clearly exists and is understood in the lives of “born-again” believers themselves. The idea of a diverse twentieth-century evangelical network of Protestants with a similar core of beliefs captures this reality.

appropriation, but to speak of religious borrowing, in this case how evangelicals interpret Saint Francis and make him their own.

Saint Francis of Assisi and Twentieth-Century America

As this thesis explores interpretations of Saint Francis of Assisi, a brief outline of the well-known stories about his life is necessary. Knowledge of Francis' life comes mostly from several medieval biographies published in the decades after his death in 1226.²¹ Born Giovanni di Pietro di Bernadone in 1181 in the Italian town of Assisi, he was named "Francesco" by his father Pietro. Biographers generally portray the young Francis as a wild youth and a leader of a ragtag band of young men. When the city of Assisi went to war with neighbouring Perugia, Francis joined the battle and was taken captive, where he suffered a long illness. After his release, through a process of prayer and conversion, Francis began attending to the poor, famously embracing and kissing a leper who was later revealed to him to be Christ. When his father, a cloth merchant, took Francis before the local bishop to accuse him of giving away his possessions to the poor, Francis dramatically and publicly disrobed, returning his clothes to his father. Francis claimed that he no longer had any father but God. When praying in the ramshackle church of San Damiano, Francis received a message from Christ to "Rebuild my church." Francis began repairing that and other churches before interpreting the command figuratively. Francis gathered other young men with him, including his friends Bernard, Giles, and Sylvester, who took the name "Friars Minor," or little brothers. They lived by a rule that, like other medieval monastic rules, emphasized poverty, chastity and obedience. Francis' friend Clare soon joined the

²¹ Notable early biographies include the three *Lives of Saint Francis* by Thomas of Celano, the two *Lives of St. Francis* by St. Bonaventure, *The Legend of the Three Companions*, and the a *Mirror of Perfection* and the *Little Flowers of St. Francis*. All are available in Marion A. Habig, ed. *St Francis of Assisi, Writings and Early Biographies: English Omnibus of Sources for the Life of St. Francis* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1973).

movement, leading a women's order. For those who wished to follow the way of life in the world, a lay third order was formed. Francis sought and eventually received papal approval for his monastic rule in 1209. The Franciscan movement grew to be one of the most influential medieval mendicant monastic movements.

Saint Francis famously took a pilgrimage to the Holy Land during the Crusades, where he crossed to the Muslim side and visited the Egyptian Sultan al-Malik al-Kâmil with an appeal to follow Christ. On his return to Italy Francis began an itinerant preaching tour and sent his Friars out in groups of two to do the same. Of the many miraculous stories attributed to Francis, those involving animals are most well-known. He pacified and converted a violent wolf that was terrorizing the town of Gubbio. He preached to birds who listened to him attentively, and he showed care for other animals. He was also known for mystical visions and severe asceticism. During one fast late in his life Francis received a vision of Christ as a seraph, imprinting the wounds of Christ on his hands, feet and side—the stigmata. He composed several prayers and songs; the most well-known is the “Canticle of the Sun”—imploring creation to praise God. He died after a long sickness in 1226 and was commemorated as a saint by Rome shortly thereafter.

As Patricia Appelbaum has demonstrated, Saint Francis was introduced to American non-Catholic culture in the late nineteenth century.²² By the later decades of the twentieth-century, Saint Francis was a ubiquitous presence in American culture. He was depicted in films, birdbaths, and even comic books.²³ Saint Francis was declared the patron saint of the

²² Patricia Appelbaum's *St. Francis of America* recounts in detail the introduction of Saint Francis to the non-Catholic Anglophone world in the nineteenth century and his growing place in twentieth-century American culture. Patricia Appelbaum, *St. Francis of America: How a Thirteenth-Century Friar Became America's Most Popular Saint* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 11-51.

²³ Appelbaum, *St. Francis of America*, 116-121.

1967 “summer of love” in San Francisco.²⁴ Peace activists and environmentalists adopted Francis as their hero, and his example inspired inter-religious dialogue. An early twentieth-century English hymnist had translated Francis’ “Canticle of the Sun” and set it to music as “All Creatures of Our God and King,” which became a widespread favourite in Protestant hymnals.²⁵ The famous “Peace Prayer” (“Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. . .”), falsely credited to Saint Francis, also had a popular reach both within and beyond church walls.²⁶ Another saying falsely attributed to Saint Francis became popular among Christians in the 1990s: “Preach the gospel at all times, and if necessary use words.”²⁷ A medieval Italian Catholic saint had surprisingly become twentieth-century America’s saint.

The largely white American evangelical movement was coming of age at the same time. The Jesus movement of the late 1960s channeled countercultural energy into a budding evangelical subculture. By the 1970s the movement was embraced by mainstream evangelicals such as Billy Graham, and was influential in the emergence of evangelical youth culture, the charismatic renewal, and contemporary Christian music.²⁸ A surge of evangelical church growth in the 1960s and 1970s, along with the high profile of celebrity evangelical converts and politicians, most notably President Jimmy Carter, brought evangelicals into the mainstream of late twentieth-century American culture.²⁹ At the same time historians identify an evangelical identity crisis as a broad and growing evangelical coalition sought to define

²⁴ Appelbaum, *St. Francis of America*, 142.

²⁵ Appelbaum, *St. Francis of America*, 73-53.

²⁶ Appelbaum, *St. Francis of America*, 70-71.

²⁷ Appelbaum, *St. Francis of America*, 174.

²⁸ See Larry Eskridge, *God’s Forever Family: The Jesus People Movement in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Larry Eskridge, “‘One Way’: Billy Graham, the Jesus Generation, and the Idea of an Evangelical Youth Culture,” *Church History* 67, no 1 (1998): 83-106.

²⁹ Newsweek, following George Gallop, declared 1976 “The Year of the Evangelical.” Kenneth L. Woodward, “Born Again!” *Newsweek* (October 25, 1976), 68-78.

itself.³⁰ Theological, political and social divisions became more pronounced as the evangelical movement that had seemed unified in the post-war years became increasingly fragmented. As the charismatic renewal movement brought the “gifts of the Spirit”—tongues, healing and the like—to both Catholics and Protestants, it spurred new ties between the divided faiths.³¹

In this context of an evolving, sizeable but divided American evangelical movement, Saint Francis made an appearance among evangelicals. While they continued to sing “All Creatures of Our God and King” and pray the prayer of peace, some evangelicals turned to the life of the medieval Catholic friar to give new meaning to their faith. This thesis tells their story.

Thesis Outline

Chapter One of this thesis presents a brief survey of scholarly literature on recent American evangelical Protestantism, on the relationship of American evangelicals to Catholicism and classical Christian spirituality, and on the history of the reception of Saint Francis in Western and American culture. Chapter Two explores appropriations of Saint Francis among advocates for a return to classical spiritual disciplines, particularly Richard Foster and Dallas Willard, popular spiritual writers and co-founders of Renovaré. Chapter Three presents interpretations of Francis by neo-charismatic leaders. Chapter Four examines politically progressive and environmentalist evangelicals from the 1970s onward and their admiration for the Saint of Assisi. Chapter Five explores the interpretations of Saint Francis

³⁰ This was observed by Carl Henry, an influential early neo-evangelical figure, and confirmed by later historians. Carl F. H. Henry, *Evangelicals in Search of Identity* (Waco: Word Books, 1976); Timothy P. Weber, “Looking for Home: Evangelical Orthodoxy and the Search for the Original Church,” in *New Perspectives on Historical Theology: Essays in Memory of John Meyendorff*, ed. Bradley Nassif (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 96-103; Mark Noll, *American Evangelical Christianity: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 22.

³¹ Molly Worthen, *Apostles of Reason: The Crisis of Authority in American Evangelicalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 149, 157-158.

by those associated with *Christianity Today* publications and other institutions that arose out of the mid-twentieth-century neo-evangelical movement. Chapter Six explores the inspiration of Saint Francis on evangelical attempts at monastic-inspired community by contemporary Christian musician Rich Mullins and his colleagues and the new monastic movement of the late 1990s and early 2000s. Chapter Seven presents examples taken from the so-called emerging or emergent church movement. The conclusion provides a synthesis of these evangelical appropriations of Saint Francis and their significance for understanding American evangelicalism. While beyond the scope of this thesis, an epilogue offers brief reflections on evangelical responses to the 2013 election of Pope Francis in connection with the saint whose name he bears.

Chapter 1
Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter surveys three areas of scholarship that are pertinent to the subject of this thesis, namely the history of evangelical Protestantism in America since the 1960s, the relationship of American evangelicalism to Roman Catholicism and Catholic spirituality, and the place of Saint Francis of Assisi in Western and American culture. This chapter will, of necessity, be selective given the considerable scholarly attention that American evangelicalism has garnered. Historical scholarship on late twentieth-century American evangelicalism is increasingly maturing, bringing complexity to simplistic interpretations of evangelical politics, providing greater insight into evangelical relationships to modernity, and giving much needed attention to the internal diversity and dynamics of evangelical thought and motivations. Scholars have given attention to recent changes in evangelical Protestant relationships to Roman Catholicism and Catholic spirituality, though a thorough examination of the evangelical appropriation of saints from non-Protestant traditions is needed to uncover the significance of the changing dynamics of evangelical-Catholic interactions. A few broader studies have examined interpretations of Saint Francis of Assisi and his significance to Western and American culture, with only a little attention given to evangelical interpretations of Saint Francis. The appropriation of Saint Francis by evangelicals is shaped by distinct evangelical concerns and changes in the late twentieth-century; these appropriations warrant closer examination.

Review of Scholarly Literature on Recent American Evangelicalism

There is a vast amount of historical scholarship on American evangelicalism in the late twentieth-century. Beginning in the late 1970s, scholars attempted to account for the

vitality and popular growth of evangelicalism during the 1960s and 1970s by seeking to understand American evangelical relationships to modernity and its increased visibility in American society. William McLoughlin and Martin Marty explained evangelical numerical growth and public prominence as the result of anti-modern attitudes of withdrawal from or reaction to the social unrest of “the turbulent sixties.”¹ Their theories account for a level of conservatism and reactionary politics in the conspicuous so-called Christian right, but they do not effectively account for all evangelical orientations to the world. Scholars quickly challenged this “stimulus-response” or “backlash” model that understands evangelical growth as a mere reaction to modernism and secularism.² Grant Wacker highlights the widespread evangelical attitude of custodianship toward their responsibility for the spiritual care of American society alongside the spread of southern religious and cultural ideas into the American evangelicalism in the north and west.³ Nathan O. Hatch notes a “democratic orientation” integral to early evangelicalism that continued into the late twentieth-century, which manifested itself in lay involvement and populist gospel proclamation, resulting both in evangelistic success and in the neglect of scholarship and the arts, thereby giving evangelicalism an anti-intellectual shape.⁴ George Marsden offers two views of history that

¹ William G. McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform: An Essay on Religion and Social Change in America, 1607-1977* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 213-214. See also William G. McLoughlin, “The Illusions and Dangers of the New Christian Right,” *Foundations* 25 (1982): 141. Marty, however, holds that evangelicalism in some way paralleled modernization by using tools of modern media. Martin E. Marty, “Religion in America since Mid-Century,” *Daedalus* 111, no. 1 (Winter 1982): 158-159. Writing in 1984, Leonard Sweet likewise argues that with its anti-modern impulse and language of clear absolutes, evangelicalism filled the void of clear authority left by the declining influence of liberal mainline churches in America. Leonard I. Sweet, “The 1960s: The Crises of Liberal Christianity and the Public Emergence of Evangelicalism,” in *Evangelicals in Modern America*, ed. Marsden, 31-42.

² Grant Wacker, “Uneasy in Zion: Evangelicals in Postmodern Society,” in *Evangelicalism and Modern America*, ed. George Marsden (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1984), 17. For challenges to the idea of an American evangelical “backlash,” see *American Evangelicals and the 1960s*, ed. Axel R. Schäfer (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2013).

³ Wacker, “Uneasy in Zion,” 22-26.

⁴ Nathan O. Hatch, “Evangelicalism as a Democratic Movement,” in Marsden, *Evangelicalism and Modern America*, 72-81.

shape evangelical orientation to American society: varieties of millennialism, which emphasizes believers at war with modernity, and the narrative of America as God's chosen nation founded on Christian values.⁵ For Marsden, the tension between these narratives, rather than impulses of anti-modernism, better explain evangelical orientations toward American society, which he believes to be shaped by early modern values.⁶ More recently Paul Boyer, Eileen Luhr, Daniel Williams and other scholars further qualified the relationship between evangelicals and contemporary American culture, a relationship that Boyer calls "symbiotic," marked by both selective appropriation and opposition to cultural change.⁷ While the question of evangelical relationship with modern culture remains a debated topic, most scholars rightly view the anti-modern label as insufficient to account completely for the orientation of evangelical Protestantism to contemporary American society.⁸

Evangelical involvement in politics has captured both popular and scholarly attention. While stereotypes of evangelicals as right-wing extremists have been around since at least the 1960s, secular fears of evangelical dominion reached a fevered pitch during the

⁵ George Marsden, "Evangelicals, History, and Modernity," in Marsden, *Evangelicalism and Modern America*, 95-96. The latter is similar to Wacker's "custodial idea."

⁶ "Evangelicals have been, on the whole, champions of common sense, empiricism and scientific thinking." Marsden, "Evangelicals, History, and Modernity," 98.

⁷ Paul S. Boyer, "Back to the Future: Contemporary American Evangelicalism in Cultural and Historical Perspective," in Schäfer, *American Evangelicals and the 1960s*, 27; Eileen Luhr, "A Revolutionary Mission: Young Evangelicals and the Language of the Sixties," in Schäfer, *American Evangelicals and the 1960s*, 78; Daniel K. Williams, "Sex and Evangelicals: Gender Issues, the Sexual Revolution, and Abortion in the 1960s," in Schäfer, *American Evangelicals and the 1960s*, 114.

⁸ Molly Worthen, however, highlights anti-modernism of a different sort. Worthen contends that charismatic and liturgical renewal, alongside emerging evangelical and new monastic appropriations of earlier Christian traditions, represent anti-modernist reactions to fundamentalist rationality. This religious and spiritual anti-modernism should not be confused with the social and political anti-modernism identified by McLoughlin and Marty. Molly Worthen, *Apostles of Reason: The Crisis of Authority in American Evangelicalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 257.

presidency of George W. Bush.⁹ Some historians sought to correct such one-sided interpretations of evangelicalism either by highlighting evangelical concerns outside the political arena,¹⁰ or by presenting evangelical political diversity.¹¹ Historians such as Darren Dochuck and Stephen Miller offered increasingly mature interpretations of American evangelical political activity that take into account evangelical political diversity and the complex factors behind the political orientations of American evangelicals.¹² Evangelical Protestantism is, however, primarily a religious movement, not a political one. The political focus of much of American evangelical historiography often neglects the dynamics that shape evangelical culture and thought from within.

Since the 1970s scholars and evangelical leaders themselves have become aware of the increasingly diverse and fragmented nature of evangelical Protestantism in America.¹³

⁹ Several book titles alone indicate this: Kevin Phillips, *American Theocracy: The Peril and Politics of Radical Religion, Oil, and Borrowed Money in the 21st Century* (London: Viking, 2006). Jeff Sharlet, *The Family: The Secret Fundamentalism at the Heart of American Power* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006). Chris Hedges, *American Fascists: The Christian Right and the War on America* (New York: Free Press, 2007). Steven Miller calls this time the “second evangelical scare.” Steven P. Miller, *The Age of Evangelicalism: America’s Born-Again Years* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 142.

¹⁰ While following the idea that the religious right represents conservative alarm, Marsden argues that evangelicalism is primarily spiritual in its orientation; too much attention should not be given to the political right. George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 239, 252. Barry Hankins contends that evangelicalism is not uniquely extreme, but is shaped by and at home in American culture. Barry Hankins, *American Evangelicals: A Contemporary History of A Mainstream Religious Movement* (Plymouth: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2009), ix.

¹¹ David Swartz and Brantley Gasaway offer excellent analyses of politically progressive evangelical movements. David Swartz, *Moral Minority: The Evangelical Left in an Age of Conservatism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012); Brantley Gasaway, *Progressive Evangelicals and the Pursuit of Social Justice* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

¹² Dochuck contends that the religious right did not emerge out of nowhere in the late 1970s; Rather, Dochuck highlights persistent attitudes of cultural custodianship and free-market conservatism among evangelical migrants from the American South to the West. Darren Dochuck, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2011). Miller argues that the period from the 1970s to the early 2010s was an “age of evangelicalism,” where evangelicals exercised an outsized influence on American social, political and cultural conversations; evangelicalism was not merely a subculture. American history, for Miller, is tied in with evangelical history. Miller, *The Age of Evangelicalism*.

¹³ In 1976, *Christianity Today*’s first editor Carl Henry observed that the resurgence of fundamentalism, and divisions over missions, politics, the role of social action, and biblical inerrancy all marked “the crumbling of evangelical unity” from “the evangelical high noon of a half-generation ago.” Carl F. H. Henry, *Evangelicals in Search of Identity* (Waco: Word Books, 1976), 22-24. Other evangelicals of Wesleyan or Anabaptist

Sometimes discussions of evangelical diversity revolve around questions of the inclusion of diverse Protestant groups within the “evangelical” label—debates that have never been resolved.¹⁴ For some scholars, evangelical diversity rendered the label itself contentious, even meaningless.¹⁵

Mark Noll writes that the seventies saw the emergence of “a more pluralistic evangelicalism” that has reigned in place of the more monolithic post-war neo-evangelical consensus.¹⁶ Noll credits this fragmentation to a number of factors including increasing globalization and awareness of global social issues, an increasing place for university-educated evangelicals, feminist movements, the charismatic movement, and evangelical politicization.¹⁷ According to Noll, few commonalities remain between disparate evangelicals.¹⁸ Noll rightly highlights both the breadth of American evangelical diversity and some possible causes of this fragmentation that shapes contemporary evangelical experience.

Other scholars have attempted to account for evangelical diversity by offering lists of American evangelicalism’s constitutive parts, some of which contain as many as sixteen sub-groups.¹⁹ The widespread recognition of American evangelical diversity has shaped the

persuasions saw this diversity as a challenge to the hegemony of Reformed-minded neo-evangelicals like Henry. Theologian Robert Webber, for example, claimed that evangelical pluralism “wrenched control” from Henry and the fundamentalist Presbyterians who championed neo-evangelicalism. Robert E. Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals: Facing the Challenges of the New World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), 36-37.

¹⁴ See, for example, Donald W. Dayton and Robert K. Johnston, eds., *The Variety of American Evangelicalism* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1991). See also footnote 20 of the Introduction of this thesis.

¹⁵ Donald W. Dayton, “Some Doubts about the Usefulness of the Category ‘Evangelical,’” in Dayton and Johnston, *The Variety of American Evangelicalism*, 250; D. G. Hart, *Deconstructing Evangelicalism: Conservative Protestantism in the Age of Billy Graham* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004).

¹⁶ Mark Noll, *American Evangelical Christianity: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 22.

¹⁷ Noll, *American Evangelical Christianity*, 22-23.

¹⁸ Noll, *American Evangelical Christianity*, 24.

¹⁹ Robert Webber identifies sixteen distinct though related evangelical subgroups. Robert Webber, *Common Roots: A Call to Evangelical Maturity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978), 32. Timothy Weber identifies “classical, pietistic, fundamentalist, and... progressive” evangelicals. Timothy Weber, “Premillennialism and the Branches of Evangelicalism,” in Dayton and Johnston, *The Variety of American*

selections of scholars like Randall Balmer, whose continually expanding ethnographic study includes fundamentalists, premillennial dispensationalists, Latino and Native American Protestants, Pentecostals, Jesus movement communities, megachurch pastors, contemporary Christian musicians, and Christian publishers.²⁰ A wealth of scholarly literature offers explorations of particular influential movements and figures from within the American evangelical fold.²¹ Evangelical historiography increasingly reflects the reality of American evangelical diversity. An understanding of evangelical diversity is crucial for comprehending evangelical openness to Catholic spirituality and understanding the range of evangelical appropriations of Saint Francis of Assisi.

Two recent books are worthy of note for their significant analyses of guiding ideas that shape evangelical thought. Matthew Avery Sutton's *American Apocalypse* argues for the centrality of premillennial belief throughout twentieth-century evangelicalism.²² Sutton focuses on the populist surge of apocalyptic evangelical ideas, literature and imagery, and its significance to American culture. Apocalyptic beliefs of the near return of Christ, Sutton claims, profoundly shaped the thought, behaviour and hopes of fundamentalists, Pentecostals

Evangelicalism, 12. Matthew Avery Sutton includes neo-evangelicalism, premillennial populism, black evangelicalism and progressive evangelicalism, a list from which charismatics are notably absent. Matthew Avery Sutton, *American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 351. Richard Quebedeaux presents five sub-groups based on a chronological development. *The Young Evangelicals: The Story of the Emergence of a New Generation of Evangelicals* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), 18-37.

²⁰ Randall Balmer, *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory: A Journey into the Evangelical Subculture in America*, twenty-fifth anniversary ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

²¹ Some recent examples include John G. Turner, *Bill Bright and Campus Crusade for Christ: The Renewal of Evangelicalism in Postwar America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008); Barry Hankins, *Francis Schaeffer and the Shaping of Evangelical America* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2008); Larry Eskridge, *God's Forever Family: The Jesus People Movement in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); and Kate Bowler, *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

²² Sutton takes aim at some well-established historical motifs, such as the widespread assumption that fundamentalists retreated from public life and returned from their withdrawal after the Second World War. Sutton argues instead for continuity between late twentieth century evangelicals and earlier fundamentalists. Against "the Marsden-Carpenter rise-fall-rebirth narrative," Sutton contends that fundamentalists never retreated. This story of retreat was a construction of neo-evangelicals such as Carl Henry, who sought to create a new evangelical identity. Sutton, *American Apocalypse*, xiii.

and other “radical evangelicals.”²³ For Sutton, this apocalypticism did not stand apart from other influences of culture and power.²⁴ However, Sutton’s reading of the history of evangelicalism as overwhelmingly a premillennial movement is a reflection of his more narrow selection of evangelical sub-groups; premillennial apocalypticism is not central for all evangelicals. Nevertheless, his work has methodological importance, as he incorporates social theory and attention to class, race and gender in his research, making use of the correspondence of evangelical laity alongside the popular works of key figures. Sutton gives needed attention to African American churches, arguing they are one of four streams of contemporary evangelicalism.²⁵ Sutton’s work helpfully highlights evangelical motivations and under-examined pockets of American evangelical Protestantism, but his narrower focus on apocalyptic “radical evangelicals” does not reflect the broader evangelical spectrum. Those evangelicals who showed selective openness to Catholic spirituality in the twentieth century, for example, are not represented by Sutton’s selection.

In *Apostles of Reason*, Molly Worthen turns to the history of evangelical ideas. Worthen argues that an evangelical “crisis of authority” undergirds evangelical thought, attitudes toward education, and orientation toward society.²⁶ This crisis stems from an emphasis on *sola scriptura* in an individualist culture without the guidance of any magisterial authority. While Worthen tends to focus on debates among educated evangelical idea-makers and not on popular belief, this book provides a clear window into the forces that have shaped

²³ Sutton, *American Apocalypse*, 4. This in turn “gave Americans a language with which to make sense of tragedy.” Sutton, *American Apocalypse*, 370.

²⁴ Sutton, *American Apocalypse*, 3.

²⁵ The other three are neo-evangelicalism, premillennial populism and progressive evangelicals. Sutton, *American Apocalypse*, 351. Sutton’s use of sources also yields attention to black evangelicals. As white evangelicals saw the chaos of civil rights demonstrations in apocalyptic terms, Sutton highlights the fact that some black evangelicals did so in reverse. Smallwood Williams preached that whites were committing “last days-religious apostasy” by supporting segregation. “Prophecy,” says Sutton, “could cut both ways.” Sutton, *American Apocalypse*, 335.

²⁶ Molly Worthen, *Apostles of Reason*, 2.

evangelical thought from within. While it does not offer a complete explanation, Worthen's authority crisis may be the most valuable model yet for understanding the changing landscape of evangelical character and thought. These tensions of authority are integral for understanding evangelical openness to Catholic spirituality in the late twentieth-century.

Review of Scholarship on Evangelical-Catholic Relations

Historians have paid increasing attention to the role and motivations of evangelicals in the long past of antagonistic Protestant attitudes toward Roman Catholics. Ray Allen Billington explores nativist impulses against Roman Catholics in the nineteenth-century United States, with only a cursory exploration of the reasons for such sentiment among evangelicals.²⁷ John Higham places anti-Catholicism in the context of multiple religious, social and political factors, differentiating religious opposition to Catholicism from populist nativism.²⁸ John Wolffe further distinguishes "*religious* anti-Catholicism... and *political* anti-Catholicism," which he claims do not always correlate in the United States.²⁹ Wolffe argues that mid-nineteenth century evangelical (religious) anti-Catholicism in Britain and America was integrally tied to evangelical identity. Distinctive evangelical beliefs, including Bebbington's quadrilateral of conversionism, activism, Biblicism and crucicentrism (to which Wolffe adds individualism), reflected self-conscious contrasts with Roman Catholicism.³⁰ Perceived Catholic formalism, clericalism, uniformity and works-

²⁷ Ray Allen Billington, *The Protestant Crusade, 1800-1860: A Study of the Origins of American Nativism* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1964).

²⁸ John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New York: Atheneum, 1967), 5-6, 29.

²⁹ John Wolffe, "Anti-Catholicism and Evangelical Identity in Britain and the United States, 1830-1860," in *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, the British Isles, and Beyond, 1700-1990*, eds. Mark A. Noll, David W. Bebbington and George A. Rawlyk (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 186-187.

³⁰ Wolffe, "Anti-Catholicism and Evangelical Identity," 179, 181-184. Richard Lougheed similarly claims that "Anti-Catholicism was a defining characteristic of world-wide evangelicalism prior to Vatican II."

righteousness were part of the background against which mid-nineteenth-century evangelicals defined their own beliefs and practices, suggesting an ideological opposition that went deeper than mere prejudice.³¹ Wolffe's claims rightly highlight the entrenched evangelical attitudes of antagonism toward Catholicism that were embedded within eighteenth and nineteenth-century evangelicalism in America.³² These sentiments profoundly shaped perceptions of Catholicism in evangelicalism over the centuries, though recent decades have seen a softening of these attitudes.

Other historians have examined evangelical-Catholic interactions in the more recent past, noting twentieth-century shifts toward evangelical cooperation with Roman Catholics and openness to Catholic and classical Christian spirituality.³³ Neil J. Young explores ambivalent American evangelical attitudes toward the Second Vatican Council. Evangelicals, Young argues, were initially suspicious of the institution and theology of the Catholic Church.³⁴ Yet, with the council's promotion of Bible study, evangelicals began to forge individual relationships with Catholics. This enabled later political cooperation between evangelicals and Catholics as part of the Christian right.³⁵ Darren Dochuck similarly

Richard Loughheed, "Anti-Catholicism among French Canadian Protestants," *Historical Papers: Canadian Society of Church History* (1995): 164.

³¹ Wolffe, "Anti-Catholicism and Evangelical Identity," 181-184.

³² Patricia Appelbaum argues that the mid-nineteenth-century Protestant-Catholic encounter in America was not merely one of antagonism. Some Protestants, Appelbaum claims, responded to the influx of Catholic immigrants with an ambivalent mix of resistance, attraction, and selective appropriation of Catholic traditions. Such fascination was often tied in with growing medievalist and anti-modernist longings for a simpler world. Patricia Appelbaum, *St. Francis of America: How a Thirteenth-Century Friar Became America's Most Popular Saint* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 12-13. Appelbaum focuses primarily on upper- and middle-class liberal Protestant consumers of art and literature, who clearly do not represent the popular evangelical anti-Catholic sentiments of Wolffe's subjects. Nevertheless, Appelbaum demonstrates early softening in parts of American Protestantism toward Catholic ideas and figures, specifically Saint Francis of Assisi.

³³ Classical Christian spirituality here refers to traditional models and spiritual disciplines of Roman Catholic, Orthodox or Anglican traditions.

³⁴ Neil J. Young, "'A Saga of Sacrilege': Evangelicals Respond to the Second Vatican Council," in Schäfer, *American Evangelicals and the 1960s*, 265-269.

³⁵ Young, "'A Saga of Sacrilege,'" 272-275.

observes a softening of tensions between evangelicals and Catholics going back to at least the 1950s, but centred around cooperation in the conservative political and moral crusades beginning in the late 1970s.³⁶ Dochuck and Young effectively account for the attitudes of theologically and politically conservative evangelicals. They do not, however, address evangelical openness to Catholic spirituality and theology.

Molly Worthen offers a useful framework in which to place the growing evangelical-Catholic encounter. In contrast with scholars who trace Catholic-evangelical cooperation to the political battles of the late seventies, Worthen argues for earlier, stronger ties through the charismatic movement in the 1960s.³⁷ She also associates evangelical liturgical and neo-monastic renewal with a search for “premodern authority.”³⁸ This search, for Worthen, reflects anti-institutional impulses and selective individualism.³⁹ These “catholic” evangelicals who show interest in pre-Reformation traditions and practices are, for Worthen, “quintessentially evangelical.”⁴⁰ While not a complete explanation, her idea of an ongoing evangelical crisis of authority provides a helpful starting point for further explorations of this encounter.

Timothy Weber examines a group of evangelicals who converted to Eastern Orthodoxy during the late eighties. He identifies an evangelical quest for self-definition and identity in the seventies and eighties.⁴¹ Weber recognizes a growing catholicity and cross-tradition awareness in some parts of evangelicalism, made possible by the trans-denominational charismatic movement, the increasing study of church history, and attempts

³⁶ Dochuck, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt*, 346.

³⁷ Worthen, *Apostles of Reason*, 149, 157-158.

³⁸ Worthen, *Apostles of Reason*, 154-155.

³⁹ Worthen, *Apostles of Reason*, 161-162.

⁴⁰ Worthen, *Apostles of Reason*, 161.

⁴¹ Timothy P. Weber, “Looking for Home: Evangelical Orthodoxy and the Search for the Original Church,” in *New Perspectives on Historical Theology: Essays in Memory of John Meyendorff*, ed. Bradley Nassif (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 96-97.

to ground evangelical orthodoxy in historic Christianity.⁴² Yet, in the case of these Orthodox converts, their conversion also betrayed a primitivist drive to find the pure “New Testament Church,” paralleling earlier evangelical restorationist movements.⁴³ Weber’s work valuably uncovers a number of forces and assumptions at work in evangelical encounters with classical Christian confessions, though Weber leaves open the question of how evangelical identity confusion, historical awareness, and primitivist impulses affected evangelicals who did not convert to Orthodoxy (or Roman Catholicism).

While historians have surveyed earlier evangelical spirituality,⁴⁴ only a few have given attention to new appropriations of Catholic spirituality in the latter half of the twentieth century. Theologians, however, have taken note. David Parker identifies an emerging late twentieth-century interest in classical spirituality and spiritual formation, paralleling this spiritual formation stream with emerging liberation, prosperity and charismatic approaches to spirituality in the late twentieth century.⁴⁵ Parker contrasts the evangelical movement toward classical spirituality with “traditional” evangelical spirituality of “daily personal and family devotions, prayer meetings, Sunday observance, witnessing, holiness and surrender to the

⁴² Weber, “Looking for Home,” 99.

⁴³ Weber, “Looking for Home,” 105-106.

⁴⁴ James W. Gordon claims that, in spite of holding diverse opinions about spirituality, evangelicals share values of conversion, the centrality of the cross, the scriptural basis of spirituality and the need for sanctification. James M. Gordon, *Evangelical Spirituality: From the Wesleys to John Stott* (London: SPCK, 1991), 312-313. Ian Randall similarly claims that manifestations of evangelical England between the world wars reflect Bebbington’s quadrilateral of beliefs, though he finds differences in continuity with past evangelical tradition between conservative and liberal models of spirituality. Ian M. Randall, *Evangelical Experiences: A Study in the Spirituality of English Evangelicalism 1918-1939* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1988), 278, 270. Other scholars highlighted the Keswick, or “higher life,” holiness movement of the late nineteenth century and its pervasive influence on evangelical spirituality, suggesting it as a model that came to dominate much of evangelical devotionalism well into the twentieth century. David Bundy, “Keswick and the Experience of Evangelical Piety,” in *Modern Christian Revivals*, ed. Edith L. Blumhofer and Randall Balmer (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 118; Richard Ostrander, “The Battery and the Windmill: Two Models of Protestant Devotionalism in Early-Twentieth-Century America,” *Church History* 65, no. 1 (March 1996): 42-61; Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 153-169; Grant Wacker, “The Holy Spirit and the Spirit of the Age in American Protestantism, 1880-1910,” *The Journal of American History* 72, no. 1 (June 1985): 45-62.

⁴⁵ David Parker, “Evangelical Spirituality Reviewed,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 63, no. 2 (1991): 123.

will of God in daily vocation, personal morality and Christian service.”⁴⁶ According to Parker, evangelical interest in classical spirituality, with its sacramental theology and classical disciplines, is a response to an evangelical neglect of tradition and a loss in faith in traditional evangelical spiritual disciplines.⁴⁷ Parker’s exploration of this shift in spirituality indicates possible reasons that some evangelicals have looked to medieval Catholic saints such as Saint Francis as models for faith.

Reformed evangelical theologian Kenneth Stewart offers a critical response to the trends of evangelical conversions to Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy alongside the increasing evangelical interest in appropriating pre-Reformation Christian traditions. Stewart ties these trends to decaying Protestant traditions, an evangelical identity crisis brought on by a more open Catholic church after Vatican II, and the “allure” of Catholic claims to unbroken Christian orthodoxy.⁴⁸ Many evangelicals, Stewart claims, experience an “inferiority complex” when confronted with older Christian traditions, leading some to appropriate pre-Reformation devotional practices, aesthetics and spirituality.⁴⁹ While Stewart defends evangelical Protestantism as a whole from charges of neglecting Christian tradition, he does note anti-tradition sentiments among early twentieth-century Protestants and contemporary “isolationist, independent, and separatist stream[s] of evangelicalism”; this neglect drives some evangelicals to other Christian confessions.⁵⁰ Stewart highlights (and even underplays) anti-traditional dynamics that are present in many American evangelical

⁴⁶ Parker, “Evangelical Spirituality Reviewed,” 126. This list, particularly personal devotionalism and motifs of surrender, likely reflect the influence of Keswick spirituality.

⁴⁷ Parker, “Evangelical Spirituality Reviewed,” 124, 137.

⁴⁸ Kenneth Stewart, *In Search of Ancient Roots: The Christian Past and the Evangelical Identity Crisis* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2017), 3-5.

⁴⁹ Stewart, *In Search of Ancient Roots*, 6-7

⁵⁰ Stewart, *In Search of Ancient Roots*, 87, 262. Overall, Stewart disapproves the evangelical “smorgasbord-style sampling of” Christian tradition, and uncritical evangelical admiration of monasticism. Stewart, *In Search of Ancient Roots*, 12, 174-185.

circles that may drive both conversions and the eclectic, individualist tradition appropriation that Stewart critiques.⁵¹

Stewart, Parker, Weber, Worthen and others bring needed attention to growing evangelical interest in pre-Reformation Christian traditions and Catholic spirituality, and uncover some driving reasons behind these trends. Little attention, however, has been given to the phenomenon or significance of evangelical appropriation of Catholic saints. Such an examination would bring greater clarity to the extent and evolution of recent evangelical-Catholic encounters.

Review of Scholarship on Saint Francis in Contemporary Culture

Several scholars have explored appropriations of Saint Francis of Assisi in contemporary culture. Lucinda Matthews-Jones highlights the influential role played by the idealization of Saint Francis in forming religious images of masculinity that imbued parts of the London settlement house movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁵² In a treatment of the same era, Ellen Ross explores the lives of two West London Protestant “Franciscan” women in the 1890s who, through their exposure to French Protestant Paul Sabatier’s popular biography of Saint Francis, devoted themselves to material renunciation and experimental models of social activism among the poor.⁵³

André Vauchez’s study on Saint Francis of Assisi, recently translated into English, includes an exploration of the saint’s contemporary legacy in the modern world. Vauchez notes the evolving, unclear, and contradictory images of Saint Francis in Western culture,

⁵¹ Stewart, *In Search of Ancient Roots*, 264-265.

⁵² Lucinda Matthews-Jones, “St Francis of Assisi and the Making of Settlement Masculinity, 1883-1914,” in *What is Masculinity? Historical Dynamics from Antiquity to the Contemporary World*, ed. John H. Arnold and Sean Brady (Palgrave: MacMillan, 2011), 285-302.

⁵³ Ellen Ross, “St. Francis in Soho: Emmeline Pethick, Mary Neal, the West London Wesleyan Mission, and the Allure of ‘Simple Living’ in the 1890s,” *Church History* 83, no. 4 (December 2014): 843-883.

evoked to support causes ranging from Catholic orthodoxy to socialism to ecology to Christian-Muslim dialogue after the September 11, 2001 attacks.⁵⁴ “Why is he invoked even today” Vauchez wonders, “in order to legitimate all kinds of ideologies and aspirations, some of which have little to do with what we know of his personality and life?”⁵⁵ Vauchez proposes that Saint Francis is perceived by the modern world as the ideal, authentic Christian, and one whose appeal, like Gandhi or Martin Luther King, Jr., extends beyond “confessional and ideological divisions.”⁵⁶ Vauchez criticizes many “quasi-messianic” and “dehumanizing” interpretations of Saint Francis that have the effect of denying his historical human reality.⁵⁷ Vauchez aptly captures, in brief, major motifs in contemporary interpretations of Saint Francis, especially the central perception of Saint Francis as a true, authentic Christian.

John Victor Tolan traces the long history of interpretation of Saint Francis’ encounter with the Egyptian Sultan al-Malk al-Kâmil during the fifth crusade. He finds a turn in the twentieth century, when interpreters began to emphasize peace, religious tolerance, and dialogue, replacing earlier, triumphalist, pro-Western, and anti-Islamic interpretations of the encounter.⁵⁸ Overall, claims Tolan, interpreters of all times tend to adapt the story to their own cultural and ideological values through “a voluntary deformation of the medieval sources.”⁵⁹ While much (though by no means all) of Tolan’s study focuses on Catholic sources, he sheds light on common motifs for understanding Francis, and demonstrates how cultural values perennially reshape the image of Saint Francis.

⁵⁴ André Vauchez, *Francis of Assisi: The Life and Afterlife of a Medieval Saint*, trans. Michael F. Custado (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 239-243.

⁵⁵ Vauchez, *Francis of Assisi*, 244.

⁵⁶ Vauchez, *Francis of Assisi*, 244-245.

⁵⁷ Vauchez, *Francis of Assisi*, 246.

⁵⁸ John Victor Tolan, *Saint Francis and the Sultan: The Curious History of a Christian-Muslim Encounter* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 16.

⁵⁹ Tolan, *Saint Francis and the Sultan*, 16, 12, 324.

Patricia Appelbaum's book *Saint Francis in America* contributes significantly to the study of Saint Francis' legacy for Protestants and Americans in general. Appelbaum locates Saint Francis' introduction to American non-Catholics in eighteenth-century middle class exposure to art, travel, literature, and the emerging discipline of church history.⁶⁰ While early Protestant interpreters approached Francis with caution, the influence of popular biographies, especially that of French Protestant Paul Sabatier, cemented Saint Francis' image as a true Christian by the early twentieth century.⁶¹ Appelbaum explores the Saint Francis of early twentieth-century social gospel reformers and pacifists,⁶² the unthreatening Francis of post-Second World War conservative "consensus culture,"⁶³ and the more radical image of an anti-materialist, anti-war, environmentally-conscious, and "authentic" Saint Francis of 1960s and 1970s counterculture.⁶⁴ Appelbaum finds that interpretations of Francis are shaped by historical forces; "they reflect the cultural preoccupations of their time."⁶⁵ At the same time, interpreters often invoke Francis as an alternative to prevailing cultural norms.⁶⁶

Appelbaum's study includes several evangelical interpreters of Saint Francis. She contends that evangelicals showed wider acceptance to Francis in the early 1980s.⁶⁷ Comparing them to liberal Protestant interpreters from the turn of the century, Appelbaum claims that late twentieth-century evangelicals tended to see Francis as a model Christian.⁶⁸ Appelbaum observes *Christianity Today* editor Mark Galli's characteristic interest in

⁶⁰ Appelbaum, *St. Francis of America*, 11-30.

⁶¹ Appelbaum, *St. Francis of America*, 35.

⁶² Appelbaum, *St. Francis of America*, 39.

⁶³ Appelbaum, *St. Francis of America*, 89.

⁶⁴ Appelbaum, *St. Francis of America*, 113.

⁶⁵ Appelbaum, *St. Francis of America*, 4.

⁶⁶ Appelbaum, *St. Francis of America*, 4.

⁶⁷ Appelbaum, *St. Francis of America*, 139.

⁶⁸ Appelbaum, *St. Francis of America*, 139.

evangelism, the Bible, and Christian discipleship in his portrayal of Francis.⁶⁹ Appelbaum notes that evangelicals connected with the “emerging church” place a more postmodern emphasis on Saint Francis that nevertheless bears similarity to early liberal Protestant images of the saint.⁷⁰

The inclusion of evangelical voices is notable in Appelbaum’s broad survey of Saint Francis in American culture. Building on Appelbaum’s excellent work, I seek to expand the study of evangelical appropriations of Saint Francis. These interpretations of Francis vary widely, and are best understood within the recent history of evangelical movements, fragmentation, changing spirituality, and evangelical relationships to American culture. Additionally, some evangelicals in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries went beyond mere appreciation of Saint Francis; like Ross’s nineteenth-century London activists, they followed Francis’ example in monastic-inspired community and service among the poor. An in-depth look at evangelical appropriations of Saint Francis helps to address significant developments in evangelical spirituality and culture, and highlights uniquely evangelical Protestant responses to the medieval saint.

Conclusion

Historical scholarship on American evangelicalism in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries is increasingly maturing in its understanding of evangelical social orientations, politics, diversity, and thought. The relationship between American evangelicals and Roman Catholics and Catholic spirituality is also receiving necessary scholarly attention. The examination of American evangelical appropriations of Saint Francis of Assisi in this thesis contributes to a deeper understanding of forces motivating and contributing to

⁶⁹ Appelbaum, *St. Francis of America*, 169.

⁷⁰ Appelbaum, *St. Francis of America*, 170.

evangelical religious change, as well as the evolving attitudes of evangelicals toward Catholicism and Catholic spirituality. This thesis likewise expands on studies of Saint Francis' reception in American culture by examining evangelical attitudes toward Saint Francis. This thesis explores this story of the growing evangelical appreciation and appropriation of the poor medieval Italian monk.

Chapter 2
Saint Francis and Ancient-Future Evangelical Spirituality

Introduction

In his 1978 bestselling book *The Celebration of Discipline*, evangelical Quaker devotional author Richard Foster called his readers to a meditation on nature. After offering advice on the study of books (including *The Little Flowers of Saint Francis*), Foster presents the example of Saint Francis of Assisi's love for creation. He tells his readers:

to make friends with the flowers and the trees and the little creatures that creep upon the earth ... There is certainly a communication that goes beyond words—and animals, even plants, seem to respond to our friendship and compassion. I know this because I have experimented with it and so have some first-rate scientists, and we have found it to be true. Perhaps the stories of St. Francis of Assisi taming the wolf of Gubbio and preaching to the birds are not so farfetched.¹

Saint Francis' interactions and conversations with animals were, for Foster, historical possibilities and archetypes for emulation.

While it might be surprising that a medieval saint was presented to evangelicals as a model for a mystical connection to nature, Foster was not alone in his love for the poor man of Assisi. Foster and other evangelical spiritual writers looked to Francis as a link to what they saw as authentic and transformative spirituality, and as inspiration for evangelical spiritual practices based on older classical Christian traditions. Saint Francis emerged as a figure whom these evangelicals considered an authoritative, authentic Christian guide for promoting the recovery of lost traditions of Christian spirituality.

This chapter first summarizes several important changes in evangelical spirituality in the twentieth century. It then explores ancient-future movements that advocated for a return to pre-Reformation Christian traditions as aids for spiritual and theological renewal, and

¹ Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1998), 64.

interpretations of Saint Francis by Richard Foster and Dallas Willard, who advocated for an evangelical recovery of classical Christian spiritual disciplines.

Late Nineteenth and Twentieth-Century Evangelical Spirituality

The “Victorious Life” or “Higher Life” holiness movement had a profound influence on the direction of evangelical spirituality during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.² Representatives of this transatlantic movement, often associated with Keswick, England, where popular conferences were held, argued that through intentional times of waiting on God and surrender to the Holy Spirit, Christians would receive sanctification, relief from anxiety, and power for holy living and mission.³ Preachers of this movement such as Hannah Whitall Smith, F. B. Meyer, Andrew Murray and Charles G. Trumbull, claimed that full surrender to God’s will and faith in Christ’s promises makes way for the Spirit’s work in a Christian’s life to subdue a believer’s sinful nature; this was presented as an often-instantaneous sanctification by faith.⁴ The Keswick legacy shaped the prevailing spiritual ethos among nineteenth and twentieth-century American evangelicals, its influence so

² Douglas Frank contends that Victorious Life thought, alongside premillennial dispensationalism, “became the backbone of the fundamentalist movement in American evangelicalism” beginning in the early twentieth century. The movement’s emphases were felt across the Protestant world, especially among those trained for ministry. Douglas W. Frank, *Less than Conquerors: How Evangelicals Entered the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans, 1986), 114-115.

³ David Bebbington traces Methodist, Quaker and Brethren influences in the emergence of the Keswick movement in Britain. He claims that Keswick spirituality parallels secular self-improvement ideology and reflects the thought of the Romantic Movement. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989), 153-169. See also Grant Wacker, “The Holy Spirit and the Spirit of the Age in American Protestantism, 1880-1910,” *The Journal of American History* 72, no. 1 (June 1985): 45-62. Focusing on the American context, Douglas Frank places the Victorious Life focus on overcoming worry in the growing self-anxiety of the pressures of modern industrial life at the turn of the century and the middle-class quest for wealth. He also draws parallels between Victorious Life thought and secular proponents of the “mind cure” movement of the early twentieth-century. Frank, *Less than Conquerors*, 123-129, 145-157.

⁴ While influenced by John Wesley’s idea of sinless perfection, most Victorious Life proponents held that a person’s sinful nature is not removed, only “crucified.” Frank, *Less than Conquerors*, 114.

thorough that few evangelicals were aware of the roots of these holiness ideas.⁵ One outcome was the evangelical practice of a daily personal “quiet time” of prayer and surrender to God’s will.⁶

New movements of evangelical spirituality began to replace Higher Life thought in the late twentieth century. The charismatic movement, already begun in the late 1950s, marked the introduction of Pentecostal “gifts of the spirit,” such as speaking in tongues, healing, and prophecy, into non-Pentecostal Protestant and Catholic churches, including evangelical churches. Some circles saw a growing message of God’s material blessing for the faithful, which came to be called the “prosperity gospel.”⁷ Other evangelicals called for spiritual renewal through the recovery of ancient Christian spiritual practices;⁸ they sought to find evangelicalism’s future in the Christian past.⁹

Ancient-Future Evangelicals

In 1976 and 1977, a number of evangelical pastors, professors and seminarians met in Warrenville, Illinois at the National Conference of Evangelicals for Historic Christianity. They were drawn together by their perception of evangelical shortcomings that could be

⁵ Douglas Frank notes this pervasive influence as well as the recurrence of language about the higher Christian life into the 1980s among students at Wheaton College and Moody Bible Institute. Frank, *Less than Conquerors*, 154.

⁶ Richard Ostrander contrasts the time-consuming, world-denying inclinations of Keswick spirituality in the early twentieth century with liberal theological tendencies to embrace modern life and adjust spiritual practices accordingly. Nevertheless, Ostrander notes that Keswick spirituality ultimately accommodated to allowing shorter, quicker modern prayer, as seen in Lettie Cowman’s *Streams in the Desert*. Richard Ostrander, “The Battery and the Windmill: Two Models of Protestant Devotionalism in Early-Twentieth-Century America,” *Church History* 65, no. 1 (March 1996): 42-61. Theologian David Parker’s description of what he considers traditional evangelical spirituality consisting of “daily personal and family devotions, prayer meetings, Sunday observance, witnessing, holiness and surrender to the will of God in daily devotion, personal morality and Christian service” bears Keswick’s imprint. Parker, “Evangelical Spirituality Reviewed,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 63, no. 2 (1991): 128.

⁷ For an exploration of the charismatic and prosperity gospel movements, see Chapter Three of this thesis.

⁸ David Parker highlights varieties of evangelical spirituality in the late twentieth century, including Quaker, liberation, prosperity, charismatic, and classical Christian spirituality. Parker, “Evangelical Spirituality Reviewed,” 123.

⁹ Chris Armstrong, “The Future Lies in the Past,” *Christianity Today*, Feb 2008, 22-29.

corrected by theological, biblical, sacramental and spiritual renewal through connection with Reformation and pre-Reformation church tradition. Spearheaded by Wheaton professor Robert Webber, the group also included Campus Crusade for Christ evangelist Peter Gillquist and Thomas Howard, brother of the popular writer Elizabeth Elliot.

While a few attendees later converted to older Christian confessions,¹⁰ the delegates focused on calling evangelicals to renewal through attention to tradition. They issued “The Chicago Call” outlining their vision. According to Robert Webber, these evangelicals saw themselves as a reform movement in continuity with the evangelical traditions of earlier generations. As during the neo-evangelical movement in the 1950s, evangelicalism was again in need of reform—this time, a reform of turning to the past.¹¹

A year later, Webber published *Common Roots*, appealing to the early church for correctives to evangelical shortcomings, including in the realm of spirituality.¹² The Protestant Reformers, Webber claims, problematically broke with “a vast reservoir of spirituality” in the pre-Reformation church, including the monastic movements of Bernard of Clairvaux and Francis of Assisi.¹³ “Unfortunately,” Webber states, “when the Reformers attempted to rid the church of her bad habits of devotion such as the excessive emphasis on

¹⁰ Thomas Howard became Roman Catholic, publishing the aptly named *Evangelical is Not Enough* in 1984. Thomas Howard, *Evangelical is Not Enough: Worship of God in Liturgy and Sacrament* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers, 1984). Peter Gillquist, along with Job Braun and others associated with Campus Crusade for Christ, led a large-scale conversion into the Eastern Orthodox Church. See Peter Gillquist, *Becoming Orthodox: A Journey to the Ancient Christian Faith* (Ben Lomond: Conciliar Press, 1989); Peter Gillquist, ed., *Coming Home: Why Protestant Clergy are Becoming Orthodox* (Ben Lomond: Conciliar Press, 1992); Timothy P. Weber, “Looking for Home: Evangelical Orthodoxy and the Search for the Original Church,” in *New Perspectives on Historical Theology: Essays in Memory of John Meyendorff*, ed. Bradley Nassif (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 95-121. Robert Webber joined the Episcopalian church. Anglican churches, particularly in the UK, have long had an evangelical wing. See Robert Webber, *Evangelicals on the Canterbury Trail: Why Evangelicals are Attracted to the Liturgical Church* (Waco: Word Books, 1985). Many of these converts still claimed to embrace evangelical values.

¹¹ Robert Webber, “Behind The Scenes: A Personal Account,” in *The Orthodox Evangelicals*, ed. Robert Webber and Donald Bloesch, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers, 1978), 19.

¹² Robert Webber, *Common Roots: A Call to Evangelical Maturity* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), 8.

¹³ Webber, *Common Roots*, 219.

Mary, a preoccupation with the saints, the worship of relics, and devotion to the host, she failed to retain other positive approaches to spirituality which [sic] had always characterized the church.”¹⁴ Evangelical spirituality now needed correction through exposure to the traditional devotional resources of the early church, medieval church, and Catholic Reformation.¹⁵ Richard Lovelace, a Gordon-Conwell Church historian and participant in the conference, similarly defended medieval monasticism to skeptical evangelicals. He called Christian monks “the first Christian counterculture,” paralleled with Jesus movement communes of the 1960s and 1970s.¹⁶ These calls for revitalization of evangelical theology, worship and spirituality through the retrieval of neglected Christian traditions came to be known as the “ancient-future” movement, a term coined by Webber. The Chicago Call did not have widespread impact among American evangelicals, but calls for the renewal of classical Christian spiritual disciplines fell on willing ears.

The Saint and Guide

Ancient Christian disciplines found a popular advocate in Richard Foster. As a young pastor of an Evangelical Friends Church in California, Foster felt he possessed inadequate spiritual resources to serve the intense needs of his congregants.¹⁷ This led him to turn to “the Devotional Masters of the Christian Faith—Augustine of Hippo and Francis of Assisi and

¹⁴ Webber, *Common Roots*, 220.

¹⁵ Webber, *Common Roots*, 230-231, 236-237. Webber’s list of recommendations includes Bernard de Clairvaux, Augustine, Thomas A Kempis, Teresa of Avilla, Meister Eckhart, George Fox and Thomas Merton among others.

¹⁶ Richard Lovelace, “A Call to Historic Roots and Continuity,” in Webber, *The Orthodox Evangelicals*, 52.

¹⁷ While Quakers have a largely separate history from other evangelicals, some Quaker groups shared major evangelical concerns for biblical fidelity and evangelism. They came under the influence of fundamentalist and later neo-evangelical ideas in the twentieth century. Timothy James Burdick traces the influence of fundamentalism and neo-evangelicalism among some Oregon Quakers in the early twentieth-century. Timothy James Burdick, “Neo-Evangelical Identity within American Religious Society of Friends (Quakers): Oregon Yearly Meeting, 1919-1947” (PhD diss., University of Birmingham, 2013).

Julian of Norwich and many others.”¹⁸ His reading was an eclectic mix of Christian spiritual traditions.¹⁹ Through Baptist philosopher Dallas Willard, Foster was exposed to the importance of the “classical spiritual disciplines” like fasting, prayer, meditation and service.

In 1978 Foster published the popular *Celebration of Discipline*.²⁰ Foster’s book calls Christians to recover classical disciplines, providing practical instructions on their implementation.²¹ The book reflects his wide-ranging interest in Christian devotional writers from many traditions. For Foster, these “‘saints’ as we sometimes called them” represented true committed Christian discipleship.²²

One of Foster’s spiritual heroes was Saint Francis of Assisi. Foster cites the visit between Dominic and Francis as an example of humble silence.²³ He lauds Francis’ embrace of humility as an alternative to “self-righteous service,”²⁴ and upholds Francis’ interactions with creation as a model for communion with nature.²⁵ For Foster, Francis is a prime model for what he sees as authentic Christian spirituality and discipleship.

Foster’s embrace of Saint Francis is not without some reservations. He offers qualifications for wary readers, acknowledging medieval excesses in fasting.²⁶ But Foster also defends Francis. Foster recounts the story of a conversation between Saint Francis and Brother Leo about true joy found in humility, in “willingly enduring sufferings, insults,

¹⁸ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1998), xiii.

¹⁹ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 3rd ed., xiv.

²⁰ *Christianity Today* named Foster’s book number eight in their list of 100 books of the century, notably appearing alongside Catholics J. R. R. Tolkien, Thomas Merton and G. K. Chesterton. “CT Book Awards 2000: Books of the Century,” *Christianity Today*, April 24, 2000, 92-93. *Celebration of Discipline* was also number eleven in another *Christianity Today* list of fifty books that influenced evangelicals. David Neff, “The Top Books that have Shaped Evangelicals,” *Christianity Today*, October 2006, 55.

²¹ Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1978), 1.

²² Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 3rd ed., xiv.

²³ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 1st ed., 89.

²⁴ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 1st ed., 112, 116.

²⁵ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 1st ed., 64.

²⁶ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 1st ed., 41.

humiliations, and hardships for the love of Christ.”²⁷ “We find these words hard to deal with today” states Foster, citing some characteristic Protestant concerns: “We fear that such an attitude will lead irrevocably down the path of excessive asceticism and self-mortification.”²⁸ Citing Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Foster advocates for a middle ground between a “worm theology” and an outright rejection of ascetic practices.²⁹ Foster introduced Saint Francis, and classical spiritual disciplines, to a wary but hungry evangelical Protestant audience.

After the wide reception of *Celebration of Discipline*, Foster authored another book focused on the discipline of simplicity. In the book, Saint Francis and the first Franciscans stand alongside the Desert Fathers, John Wesley, Blaise Pascal and others as models of true Christian simplicity.³⁰ Drawing on Paul Sabatier’s influential biography of Saint Francis, Foster highlights Francis and the Franciscan’s “unusual combination of mystical contemplation and evangelistic fervor,”³¹ their preaching, singing and joy.³² “They led a cheerful, happy revolt,” Foster claims, “against the spirit of materialism and double-mindedness.”³³ They are saints for a consumer age.³⁴

As before, Foster presents Saint Francis a spiritual model, but argues for caution in following his example. Saint Francis is a “healthy model of celibacy,” which is “essential for some expressions of simplicity,” but he counsels those who are married not to try to live like

²⁷ Brother Ungino di Monte Santa Maria, *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1968), 58-60 quoted in Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 1st ed., 116.

²⁸ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 1st ed., 116.

²⁹ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 1st ed., 116.

³⁰ Richard J. Foster, *Freedom of Simplicity* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1981), 58.

³¹ Foster, *Freedom of Simplicity*, 59.

³² Foster, *Freedom of Simplicity*, 60.

³³ Foster, *Freedom of Simplicity*, 61

³⁴ Ron Sider’s *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, released in 1972, marked another earlier call for evangelicals to reject excessive materialism and the inequality of capitalism. Foster recommends Sider’s book to his readers. Foster, *Freedom of Simplicity*, 70. For the broader politically progressive evangelical movement of the late twentieth century, see Chapter Three of this thesis.

Francis.³⁵ Foster includes practical considerations on following Saint Francis' example for people in different stations in life.³⁶ Though caution is needed, Foster claims that Saint Francis' simplicity and joy are worthy of emulation.³⁷

Foster continued to give Saint Francis a significant place in his prolific spiritual writing.³⁸ In *Money, Sex and Power* (1985) Foster reflects on the Franciscan vows of chastity, poverty and obedience, and offers a more accessible trio of fidelity, simplicity and service to everyday Christians.³⁹ Foster depicts Saint Francis as reforming prophet aiming to reshape the institutional Church from within.⁴⁰

In a 2009 book co-authored by Foster and Gayle Beebe, the authors highlight Saint Francis as a model for pursuing intimacy with Jesus. The authors include the story of Francis' vision of Christ and receiving of the stigmata to introduce the theme of the imitation of Christ.⁴¹ Saint Francis is "evangelical" in his concern for the message of the gospels, and his simple speech confirms him as "one of the earliest vernacular theologians."⁴² Their narrative of the life of Saint Francis highlights Francis' imitation of Christ, his reliance on the

³⁵ Foster, *Freedom of Simplicity*, 61.

³⁶ Foster, *Freedom of Simplicity*, 116.

³⁷ Foster, *Freedom of Simplicity*, 102.

³⁸ In two collections of devotional writings Foster co-edited, selections from and about Francis and Clare of Assisi appear alongside Foster's usual diverse array of Protestant, Orthodox and Catholic writers from throughout Christian history. Richard J. Foster and James Bryan Smith, eds., *Devotional Classic: Selected Readings for Individuals and Groups* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1993), 39; Richard J. Foster and Emilie Griffen, eds., *Spiritual Classics: Selected Readings for Individuals and Groups on the Twelve Spiritual Disciplines* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2000), 134.

³⁹ Richard J. Foster, *Money, Sex and Power: The Challenge of the Disciplined Life* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985). Foster also reflects on this trio in Foster and Griffen, eds., *Spiritual Classics*, 137.

⁴⁰ Richard J. Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1992), 251.

⁴¹ Richard J. Foster and Gayle D. Beebe, *Longing For God: Seven Paths of Christian Devotion* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2009), 121.

⁴² Foster and Beebe, *Longing for God*, 125.

Holy Spirit, sacramental view of creation, the centrality of the church, the significance of the Eucharist, Christian community, living the gospel in action, and the importance of virtues.⁴³

For Richard Foster, Saint Francis was a model of the truly Christian life, in his simplicity, zeal, preaching and prayer. Foster sought to offer the guidance of Saint Francis' medieval piety to twentieth-century American believers. In so doing, Foster qualified the more radical moves of Francis and his early companions. Saint Francis was a model to follow in spirit, but not always in letter. Alongside a cacophony of other spiritual heroes from diverse Christian traditions, Saint Francis served as an "authentic" Christian guide to evangelicals seeking a new depth of spiritual discipline and experience that they could not find in popular expressions of evangelical Protestantism.

Saint Francis the Irresponsible

A University of Southern California professor of philosophy and Baptist named Dallas Willard had introduced Richard Foster to the importance of classical spiritual disciplines.⁴⁴ Willard began teaching about the spiritual disciplines in the 1970s. After the enormous success of *Celebration of Discipline*, Foster, Willard and others founded the organization Renovaré, and became popular figureheads of the movement dedicated to spreading the message of spiritual formation among evangelical Christians.

Published ten years after *Celebration of Discipline*, Willard's *The Spirit of the Disciplines* offered a discussion on similar paths to spiritual growth. Willard introduces Saint Francis in his treatment of wealth and poverty. Willard argues that poverty is not inherently

⁴³ Foster and Beebe, *Longing for God*, 126-127. The emphasis on the lived gospel ties in with the "activism" identified by David Bebbington as a distinctive marker of evangelicals. Many of the other emphases, however, are of a more Catholic or high church bent.

⁴⁴ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 1st ed., xi.

spiritual, distinguishing the use of wealth from trust in wealth.⁴⁵ Willard disagrees with widespread attitudes of judgment against wealth and the wealthy, especially by those influenced by liberation theology.⁴⁶ Poverty, for Willard, is no virtue, but generosity is: “If giving more is good, having more is also good.”⁴⁷ Willard focuses on the positive effects of giving, only briefly addressing temptations associated with riches.

Saint Francis and Saint Anthony of Egypt are Willard’s examples of people who literally followed Jesus’ command to the rich young ruler to give away all he had.⁴⁸ Willard interprets these saints’ calls to poverty as personal exceptions that should not be imitated. Their literal obedience was “a powerful statement to their times and ours,” but that does not give poverty any spiritual merit.⁴⁹ Willard argues for an inward freedom from the rule of greed and for the need to train Christians to manage wealth rightly and target the roots of poverty. But to give away all, like Saint Francis, is to “abandon the goods of the world to the enemies of God.”⁵⁰ Willard sees essential dangers in a Franciscan idealization of poverty, and notes the inability of Franciscans, other than the schismatic Fraticelli,⁵¹ to live out Francis’ renunciation of wealth.⁵² For Willard, such a glorified poverty is not like the true poverty of the poor, whose “crushing deprivation and helplessness” is anything but simple.⁵³

⁴⁵ Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 195.

⁴⁶ Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 196. Willard implicates John Wesley in this indictment, questioning Wesley’s call for the rich to give everything away and the praise he heaped on a minister who died with few possessions. Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 197-198. Liberation theology was a diverse post-colonial movement primarily arising out of Latin America. It challenged the inequalities of the global capitalist system and American imperialism through theologies emphasizing the liberating narratives of the Bible, particularly the Exodus and the Old Testament prophets in particular.

⁴⁷ Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 199.

⁴⁸ See Mark 10:17-23.

⁴⁹ Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 201.

⁵⁰ Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 202.

⁵¹ The Fraticelli was a late thirteenth-century group of schismatic Franciscans who sought rigorous obedience to the Rule of Saint Francis, considered heretical by the Roman Catholic Church.

⁵² Willard accuses the Franciscans of an “implicit Manichaeism” in their idealization of poverty. Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 203.

⁵³ Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 203-204.

Christians should instead try to be with the poor and serve them effectively.⁵⁴ For Willard, Saint Francis' call to poverty is no model for contemporary Christian emulation; rather, Willard's Francis is a distant saint whose poverty is out of bounds.

Willard's view of Saint Francis, however, was not only critical. In *Divine Conspiracy* Willard later explored the need for Protestants to look to saints in cultivating Christian discipleship. He advocates for

seriously looking at the lives of others who have truly apprenticed themselves to [Christ]... To look closely at a Saint Francis, a John Wesley, a David Brainerd, an Albert Schweitzer, or one of his many well-known Theresas, for example, is to see something that elevates our vision and our hope toward Jesus himself. We should, however, make sure to soak our soul in the Gospels before turning to the lives of his followers.⁵⁵

Saint Francis takes his place among other models of faith to be interpreted critically. Willard shows characteristic evangelical biblicist reservations to an uncritical emulation of Roman Catholic saints and other Christian traditions, yet he presents Saint Francis and others as true disciples of Christ and inspirations for modern Christians.

Conclusion

Foster, Willard and others offered Saint Francis alongside a host of figures from throughout Christian history for the spiritual edification of evangelicals. Their eclectic Christian spirituality that looked outside evangelical Protestant traditions for spiritual guides served as a new approach to evangelical spirituality in America. While his poverty was out of bounds for Willard, Saint Francis of Assisi served for Willard, Foster and others as a noteworthy model for the pursuit of transformative Christian discipleship. The appeal of these authors to recover classical spiritual disciplines made a particular mark on evangelical

⁵⁴ Willard also qualifies Jesus' blessings and woes about the rich and poor, arguing against interpreting the beatitudes as legalistic prescriptions. Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 207-208.

⁵⁵ Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1998), 297.

Protestants in America, and helped to introduce Saint Francis to evangelicals suspicious of Catholicism.

Increasingly, some evangelicals like Foster were willing to throw out many Protestant reservations and embrace the medieval saint. That Saint Francis of Assisi showed so much appeal for evangelicals itself indicates changes in evangelical spirituality. While Higher Life spirituality's emphasis on victorious Christian living, alongside a dualism between sacred and secular life, dominated earlier evangelical thought, the incarnational spirituality of Saint Francis and other ancient and medieval Christians, provided an alternative for evangelicals. This may not have been an intentional turn. In his eclectic spirituality, Foster drew from some Keswick figures like Hannah Whitall Smith and Andrew Murray.⁵⁶ Yet overall Foster, Willard, and other advocates for spiritual formation through classical Christian disciplines represent an alternative to the passive and inwardly focused faith of Higher Life holiness. Foster advocates for more sacramental, incarnational spirituality that is affirming of ordinary human life, not just the separatist and missionary emphasis of Keswick teaching; this is especially true where Foster draws from Catholic and Orthodox monastic traditions. Likewise, the popularity of Saint Francis and interactions between evangelicals and Catholics in the charismatic movement gave evangelicals new resources and figures to turn to for spiritual renewal.⁵⁷ Many evangelicals increasingly saw non-Protestant and especially pre-Reformation Christian traditions as holding promise where they thought evangelical Protestant spirituality was lacking.

Yet the ancient-future and spiritual formation movements were not mere correctives to spirituality seen as inadequate or simply challenges to an old system; they were also

⁵⁶ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 3rd ed., 36, 192.

⁵⁷ See Chapter Three, Footnote 15 of this thesis.

responses to dwindling participation of evangelicals in traditional Protestant practices of piety—prayer, Bible reading and the like.⁵⁸ The novelty of figures such as Foster is that in an attempt to lead evangelicals to prayer he drew on the inspiration of a medieval Catholic saint. The secret for ensuring the vitality of the future of evangelical spirituality lay in the past.

⁵⁸ Wade Clark Roof finds declining practices of traditional evangelical piety, such as personal and family prayer, among baby boomer believers. Wade Clark Roof, *A Generation of Seekers: The Spiritual Journeys of the Baby Boom Generation* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1993), 109.

Chapter 3

Saint Francis of Azusa (or Pasadena): Charismatic Evangelicals and Saint Francis

Introduction

In his 1997 *Streams of Living Water*, Richard Foster weighed in on the growing charismatic movement, where Protestants and Catholics, and evangelicals in particular, were turning to the “gifts of the Holy Spirit”—tongues, prophecy and the like. In the book, which celebrates what Foster calls the great Christian traditions, the story of “Franchesco” introduces his charismatic chapter.¹ Foster identifies Saint Francis as charismatic “because of the striking power in the Spirit that surrounded all that Francis did and said.”² Foster shares stories of dramatic miracles, including the meeting between Saint Francis and Saint Clare, in which onlookers saw spiritual flames engulfing the Church of St. Mary.³ The taming of the wolf of Gubbio represents a “dramatic act [of] the Shalom of God.”⁴ Foster also highlights the saint’s exuberant joy, possibly tacitly defending stories of controversial “holy laughter” revivals, like that of the Toronto Airport Vineyard in the mid-1990s.⁵ “Holy Joy,” claims Foster, “is one of the most common marks of those who walk in the power of the Spirit, and Francis and his merry band possessed it in abundance.”⁶ For Foster, the life of Saint Francis

¹ Saint Francis appears alongside a number of what Foster considers to be charismatic figures in church history, including, among others, the Apostle Paul, the Montanists, Joan of Arc, George Fox, John Wesley, William Seymour, Aimee Semple McPherson and John Wimber himself. The inclusion of the Montanists, considered heretical by early orthodox Christians, is unusual.

² Richard J. Foster, *Streams of Living Water: Celebrating the Great Traditions of the Christian Faith* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1998), 100.

³ Foster, *Streams of Living Water*, 101.

⁴ Foster, *Streams of Living Water*, 102.

⁵ The controversial but influential “Toronto blessing” laughter phenomenon began when Randy Clark from the St. Louis Vineyard preached in the Toronto Airport Vineyard in 1994. Under the leadership of John Arnott, the movement came to be characterized by laughter, shaking and falling, and even animal noises attributed to the work of the Holy Spirit. John Wimber himself cut ties between the Vineyard denomination and the Toronto church, later renamed Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship, then subsequently renamed Catch the Fire. See Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1997), 277.

⁶ Foster, *Streams of Living Water*, 104. However, Foster adds that their joy could be solemn, not merely superficial. Foster, *Streams of Living Water*, 106.

“was rich in miracles and healings, signs and wonders, revelations and visions.”⁷ Foster uses Saint Francis as a historic example of charismatic signs and wonders.

However, Foster also invokes Saint Francis to critique charismatic excesses. “Power is not an end of itself,” Foster warns.⁸ Francis’ spiritual power was connected to his spiritual growth in the fruit of the spirit and in virtues. The miracles around Francis were as much inward as outward. Virtues, not simply spiritual power, “are the energies of the converted life.”⁹ Foster seeks to orient his readers to a healthy view of Spirit empowerment and away from a fascination with power and the miraculous as such.¹⁰ Yet his exploration also communicates to skeptical audiences the value of such charismatic experiences. “I commend Francis of Assisi to you,” Foster tells his readers, “as a model of charismatic jubilee.”¹¹

While Richard Foster attempted to bridge eclectic spiritual movements, some neo-charismatic evangelicals also saw Saint Francis as a kindred spirit.¹² They did not necessarily share Foster’s guarded attitude toward spiritual power. These neo-charismatic leaders drew on Saint Francis’ miracles and mysticism to defend their own controversial practices, and to serve as an archetype for spiritual power and mystical encounters. For others, Saint Francis was a saint to admire from a distance, whose poverty was incompatible with the growing prosperity gospel emphasis on the blessing of wealth. Yet, in the minds of these neo-

⁷ Foster, *Streams of Living Water*, 102.

⁸ Foster, *Streams of Living Water*, 103.

⁹ Foster, *Streams of Living Water*, 104.

¹⁰ Foster also does this with the examples of Saint Paul and of William J. Seymour, pastor during the “Azusa Street Revival” of 1906 in Los Angeles that helped launch the Pentecostal movement. Paul’s “power encounters” were accompanied by keen theological insight. Foster, *Streams of Living Water*, 112. Seymour emphasizes that love was the mark of the infilling of the Holy Spirit, and “was more important to him than glossolalia.” Foster, *Streams of Living Water*, 120.

¹¹ Foster, *Streams of Living Water*, 106.

¹² Neo-charismatic refers to independent/nondenominational evangelical churches marked by a primarily charismatic orientation, and evangelical denominations and networks that emerged from the charismatic movement, such as the Vineyard. In spite of many similarities, neo-charismatics did not necessarily share a history with historic Pentecostal denominations.

charismatic evangelicals, Saint Francis represented an authentic example of Christian faith and charismatic spirituality.

This chapter provides an overview of the neo-charismatic movement and opposition to it among some evangelicals, alongside the interrelated church growth movement. It then turns to John Wimber and Kevin Springer's interpretation of Saint Francis. This is followed by a brief exploration of the prosperity gospel movement alongside neo-charismatic leader and church growth guru C. Peter Wagner's more critical admiration of Saint Francis. Finally, this chapter explores John Crowder's portrayal of Saint Francis as a charismatic mystic.

Charismata and Its Discontents

During the 1960s and onward, charismatic "gifts of the Spirit" that had been hallmarks of the Pentecostal tradition such as speaking in tongues, prophecy, and healing, made their way into Protestant and Catholic worship alike.¹³ The message of spiritual gifts spread like wildfire among evangelicals. The countercultural Jesus movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s also brought with it a strong dose of Pentecostal-flavored

¹³ Scholars credit this to a number of influences, notably the Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship International, the influence of Pentecostal representative David duPlessis, the role of Oral Roberts' Pentecostal-influenced televised messages, charismatic Episcopalian centres such as Dennis Bennet and St. Luke's Episcopalian Church in Seattle and Houston's Church of the Redeemer, centres of charismatic renewal such as Melodyland Christian Center in Anaheim, California and Christian Growth Ministries in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, and the work of healing evangelists such as Kathryn Kuhlman. See Michael Harper, *Three Sisters: A Provocative Look at Evangelicals, Charismatics, and Catholic Charismatics and their Relationship to One Another* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1979), 27; Richard Quebedeaux, *The New Charismatics: The Origins, Development, and Significance of Neo-Pentecostalism* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1976), 69; Vinson Synan, "Charismatic Renewal Enters the Mainline Churches," in *The Century of the Holy Spirit: 100 Years of Pentecostal and Charismatic Renewal, 1901-2001*, ed. Vinson Synan (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 150. The charismatic movement found advocates and practitioners in mainline Protestant denominations as early as the 1950s. The Episcopalian priest Richard Winkler in Wheaton, Illinois, had an experience of "the Baptism of the Holy Spirit" in the mid-1950s. Synan, "Charismatic Renewal," 153. Another Episcopalian priest, Dennis Bennett, however, came to be seen as the symbolic founder of the movement because of his high profile in national media and the influence of St. Luke's Episcopalian Church in Seattle. For an overview of early charismatic renewal movements see Synan, "Charismatic Renewal," 149-176; Vinson Synan, "The 'Charismatics': Renewal in Major Protestant Denominations," in Synan, *The Century of the Holy Spirit*, 177-208; and Peter Hocken, "The Catholic Charismatic Renewal," in Synan, *The Century of the Holy Spirit*, 209-232.

experience.¹⁴ Such an interest in experiential spirituality had many parallels in American culture in the 1960s, but as Richard Quebedeaux argues the charismatic movement's lasting scale and large impact were unique.¹⁵

The charismatic turn among many evangelicals was not without controversy. In 1978, Quebedeaux identified opposition to charismatics from “the distinctly fundamentalist and evangelical denominations.” This criticism was “not well formulated, and rarely published.”¹⁶ But the silence was not long-lived. The same year John MacArthur, a Calvinist pastor and former Talbot Seminary faculty member, published a polemic against the movement, challenging the charismatics' alleged heretical theology and taking shots at more bizarre charismatic behaviours: “puppies are raised from the dead; washing machines are ‘healed’; empty gas tanks are supernaturally filled; people are ‘slain’ (knocked flat) by the

¹⁴ Larry Eskridge credits the Jesus People's charismatic leanings with their strong literalist understanding of scripture and widely shared fascination with the miraculous and supernatural. Larry Eskridge, *God's Forever Family: The Jesus People Movement in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 79-85.

¹⁵ Quebedeaux, *The New Charismatics*, 196. Quebedeaux connects the charismatic movement with cultural trends of “instantism,” growing leisure time, widespread anti-institutionalism, and “a ‘rediscovery’ of the supernatural by the middle class in contemporary Western society. Quebedeaux, *The New Charismatics*, 185-189.

Parallel charismatic movements among Protestants and Catholics led to a level of cooperation and camaraderie that was unprecedented in American history. Quebedeaux highlights the unparalleled “intense and heartfelt” encounter between evangelicals and Catholics. Quebedeaux, *The New Charismatics*, 7. Molly Worthen notes that evangelical-Catholic connections through charismatic renewal ran deeper and began earlier than later political alliances in the 1970s and 1980s. Worthen, *Apostles of Reason*, 149. She also notes the role of the influence inter-denominational nature of the charismatic movement in contributing to evangelical interest in classical spiritual disciplines. Both the charismatic renewal and the interest in liturgical and traditional Christianity mark, for Worthen, “two dimensions of the same search for authentic spiritual experience, for supernatural and timeless authority. Worthen, *Apostles of Reason*, 166. The Vatican's Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity engaged in sustained talks with Pentecostal and Charismatic denominations in the 1970s. See “Final Report of the Dialogue Between the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity of the Roman Catholic Church and Leaders of Some Pentecostal Churches and Participants in the Charismatic Movement within Protestant and Anglican Churches: 1972-1976,” La Santa Sede, accessed April 24, 2018, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/pentecostals/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_1972-1976_final-report-pentecostals_en.html. Some evangelicals saw this cross-denominational cooperation and renewal as heralding a new future of unity. See Harper, *Three Sisters*; and Richard Lovelace, “Three Streams, One River?” *Charisma*, September 1984, 8.

¹⁶ Quebedeaux, *The New Charismatics*, 163.

Holy Spirit.”¹⁷ For MacArthur, and other evangelicals standing in the “cessationist” tradition, such signs were not from God; some were even demonic.¹⁸ Yet charismatic expansion continued nevertheless, in spite of the deep suspicions of some evangelicals.

During the same decades of charismatic expansion, evangelicals were also learning a new approach to conceiving church. The church growth movement began as a critique of Western missions by missiologist Donald McGavran in the 1950s, who argued that people should be converted not as individuals but as homogenous cultural groups.¹⁹ McGavran argued for church growth as the surest means to evangelize the “unchurched.”²⁰ Churches, according to McGavran, need to respond appropriately to changes in their neighbourhood, to draw on social sciences where necessary.²¹ As many church growth advocates were impatient with formality and slow-moving bureaucracy, new churches were often free of denominational trappings.²²

¹⁷ John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The Charismatics: A Doctrinal Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), 11. One curious example that ties in with the discussion about Saint Francis is a story of a woman leader who claimed to have received the stigmata. Her claim to innumerable divine revelations that functioned as an authority apart from scripture leads MacArthur to conclude that “her power was demonic.” MacArthur, *The Charismatics*, 36-37. MacArthur compares charismatics with the Montanists, a schismatic early church movement whose leaders were believed to have been prophets of the Holy Spirit, a movement that Richard Foster also included in his list of historic charismatics. MacArthur, *The Charismatics*, 28-29; Chapter Three, footnote 1 of this thesis.

¹⁸ Cessationism, often tied to a premillennial dispensationalist view of end times, held that the gifts of the Holy Spirit had ceased operating after the age of the apostles and the closing of the biblical canon.

¹⁹ Donald McGavran, “V. Homogenous Populations and Church Growth,” in *Church Growth and Christian Mission*, ed. Donald McGavran (New York, Harper and Row Publishers, 1965), 69. C. Peter Wagner, himself a significant figure in this movement, credits McGavran’s *Bridges of God* (1955) and *How Churches Grow* (1959) as providing inspiration for the popular movement. C. Peter Wagner, *Your Church Can Grow: Seven Vital Signs of a Healthy Church* (Glendale: GL Regal Books: 1976), 11.

²⁰ Worthen, *Apostles of Reason*, 128.

²¹ Donald McGavran and Win Arn. *How To Grow Your Church: Conversations about Church Growth* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1973), 54. Molly Worthen claims that the social science emphasis of the church growth movement “enabled evangelicals to embrace the modern vogue of cultural relativism—to acknowledge that human beings’ worldviews arose from culturally informed assumptions—without relinquishing the ultimate truth of Christianity.” Worthen, *Apostles of Reason*, 131.

²² McGavran and Arn, *How to Grow Your Church*, 113-114. Sociologist Donald E. Miller describes what he calls “new paradigm churches” that include both “seeker-sensitive churches” and heavily charismatic “apostolic networks” that believe in continuity of the “fivefold ministry” of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers mentioned in Ephesians 4:11. Donald E. Miller, *Reinventing American Protestantism: Christianity in the New Millennium* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 1-2. Miller offers a

Many of these independent evangelical churches that emerged in late twentieth-century America were profoundly shaped by charismatic experience.²³ C. Peter Wagner noted the new growth of charismatic evangelicals in the 1980s. Wagner coined the term “Third Wave of the Holy Spirit,” distinguishing the new movement from early Pentecostalism and from the charismatic movement of the 1960s.²⁴ It is questionable whether the so-called “third wave” did not simply constitute an extension of the charismatic movement.²⁵ Nevertheless, new independent churches and new evangelical charismatic denominations, such as the Vineyard, emerged from the charismatic milieu. These neo-charismatic churches could claim strong evangelical identity.²⁶ “I’m just a straightline evangelical,” claimed Wagner, not a charismatic or Pentecostal.²⁷

Saint Francis the Charismatic

One unconventional way to grow a church was through supernatural signs. From 1982 to 1985 Wagner co-taught a controversial course called “Signs, Wonders and Church Growth” at Fuller Theological Seminary’s Institute of Church Growth in Pasadena, California. Alongside him was jazz-musician-turned-pastor John Wimber, leader of the young Vineyard network of churches. Wimber, an ardent advocate for divine healing and

description of “new paradigm churches”—often independent, baby boomer churches marked by emotional contemporary worship, casual clergy, an informal style and often (though not always) the charismatic “gifts of the spirit.” Miller, *Reinventing American Protestantism*, 20.

²³ Quebedeaux, *The New Charismatics*, 122.

²⁴ C. Peter Wagner, *The Third Wave of the Holy Spirit: Encountering the Power of Signs and Wonders Today* (Ann Arbor: Vine Books, 1988).

²⁵ Vinson Synan states, “While Wagner’s ‘Third Wave’ idea described the experience of thousands of churches and pastors, it did not point to an organized movement as such. It did, however, open the door for thousands of mainline evangelicals to practice Pentecostal worship and exercise spiritual gifts, even if they felt uncomfortable with classical Pentecostalism.” Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition*, 272.

²⁶ I use neo-charismatic as a rough equivalent of Wagner’s “third wave.” Neo-charismatic churches refer to independent/nondenominational evangelical churches marked by a primarily charismatic orientation, and the denominations and networks that emerged from the charismatic movement, such as the Vineyard.

²⁷ C. Peter Wagner, “MC510: Genesis of a Concept,” in *Signs and Wonders Today: The Story of Fuller Theological Seminary’s Remarkable Course on Spiritual Power*, new expanded ed., ed. C. Peter Wagner (Altamonte Springs, FL: Creation House, 1987), 43.

signs, was no stranger to controversy. He had left the leadership of a Calvary Chapel church under pressure over his emphasis on the miraculous.²⁸ Wimber and Wagner's course at Fuller, which added experimentation with healing prayer to complement the instruction, was met with alarm by some Fuller faculty.²⁹

In 1986 Wimber published *Power Evangelism* with co-author Kevin Springer, a call for Western Christians to embrace and pray for signs and wonders in their attempt to do effective evangelism.³⁰ "Because Western Christians are inhibited from practicing power evangelism," the authors state, "their effectiveness is blunted. This leaves them ineffective in dealing with people who have problems with demons, illness, and serious sin."³¹ The book presents a view of the world as a cosmic warfare of unseen forces. The authors attempt to deal with criticism and cessationist beliefs by arguing that both in the Bible and church history the biblical signs and wonders continued.³² Alongside Martin Luther and evangelical missionaries, an appendix on "Signs and Wonders in Church History" includes stories of Saint Francis performing healings and miracles among people in his travels.³³ Wimber and Springer appealed to Saint Francis alongside a diverse group of historical Christian figures, to provide historical validation for their novel charismatic practices.³⁴

²⁸ John Wimber, "Zip to 3,000 in Five Years," in Wagner, *Signs and Wonders Today*, 31; John Wimber and Kevin Springer, *Power Evangelism* (San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers, 1986), xix. For both Wimber and Wagner, the charismatic experiences of majority world Christians and missionaries played a major role in their acceptance of such phenomenon.

²⁹ For the controversy over Wimber and Wagner's course, see George M. Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1987), 292-295.

³⁰ The book garnered the number twelve place in *Christianity Today's* list of books that influenced evangelicals, right alongside *Celebration of Discipline*. "The Top Books," *Christianity Today*, 55.

³¹ Wimber and Springer, *Power Evangelism*, 41.

³² Wimber and Springer, *Power Evangelism*, 120.

³³ Wimber and Springer, *Power Evangelism*, 165-166.

³⁴ Wimber and Springer's follow-up *Power Evangelism* included a sympathetic foreword from Richard Foster. John Wimber and Kevin Springer, *Power Healing* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1987).

Prosper and Influence

Some evangelicals shaped by the growing prosperity gospel message found Saint Francis' ideal of voluntary poverty incongruous with their faith. The prosperity gospel, alternately known as "word of faith" or "health and wealth," taught that through God-given spiritual laws, faith bestowed God's financial, medical and psychological blessings on believers. Prosperity teaching remained controversial among many evangelicals.³⁵ The message emerged from an amalgamation of influences including the late nineteenth-century New Thought emphasis on the power of human words to affect changes in the world, Pentecostal theologies of healing, African American spiritualism, positive thinking ideology, and post-Second World War American material prosperity.³⁶ The movement was popularized by itinerant Pentecostal preachers in the 1950s, and, became mainstream in American culture through radio and television in the 1970s and 1980s.³⁷ Loose networks of independent prosperity leaders and churches arose, though the movement's messages were also keenly felt in many Pentecostal and neo-charismatic denominations.³⁸

C. Peter Wagner himself came under the influence of the prosperity gospel message.³⁹ With a penchant for labeling evangelical movements, Wagner described the host of new nondenominational churches that emerged in the 1990s as a "New Apostolic Reformation" in a book by that name.⁴⁰ This movement, for Wagner, was a move away from old institutional

³⁵ See for example W. Jay Wood, "Three Faces of Greed," *Christianity Today*, January 7, 2005.

³⁶ For antecedent movements to the prosperity gospel movement, see Kate Bowler, *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 9-40.

³⁷ Bowler, *Blessed*, 42-43, 74-75. Bowler parallels the rise of prosperity gospel with a broader reorientation of American religion—the questioning of self-denial in favor of optimism to overcome problems. Bowler, *Blessed*, 7.

³⁸ Bowler, *Blessed*, 79-82.

³⁹ Bowler, *Blessed*, 156.

⁴⁰ C. Peter Wagner, ed., *The New Apostolic Churches* (Venture: Regal, 1998), 18. "Apostolic" here refers to a growing belief among some charismatic Christians that apostolic function and authority continued as a

denominational trappings to the freedom of dynamic, charismatic (in the personality sense), vision-driven leadership.⁴¹ These new churches had a new approach to money: “new apostolic churches experience relatively few financial problems,” claims Wagner, because they preach tithing. “Tithes and offerings are regarded as seeds that will produce fruit of like kind for individuals and families.”⁴² Those who gave money to these churches were promised financial prosperity, a key idea from the prosperity gospel movement.

Wagner’s embrace of prosperity for the purpose of influence led him to a negative view of the example of Saint Francis. In *The Church in the Workplace*, Wagner emphasizes the need for Christians to exert influence on or dominion over human society as an “ultimate goal of accomplishing God’s purposes here on Earth.”⁴³ Wealth, for Wagner, is the foremost influencer. Wagner questions what he calls the “monastery mind-set” of traditional churches toward wealth, which he says entered Christianity via medieval monasticism.⁴⁴ Instead he calls for a “prosperity mind-set.” For Wagner, John Wesley and Saint Francis are examples of a monastery mindset, seeing the path of poverty as more spiritual than a life of wealth. In Wagner’s telling, Saint Francis’ “father ran a successful import-export business.”⁴⁵ Alongside Wesley, Wagner explores Francis’ renunciation of wealth and marriage to “lady poverty” and his austere lifestyle. He does not reject Francis and Wesley outright. “Don’t these stories make you stand in awe of the two men’s wonderful dedication to God?” he asks. “But don’t they also make you feel that if you don’t do something like that from now on, you

model for the twentieth-century church, with some pastors and denominational leaders adopting “apostle” as a functional title.

⁴¹ Wagner, ed., *The New Apostolic Churches*, 20.

⁴² Wagner, ed., *The New Apostolic Churches*, 23-24.

⁴³ C. Peter Wagner, *The Church in the Workplace* (Ventura: Regal, 2006), 119.

⁴⁴ Wagner, *The Church in the Workplace*, 121. Wagner contrasts the traditional “nuclear church” with the “extended church” that extends from a single day of worship to exert influence society and the workplace.

⁴⁵ Wagner, *The Church in the Workplace*, 121. It is possible Wagner drew on Dallas Willard, who also critiqued both Saint Francis and Wesley side by side. See Chapter Two, footnote 46 of this thesis.

might be letting God down?”⁴⁶ Wagner contrasts these “legendary role models” with prosperity-minded Christians who understand the influential power of wealth.⁴⁷ Citing Jesus’ parable of the servant faithful with the ten minas who was awarded ten cities,⁴⁸ Wagner asks, “How do you get influence over a city? One way, according to Jesus, is by being a good trader and obtaining wealth.”⁴⁹ Wagner shares some of Dallas Willard’s reservations of Saint Francis’ poverty, but Wagner goes beyond Willard in his embrace of the inherent goodness of wealth. While he sees Saint Francis’ faith as admirable, for Wagner the call and need for prosperity and influence represent the better way, leading him to admire but reject Francis’ zeal for holy poverty.

Getting Sloshed and Moving Mountains

In the 1990s and 2000s, some neo-charismatics became increasingly marginal from other American evangelicals in their pursuit of more radical signs and wonders. The “Toronto Blessing” gained the ire of many evangelicals, including some charismatics, for the acceptance of bizarre phenomenon, like animal noises, as acts of the Holy Spirit.⁵⁰ Its influence, however, was significant. Other charismatics pursued even more extreme expressions and miracles, bringing the informality of new churches to an exaggerated level. Some spoke about being “drunk” or “high in the Spirit,” even taking invisible joints.⁵¹ This angered popular charismatic periodical *Charisma* editor J. Lee Grady. In 2009 Grady opined against charismatic leaders who mumbled in incoherent tongues and promoted getting “sloshed” and physically wobbly in their worship. John Crowder, a charismatic teacher from

⁴⁶ Wagner, *The Church in the Workplace*, 122.

⁴⁷ Wagner, *The Church in the Workplace*, 122.

⁴⁸ See Luke 19:11-27.

⁴⁹ Wagner, *The Church in the Workplace*, 122.

⁵⁰ See footnote 5 of this chapter.

⁵¹ J. Lee Grady, “Sloshed in the Spirit? It’s Time to Get Sober,” Fire In My Bones (blog), *Charisma*, October 27, 2009, <https://www.charismamag.com/blogs/fire-in-my-bones/7143-sloshed-in-the-spirit-its-time-to-get-sober>.

California, is Grady's particular target: "He teaches that God wants all Christians to be continually drunk in the Holy Spirit—and he provides resources to help you do just that, including an electronica recording that will help you, in Crowder's words, 'trance out,' and a teaching that encourages stigmata and levitation."⁵² Biblical sobriety, Grady claims, is the needed corrective to Crowder's excess.

While not a major neo-charismatic figure, Crowder's spirituality nevertheless captured some trends of the movement.⁵³ In 2006 the traveling teacher of "ecstatic" spirituality published *Miracle Workers, Reformers and New Mystics*, a historical survey of almost any kind of spiritual experience found within Christianity. He presents his spiritual vision via a cadre of modern revivalists, ancient saints and mystics, church reformers and evangelists, from the biblical Enoch, to Saint Anthony of Egypt, Orthodox monk Saint Seraphim of Sarov, Jesus movement evangelist Lonnie Frisbee, and Pentecostal healer John G. Lake. Crowder includes highly controversial figures intentionally, critiquing their failings as well as upholding their successes. Crowder also defends his use of Catholic saints, arguing that in a "post-Protestant" context it is acceptable to recover spiritual resources lost by the Reformation.⁵⁴ For Crowder "there are many hidden truths and spiritual weapons that have lain dormant for ages, just waiting to be recovered."⁵⁵ Accordingly, ancient mystics hold keys for contemporary power, spiritual experience and revival.

For Crowder, Saint Francis of Assisi was one such "nature mystic." Crowder critiques a "modernist mind-set" of subjugating and domesticating creation, and upholds the need for

⁵² Grady, "Sloshed in the Spirit?"

⁵³ Other neo-charismatics, including the International House of Prayer's James Goll, drew on Catholic Mystics such as Teresa of Avila and Brother Lawrence. James W. Goll, *The Lost Art of Practicing His Presence* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2005).

⁵⁴ John Crowder, *Miracle Workers, Reformers and New Mystics* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2006), 198.

⁵⁵ Crowder, *New Mystics*, 19.

environmental advocacy and a worldview that balances natural and spiritual elements.⁵⁶ Saint Francis exemplifies this balance; Francis and the early Franciscans were “naturally supernatural.”⁵⁷

Crowder paints Francis as an exuberant holy fool: “Saint Francis of Assisi... dropped his pants in front of a bishop, talked to animals and gave away everything he owned. By most modern standards, he would be considered mentally ill.”⁵⁸ Crowder considers him an apostle. Francis’ humility was a mark of joy, “not religious misery. He was always moving his feet around and dancing because of a cheerfulness he could not seem to contain.”⁵⁹

For Crowder, Saint Francis’ poverty is “a prophetic sign,” but not something to imitate.⁶⁰ He depicts Francis and his followers as simple and uneducated against the backdrop of the Catholic clergy “who were essentially upper class snobs.” Francis “did not even have his friars study theology,” Crowder claims.⁶¹ He interprets the interactions of Francis and the Catholic hierarchy as one of pure faith against “religion” in the pejorative sense. For Crowder, Saint Francis stands for a populist, anti-intellectual faith.

Crowder counsels readers not to distrust the stories of Saint Francis’ miracles simply because of embellishment. He defends Francis’s conversion of the wolf and preaching to the birds as historically genuine.⁶² Even the stigmata, Saint Francis’ receiving of the marks of Jesus’ wounds, is something that some true mystical believers can and do receive today.⁶³

⁵⁶ Crowder, *New Mystics*, 94-95.

⁵⁷ Crowder, *New Mystics*, 97.

⁵⁸ Crowder, *New Mystics*, 95.

⁵⁹ Crowder, *New Mystics*, 96.

⁶⁰ Crowder, *New Mystics*, 96.

⁶¹ Crowder, *New Mystics*, 96.

⁶² Crowder, *New Mystics*, 99.

⁶³ John Crowder, “Stigmata and Blood Signs, Part 1,” Sons of Thunder, November 21, 2008, https://www.thenewmystics.com/Articles/1000040754/Home_Page_of/Articles/Stigmata_and_Blood.aspx. In a case that illustrates Crowder’s exaggerated informality, he refers to the stigmata as “Stiggy.”

Ultimately, Saint Francis' nature miracles hold potential for modern Christians. "Like Adam, there will be believers who understand how to walk in dominion over nature."⁶⁴ Crowder connects this with his vision of future nature mysticism in his literal interpretation of biblical prophecies; "At some point," Crowder claims, "a mountain will literally move at the command of a son of God. I believe barren deserts will literally bloom into gardens at believers' faith."⁶⁵ These signs will come from believers "becoming saturated in God's Spirit."⁶⁶

For Crowder, Saint Francis is one key to uncovering possible nature miracles, signs and wonders. Crowder upholds Saint Francis' embrace of the natural and spiritual realities as a model to modern Christians. According to Crowder, believers who are immersed in God's Spirit can live the same kind of miraculous life and have the same ecstatic experiences of the saints and mystics of old. These saints can be plundered for their mysticism without the trappings of formality and "religion." Crowder's synthesis is unique, but it brings together charismatic trajectories toward increasingly dramatic experience, romanticism toward ancient Christian mysticism, and a critique of modernist views of nature in a heavily individualized, emphatically anti-informal form of charismatic spirituality. Saint Francis both inspired and legitimated Crowder's charismatic "new mysticism."

Conclusion

Neo-charismatics such as Wimber, Springer and Crowder appealed to Saint Francis to defend their charismatic experiences to skeptical Christians. These neo-charismatics saw Saint Francis as an authentic Christian of the past, whose miracles legitimated and inspired

⁶⁴ Crowder, *New Mystics*, 100.

⁶⁵ Crowder, *New Mystics*, 101. For Crowder, these Christian signs will expose counterfeit New Age spirituality because of God's superior power. Crowder, *New Mystics*, 101-102.

⁶⁶ Crowder, *New Mystics*, 101.

their own pursuit of spiritual power and mysticism. Wagner's prosperity theology lent him a more skeptical lens through which to see Saint Francis' poverty, though Wagner continued to admire his faith. However, for Crowder, Wimber and Springer, Saint Francis served as a historical guide and defender for the new evangelical charismatic spirituality.

In a sense, John Crowder's interpretation of Saint Francis, marked by intense informalism, ecstatic Spirit-led spontaneity, and connection to nature, is a far cry from the likes of Richard Foster, who puts greater stock in classical Christian traditions and guidance, calling evangelicals to adopt older Christian traditions and practices as their own. In some ways these indicate two poles or trajectories in evangelicalism, one toward and another away from tradition and structure. Yet both Foster and Crowder appeal to eclectic figures from Christian history to recover "authentic" Christian faith. In this ecumenism of ideas the gates were flung open for evangelicals to embrace a wide array of Christian traditions as their own, appropriating non-Protestant traditions and figures such as Saint Francis of Assisi for their modern lives of faith. As Crowder claimed, the times were, in a sense, "post-Protestant"⁶⁷—but post-Protestant in an individualist, evangelical fashion.

⁶⁷ Crowder, *New Mystics*, 198.

Chapter 4

The Saint of New Causes: Progressive Evangelicals, Creation Care, and Saint Francis

Introduction

In the early 1970s a young evangelical activist named Jim Wallis went to a cheap double feature at a theatre. One film was Franco Zeffereilli's recently released *Brother Sun, Sister Moon*. The film's portrayal of Saint Francis of Assisi as a traumatized wealthy crusader turned hippie-like lover of nature, peace, and simplicity inspired Wallis:

I left the theater stunned and speechless. On the way home in the dark car, I quietly began to weep. Never before had I encountered a life so consumed with the gospel, a man so on fire with the love of God, a disciple so single-mindedly focused on following after Jesus, a spirit so joyful in abandoning everything to serve his Lord. The evangelical poverty of Francis had evangelized me to the depths of my soul.¹

Wallis was a prominent progressive evangelical political activist, a founder and leader of *Sojourners* magazine and community. He and other like-minded evangelicals believed that Saint Francis offered a much-needed voice of peace, simplicity, love for the poor, and radical discipleship during decades marked by war, militarism and rampant consumerism. Other environmentally conscious evangelicals found kinship with Saint Francis' love of God's creation. Saint Francis inspired progressive and ecologically-concerned evangelicals, offering, in their minds, a Christian alternative to the destructive and unjust political ideologies they opposed. Many progressive evangelicals saw Saint Francis as a representative of true Christianity, a link, in their minds, to the authentic, pure faith of the early church and of the Bible.

This chapter first explores the politically progressive evangelical movement of the late twentieth century, including the periodical *Sojourners* and leaders Jim Wallis and Tony Campolo, who saw Saint Francis as a model for their Christian political activism. The

¹ Jim Wallis, "An Explosion of Love," *Sojourners*, January 1981, 3.

chapter then explores evangelical environmentalist movements and interpretations of Saint Francis as a key to a right Christian relationship to nature.

The Progressive Evangelical Movement²

In the 1960s, many American evangelicals met civil rights and anti-war protests, and the changing moral order with cool reserve or even overt hostility. While some mid-twentieth century fundamentalists were dramatically patriotic, anti-communist and anti-New Deal, most evangelical political action was quietly conservative.³ Billy Graham's public support of Richard Nixon likely reflected the tacit support of many white evangelicals for conservative politicians, yet evangelicals were still far from the politically engaged force they were to become later in the twentieth century.

Beginning in the 1960s, however, small groups of young evangelicals began to engage in social and political activism on the political left. Christian World Liberation Front (CWLF), founded during the height of the Jesus movement as an evangelistic outreach of Campus Crusade for Christ to Berkeley's student counterculture, developed into an intentional community crusading against racism in the late 1960s.⁴ Out of frustration with the lack of engagement among evangelicals on issues of race, John Alexander, a Wheaton professor, and his father Fred founded *Freedom Now* magazine, later named *The Other Side*,

² Following Brantley Gasaway, I prefer the term "progressive evangelical" to "the evangelical left" or "liberal evangelicals." Politically progressive evangelicals usually held conservative theological convictions and were often critical of both conservative and liberal expressions of partisan politics. Brantley Gasaway, *Progressive Evangelicals and the Pursuit of Social Justice* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 16-17.

³ For an overview of perceptions and varieties of American evangelical political engagement before the 1970s, see Swartz, *Moral Minority: The Evangelical Left in an Age of Conservatism* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 13-15.

⁴ See David R Swartz, "The Evangelical Left and the Move from Personal to Social Responsibility," in *American Evangelicals and the 1960s*, ed. Axel R. Schäfer (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2013), 216. Sharon Gallagher, an early member of the CWLF went on to play an important role in the emergence of evangelical feminism. Swartz, *Moral Minority*, 105-107. For an excellent treatment of the development of evangelical feminism, its theological divisions, and its impact on the larger evangelical movement see Pamela Cochran, *Evangelical Feminism: A History* (New York: New York University, Press, 2005).

partnering with African American evangelical civil rights leaders such as John Perkins and Tom Skinner. The 1970 InterVarsity Urbana conference, where Skinner was a main speaker, had strong racial justice and anti-war themes.⁵ Jim Wallis, a student who became involved in civil rights and anti-war demonstrations at the University of Michigan, returned to his Christian roots in disenchantment with the shortcomings of the New Left movements.⁶ Joining Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois, Wallis and other like-minded students formed *Post-American*, a magazine and intentional community addressing political and social issues from an evangelical perspective. The group moved to Washington, DC and was later renamed *Sojourners*. These movements were helped along in their social justice messages by extensive contact with majority world Christians,⁷ in particular the advocacy of Latin American theologians Samuel Escobar and René Padilla.⁸ A progressive evangelical coalition was emerging.

Hoping to counter the prospect of Richard Nixon's re-election, several politically progressive American evangelicals, including Ronald Sider and Robert Webber, formed Evangelicals for McGovern during the 1972 election. Running a campaign calling for the end of the Vietnam War and increasing social welfare, the populist George McGovern seemed an

⁵ Swartz, *Moral Minority*, 105-107. Richard Quebedeaux, *The Young Evangelicals: The Story of the Emergence of a New Generation of Evangelicals* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), 92-93.

⁶ Jim Wallis, *Revive Us Again: A Sojourner's Story* (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1983), 72-73.

⁷ I use the term "majority world" instead of "third world" or "non-Western world" to speak of Asia, Latin America, Africa and the South Pacific. "Third World" is a Cold War term that no longer accurately describes the world political order, and "non-Western" is geographically imprecise.

⁸ Swartz, *Moral Minority*, 113-114. Escobar and Padilla played an important role in advocating for a message of holistic missionary strategies at the International Congress of World Evangelization in Lausanne, Switzerland, in 1974. This conference and the subsequent Lausanne Movement, sponsored by the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, continue to serve as a global forum for evangelical missions. See Timothy Yates, *Christian Mission in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 202-203; David Cook Kirkpatrick, "C. Rene Padilla: Integral Mission and the Reshaping of Global Evangelicalism" (PhD diss. University of Edinburgh, 2015).

ideal candidate to these evangelicals. Yet to their dismay Evangelicals for McGovern failed to influence evangelicals electorally, and Nixon soundly defeated McGovern in the election.⁹

In spite of the disappointing outcome, Sider organized a 1973 meeting of evangelicals at a YMCA in Chicago to discuss evangelical social action. Carl F. H. Henry, *Christianity Today*'s first editor and neo-evangelical statesman, was present along with younger evangelicals such as Wallis, CWLF's Sharon Gallagher, John Howard Yoder, John Perkins and John Alexander.¹⁰ From these meetings delegates issued the Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern, calling on evangelicals to embrace committed discipleship and justice for the poor, with denunciations of racism, materialism, militarism, and male domination of women.¹¹ This meeting eventually led to the formation of Evangelicals for Social Action with Sider at the helm. While the event was well publicized, the larger evangelical community did not receive the declaration enthusiastically.¹² The progressive

⁹ Molly Worthen claims that Evangelicals for McGovern failed to galvanize the larger evangelical community "because they underestimated their fellow believers' anxieties over cultural change and the specter of creeping socialism." Molly Worthen, *Apostles of Reason: The Crisis of Authority in American Evangelicalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 191.

¹⁰ Worthen and Swartz both note the primarily northern, urban makeup of the conference participants and the absence of many southern evangelicals. Worthen, *Apostles of Reason*, 189; Swartz, "The Evangelical Left," 212.

¹¹ Brantley Gasaway says the Chicago Declaration and similar calls by progressive evangelicals amounted to "the first campaigns to push evangelicals back into the political sphere" in the 1970s. Gasaway, *Progressive Evangelicals*, 25. Neo-evangelicals such as Carl Henry had long accused their fundamentalist forebears with social withdrawal. Darren Dochuck, however, demonstrates that the evangelical religious right has a long history in the American South and into California. According to Dochuck, the religious right of the 1970s and 1980s did not emerge in a vacuum, but were part of a longer Jeffersonian tradition active in their political opposition to New Deal liberalism. Darren Dochuck, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2011). Matthew Avery Sutton also contends that mid-twentieth-century fundamentalists were not culturally or politically withdrawn. Matthew Avery Sutton, *American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), xiii-xiv. Nevertheless, Gasaway's claim has some merit, as the level and participation of American evangelicals in electoral politics took on a much more intentional and numerically significant role in the 1970s and 1980s, though overwhelmingly on the right wing.

¹² David Swartz claims that moderate evangelicals received the calls for social responsibility presented by progressive evangelicals, but did not necessarily embrace their political positions. *Moral Minority*, 182.

evangelical coalition also proved fragile and divided along racial, gender and theological lines.¹³

Over the next decades Evangelicals for Social Action, *Sojourners*, *The Other Side* and evangelical leaders such as Tony Campolo continued their campaigns to win over American evangelicals to the causes of opposing nuclear proliferation, exposing American military wrongs, ending global hunger, fighting poverty, combating racial discrimination in America, ending South African Apartheid, calling for gender equality, and resisting consumer capitalism. These figures tried to navigate a biblical alternative to the political left and the religious right, often quite critical of both.¹⁴ While many of their calls seemed to fall on deaf evangelical ears, Ron Sider's *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* was well-received, earning it the number seven place in *Christianity Today's* list of top books that influenced evangelicals.¹⁵ The movement had many evangelical detractors,¹⁶ and usually failed to galvanize evangelicals politically.¹⁷ The progressive evangelical movement nevertheless

¹³ Swartz highlights the role of identity politics in the disunity that ensued after the Chicago Declaration. David R. Swartz, "Identity Politics and the Fragmenting of the 1970s Evangelical Left," *Religion and American Culture* 21, no. 1 (2011): 81-120.

¹⁴ In the words of Jim Wallis, "That conservative evangelical faith leads to conservative politics is a popular misconception." Wallis, *Revive Us Again*, 18. Brantley Gasaway claims that progressive evangelicals developed an implicit "public theology of community" that was an alternative to prevailing liberal and conservative ideologies, based on "biblical paradigms concerning human identity, communal responsibilities, substantive equality, socioeconomic rights, distributive justice, and the role of the state." Gasaway, *Progressive Evangelicals*, 54, 56. The movement may have been more piecemeal and spontaneous than Gasaway's idea of the public theology seems to suggest, though his claim that such an implicit ideology guided the movement has merit.

¹⁵ "The Top Books that have Shaped Evangelicals." *Christianity Today*, October 1, 2006, 55.

¹⁶ David Chilton, for example, parodied Sider's *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* with his own cold-war-tinged *Productive Christians in an Age of Guilt-Manipulators*. "Satan is going to lose," claims Chilton, "despite Soviet missiles, Cuban surrogate troops, liberation theology, Ronald Sider, and Inter-Varsity Press." David Chilton, *Productive Christians in an Age of Guilt-Manipulators: A Biblical Response to Ronald J. Sider*, rev. ed. (Tyler: Institute for Christian Economics, 1982), 28. Francis Schaeffer also criticized Sider, Evangelicals for Social Action, and evangelical feminism in the 1980s. Francis Schaeffer, *The Great Evangelical Disaster* (Westchester: Crossway Books, 1984), 111-115. See also Swartz, *Moral Minority*, 229.

¹⁷ According to David Swartz, in spite of such resistance Sider and others believed that "evangelicalism was up for grabs" politically, and that their success in galvanizing evangelicals might have been possible in the 1970s. Progressive evangelicals failed, according to Swartz, because of the ecumenical scope of the movement and divisions along the lines of identity politics. Swartz, *Moral Minority*, 182, 250.

played an influential role in fostering late twentieth-century evangelical social consciousness.¹⁸

In 1976, the so-called “Year of the Evangelical,”¹⁹ Jimmy Carter won the presidency as an openly “born again” candidate, in part on a wave of evangelical support.²⁰ By the 1980 election Carter was very unpopular, including among progressive evangelicals, who bemoaned his militarism, his failure to follow through on his rhetoric of rights, and his capitulation to secular ideologies that separated faith from politics.²¹ “Unable to vote for peace and justice,” Jim Wallis wrote on the eve of the 1980 election, “we can intercede for the nation.”²²

These politically progressive evangelicals were quickly overshadowed by the dramatic electoral triumph of the religious right with the influence of Jerry Falwell’s Moral Majority in the 1980 election of Ronald Reagan. The Moral Majority, with some organizational similarities to progressive evangelical networks,²³ swept to success among evangelicals who felt threatened by the moral degeneration of American society. The effects

¹⁸ Swartz, “The Evangelical Left,” 211-230. Gary Vanderpol effectively argues for three major shifts in post-Second World War American evangelicalism that resulted in the widespread acceptance of diverse methods for mission to the poor. The first shift occurred in the 1940s and 1950s, where because of neo-evangelical advocacy and growing missionary encounters with the poor around the world, evangelical missionary agencies embraced charity for the poor as a legitimate part of mission work. Relief remained episodic and individualistic. This is the “quintessential, bedrock theory of mission to the poor.” Gary Vanderpol, “The Least of These: American Evangelical Parachurch Missions to the Poor, 1947-2005” (PhD diss., Boston University, 2011), 8, 33-41. The second shift, catalyzed by evangelical missions conferences such as the Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization, evangelical missions organizations embracing a relief and development emphasis, and the advocacy of “radical” progressive evangelicals, introduced deeper challenges to systemic injustice and poverty. Vanderpol, “The Least of These,” 100-152. The last shift at the end of the twentieth-century entailed an increasing acceptance of holistic views of mission incorporating development theory, classic 1950s evangelical theory of mission to the poor, and the structural emphasis of progressive evangelicals to produce a diverse array of evangelical responses to poverty. Vanderpol, “The Least of These,” 100-152, 216-280.

¹⁹ Kenneth L. Woodward, “Born Again!” *Newsweek*, October 25, 1976, 68-78.

²⁰ See Swartz, *Moral Minority*, 218.

²¹ See Miller, *The Age of Evangelicalism: America’s Born-Again Years* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 40; and Swartz, *Moral Minority*, 223-224.

²² Jim Wallis, “Lord Have Mercy,” *Sojourners*, October 1980, 5.

²³ See Swartz, *Moral Minority*, 228-229.

of the election were not to the liking of progressive evangelicals. “We called for social and political action,” Sider lamented, “but instead we got eight years of Ronald Reagan.”²⁴ The Reagan administration’s militarism, cold war rhetoric, covert Central American military incursions, and wholesale embrace of free market economics proved to be particularly painful for progressive evangelicals. *Sojourners* launched Witness for Peace in the early 1980s to stage nonviolent opposition to Reagan’s support for Nicaragua’s Contras. For its part, the Reagan administration actively opposed *Sojourners*, and Wallis found himself the subject of FBI surveillance.²⁵ While Wallis, Tony Campolo and other progressive evangelical leaders came to have a higher national profile in the 1990s and 2000s,²⁶ progressive evangelicals lived under the shadow of the larger religious right for most of the end of the century.²⁷

The progressive evangelical movement was shaped by a historical awareness. John Perkins, a Mississippi civil rights leader founder of the Christian Community Development Association, claimed Saint Francis of Assisi was a major inspiration in his early years as a Christian, directing him to the gospel possibility of love between people; Francis was a

²⁴ Michael Cromartie, “Fixing the World,” *Christianity Today*, April 27, 1992, 25.

²⁵ Worthen, *Apostles of Reason*, 182.

²⁶ Wallis and Tony Campolo founded the organization Call To Renewal in 1995, to combat the political influence of Pat Robertson and Ralph Reed’s conservative Christian Coalition. See Miller, *The Age of Evangelicalism*, 150. With the publication of *God’s Politics* during the presidency of George W. Bush, Wallis became even more of a national figure, making appearances on Jon Stewart’s *The Daily Show*, moderating a 2008 democratic primary debate between Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton and John Edwards, and serving on Obama’s White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships. “Democrats at the Sojourners Forum,” *New York Times*, June 4, 2007, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/06/04/us/politics/04text-dems.html>. For Wallis’s public role see also Miller, *The Age of Evangelicalism*, 150-153, 157-158; Dan Gilgoff, “Evangelical Minister Jim Wallis in Demand is in Obama’s Washington,” *US News and World Report*, March 31, 2009, <https://www.usnews.com/news/religion/articles/2009/03/31/evangelical-minister-jim-wallis-is-in-demand-in-obamas-washington>. According to David Swartz, Wallis and other progressive evangelical leaders gained a greater influence through their move toward more centrist positions and their acceptance of establishment political parties. Swartz, *Moral Minority*, 260.

²⁷ Jim Wallis and Wes Michaelson also attempted to expose Campus Crusade for Christ founder Bill Bright’s covert conservative political advocacy. See John G. Turner, *Bill Bright and Campus Crusade for Christ: The Renewal of Evangelicalism in Postwar America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 164-168.

Christian who truly modeled the teachings of Jesus.²⁸ An early statement of the Post-American community states, “As radical Christians we seek to recover the earliest doctrines of Christianity, its historical basis, its radical ethical spirit, and its revolutionary consciousness.”²⁹ Wallis regularly claimed continuity with the nineteenth-century evangelical reformist tradition.³⁰ It could be said that the progressive evangelical movement was an exercise in tradition retrieval: the pre-Constantinian church, the early Franciscans and the early Anabaptists stood alongside earlier reformist evangelicals as models for Christian social reform and nonviolent action.³¹ According to Molly Worthen, the “radically ecumenical” progressive evangelicals saw these movements as “the closest approximations of the first century church.”³²

Roman Catholic connections became particularly salient. In 1981, Jim Wallis noted the increasingly strong Catholic influence on *Sojourners*. “Sojourners is still clearly evangelical,” Wallis claimed, “but now, one would have to say, in both the Protestant and Catholic Traditions.”³³ Catholic writers such as Henri Nouwen and Richard Rohr were regular contributors.³⁴ Wallis later called himself “a convert to Catholic Social teaching.”³⁵

²⁸ Richard Clark, host, “John Perkins on the Day He Finally Understood the Bible,” *The Calling* (mp3 podcast), Soundcloud, June 2017, <https://soundcloud.com/localchurch/the-calling-67-john-perkins>.

²⁹ Wallis, *Revive Us Again*, 92-93.

³⁰ Wallis, *Revive Us Again*, 17. This reflects similar sentiments held by other progressive evangelicals that a return to an earlier evangelicalism was needed. Drawing on Timothy Smith, David Moberg claimed in 1972 that, “There was a time when evangelicals had a balanced position that gave proper attention to both evangelism and social concern, but a great reversal early in the century led to a lopsided emphasis upon evangelism and omission of most aspects of social involvement.” David O. Moberg, *The Great Reversal: Evangelism versus Social Concern* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1972), 25-26. Donald Dayton likewise called evangelicals to uncover the social reformist traditions of earlier Wesleyan evangelical movements. Donald W. Dayton, *Discovering an Evangelical Heritage* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976).

³¹ Molly Worthen identifies three main intellectual influences on progressive evangelicals: twentieth-century European theology (especially Dietrich Bonhoeffer), progressive evangelical scholarship, and “non-Reformed churches (and even Roman Catholics),” most notably the neo-Anabaptist thought espoused by the likes of John Howard Yoder. Worthen, *Apostles of Reason*, 195-197.

³² According to Molly Worthen, *Apostles of Reason*, 197.

³³ Jim Wallis, “Ten Years,” *Sojourners*, September 1981, 5.

³⁴ Richard Foster was also a contributor.

³⁵ Jim Wallis, *Seven Ways to Change the World: Reviving Faith and Politics* (Oxford: Lion, 2008), 70.

He waxed praise for Dorothy Day, founder of the Catholic Worker. “The same combination of conservative religion and radical politics is the energy behind Sojourners,” Wallis claimed, “and became a point of strong solidarity between ourselves and the Catholic Worker.

Probably the nicest thing anyone ever said about us was when some of our friends at the New York house of hospitality called us a ‘protestant Catholic Worker.’”³⁶ For Wallis, Dorothy Day was one of “two teachers” of the *Sojourners* community. The other was Saint Francis of Assisi.³⁷

Sojourners’ Saint

In December 1981, near the peak of its circulation,³⁸ *Sojourners* published an issue commemorating the eight hundredth birthday of Saint Francis of Assisi.³⁹ Wallis introduced the issue with his own story of encountering Saint Francis. Largely ignorant about the life of the saint,⁴⁰ Wallis knew little beyond “one of the worst caricatures of history”—the Francis birdbath statue.⁴¹ This changed when he went to see Franco Zeffereilli’s *Brother Sun, Sister Moon*. While recognizing some of the historical inaccuracies of the portrayal of a simple-minded Saint Francis, Wallis speaks of the movie and his encounter with Saint Francis as a dramatic impetus to Christian discipleship.⁴² This encounter led Wallis to a time of self-examination and prayer that marked “the beginning of an intense and often painful friendship” with the saint of Assisi.⁴³ Wallis adopts the language of conversion for his story;

³⁶ Jim Wallis, “An Explosion of Love,” *Sojourners*, January 1981, 3.

³⁷ Wallis, *Revive Us Again*, 162-172.

³⁸ *Sojourners* had 55,000 subscribers in 1982. Gasaway, *Progressive Evangelicals*, 40.

³⁹ Wallis, Jim, ed. “Francis: The Little Poor Man of Assisi.” *Sojourners*, December 1981.

⁴⁰ “Protestant seminaries,” Wallis remarks, “generally don’t do well with the lives of the saints.” Wallis, Jim, “A Holy Jealousy,” *Sojourners*, December 1981, 3.

⁴¹ Wallis, “A Holy Jealousy,” 3.

⁴² Wallis, “A Holy Jealousy,” 3.

⁴³ Wallis, “A Holy Jealousy,” 3.

“Francis was converting me again to Jesus... It was like meeting Jesus afresh.”⁴⁴ For Wallis, this portrayal of Saint Francis’s counter-cultural life in the thirteenth-century context provides a compelling model and saint for the twentieth-century world.⁴⁵

Wallis upholds Saint Francis as an example of true service and Christianity to his readers. Wallis grounds Francis’ poverty in his love for the poor: “Francis wanted to be poor because Jesus was poor and because his beloved master so loved the poor.”⁴⁶ Francis’ poverty, according to Wallis, was not for its own sake, but was a means to draw near to God. Francis also exuded Christ-like love; “Never has God been so freely praised nor ordinary men so highly regarded as in the life of Francis.”⁴⁷ The first Franciscans represented an “authentic renewal movement” marked by a rediscovery of the gospel. For Wallis, the movement was more authentic as it was more spontaneous and less institutional; Wallis notes Francis’ reticence to formulate a rule, and the Franciscan embrace of poverty that “was always resisted by the church.”⁴⁸ For Wallis, Saint Francis was a holy rebel.

Saint Francis also provided a key to tensions experienced by the politically homeless *Sojourners* community; “Francis lived and spoke directly to the confusion most of us still have between success and obedience,” Wallis claims, “a particularly American affliction.”⁴⁹ With language echoing what any evangelical might say about Jesus, Wallis warns his readers “that if you begin to follow after [Saint Francis] as he dances through the world, he will

⁴⁴ Wallis, “A Holy Jealousy,” 3-4. Reorienting the idea of conversion is a favourite theme for Wallis and other progressive evangelicals. Published earlier that year, Wallis’s *A Call to Conversion*, painted the need for the recovery of “the biblical meaning of conversion” with its holistic and social dimensions as the pressing need of his time in a world racked by poverty, industrialization, environmental catastrophe and nuclear arms. Jim Wallis, *The Call to Conversion: Why Faith is Always Personal but Never Private*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2005), xviii, xiii.

⁴⁵ Wallis, “A Holy Jealousy,” 4.

⁴⁶ Wallis, “A Holy Jealousy,” 4.

⁴⁷ Wallis, “A Holy Jealousy,” 4.

⁴⁸ Wallis, “A Holy Jealousy,” 4. David Swartz notes the influence of the New Left on themes of authenticity for *Post-American/Sojourners*, as well as a growing evangelical desire for authentic faith. Swartz, *Moral Minority*, 56.

⁴⁹ Wallis, “A Holy Jealousy,” 5.

certainly turn your life upside down, as he has mine.”⁵⁰ For Wallis, Saint Francis was a powerful representative of true Christian discipleship.

In the same issue of *Sojourners*, Glenn Hinson, a professor of Church History at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, expanded on Wallis’ emphasis on the tension of success and fidelity in the realm of peace. In his choice of peace in time of war, Francis showed a “divine foolishness.”⁵¹ According to Hinson, Francis went through a conversion from fighting physical war to oppose “war and all its causes with charity and humility and persuasion.”⁵² Francis’ thirteenth-century context bore similarity to the twentieth-century world, but Francis “discovered in the Gospels the evangelical principle of non-resistance to evil.”⁵³ While a rediscovery of a lost message, Francis’ nonviolent position was also ahead of his time, “an outlook from beyond the horizon of his own age.”⁵⁴ For Hinson, the story of Francis’ attempt to convert the Sultan illustrates the principle of faithfulness in the face of defeat; Francis’ failure to win the Sultan over was still a personal gain for having tried.⁵⁵ Saint Francis, then, was an undaunted peace activist with something to teach others facing the impossible task of nonviolence in a militarized world. “We can have no assurance of success. Yet, to echo Mother Teresa, we should act anyway, knowing that God did not call us to be successful. Rather, he called us to be faithful.”⁵⁶

The same issue of *Sojourners* primarily included articles from Catholic writers, such as the Franciscan Richard Rohr (a *Sojourners* editor), the Benedictine Joan Chittister, and

⁵⁰ Wallis, “A Holy Jealousy,” 5.

⁵¹ Hinson, “St Francis of Assisi,” 18.

⁵² Hinson, “St Francis of Assisi,” 18.

⁵³ Hinson, “St Francis of Assisi,” 18.

⁵⁴ Hinson, “St Francis of Assisi,” 18. This rhetoric of progress contrasts with many evangelical fans of Saint Francis who see him rather as the restoration of something primitive that was lost.

⁵⁵ Hinson, “St Francis of Assisi,” 18.

⁵⁶ Hinson, “St Francis of Assisi,” 18.

Jesus-movement-folk-musician-turned-Franciscan-monk John Michael Talbot.⁵⁷ The issue is peppered with quotes from Saint Francis, including the text of the “Canticle of the Sun,” and entries from G. K. Chesterton, Omer Englebert and other Francis biographers.⁵⁸ One startling quotation is attributed to Vladimir Lenin:

I made a mistake. Without a doubt, an oppressed multitude had to be liberated. But our method only provoked further oppression and atrocious massacres. My living nightmare is to find myself lost in an ocean of red with the blood of innumerable victims. It is too late now to alter the past, but what was needed to save Russia were ten Francis of Assisi’s [sic].⁵⁹

While the quote is of dubious origins,⁶⁰ Saint Francis provides the perfect foil for progressive evangelicals to differentiate genuine Christian love from atheistic Communism. Saint Francis stands as a paragon of peace, love for the poor and true gospel conversion for these progressive evangelicals—he was, according to these evangelicals, an authentic Christian helping them navigate a politically and morally antagonistic world.

A Prophet for America

A Baptist professor of Sociology at Eastern University in Philadelphia, Tony Campolo popularized progressive evangelical themes in the 1980s and 1990s. In 1995 he helped launch Call to Renewal with Jim Wallis. He also befriended Bill Clinton, introducing

⁵⁷ Chittister’s article makes the Reagan context quite explicit, contrasting Francis’ generosity and love with Ronald Reagan’s free market admonishments to the leaders of Southern countries at the 1981 Cancun leaders summit. Joan Chittister, “The Key Nobody Wants,” *Sojourners*, December 1981, 21-22.

⁵⁸ On G. K. Chesterton’s biography of Saint Francis and its wide Protestant appeal, see Patricia Appelbaum, *St. Francis of America: How a Thirteenth-Century Friar Became America’s Most Popular Saint* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 54-56.

⁵⁹ Vladimir Lenin, *Letters on Modern Atheism*, quoted in *Sojourners*, December 1981, 17.

⁶⁰ The quote was cited in a syndicated column published in American newspapers in 1958 as Lenin’s last words, “according to ‘Letters on Modern Atheism.’” The author, James Keller, was a Roman Catholic Priest. James Keller, “Three Minutes a Day,” *Daily Independent Journal from San Rafael, California* (April 30, 1958): 29. While Lenin wrote nothing of that name, Father Joseph Ledit of the Vatican’s Secretariat on Atheism published a periodical called *Lettres de Rome sur L’Atheisme Moderne*, or *Rome Letters on a New Atheism* in the 1930s, though it was published in English under the name *The World’s Problem*. Ledit, who spoke Russian and worked clandestinely in the USSR shortly after the time of Lenin’s death, would be the ideal candidate either to have heard of the remark or (more likely) to have forged it. See Phillippe, Chanaux, “Father Włodzimierz Ledóchowski (1866-1942): Driving Force behind Papal Anti-Communism during the Interwar Period,” *Journal of Jesuit Studies* 5, no. 1 (2018): 62.

Clinton to evangelical academics who could help him understand evangelical opposition to his presidency, and controversially serving as one of Clinton's spiritual counselors during the Monica Lewinsky scandal.⁶¹ Among evangelicals he was known as a prolific author and perennial presence in the evangelical speaking circuit. Campolo stated his mission in 1985: "I'm called to be a critic"—that is, a critic of the church.⁶²

In 1991, Campolo published *Wake Up America*, a book about "the spiritual condition of America," which Campolo believed was in rough shape.⁶³ Materialism, consumerism, alienation, and a sense of directionlessness pervade the national mood.⁶⁴ This dire situation sets Campolo up to present the new generation of young Christians as offering hope for social and religious renewal. Campolo's idea of a prophet is central: "We need a prophet," Campolo claims, "who will weep for America, who will stir us to a memory of what were meant to be."⁶⁵ This prophet will be "a voice crying in the wilderness of our consumer-oriented cultural system" to offer the vision of an alternative future.⁶⁶ When Campolo posed this idea to a group young Christians, they offered Martin Luther King Jr. and Mohandas Gandhi as possible prophets, but settled on Saint Francis of Assisi. "It seems strange," states Campolo, "that a medieval saint of the Roman Catholic church should be the voice that a group of Protestant young people thought would be the most relevant to our time."⁶⁷

Yet, for Campolo, Francis was the perfect saint to challenge modern culture in weeping compassion. "We do not need some wild-eyed pulpiteer," Campolo claims,

⁶¹ Miller, *The Age of Evangelicalism*, 115-116; Ted Olsen, "Why Clinton Likes Campolo," *Christianity Today*, January 2003, 37.

⁶² Ted Olsen, "The Positive Prophet," *Christianity Today*, January 2003, 35.

⁶³ Tony Campolo, *Wake Up America! Answering God's Radical Call While Living in the Real World* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1991), xiii.

⁶⁴ Campolo, *Wake Up America!* 13.

⁶⁵ Campolo, *Wake Up America!* 18.

⁶⁶ Campolo, *Wake Up America!* 19-20.

⁶⁷ Campolo, *Wake Up America!* 23.

“condemning us for our consumer-oriented ways as much as we need such a wet-eyed saint, pleading with us to find fulfillment and ecstasy in service of the poor.”⁶⁸ Campolo favorably compares Francis to liberation theologians in his love of the poor, a comparison that might not have been positive to other evangelicals such as Dallas Willard.⁶⁹ The story of Francis encountering Jesus through the leper leads Campolo to claim that, “To Francis, the poor were sacramental.”⁷⁰ Saint Francis could bring the compassion modern America lacked.

Campolo’s Francis is also a prophet of peace to a generation of young people disillusioned with American military incursions in Latin America and the Middle East.⁷¹ Francis’ rejection of the crusades reflected his love of enemies that carried Christ’s presence. Saint Francis “could not only look on the Muslims as persons to be hated and slain any more than he could look that way on his Lord.”⁷² Saint Francis’ meeting with the Sultan was about sharing Christ, the source of love, not about arguing theology and apologetics.⁷³ According to Campolo, Saint Francis recovered the original gospel message of peace. “The early church was pacifist,” Campolo claims, but lost its way after the conversion of Constantine. Saint Francis “would recover Christ’s message” that killing of enemies is wrong for Christians, even in war.⁷⁴ For Campolo, Francis was a key link to a purer early church age while also a voice for non-violence to the post-Vietnam era.⁷⁵

⁶⁸ Campolo, *Wake Up America!* 25.

⁶⁹ See page 43 of this thesis.

⁷⁰ Campolo, *Wake Up America!* 24. Campolo’s favourite theme of Christ’s presence mediated through humans landed him in a curious controversy in 1985, when concerned pastors had him banned from speaking at a Campus Crusade for Christ event. The ensuing conflict was resolved in a one of its kind evangelical “heresy trial” led by theologian J.I. Packer. Campolo was ultimately cleared of any serious error, but was admonished to avoid being carried away by “evangelical inadvertence” and unclear mystical language. Olsen, “The Positive Prophet,” 35.

⁷¹ Campolo, *Wake Up America!* 25-26. Campolo’s young people are clearly of an educated and progressive bent.

⁷² Campolo, *Wake Up America!* 26.

⁷³ Campolo, *Wake Up America!* 26.

⁷⁴ Campolo, *Wake Up America!* 27.

⁷⁵ Campolo, *Wake Up America!* 27-28.

Saint Francis also points to possibilities for Christian devotional life. Campolo extols Francis' longsuffering obedience and his receipt of the stigmata as a deeper spiritual alternative to passionless theology and cheap television evangelism.⁷⁶ Saint Francis, claims Campolo, makes waiting on God and the gift of "closeness with Christ" accessible to evangelicals.⁷⁷

Saint Francis became a favourite example of Campolo's in his later writings. In *Following Jesus without Embarrassing God* (1997), Campolo presents Saint Francis as an example of a right attitude toward wealth that does not degenerate into class war. "St. Francis," states Campolo, "who followed Christ by giving all he possessed to the poor, went out of his way to keep rich people from feeling like second-class Christians."⁷⁸ Francis was no guilt-manipulator, but taught the biblical idea of joyful giving.⁷⁹ Elsewhere, Campolo connects Francis' encounter with the leper with modern global poverty, relating his own story of encountering an impoverished Haitian mother, begging him to care for her child. Campolo mourned his failure to act: "I believe that Jesus mystically presented Himself to me through that child, and when I rejected that child, I rejected Jesus."⁸⁰ In a book coauthored with Mary Albert Darling, Campolo offers "AIDS victims and other ostracized and oppressed peoples" as the modern-day equivalents of Francis' leper, and mediators of Christ's presence.⁸¹ The central claim of Campolo and Darling's book is that "Mystical Christianity provides the nexus that holds evangelism and social justice together and keeps

⁷⁶ Campolo, *Wake Up America!* 33.

⁷⁷ Campolo, *Wake Up America!* 34-35.

⁷⁸ Tony Campolo, *Following Jesus without Embarrassing God* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1997), 15.

⁷⁹ Campolo, *Following Jesus*, 15-16.

⁸⁰ Tony Campolo, *Let Me Tell You a Story: Life Lessons from Unexpected Places and Unlikely People* (Nashville, Thomas Nelson, 2000),

⁸¹ Tony Campolo and Mary Albert Darling, *The God of Intimacy and Action* (San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, 2007), 38.

them both dynamic and vital.”⁸² The book reads like a Richard Foster work, with Saint Francis as a key representative of Christian mysticism that informs social action. According to Campolo, Saint Francis revealed a truly Christian spiritual path to approach poverty and suffering where contemporary evangelicals fell short.

The Eco-Friendly Friar

Tony Campolo’s perennial return to the example of Saint Francis often focused on themes of animals and creation. His aptly named 1992 book *How To Rescue the Earth without Worshipping Nature* is Campolo’s environmental manifesto. Campolo argues for a holistic view of salvation that includes the redemption of both people and the created world.⁸³ While he dismisses the claims of some evangelicals that all environmentalists betray New Age sympathies,⁸⁴ Campolo seeks to separate biblical, Christian environmentalism from the “seductive influence” of pagan-like spiritualities.⁸⁵ Christians need to rise to the task of environmental advocacy to avoid New Age influence. “I am worried,” Campolo laments, “that our indifference to the destruction of God’s creation will allow a bunch of New Age gurus to hijack a movement that should be ours.”⁸⁶

Campolo consults a wide range of Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox thought in his exploration of caring for the environment; evangelical traditions apparently did not offer Campolo adequate resources to confront ecological disasters.⁸⁷ Foremost for Campolo was, of course, “the greatest saint of the church since New Testament days—St. Francis of

⁸² Campolo and Darling, *The God of Intimacy and Action*, xiv.

⁸³ Tony Campolo, *How to Rescue the Earth without Worshipping Nature* (Nashville, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1992), x.

⁸⁴ Campolo, *How to Rescue the Earth*, 4.

⁸⁵ Campolo, *How to Rescue the Earth*, 175.

⁸⁶ Campolo, *How to Rescue the Earth*, 5.

⁸⁷ Campolo, *How to Rescue the Earth*, 6.

Assisi.”⁸⁸ Just as Francis led Campolo to seek the presence of Christ the poor, Francis also offered a sacramental view of animals.⁸⁹ Considering creatures his brothers and sisters, Saint Francis showed a “spiritual kinship” with nature.⁹⁰ Campolo claims this kinship was not pantheistic: “For Francis, God was always a transcendental ‘totally other’ figure who existed before the world was created and who was the Creator of the world.”⁹¹ Campolo shares stories of Saint Francis’ prayers and praise alongside sheep and crickets as examples of his loving humility.⁹² Referencing a Catholic interpretation of Saint Paul’s comment on bearing marks of Jesus as a reference to the stigmata,⁹³ Campolo states that Francis, “like Paul, bore the bleeding wounds of the crucifixion on his body,” and “had a closeness to all the creatures his Jesus had created, even insects.”⁹⁴

For Campolo, these miraculous stories are not simply embellishments. “I tend to believe these tales of wonder,” Campolo admits, “even though they violate the commonly accepted scientific canons of what can be real ... I suppose you could call me an evangelical Protestant Franciscan because I believe in what St. Francis taught.”⁹⁵ Campolo presents Francis’ interaction with the wolf of Gubbio as a literal model for Christians: “Francis had loved the animal into being a pet,” representing real Christian possibilities “for the restoration of nature.”⁹⁶ Evangelicals, Campolo argues, can and should go and do likewise.

⁸⁸ Campolo, *How to Rescue the Earth*, 50.

⁸⁹ Campolo, *How to Rescue the Earth*, 51.

⁹⁰ Campolo, *How to Rescue the Earth*, 51.

⁹¹ Campolo, *How to Rescue the Earth*, 51. Campolo seems to use Barthian language to capture Saint Francis’ view of God.

⁹² Campolo, *How to Rescue the Earth*, 51.

⁹³ See Galatians 6:17.

⁹⁴ Campolo, *How To Rescue the Earth*, 54-55. Campolo later cites the stories of Francis praising God with the crickets and sheep to confront readers on their resistance to his example. “If you call St. Francis crazy, you are making a confession, not accusation. For what you say about such behavior only reveals how far you are removed from saintly spirituality.” Brian McLaren and Tony Campolo, *Adventures in Missing the Point: How the Culture-Controlled Church Neutered the Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 172.

⁹⁵ Campolo, *How to Rescue the Earth*, 55.

⁹⁶ Campolo, *How to Rescue the Earth*, 57.

Campolo also advocates for suffering animals.⁹⁷ He speaks of hunting for sport as one of his “pet peeves.”⁹⁸ “The closer St. Francis got to God,” Campolo states, “the more he found he could commune with animals.”⁹⁹ This contrasts with hobby hunters. “To kill such precious gifts from God as sport must be sin,” claims Campolo. “Woe to those who kill God’s creatures for sport!”¹⁰⁰

Saint Francis is a main inspiration for Campolo’s environmental advocacy. Campolo presents Francis’ mystical spirituality as the key to restoring spiritual communion with animals and the created world, the antidote to New Age error, a rebuke to sport hunters and polluters, and a guide to an ecologically conscientious lifestyle.¹⁰¹

Saint Francis and Creation Care

As environmental causes became associated with new, non-Christian spiritualities, many late twentieth-century American evangelicals reflexively saw environmentalism as a rival worldview to Christianity. There were, however, notable exceptions.¹⁰² In 1970 Francis Schaeffer, the eventual intellectual father of the religious right, offered his treatment of “the

⁹⁷ Campolo, *How to Rescue the Earth*, 75.

⁹⁸ Tony Campolo, *20 Hot Potatoes Christians are Afraid to Touch* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1988), 10.

⁹⁹ Campolo, *20 Hot Potatoes*, 139.

¹⁰⁰ Campolo, *20 Hot Potatoes*, 140.

¹⁰¹ An evangelical college student who was inspired by a Campolo talk on Christian environmentalism echoed Campolo’s message in a *Relevant* magazine article, seeking to recover environmentalism from only “secular” proponents. Saint Francis, Walt Whitman, and William Blake inspire the author to see the holiness of creation, and embrace ecological care as a response to God. “Why Environmentalism isn’t Just a Political Idea,” *Relevant*, November 18, 2002, <https://relevantmagazine.com/life/current-events/features/1636>.

¹⁰² David Larsen argues that, though evangelical ecological consciousness vacillated with the environmental attention of popular culture, evangelical environmentalism was more the norm than the exception among establishment evangelical leaders in the late twentieth century. Larsen finds that, while there were evangelical “minimizers” and “otherworldly apocalypticists” opposed to environmentalism and environmental ideologies, much of North American evangelicalism found ecological sensitivity congenial to their thought. Evangelicals, however, tended to emphasize personal choice and responsibility over organized political response. David Kenneth Larsen, “God’s Gardeners: American Protestant Evangelicals Confront Environmentalism, 1967-2000” (PhD diss., University of Chicago Divinity School, 2001), 4-5. While Larsen explores evangelical opposition to environmentalism, his analysis may not fully take into account the disparity between evangelical leadership and popular apocalypticism. More highly educated evangelicals were open to environmental concerns where the laity may not have shared their concerns. More study is needed to explore how such environmental consciousness affected the thought and behaviour of everyday believers.

ecological crisis” in *Pollution and the Death of Man*. In it, Schaeffer responds to Lynne White Jr.’s popular article “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis.”¹⁰³ White claims that the Christian view of dominion over nature bears responsibility for modern environmental degradation. For White, who is not a Christian, the revolutionary and “heretical” Saint Francis of Assisi with his “pan-psychism of all things” offers a spiritual and ecological corrective to mainstream Christianity.¹⁰⁴ Without addressing White’s interpretation of Saint Francis of Assisi, Francis Schaeffer rejects both White’s pantheism and his claim that Christianity is inherently environmentally destructive.¹⁰⁵ Schaeffer critiques White’s attitude for its low view of humanity, and sees humanity as both above and alongside creation, stewards of God’s earth.¹⁰⁶ He calls for Christians to work creatively against environmental exploitation.

Other evangelicals, not necessarily connected with the broader progressive evangelical movement, also turned to ecological concerns in the 1980s and 1990s.¹⁰⁷ The Au Sable Institute of Environmental Studies was founded as a small camp ministry in the 1960s. Under the leadership of Calvin College’s Calvin DeWitt, Au Sable evolved into a program

¹⁰³ On responses to White’s essay as a catalyst for evangelical environmental thought, see Larsen, “God’s Gardeners,” 39-73; see also Appelbaum, *St. Francis of America*, 130-131.

¹⁰⁴ Lynne White Jr., “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis,” in Francis A. Schaeffer, *Pollution and the Death of Man: The Christian View of Ecology* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1970), 113.

¹⁰⁵ Schaeffer, *Pollution and the Death of Man*, 14.

¹⁰⁶ Schaeffer, *Pollution and the Death of Man*, 33.

¹⁰⁷ For a detailed account of the rise of evangelical environmentalism in the 1980s and 1990s, see Larsen, “God’s Gardeners,” 175-334. Sabrina Danielson notes that from 1984 to 2010 evangelical publications gave increasing attention to environmental questions, while also showing increasing political polarization on environmental issues. More conservative publications such as *Christianity Today*, while supporting creation care, shied from making calls for any specific environmental actions. Sabrina Danielson, “Fracturing over Creation Care? Shifting Environmental Beliefs among Evangelicals, 1984-2010,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 52, no. 1 (2013): 198-199, 204. In *Progressive Evangelicals and the Pursuit of Social Justice*, Brantley Gasaway excludes environmental concerns from his explorations of progressive evangelicals’ main causes, noting its “scattered” coverage in progressive evangelical periodicals. 274. This is an oversight on the part of Gasaway that likely stems from his narrow focus on *Sojourners*, *The Other Side* and *Evangelicals for Social Action*. American evangelical environmental activists have been active since at least the 1980s, though not always operating in the same networks as other progressive evangelicals.

for environmental education across Christian educational institutions in the late 1970s. According to David Larsen, Au Sable's advocacy and theology were instrumental in the spread of evangelical environmental concern.¹⁰⁸ Climate and science causes gained salience among evangelicals in the 1990s and 2000s. The Evangelical Environmental Network, formed in the 1992 with Ron Sider as president, played a critical role in preventing Republicans in Congress from gutting the Endangered Species Act in 1996.¹⁰⁹ The same group later launched a highly publicized "What Would Jesus Drive?" television commercial campaign in 2002.¹¹⁰ Richard Cizik, an administrator in the National Association of Evangelicals, was a vocal advocate for climate change concerns in the 2000s, even facing pressure from some evangelical leaders to step down over his environmental stance.¹¹¹ At the same time *Christianity Today* noted the growing popularity of poet, farmer and conservationist Wendell Berry among young evangelicals.¹¹² Environmental degradation had become a concern for many evangelicals.

Environmentally-conscious evangelicals often opted to use the language of "creation care" over "environmentalism," alongside "stewardship," a word long used by evangelicals to speak about money and responsibility. Like Campolo, other evangelical environmental advocates showed concern to avoid an environmental worldview that elevates nature to any sort of divine status. "Don't make an environmental ideology the center of your faith," cautioned Loren and Mary Ruth Wilkinson.¹¹³

¹⁰⁸ Larsen, "God's Gardeners," 181-193.

¹⁰⁹ Larsen, "God's Gardeners," 288-299.

¹¹⁰ Swartz, *Moral Minority*, 259.

¹¹¹ Sarah Pulliam, "Richard Cizik Resigns from the National Association of Evangelicals," *Christianity Today*, December 11, 2008, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2008/decemberweb-only/150-42.0.html>.

¹¹² Ragan Sutterfield, "Imagining a Different Way to Live," *Christianity Today* (November 1, 2006): 60-63.

¹¹³ Loren Wilkinson and Mary Ruth Wilkinson, *Caring for Creation in Your Own Back Yard* (Vancouver, BC: Regent College Publishing, 1992), 8.

Loren Wilkinson, a poet and English professor at Seattle Pacific University who later moved to Vancouver's Regent College, was the editor of *Earthkeeping*, a multidisciplinary research project on Christian creation care first published in 1980 out of Calvin College's Calvin Center for Christian Scholarship. Its contributors included Calvin DeWitt of Au Sable and Michigan State Senator Vern Ehlers, among other specialists in economics, environmental science and philosophy. In it, the authors developed a theology for creation care that challenged premillennial dispensationalism's neglect of environmental concern.¹¹⁴

In the updated 1991 edition of the book, the authors cite Saint Francis' "Canticle of the Sun" to introduce water and fire among the elements of creation. Francis' praise of water is contrasted with modern degradation of water through pollution, acid rain and oil spills.¹¹⁵ "Francis praised fire as well," the authors state, "but recognized its ambivalence."¹¹⁶ Fire is a gift that is mishandled in the wasteful and degrading burning of energy. The authors go on to provide theological, scientific and practical guidance to a Christian response to creation.¹¹⁷

The authors of *Earthkeeping* explore the roots of modern and ancient views of nature, noting the impact of Saint Francis' familiarity with creation on the development of empirical

¹¹⁴ For an analysis of the Calvin Centre and the Reformed theology of creation developed by the authors of *Earthkeeping*, see Larsen, "God's Gardeners," 175-181.

¹¹⁵ Peter De Vos, et. al, *Earthkeeping in the '90s: Stewardship of Creation*, rev. ed., ed. Loren Wilkinson (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1991), 7.

¹¹⁶ De Vos, et. al., *Earthkeeping*, 7.

¹¹⁷ Included in their exploration is a critique of Max Weber's connection between Calvinism and capitalism. De Vos, et. al., *Earthkeeping*, 227. Most of the authors come from a clearly Reformed perspective. DeWitt furthers the connection of creation care with Calvinist theology, and particularly Abraham Kuyper, the Dutch statesman and theologian who famously emphasized God's sovereignty over every realm of human life and creation. Calvin B. DeWitt, *Caring For Creation: Responsible Stewardship of God's Handiwork* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998). Kuyperian thought in general, and Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan in particular, played an important role in one stream of progressive evangelicalism typified by the gradualist social justice emphasis of Calvin College philosopher Richard Mouw. See Swartz, *Moral Minority*, 139-140. Mouw, Paul Henry and Nicholas Wolterstorff, all Calvin faculty, took part in the drafting of the Chicago Declaration of Social Concern. Gasaway, *Progressive Evangelicals*, 42-43. Calvin College hosted its own conference on Christianity and Politics in 1973 with largely progressive themes. Gasaway, *Progressive Evangelicals*, 46. Lionel Basney, a Calvin College English professor, environmental advocate and author of *An Earth-Careful Way of Life*, was also a regular contributor to *The Other Side*. Lionel Basney, *An Earth-Careful Way of Life: Christian Stewardship and the Environmental Crisis* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994).

science.¹¹⁸ The authors argue for the need to hear the medieval mystics who had a view of God's presence in nature without degenerating into a pantheistic understanding of the world. "It is unfortunate that we have pushed these thinkers [medieval mystics] to the margins of Christian truth," the authors state, "for they have much to teach us. We need to hear them not in opposition to theological clarity, but rather as a different expression of the very richness which it is the task of theology to clarify."¹¹⁹ In spite of the authors' Reformed concern for theological accuracy, they uphold early Celtic Christians, Hildegard of Bingen and Saint Francis of Assisi as needed teachers of mysticism. "Though it is hard to distinguish fact from legend," the authors claim, "it is clear that Francis possessed, for his time, a remarkable sensitivity to nature."¹²⁰ According to these authors, Francis was ahead of his time for his natural advocacy, a needed voice for twentieth-century evangelicals.

The "Canticle of the Sun" receives extensive treatment in *Earthkeeping*. The authors note that the canticle is "very precise in its theology," borne out of a lifetime of meditation.¹²¹ They take care to place Francis within proper theological bounds: "Though accepting the various elements of creation as brother and sister creatures, and though appreciative of their splendor, purity, gaiety and strength, Francis nevertheless reserves praise for their Creator."¹²² There is nothing here of nature worship. The authors connect Francis' salutation of "sister death" with the contemporary view of "the ecological necessity of death... a rare

¹¹⁸ De Vos, et. al., *Earthkeeping*, 136. Premillennial dispensationalism was an influential framework for reading biblical prophecies as speaking of a series of ages, often emphasizing the imminent return of Christ and the destruction of the created world. Built into dispensationalism was the pessimistic assumption that the world would continually worsen before the end, and that any effort to make the world better was a waste of precious time and resources.

¹¹⁹ De Vos, et. al., *Earthkeeping*, 138.

¹²⁰ De Vos, et. al., *Earthkeeping*, 143.

¹²¹ De Vos, et. al., *Earthkeeping*, 143.

¹²² De Vos, et. al., *Earthkeeping*, 143-144

insight in the Middle Ages.”¹²³ To these authors Francis’ canticle betrays a proto-scientific understanding of biological life.

The authors of *Earthkeeping* do not portray Saint Francis as wholly unique, but show the influence of Celtic, Germanic and Eastern Orthodox Christian ideas on Francis.¹²⁴ Francis’ understanding of brotherhood with creation is, according to these authors, “central to a biblical understanding” of creation.¹²⁵ For these environmentalist evangelicals, Saint Francis was one bridge to recover what they considered to be a true biblical Christian sensitivity to nature. For them, Francis’ closeness with nature placed him on the path toward modern science, and his mysticism had practical implications for the future of Christian conservation.

Conclusion

Saint Francis was a natural source of inspiration for politically progressive and environmentally conscious evangelicals in the late twentieth century. Facing antagonism from popular conservative evangelical politics and ideologies, progressive and environmentalist evangelicals sought older models for Christian activism and environmentalism. For these evangelicals Saint Francis seemed to be an authentic, authoritative, historic Christian example for compassionate politics and ecological stewardship, a needed corrective to evangelical neglect in these areas. Francis’ embrace of poverty, peace, love, mysticism, and the world of creation provided a model for these evangelicals to imitate as they sought an alternative to the political conservatism and environmental negligence of other American evangelicals.

¹²³ De Vos, et. al., *Earthkeeping*, 144.

¹²⁴ De Vos, et. al., *Earthkeeping*, 144. The authors of *Earthkeeping* and Tony Campolo in *How To Rescue the Earth* put significant emphasis on Eastern Orthodox understandings of cosmic redemption to inform their interpretations of a biblical view of creation.

¹²⁵ De Vos, et. al., *Earthkeeping*, 144.

Progressive evangelicals' love for Saint Francis reflects their particular form of spirituality. Influenced by the likes of Saint Francis, Dorothy Day and Oscar Romero, many progressive evangelicals embraced a spirituality of finding Christ's presence among the poor and oppressed, as a means of a sometimes-mystical connection with God. This spirituality of the Christ in the poor, or "liberation spirituality,"¹²⁶ was one of a constellation of new spiritual options available to American evangelicals in the late twentieth century. Its roots, however, were in Roman Catholicism, both ancient and modern.

Another clear theme among these evangelicals is Saint Francis' link to a pure, early era of Christianity and true biblical thought. According to progressive evangelicals, Saint Francis connects modern Christians to the nonviolent position of the early church, to a biblical understanding of creation, and to a true Christian love of the poor. This nostalgia for an earlier, truer, idealized age of Christianity, whether in Saint Francis, the early church, pre-Roman Celtic Christianity, or nineteenth-century evangelicalism, functioned as something of an alternative to the moral nostalgia of the religious right. Francis was an authority from the past who led these twentieth-century evangelicals to a different way of politics and creation care as they faced an uphill battle convincing their fellow believers of the rightness of progressive and environmental causes. Francis was the saint for embattled evangelical activists.

¹²⁶ Parker, "Evangelical Spirituality Reviewed," *Evangelical Quarterly* 63, no. 2 (1991): 123.

Chapter 5
Saint Francis Today: The Evangelical Establishment Interprets Francis

Introduction

In December 1981, a young John Piper apparently picked up the most recent issue of *Sojourners* about Saint Francis of Assisi. A Wheaton and Fuller-educated Calvinist Baptist pastor in Minneapolis, Piper went on to become a popular theologian in the evangelical world with his 1986 book *Desiring God*. The *Sojourners* Lenin quotation caught his eye, and he relayed it in a devotional article. “I can’t let 1981 go by without a word about St. Francis,” Piper states, quoting Lenin’s alleged regret at his violence and longing for a saint like Francis.¹ Piper shares a story from *The Little Flowers of Saint Francis*, where Saint Francis tells Brother Leo that true joy is found in bearing poverty and rejection with patient endurance. “Join me,” Piper invited his readers, “in pursuing Philippians 3:10!”—an exhortation about sharing in Christ’s sufferings.² Increasingly for some evangelicals like Piper, Saint Francis represented a true, if miscaricatured, model for costly, biblical discipleship. For them, Saint Francis was a true historic Christian in his dedication to Christ and the words of the Bible, and they rejected popular, tame images of Saint Francis that downplayed his committed faith. Saint Francis served for them as a guide in a culture they saw as hostile, or at least contrary, to authentic, biblical Christianity.

This chapter first explores the mid-twentieth century neo-evangelical movement and institutions, including *Christianity Today*, alongside fundamentalist antipathy toward neo-evangelical openness to Catholicism and Saint Francis. The chapter then surveys interpretations of Saint Francis in *Christianity Today* and associated publications and writers,

¹ On the progeny of this quote, see Chapter Four, footnote 60 of thesis.

² John Piper, “Lenin, Francis, and Paul,” *Desiring God*, December 22, 1981, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/lenin-francis-and-paul>.

evangelicals near the centre of the cluster of institutions that arose from the neo-evangelical movement of the mid-twentieth century. These evangelicals admired Saint Francis as a true disciple of Christ, whose medieval faith contrasted with the “liberal” values of moral and religious relativism. For them, other more progressive evangelicals misread Saint Francis through the lens popular cultural values, rather than seeing the saint as a biblically obedient example for the contemporary world.

The New Evangelicals

Decades before Piper, a group of discontented fundamentalists attempted to direct the course of evangelicalism in America. The early twentieth century had seen numerous controversies that split denominations. Where liberal Protestants appealed to modern materialism, human agency, and scientific methodology, fundamentalists saw the deformation of Christian faith. Fundamentalists were so named after a set of articles published in the 1910s, emphasized the “fundamentals” of the faith against theological modernists—the divinity of Christ and the virgin birth, the reliability and historicity of Scripture, evangelism and missions, substitutionary atonement, and the imminent return of Christ. Fundamentalists denigrated critical biblical scholarship, liberal European theology, Roman Catholicism and, most famously, evolutionary biology. The debacle of the 1925 Scopes “Monkey Trial” in Dayton, Tennessee, and its subsequent portrayals in American media, entrenched exaggerated images of angry anti-intellectual fundamentalists in American popular imagination.³ The fundamentalist movement, however, was often more focused on

³ Ernest Sandeen targets such a stereotype in his ground-breaking *The Roots of Fundamentalism*. Sandeen locates the roots of fundamentalism not in the evolutionary controversies of the 1920s, but in earlier millenarian thought and biblical inerrancy. Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism 1800-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), xv-xix. Historians such as George Marsden and Joel Carpenter have argued that after the embarrassing debacles of the anti-modernist conflicts in the 1920s, fundamentalists retreated from such public controversies, focusing instead on building Bible schools, missionary networks, and radio presence that strengthened fundamentalist identity. These

missionary work than opposition to modernism, building numerous radio ministries for outreach, and educational institutions for the training of young people between the world wars.⁴

Troubled by the divisiveness and separatism that marked the movement, some mid-century fundamentalist evangelicals thought fundamentalism needed “a face lift.”⁵

Theologian Carl F. H. Henry, shaped by distaste for schism in his Presbyterian denomination,⁶ issued an invitation for fundamentalists to change their outlook. Published in 1947, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* castigates fundamentalists for ignoring social problems to focus on petty moralism and theological division.

“Fundamentalism is the modern priest and Levite,” Henry states, alluding to Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan, “by-passing suffering humanity.”⁷ Henry calls not for the rejection of fundamentalist theology but for a reformation of attitude and image, a renewal to speak a coherent intellectually and socially robust evangelical worldview to the modern world, “leading to a global renaissance within modern secularism.”⁸

fundamentalists, according to Carpenter, went on to become the architects of the booming post-Second World War evangelical network. See George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 193-194; Joel Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 3-4. Matthew Avery Sutton challenges this dominant “Marsden-Carpenter rise-fall-rebirth narrative” promoted by neo-evangelical leaders, arguing that the narrow, self-identified, premillennial fundamentalist movement continued to make cultural engagement and political causes a priority in the interwar period, including their opposition to the presidential candidacy of Al Smith and Roosevelt’s New Deal. “They never really retreated.” Matthew Avery Sutton, *American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), xii-xiv. Sutton’s exploration of interwar fundamentalist political engagement brings a needed corrective to over-simplified narratives of fundamentalist retreat. However, in his preference for a narrow definition of fundamentalism (following Ernest Sandeen), Sutton likely overstates millenarianism as the defining mark of all fundamentalists.

³ George Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1987), 166.

⁴ See especially Joel Carpenter, *Revive us Again*.

⁵ Molly Worthen, *Apostles of Reason: The Crisis of Authority in American Evangelicalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) 17.

⁶ Worthen, *Apostles of Reason*, 18-19

⁷ Carl F. H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2003), 2.

⁸ Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience*, 60-61.

Henry and likeminded evangelical leaders such as Harold Ockenga, Harold Lindsell, Charles Fuller, and with them Billy Graham, put tremendous effort into reforming conservative Protestantism in America into a sort of “third force” between fundamentalism and liberalism.⁹ Calling themselves “neo-evangelicals,” or simply “evangelicals,” they shared the fundamentalist supernaturalist view of the world and belief in the Bible’s inerrancy, but they wanted to appropriate the liberal openness to the social problems of the world.¹⁰ In 1942 Harold Ockenga founded the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) to rival both the Federal Council of Churches and Carl McIntire’s separatist fundamentalist American Council of Christian Churches, though the NAE failed to galvanize the number of churches Ockenga and others had hoped. Neo-evangelicals also founded Fuller Seminary (1947) in Pasadena, California, the Evangelical Theological Society (1949) and the periodical *Christianity Today* (1956).

These neo-evangelical leaders often had a Reformed, usually Presbyterian background, and a history in fundamentalism. Other conservative Protestants they tried to recruit to their causes did not always share their history and theological outlook.¹¹ Groups as diverse as Pentecostals, Restorationists, and Mennonites were courted by the NAE and

⁹ Sociologist John Stone claims that neo-evangelical differentiation from fundamentalists and liberals was primarily social, rather than ideological. The result is that neo-evangelicals defined themselves primarily in negative terms; they were “conscious not so much of who they were as who they were not.” John R. Stone, *On the Boundaries of American Evangelicalism: The Postwar Evangelical Coalition* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997), 17-18, 178.

¹⁰ Molly Worthen claims that the “small group of self-appointed leaders” at the helm of these new organizations “differed from their fundamentalist forefathers only in the degree of their separatist impulse.” Worthen, *Apostles of Reason*, 26, 35. Matthew Avery Sutton also sees continuity between neo-evangelicals and earlier twentieth-century fundamentalists in the realm of cultural and political engagement. Sutton, *American Apocalypse*, xiii. While there were real differences between neo-evangelicals and fundamentalist, neo-evangelical theological kinship clearly lay more with the biblicist and supernaturalist fundamentalists than with liberal “mainline” churches and Neo-Orthodox theologians such as Barth. Nevertheless, they were different enough to earn the ire of separatist fundamentalists.

¹¹ Donald Dayton was among those challenging the neo-evangelical emphasis on Reformed evangelicalism at the expense of the Wesleyan revivalist heritage. See Donald W. Dayton, *Discovering an Evangelical Heritage* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976).

sometimes found themselves on the edges of the developing post-war evangelical network.¹² In spite of these longstanding divisions, the emerging neo-evangelical networks acted as a sort of centre or mainstream establishment for significant portions of the white evangelical community in the United States.

Fundamentalist Fury

Not everyone was happy with the new neo-evangelical openness. Billy Graham's cooperation with mainline churches, and even Roman Catholics, gained the ire of fundamentalists such as Carl McIntyre and Bob Jones, Sr.¹³ Fundamentalists, and many other Protestants, had a long antagonism toward Catholics. "Is Romism Christianity?" asked one article appearing in the original edition of *The Fundamentals*.¹⁴ The answer was, of course, no: "Popery is emphatically *anti-Christian*," because of its wrong view of justification, belief in authority apart from scripture, the role of the pope and the saints, and a history of persecuting Protestants.¹⁵ One Fuller professor resigned from the seminary where Graham was a trustee over Graham's cooperation with Catholics.¹⁶ When Graham spoke words in praise of Saint Francis of Assisi on receiving an award from a Franciscan group in 1972, he was denounced by David Cloud, an Independent Fundamental Baptist missionary and tract writer.¹⁷

¹² According to George Marsden, "American evangelicalism in the 1960s was a vast, largely disconnected conglomeration of wildly diverse groups. Only some of these had been touched substantially by the classic fundamentalism." Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 230.

¹³ George Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 166.

¹⁴ T.W. Medhurst, "Is Romism Christianity?," in *The Fundamentals*, ed. R.A. Torrey (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1990), 531-542. Carl Henry also seems to have feared a future Roman Catholic domination of America. *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, xv.

¹⁵ Medhurst, "Is Romism Christianity?," 531-542.

¹⁶ Worthen, *Apostles of Reason*, 48.

¹⁷ David Cloud, "Billy Graham and Rome," Way of Life Literature, February 1, 2006, https://www.wayoflife.org/database/billy_graham_and_rome.html.

As part of the more separatist wing of fundamentalism that sought separation from what they viewed as compromised Christians and denominations,¹⁸ Cloud made a long career of condemning Graham and other evangelicals, including Tony Campolo and Richard Foster. When the Billy Graham museum at Wheaton included a banner depicting Saint Francis alongside Protestant reformers and leaders in their “rotunda of witnesses,”¹⁹ Cloud saw heresy. According to Cloud, Saint Francis “preached a false sacramental gospel of faith-works.”²⁰ Cloud denounces the Franciscan persecution of “Bible believers” and the role of Pope Innocent III, to whom Francis pledged allegiance, in the formation of the inquisition. Innocent “sent out his bloody henchmen to hunt out and torment the ‘heretical’ Waldenses.”²¹ Francis’ followers were “spiritually blind papal loyalists,”²² and Cloud condemns Francis’ Marian devotion, mysticism, and strange association with animals.²³ That Francis literally followed commands to the disciples in the gospels indicates, for Cloud, an incorrect hermeneutical framework; according to his dispensationalist timeline these were commands for an earlier age.²⁴ For separatist fundamentalists such as Cloud, associating with or admiring the Catholic Saint Francis was a sign of compromise and apostasy.

Christianity Today

Such fundamentalist separatism became increasingly marginalized from the popular movement that galvanized around the new neo-evangelical institutions. *Christianity Today*

¹⁸ Cloud is associated with Independent Fundamental Baptist churches. George Marsden describes this wing of fundamentalism as the more marginal group shaped strongly by dispensational theology “for whom strict separation was an article of faith.” Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 195.

¹⁹ “Francis of Assisi: Banners from the Rotunda of Witnesses,” Wheaton College, accessed June 18, 2018, <https://www.wheaton.edu/about-wheaton/museum-and-collections/billy-graham-center-museum/exhibits/rotunda-of-witnesses/francis-of-assisi/>.

²⁰ Cloud, “Billy Graham and Rome.”

²¹ Cloud, “Billy Graham and Rome.”

²² Cloud, “Billy Graham and Rome.”

²³ David Cloud, “Francis of Assisi,” Way of Life Literature, May 7, 2009, https://www.wayoflife.org/reports/francis_o_assisi.html.

²⁴ Cloud, “Francis of Assisi.”

played a large role in the development of the new, self-consciously moderate evangelical identity. Billy Graham conceived the magazine as a conservative rival to the liberal *Christian Century*, but also as a culturally engaged alternative to fundamentalism.²⁵ It was launched with help from Graham's father-in-law L. Nelson Bell and funding from oil magnate J. Howard Pew. Carl Henry was selected as the first editor in spite of Graham's initial hesitations that Henry's fundamentalist past put him too much in the conservative camp for his vision (Henry for his part was uncomfortable with Pew's Cold War-capitalist editorial influence).²⁶ Critically engaging with both the liberal and neo-orthodox theology of many mainline Protestants, *Christianity Today* soon boasted a readership greater than *Christian Century*.²⁷

Presenting a more moderate face than separatist fundamentalists, *Christianity Today* nevertheless landed on the conservative side of most theological and political issues over the decades that followed its formation. FBI director J. Edgar Hoover penned articles for the magazine in the early years. *Christianity Today* carried a largely anti-communist outlook during the Cold War.²⁸ Their early northern and southern editors were widely divided over race issues at the height of the Civil Rights movement.²⁹ After publishing a debate over just war and Christian pacifism in 1980,³⁰ the editors concluded with an editorial: "Our position is that across-the-board pacifism is both unbiblical and unrealistic."³¹ The magazine often

²⁵ Worthen, *Apostles of Reason*, 56-57.

²⁶ For an overview of the conflicts over the selection of Henry, see Carl F. H. Henry, *Confessions of a Theologian* (Waco: Word Books, 1986), 160-163; and Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 158-159.

²⁷ Worthen, *Apostles of Reason*, 60. *Christianity Today*'s readership was boosted at the beginning by Pew's funding of free copies for Protestant clergy. Worthen, *Apostles of Reason*, 58-60.

²⁸ Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 169.

²⁹ Henry, *Confessions of a Theologian*, 158-159.

³⁰ Robert Culver, "Justice is Sometimes Worth Fighting For," *Christianity Today*, November 7, 1980, 14-25; John Drescher, "Why Christians Shouldn't Carry Swords," *Christianity Today*, November 7, 1980, 15-23.

³¹ "In Matters of War and Peace..." *Christianity Today*, November 21, 1980, 14-15.

covered the pro-life movement and other socially conservative causes in detail, though was also increasingly open to environmental issues in the 1990s and 2000s. The editors took an explicit approach against specific policy recommendations while recognizing a need for Christian political action.³² The magazine nevertheless maintained a primarily theological and pastoral orientation.

Saint Francis Today

In 1982 *Christianity Today* published a review of a play on Saint Francis. Julia Duin, the author, refreshes her readers' memory on the popularity of Francis' peace prayer and the hymn "All Creatures of Our God and King," which "is sung in churches everywhere."³³ Duin observes the wide appeal of the story of Saint Francis: "Though a Roman Catholic saint," Duin states, "Francis is important to others as well. His yearning for God and single-minded pursuit of Jesus Christ strike an answering chord in all Christians." Duin quotes the actor, Leonardo Defilippis, who claims that "Francis is a fundamentalist in the true sense of the world" for his literal obedience of scripture.³⁴ This image of Francis' inspiring, wholehearted obedience to Jesus and the words of the Bible became the standard view of Francis for many establishment evangelicals.³⁵

Other more specialized periodicals soon joined the *Christianity Today* brand, including *Christian History*. Issues of *Christian History* began by focusing on Protestant historical figures and movements, such as Ulrich Zwingli, John Wesley, and the early

³² Henry, *Confessions of a Theologian*, 270-271; Danielson, "Fracturing over Creation Care?" 198-199, 204.

³³ Julia Duin, "Freeing Saint Francis," *Christianity Today* 26, no. 20 (December 17, 1982): 52.

³⁴ Duin, "Freeing Saint Francis," 52.

³⁵ For lack of a more fitting term, I opt to use "establishment" to describe the evangelicals heavily involved in the institutions that emerged from the neo-evangelical milieu. It would not be proper to call them neo-evangelicals, as that describes a specific mid-twentieth century movement to which their evangelical successors did not necessarily belong. Other terms like "conservative," "moderate," or "mainstream" are likewise relative and imprecise.

Anabaptists.³⁶ A 1987 issue on the topic of money in *Christian History* includes an overview of Saint Francis of Assisi's love of poverty and suspicion of money, including stories of his embrace of lepers, rejection of his father's estate, begging, and preaching in the vernacular.³⁷ In the same issue, Joyce Renick connects Saint Francis to the Waldensians, a medieval reform movement condemned by Rome. "Was Francis of Assisi secretly a Waldensian?" Renick asks.³⁸ She describes Peter Waldo, the movement's founder, as a proto-Protestant, and notes Francis' family's connections to Waldensian ideas from France. Renick sees Francis and Waldo sharing a similar view of biblical literalism, an emphasis on works from the epistle of James, and the same verses and interpretation of verses used to uphold their voluntary poverty.³⁹

Saint Francis' radical self-renunciation was too much for some authors of *Christian History*. The money issue also includes Luther's accusation that Francis was naïve in his refusal to handle money.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, the authors present Saint Francis as a reformer in the biblical tradition, who took Jesus' commands seriously and literally, if a bit excessively.

A 1994 issue of *Christian History* was dedicated entirely to Saint Francis. In one article, church historian William Stafford highlights Francis' pursuit of poverty in following Jesus' humility. For Stafford, Francis offers practical guidance for Christians to avoid greed, an imperative that, "Francis constantly reminded his hearers, God would enforce on the Last

³⁶ It was not until the fifteenth issue of *Christian History* that a pre-Reformation figure was the main feature of an issue, namely the celebration of the 1600th anniversary of Augustine of Hippo's conversion and baptism. The next example is Issue 24, which commemorated the 900th anniversary of the birth of Bernard of Clairvaux. Saint Francis, however, was included in Issue 14 about money.

³⁷ Dan V. Runyon, "St. Francis of Assisi on the Joy of Poverty and the Value of Dung," *Christian History* 14, 1987, <https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/uploaded/50cf7621b38539.61381780.pdf>.

³⁸ Joyce Renick, "Francis and the Waldensians," *Christian History* 14, 1987, <https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/uploaded/50cf7621b38539.61381780.pdf>.

³⁹ Renick, "Francis and the Waldensians."

⁴⁰ Carl Lindberg, "Luther on the Use of Money," *Christian History* 14, 1987, <https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/uploaded/50cf7621b38539.61381780.pdf>

Judgment.”⁴¹ Stafford seeks to deliver Francis from sentimentality: “Concrete, life-changing acts were more pungent for Francis than feelings or abstract principles.” According to Stafford, Francis took action in his obedience to God and embrace of poverty.⁴²

Mark Galli, then the editor of *Church History* and later editor of *Christianity Today*, highlighted overlooked facts from the life of Saint Francis, including his ascetic intensity, his literal obedience of Jesus’ commands, his disapproval of laughter among the friars, and his respect for the Catholic clergy.⁴³ The peace prayer, Galli notes, is not genuinely Francis’ work.⁴⁴ The point was to challenge popular sentimental and usually liberal images of the saint. “Though Francis revered all creatures,” Galli states, “he was not a vegetarian.”⁴⁵ Galli moves on to note the example of Francis as a true follower of the beatitudes. “He wasn’t perfect,” Galli claims, “and Protestants may not embrace all of his beliefs. But he shows me—and here I squirm—that Jesus’ commands are not wild fantasies of a dreamy idealist but hard-headed guides to a life of freedom and joy.”⁴⁶ For Galli, Saint Francis showed possibilities for real, dedicated Christianity—a saint for evangelicals to consider in his biblical literalism and even his poverty.

In a 1996 *Christianity Today* article entitled “Saint Nasty,” Galli argues that the Christian saints (among whom Galli includes notable Protestants), while virtuous, were not patient and kind in their pursuit of holiness. Alongside Bernard of Clairvaux’s crusading militarism, Luther’s insults, Calvin’s assent to the death of Servetus and Bonhoeffer’s

⁴¹ Dr. William S. Stafford, “The Case for Downward Mobility,” *Christian History* 42, 1994, <https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/uploaded/50cf8154cf2b67.43105470.pdf>

⁴² Stafford, “The Case for Downward Mobility.”

⁴³ Mark Galli, “Francis of Assisi: Did You Know?” *Christian History* 42, 1994, <https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/uploaded/50cf8154cf2b67.43105470.pdf>.

⁴⁴ Galli, “Francis of Assisi: Did You Know?”

⁴⁵ Galli, “Francis of Assisi: Did You Know?”

⁴⁶ Mark Galli, “Francis of Assisi: From the Editor—Discomforting Francis,” *Christian History* 42, 1994, <https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/uploaded/50cf8154cf2b67.43105470.pdf>.

resistance of Hitler, Galli complicates the popular image of “the saint who deserves the Nobel Peace Prize of all history, Francis of Assisi.”⁴⁷ Galli shares the story of Francis reprimanding a friar who briefly touched a coin, forcing the brother to put the coin in ass’s dung with his mouth. “When compared to the hundreds of stories of saints that can be culled from the Bible and church history,” Galli states, “Francis was merely fulfilling his job description.”⁴⁸ The saints are mean in history and scripture.⁴⁹ Kindness is often called for, but there are exceptions in the age of “the cult of tolerance.”⁵⁰ Galli shares a story of his own encounter with a parishioner who had an abortion, regretting that he met her confession with kind platitudes. “I knew immediately that I had betrayed my faith.”⁵¹ Some evils “demand something more than patience and civility.” For Galli, the saints showed the way with their holy fierceness in pursuit of God. “For Jesus,” Galli claims, “as for the saints, God is the first and the last; the world is black and white, only God and non-God.”⁵² In Galli’s eyes, Saint Francis was one true saint who did not let kindness get in the way of his pursuit of God.

Galli returned to this image of Francis in a critique of Brian McLaren and other “postmodern reformers” of the emerging church movement.⁵³ Galli cites McLaren’s desire for reformers who can speak to the postmodern cultural context as Saint Francis, Søren Kierkegaard and C.S. Lewis did to theirs. Galli challenges these examples. Saint Francis did not try to analyze his age and formulate a response to the corruption of his times. “Instead,”

⁴⁷ Mark Galli, “Saint Nasty,” *Christianity Today*, June 1996, 25.

⁴⁸ Galli, “Saint Nasty,” 25.

⁴⁹ Meanness seems to be a favourite theme of Galli’s, also applied to Jesus in his book, *Jesus Mean and Wild: The Unexpected Love of an Untamable God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006).

⁵⁰ Galli, “Saint Nasty,” 26.

⁵¹ Galli, “Saint Nasty,” 27.

⁵² Galli, “Saint Nasty,” 28.

⁵³ Mark Galli, “The Virtue of Unoriginality,” *Christianity Today*, April 1, 2002, 62. On the emerging or emergent church movement, see Chapter Six of this thesis.

says Galli, “he grappled with the teachings of Jesus.”⁵⁴ It was Francis’ encounter with the words of the Bible, not his cultural analysis, that led to the renewal of the church. McLaren and his ilk reduce the good news of the gospel to “postmodern news.”⁵⁵ For Galli, they are wasting energy that should be spent on responding to the words of Christ in the Bible as Saint Francis did.

Galli challenged contemporary interpretations of Saint Francis in his response to a 2003 Hallmark docudrama about the saint. “Environmentalists believe that the salvation of the world lies in the preservation of an eco-sensitive Francis of Assisi,” Galli claims.

“Pacifists want to make Francis an instrument of their peace movements. And *Reluctant Saint* wants to make Francis into a religious pluralist who is shocked out of his parochial Christianity into a new respect for the goodness of Islam.”⁵⁶ Writing at the beginning of the US invasion of Iraq, Galli claims that in meeting with the Muslim Sultan, Francis “went to proselytize,” not seek peace and reject the crusades. Francis’ encounter with “a less-than-irenic Islam” did not go well.⁵⁷ Such antagonism should also be expected from a secular culture: “Evangelistic fervor, of course, doesn’t play well in an age that often suspects

⁵⁴ Galli, “The Virtue of Unoriginality,” 62.

⁵⁵ Galli, “The Virtue of Unoriginality,” 62.

⁵⁶ Mark Galli, “Reimagining Francis: A Documentary Tells Us Less about the Medieval Saint than about Pop Spirituality,” *Christianity Today*, April 2003, 107.

⁵⁷ Galli, “Reimagining Francis,” 107. Galli reminds his readers that the Muslims were “equally cruel” as the Western crusaders. Galli, “Reimagining Francis,” 107. Another *Christianity Today* article leading up to the US invasion of Iraq supported the possibility of a preventative just war without explicitly endorsing the US invasion of Iraq. “If all the prudential and practical questioning points to the conclusion that Iraq or its proxies are about to use weapons of mass destruction—and that military action would not create catastrophe and chaos—a pre-emptive strike could be considered just, and perhaps an act of Christian charity and duty,” the editors contend in their application of just war theory. “Bully Culprit,” *Christianity Today*, October 2002, 32. They later claimed this fell short of an endorsement of war. “We did not argue that it was time to go to war with Iraq,” the editors later clarified, “although some correspondents thought we did.” “Weapons of the Spirit,” *Christianity Today*, March 2003, 36. The March 2003 article recommends that all evangelicals support charity work and prayer during the impending war, highlighting, among other things, the presence in Iraq of a group from Christian Peacemaker Teams who sought to join the Iraqi poor in solidarity ahead of the American invasion. The inclusion of such an adamantly anti-war group highlights the political and ideological diversity within American evangelicalism.

evangelism of being a hate crime.”⁵⁸ Galli faults the film for removing miracles and explicit faith references and attributing Francis’ poor health and stigmata to his care for lepers. Galli counters such tame images with Francis’ rigorous asceticism and sacramental Roman Catholic faith.⁵⁹ “What we end up with,” claims Galli, “is a Francis who has no strong connection with organized religion. He has no defining beliefs (other than a vague concern for the poor); he makes no demands on anyone but himself; he respects all religions; his mystical experiences are vague. He is on a quest for ‘enlightenment’ rather than... to imitate Christ.”⁶⁰ For Galli this is a misunderstanding of Francis and a misuse of history for self-justification, rather than allowing Francis to challenge the modern world through his intense discipleship.⁶¹ Galli seeks to recover what he sees as the truly Christian, biblical, and uncomfortable Francis.

Medieval News for Modern Man

Mark Galli also published a biography of Saint Francis with the aim of improving historical accuracy. He again challenged popular images of Saint Francis. According to Galli Francis revered bishops and the church hierarchy.⁶² Galli dismisses the insinuations of modern biographers of romantic involvement between Clare and Francis.⁶³ Francis’ sainthood and love were borne from long labour, like the overcoming of his revulsion toward lepers, rather than from instant spiritual experiences or vague feelings.⁶⁴

⁵⁸ Galli, “Reimagining Francis,” 108.

⁵⁹ Galli, “Reimagining Francis,” 108.

⁶⁰ Galli, “Reimagining Francis,” 109-110.

⁶¹ Galli, “Reimagining Francis,” 110.

⁶² Mark Galli, *Francis of Assisi and His World*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 40-41.

⁶³ Galli states, “this is to read a modern sensibility back into the medieval world, which has a larger imagination that [sic] does our own age. Even if their relationship was charged with subliminal sexual attraction, that energy was clearly channeled into something transcendent—a common commitment to incarnate the humility and poverty of Christ in their world.” Galli, *Francis of Assisi and His World*, 112.

⁶⁴ Galli, *Francis of Assisi and His World*, 50.

Galli emphasizes this costly message in Francis and his followers. Francis “did not send his brothers out... to proclaim a saccharine message about God’s love and the wonder of creation... but a message of penance to avoid judgment.”⁶⁵ They were not “carefree nature lovers who wandered the countryside picking flowers, singing with the birds and composing poems extolling the wonders of nature.”⁶⁶ They were not so self-centred, claims Galli, but were rather dedicated to serving God and others. They followed the discipline of the Catholic Church and a rule of prayer.⁶⁷ For Galli, these Franciscans were firm, dedicated disciples.

Surprisingly, Galli describes Francis’ formulation of the Franciscan monastic rule by opening the Bible to three passages about poverty, chastity and obedience as a move orchestrated for effect, even deception, and not a miracle.⁶⁸ Likewise Francis’ disrobing before his father and the bishop was not an act of spontaneous inspiration, but was calculated for dramatic effect.⁶⁹ For Galli, Francis struggled with a vicious cycle of pride and false humility in his public penance. “Francis was indeed a saint,” Galli acknowledges, “but a saint with ongoing character flaws.”⁷⁰ He was not the spontaneous, innocent, innocuous saint of popular lore.

Like many Protestant admirers of Francis, Galli is attuned to the reforming context of the saint and his first followers. “Corruption infected all levels of the church’s life” in Francis’ time.⁷¹ The messages of reforming groups such as the Waldensians were “in the air

⁶⁵ Galli, *Francis of Assisi and His World*, 67-68.

⁶⁶ Galli, *Francis of Assisi and His World*, 89.

⁶⁷ Galli is careful to assure his readers that the first Franciscans did not have a “merely formal relationship with the divine.” Galli, who became an Anglican, has somewhat unique high church sympathies compared to other neo-evangelicals. Galli, *Francis of Assisi and His World*, 90.

⁶⁸ Galli, *Francis of Assisi and His World*, 63.

⁶⁹ Galli, *Francis of Assisi and His World*, 41.

⁷⁰ Galli, *Francis of Assisi and His World*, 51. Galli also questions the prudence of Francis’ use of arbitrary decision-making methods as God’s guidance. Galli, *Francis of Assisi and His World*, 123.

⁷¹ Galli, *Francis of Assisi and His World*, 52.

that Francis breathed.”⁷² Galli shares that Francis preached in vernacular Italian, upsetting the hierarchical norms.⁷³ Yet Galli also emphasizes Francis’ devotion to the priesthood and to Mary.⁷⁴ Galli’s Francis is a zealous reformer but also an uncomfortably faithful Catholic.

Galli places Francis’ encounter with the Sultan in the context of other early Franciscan martyrs whose unsuccessful missionary endeavor to Morocco was miscalculated and confrontational—a bad missionary strategy.⁷⁵ Likewise, for Galli, Francis was combative in his visit to the Muslim Sultan: “He began preaching his message without earning the right to be heard. He offended the religious leaders. He insulted the hospitality of the host.”⁷⁶ This was not a happy mission of peace, but one of evangelism gone wrong, for which Francis was “in deep discouragement.”⁷⁷

Galli is cautious about the many miracle stories attributed to Saint Francis in early biographies. Some stories “border on the mythical.”⁷⁸ They should not be taken as models for imitation. As though countering charismatic claims on Saint Francis, Galli holds that miraculous encounters “are not central to Franciscan spirituality. Francis never told his brothers to seek mystical moments.”⁷⁹ The taming of the wolf of Gubbio “seems clearly to be a fabrication” in the spirit of the legend of Hercules and the lion.⁸⁰ Galli nevertheless accepts some of the nature miracles as historically possible: “they cannot all be dismissed as fairy tales.”⁸¹ But, according to Galli, Francis’ special relationship with creatures was “not an

⁷² Galli, *Francis of Assisi and His World*, 56.

⁷³ Galli, *Francis of Assisi and His World*, 59.

⁷⁴ Galli, *Francis of Assisi and His World*, 99, 144.

⁷⁵ Galli, *Francis of Assisi and His World*, 127.

⁷⁶ Galli, *Francis of Assisi and His World*, 127.

⁷⁷ Galli, *Francis of Assisi and His World*, 127.

⁷⁸ Galli, *Francis of Assisi and His World*, 90. Galli claims that *The Little Flowers of Saint Francis* especially exaggerates the miraculous elements of its stories. Galli, *Francis of Assisi and His World*, 111.

⁷⁹ Galli, *Francis of Assisi and His World*, 90.

⁸⁰ Galli, *Francis of Assisi and His World*, 154.

⁸¹ Galli, *Francis of Assisi and His World*, 153.

abstract love of nature,” but was based on the connection of animals such as sheep with scriptural images. “For Francis,” Galli claims, “nature was a living metaphor for his relationship with God ... He took his cues from the Bible.”⁸²

This picture of a Bible-centred, ascetic, evangelistic and purpose-driven Francis leads Galli to confront misinterpretations of the saint in popular culture. The peace and ecology movements misunderstand Saint Francis’ “deep personal faith, his call to strict poverty or his absolute devotion to the Roman Catholic Church.”⁸³ Galli calls out reform-minded, Francis-inspired Catholics who disparage the clergy.⁸⁴ Modern people misread the “Canticle of the Sun” as “an ode to the wonders of nature” rather than as a song of praise to God.⁸⁵ The peace prayer, points out Galli, is not genuine. “Francis was less interested in ecology and peacemaking than we are,” Galli claims, “And when he did focus on those themes he did so for unmodern reasons.”⁸⁶ The saint of popular imagination does not give the whole picture of the real Francis, who, Galli claims, would not only challenge violence and the disrespect of creation, but also modern secularization, materialism, individualism, pride and anti-institutionalism.⁸⁷ “In the end,” says Galli, “although our modern world wishes to discard so much of Francis into the rubbish bin of history, it is the medieval Francis who shows the modern world a better way.”⁸⁸ Mark Galli’s Saint Francis is a medieval, institutional, biblicist Christian who challenges modern liberal causes, emotion-driven spirituality and individualism with his life of costly discipleship. The medieval Francis, and not the Francis

⁸² Galli, *Francis of Assisi and His World*, 155-156.

⁸³ Galli, *Francis of Assisi and His World*, 179.

⁸⁴ Galli, *Francis of Assisi and His World*, 179.

⁸⁵ Galli, *Francis of Assisi and His World*, 181.

⁸⁶ Galli, *Francis of Assisi and His World*, 7.

⁸⁷ Galli, *Francis of Assisi and His World*, 182.

⁸⁸ Galli, *Francis of Assisi and His World*, 182-183.

of popular imagination or of progressive, postmodern evangelicals, is Galli's ideal saint for modern Christians.⁸⁹

(Almost) Everyone's Saint

Other establishment evangelicals also cited Saint Francis' example. The saint's popular role in culture gave him apologetic and teaching value. During Campus Crusade for Christ's 1976 "Here's Life, America" evangelistic campaign, the group came under fire from other Christians for their marketing tactics, simplistic messaging, and even alleged cult-like behaviour. They responded with a notice about the centrality of conversion in the lives of people such as Francis of Assisi and Albert Schweitzer.⁹⁰ A popular evangelical author and contributor to Youth for Christ's *Campus Life* magazine, Philip Yancey, cited Francis in the 2006 *Rumors of Another World*, his appeal for a life lived in the awareness of God's presence in the world. According to Yancey, Francis and other Christians did not reject nature, but embraced the world from a Christian perspective.⁹¹ Christians such as Francis, Bonhoeffer, Oscar Romero, Mother Teresa and Harriet Tubman did not forsake the world by focusing on eternal life, but rather became more effective agents for change.⁹² "Visit the most dangerous and deprived parts of the planet," Yancey claims, "and on the front lines you will find Christians establishing micro-credit banks, staffing hospitals and schools, drilling wells, and housing refugees." Christian faith makes people such as Francis into loving actors in the

⁸⁹ In a 2009 *Christianity Today* blog, Galli also targets the Francis misquote, "Preach the gospel at all times, and if necessary, use words." Unsurprisingly, Galli believes Christians need to use words. Mark Galli, "Speak the Gospel," Soul Work (blog), *Christianity Today*, May 21, 2009, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2009/mayweb-only/120-42.0.html>.

⁹⁰ John G. Turner, *Bill Bright and Campus Crusade for Christ: The Renewal of Evangelicalism in Postwar America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 169.

⁹¹ Philip Yancey, *Rumors of Another World: What on Earth Are We Missing?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 49.

⁹² Yancey, *Rumors of Another World*, 226-227.

world.⁹³ In spite of their radical appearance, saints such as Francis were truly “torchbearers” enlightening the world.⁹⁴ Saint Francis was a convenient and inspiring example for evangelical faith—a universally acknowledged Christian exemplar.

Wendy Murray, a journalist for *Christianity Today*, published her own biography of Saint Francis in 2008. It is primarily an investigative work. One of Murray’s main claims is that Clare played a major, but later downplayed, role in Francis’ life and conversion. “The electric charge that ultimately propelled Francis’ conversion was his love for Clare,” whom Murray believed fills the holes in accounts of Francis life.⁹⁵ She claims, as Galli hypothesizes, that this love led them to complete dedication to God, not to a continued romantic relationship.⁹⁶

While largely an investigative and descriptive work, Murray ventures into challenging some popular interpretations of Saint Francis’ life. She presents a moderate reading of Francis’ meeting with the Sultan, emphasizing his evangelistic intent: “Some observers would like to have seen a Francis who viscerally condemned the beliefs of Islam. Others would have preferred a Francis who acknowledged Islam as equal to Christianity... The reality is, he did neither.” Rather, Francis risked his life to invite the Sultan to become a Christian.⁹⁷ Like Galli, she also attacks popular interpretations of the “Canticle of the Sun.”

⁹³ Yancey, *Rumors of Another World*, 227.

⁹⁴ Yancey, *Rumors of Another World*, 238.

⁹⁵ Wendy Murray, *A Mended and Broken Heart: The Life and Love of Francis of Assisi* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), xvi.

⁹⁶ Murray’s attention on the significant role of Clare could suggest the influence of evangelical feminism and themes of women’s empowerment in American culture and academia. Some evangelical feminist scholars in the late twentieth-century sought to correct one-sided portrayals of history by highlighting the significant role of women in the life of the church. See for example Ruth A. Tucker and Walter L. Liefeld, *Daughters of the Church: Women and Ministry from the New Testament Times to the Present* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1984).

⁹⁷ Murray, *A Mended and Broken Heart*, 120.

“God is the recipient [of the praise],” claims Murray, “It is not pantheism.”⁹⁸ For Murray, Saint Francis is popularly misunderstood.

Murray shares an anecdote about a painting from Assisi popularly, but wrongly, believed to be Clare. When a Franciscan Friar was asked why the order did not clarify this, he said, “It is what the people want.” Murray responds, “This touches upon the contradiction related to the phenomenon of Saint Francis. Sometimes the image is made to conform to the picture of the saint the people want.”⁹⁹ She notes in particular the identification of Francis with animal rights, peace and environmentalism.¹⁰⁰ Saint Francis, Murray claims, “would be willing to be everyone’s saint... as long as the appropriation is not confused appropriation.”¹⁰¹ Francis’ faith, peace, poverty and love for nature were not “sentimental or trivial,” but were centred on his love and dedication to the gospel of Christ. Murray writes that “He would not kill for it, but he would die for it. He would not raise a sword for it, but he would go to battle for it ... [he] singlehandedly demonstrated that the New Testament Gospel of Christ crucified can be lived truly with integrity in a violent, chaotic, and un-Gospel-like age.”¹⁰² For Murray, the true picture of Francis is one of a committed disciple, not the tame saint of popular sentiment.

Conclusion

Murray, Galli, and other “mainstream” evangelicals considered Saint Francis a true disciple of Christ who followed the biblical commands of Christ and sacrificed everything for God, “eliminating,” according to Murray, “the excuse that it could not be done.”¹⁰³ For

⁹⁸ Murray, *A Mended and Broken Heart*, 145.

⁹⁹ Murray, *A Mended and Broken Heart*, 182.

¹⁰⁰ Murray, *A Mended and Broken Heart*, 183.

¹⁰¹ Murray, *A Mended and Broken Heart*, 185.

¹⁰² Murray, *A Mended and Broken Heart*, 185.

¹⁰³ Murray, *A Mended and Broken Heart*, 188.

these evangelicals, Francis was not a mascot for “liberal” causes, but a historic Christian saint who challenged his world, and continues to challenge the modern world, inspiring faithfulness in a hostile or indifferent culture. Ecological and pacifist interpretations of Francis were at best incomplete for these writers, if not completely off the mark. Rather, for them, Saint Francis was a true, biblicist, evangelistic and zealous disciple of Jesus—an archetypical Christian.

Some battles over the interpretation of Francis were civil conflicts among evangelicals; according to Galli and Murray, evangelicals who followed innocuous cultural stereotypes of Saint Francis misunderstood his biblical faith. For them Saint Francis was wrongfully tamed by modern culture and progressive misunderstandings. In their mind these misunderstandings barred the way to the real Francis, and by extension, to authentic biblical faith in Jesus.

Feelings of cultural alienation may lie behind some of these interpretive battles over Saint Francis’ significance. American evangelicals have often felt themselves to be a marginalized minority. The politics of the religious right,¹⁰⁴ popular contemporary Christian music such as DC Talk’s hit song “Jesus Freak,”¹⁰⁵ and the quick fame of Columbine High School “martyr” Cassie Bernall¹⁰⁶ reflected these feelings of alienation in the late twentieth

¹⁰⁴ See Chapter Four of this thesis.

¹⁰⁵ Mark Allan Powell notes the consciously outsider status of much contemporary Christian music in the 1990s. Mark Allan Powell, “Contemporary Christian Music as a Window on Evangelical Piety,” in *Evangelical Christians and Popular Culture: Pop Goes the Gospel Vol. 3*, ed. Robert H. Woods, Jr. (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2013): 95-97.

¹⁰⁶ While early reports from the Columbine shooting reported Bernall’s confession of belief in God before her death, later evidence revealed that this was a case of mistaken identity. Ralph W. Larkin, *Comprehending Columbine* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007), 43-44. Ralph Larkin explores the evangelical hagiography about Cassie Bernall and another evangelical victim Rachel Scott, and the function of the Columbine shooting as a fault line for the American political and religious culture wars. Evangelicals, Larkin claims, sought to cast the tragedy as a conflict between good and evil with confessing Christians as targeted victims.

century. Evangelicals appropriated some figures, such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, because of their heroic, counter-cultural image of resistance in a morally degraded society.¹⁰⁷ Many culturally conservative evangelicals saw American culture as liberal, immoral and confused, and intolerant of Christian convictions. They brought this lens to their reading of Saint Francis.

For Galli, Murray and other establishment evangelicals, the antidote to a shallowly liberal Saint Francis was the saint's costly, biblical discipleship. This emphasis bears the indelible imprint of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, whose idea of "costly grace" against "cheap grace" was received widely among American evangelicals, Galli included.¹⁰⁸ Philip Yancey presented Bonhoeffer and Francis in the same breath. Bonhoeffer's idea of costly discipleship became the framework for many evangelicals examining the life Saint Francis and other heroes of the faith. Francis' wholehearted zeal in following God was, for these evangelicals, an ancient breath of clear air for a modern, confused world.

Bernall's alleged martyrdom also inspired a hit Christian song in Michael W. Smith's "This Is Your Time," garnering the Dove Award for Song of the Year in 2000. "Past Winners," GMA Dove Awards, accessed September 19, 2018, <https://doveawards.com/awards/past-winners/>.

¹⁰⁷ Evangelical author Eric Metaxes highlights this parallel in his bestselling biography, *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Prophet, Martyr, Spy* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010).

¹⁰⁸ See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), 44-56. Elsewhere Galli mentions his debt to Bonhoeffer's idea of costly grace. Galli, *Jesus Mean and Wild*, 13.

Chapter 6
The New Franciscans? New Monastic Appropriations of Saint Francis

Introduction

Around the time of his high school graduation in 1974, a young Rich Mullins watched *Brother Sun, Sister Moon*. Similar to the effect on Jim Wallis, the movie had a transformative impact on Mullins. “I started to wonder,” he reflected, “if maybe Saint Francis had found a more authentic faith, though he had found it so many years before.”¹ By the 1990s, Mullins was a household name in the burgeoning contemporary Christian music industry, known especially for the praise song, “Awesome God,” that became a mainstay in evangelical worship. Yet the ideas of Saint Francis never left him. With a friend known only as “Beaker,” Mullins discussed following the example of Saint Francis. What would it look like, they wondered, to adopt the Franciscan values of simplicity, poverty and obedience while not being monks, let alone Catholics?² Their answer was to form “The Kid Brothers of Saint Frank,” a small group of men practicing modified Franciscan vows as Protestants, intentionally pursuing a life of simplicity, stewardship and the love of God.

The Kid Brothers of Saint Frank anticipated a wave of attempts by other evangelicals to form neo-monastic communities inspired by the likes of the Desert Fathers, the Benedictines and Franciscans, and modern movements such as the Catholic Worker and the Christian Community Development Association. For evangelicals who formed new monastic communities in the 1990s and 2000s, Saint Francis of Assisi was one influence representing a link to an idealized earlier age of pure Christianity, a hero of love and costly discipleship in

¹ Jim Long, “The Dreamer and the Saint,” *CCM Magazine*, July 1997, <http://www.audiori.net/richmullins/articles/dreamersaint.html>.

² Bob Michaels, “*Canticle of the Plains* World Premier,” interview with Rich Mullins and Mitch McVicker, El Dorado-Wichita, Kansas Radio Station 99.1 FM, KTLI, February 2, 1997, <http://www.kidbrothers.net/words/interviews/ktli-feb0297-backup-copy.html>.

the midst of a compromised American church and consumerist culture, and a model for emulation in new monastic community life.

This chapter first explores Rich Mullins and the Kid Brothers of Saint Frank and the musical they composed about the life of Saint Francis, placing them in the context of the growing contemporary Christian music industry. The chapter then turns to a brief history of new monastic movements, examining appropriations of Saint Francis that inspired evangelical monastic communities and mission to the poor.

Rich Mullins and the Kid Brothers of Saint Frank

Critics have called the 1990s the “golden age of Christian Music.”³ Contemporary Christian music had its roots in the Jesus People movement of the late 1960s and 1970s, setting Christian-themed lyrics to both folk and rock and roll music.⁴ The Christian music scene developed its own largely separate sphere from the mainstream rock and pop market.⁵ It became, in Mark Allan Powell’s telling, music by and for evangelicals, a genre defined by lyrics that upheld evangelical belief, piety and identity.⁶ By the 1990s contemporary

³ Writing for *Christianity Today*, Joel Heng Hartse claims that “the golden age can be said to begin—somewhat arbitrarily, as these things go—in 1990, with the release of Michael W. Smith’s sixth studio album, *Go West Young Man*, and end with Switchfoot’s *The Beautiful Letdown* in 2003.” The latter marks an increased transition toward major label, mainstream acceptance of some musicians previously confined to the contemporary Christian music industry. Joel Heng Hartse, “A Peculiar Display,” *Christianity Today*, November 2015, 74. See also Katelyn Beaty, “Holy Hip-Hop Grows Up: But I’m Still Grateful for CCM’s Golden Era,” *Christianity Today*, May 2013, 7.

⁴ While some early contemporary Christian music figures such as Andrae Crouch had gospel music connections, most early contemporary Christian artists did not. Mark Allan Powell, *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Christian Music* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), 10. Powell also notes the American fundamentalist roots of contemporary Christian music, with strong biblical literalism, emphasis on personal holiness over social justice, and low-church orientation. Powell, *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Christian Music*, 17.

⁵ This had an isolating effect that caused ire to some later musicians who considered the Christian music industry a “ghetto.” Powell contends that this isolation resulted from the enormous proliferation of Christian musicians with little mainstream appeal, as well as the apocalypticism and isolationism of many of the fundamentalist-influenced musicians. Powell, *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Christian Music*, 10-11.

⁶ Powell, *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Christian Music*, 120; Mark Allan Powell, “Contemporary Christian Music as a Window on Evangelical Piety,” in *Evangelical Christians and Popular Culture: Pop Goes the Gospel Vol. 3*, ed. Robert H. Woods, Jr. (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2013): 87.

Christian music was big business, boasting \$900 million in revenue in 1996.⁷ Contemporary Christian music played a significant role in fostering and reflecting American evangelical identity. Mark Allan Powell effectively argues that the lyrics of these “popular theologians”⁸ reflected the political, social and religious mood of American evangelicals through the decades of the later twentieth century.⁹

Rich Mullins was a well-known figure in the contemporary Christian music scene, known both for his songwriting and recording. His hit praise song “Awesome God” was used regularly in many evangelical churches. His death in a traffic accident in 1997 led to an outpouring of grief and praise for the musician from many fans.¹⁰ The writings and media published about his life border on hagiography. He was, according to one commentator, “the most beloved troubadour in contemporary Christian music and probably came as close as anyone else in the field to being regarded as ‘a saint.’”¹¹

Mullins was raised in evangelical Quaker, Christian Church, and Methodist settings. He showed genuine openness to Catholicism,¹² even enrolling in catechism, though

⁷ Larry Eskridge, *God's Forever Family*, 268. Christian music comprised three percent of American music sales in 1999. Stephen D. Perry, and Arnold S. Wolfe, “Testifications: Fan Response to a Contemporary Christian Music Artist’s Death,” in *Religion and Popular Culture: Studies of the Interaction of Worldviews*, ed. Daniel A. Stout and Judith M. Buddenbaum (Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press, 2001), 251.

⁸ Powell, “Contemporary Christian Music,” 101.

⁹ Surveying contemporary Christian music by decade, Powell notes an anti-institutional outlook during the Jesus People movement of the 1960s; an emphasis on positive feelings and sentimentality in the 1970s; triumphalism and militant imagery in the 1980s; and vulnerability and a conscious outsider status in the 1990s. Powell, “Contemporary Christian Music,” 88-97.

¹⁰ Stephen Perry and Arnold Wolf analyzed fan responses to Mullins’ death, with tributes reflecting life-changing inspiration, the effects of Mullins’ music on personal conversion and ministry, and feelings of intimacy and connection with the artist. “CCM fans linked his music with support for their previously held religious beliefs and with renewal of those beliefs.” Perry and Wolf, “Testifications,” 263.

¹¹ Powell, *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Christian Music*, 614.

¹² Mullins often spoke in favor of a Catholic understanding of the Eucharist and even the role of the Pope. “The difference between me and most Protestants,” Mullins claimed, “is [that] most Protestants have no problem at all saying, ‘The Lord told me this’ or ‘The Lord told me that,’ but they won’t believe that the Lord speaks through the Pope. You know, at least this guy has some credentials.” “Interview.” *Syndicate* 9, 1994, <http://www.audiori.net/richmullins/articles/syndicate.html>.

ultimately choosing not to convert.¹³ Mullins moved from Kansas to the Navajo Reservation in New Mexico to teach music, taking breaks to tour and record music. Mullins seems not to have had evangelism in mind with his move the Navajo Reservation as much as his own self-formation: “A lot of people think I’ve come out here to save the Indians,” he said. “For me, it’s much more to work out my own salvation with fear and trembling.”¹⁴ Mullins successfully advocated for Compassion International, an evangelical relief organization, to work on Native American reservations. His lyrics often emphasized the humanity of Jesus and the beauty of nature.¹⁵ To some observers Mullins seemed something of an enigma, a humble exception to the increasingly entertainment-oriented direction of the Christian music industry.¹⁶

These moves on Mullins part seem to have been largely inspired by Saint Francis.¹⁷ As noted above, Mullins and his friend Beaker founded the “Kid Brothers of Saint Frank” in the 1990s. They modified traditional Franciscan vows, interpreting chastity as the selflessness love of God, poverty as simplicity and stewardship, and obedience as submission

¹³ Thom Granger, “Hope to Carry On,” *CCM Magazine*, May 1990, <http://www.audiori.net/richmullins/articles/hopetocarryon.html>. Popular Catholic writer Brennan Manning’s emphasis on God’s love had a particular impact on Mullins, leading him to name his band the Ragamuffin Band after Manning’s book *The Ragamuffin Gospel*. James Bryan Smith, *Rich Mullins: A Devotional Biography: Arrow Pointing to Heaven*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2009), 60.

¹⁴ Lou Carlozo, “Christian Rocker Finds New Life in Desert,” *Chicago Tribune*, April 25, 1996, <http://www.audiori.net/richmullins/articles/newlifeinthedesert.html>. Ibid.

¹⁵ For example, “Calling Out Your Name,” is a reflection on the natural scenes of the Midwest, with prairies, buffalo and pheasants praising God. Rich Mullins, “Calling Out Your Name,” on *The World As Best as I Remember It* vol. 1, Reunion Records, 1991. In “Homeless Man,” recorded as a demo shortly before his death, Mullins sings “Birds have nests/foxes have dens/But the hope of the whole world rests on the shoulders of a homeless man.” Rich Mullins and the Ragamuffin Band, “Homeless Man,” on *The Jesus Record* disc one: The Jesus Demos, Myrrh Records, 1998.

¹⁶ Mullins’ band mate Rick Elias claims that in the commercial Christian music scene of 1990s “the people that really had something to say were marginalized... except for Rich Mullins.” Rick Elias interview, *Rich Mullins: A Ragamuffin’s Legacy*, directed by David Leo Shultz (Color Green Films, 2014). Mullins’ downward mobility and seeming disregard for the music industry raised eyebrows for some evangelicals who saw success as a means to ministry. “I wish he’d care more about his career,” noted Ashley Cleveland, a Christian singer who toured with Mullins, “because here’s one person who could reach a lot of people with the gospel.” Carlozo, “Christian Rocker Finds New Life in the Desert.”

¹⁷ Smith, *Rich Mullins*, 54.

to their own churches' traditions.¹⁸ Mullins and Beaker recruited three twenty-something students from Friends University to join the group. The management of Mullins' music profits was turned over to an accountant, and Mullins and the other Kid Brothers lived on an allowance that was then equivalent to a modest working wage.¹⁹ Mullins served as an overseer for the group, leading devotional times and, from time to time, making them all watch his favourite film, *Brother Sun, Sister Moon*.²⁰

Mullins and Beaker wrote and produced a play based on the life of Saint Francis with Kid Brother Mitch McVicker in the lead role. Called "The Canticle of the Plains," they reimagined Francis as "Frank" in a play set in the old American West, replete with talking eagles and mountain lions. The "Canticle of the Plains" was recorded and released as a CD with members of popular Christian bands DC Talk and Sixpence None the Richer accompanying the Kid Brothers.²¹ It was also performed as a play at the evangelical Wheaton College.

In the musical, Frank is traumatized by the violence of the Civil War, and leaves Kansas to wander with a freed slave named Buzz, seeking "Dineh Bejeya," a sort of Kingdom of God far away.²² They are joined by a saloon piano player named Ivory; Clare, Frank's childhood sweetheart (they abandon romantic love to follow God); and a miner named Lefty. In the midst of the American army's unjust treatment of the Navajo—a nod to historical events—a miracle disarms the soldiers. Frank and his companions find that the place they are looking for was there all along: "the land of the people."²³ In ways reminiscent

¹⁸ Carlozo, "Christian Rocker Finds New Life in the Desert"; Smith, *Rich Mullins*, 170.

¹⁹ Smith, *Rich Mullins*, 167-169.

²⁰ Interview with Eric Hauck, *Rich Mullins*, dir. Shultz.

²¹ Kid Brothers of Saint Frank. *Canticle of the Plains*. Ragamuffin Records, 1997.

²² Buzz is based on Saint Francis' companion Brother Bernard. Michaels, "*Canticle of the Plains* World Premier."

²³ Michaels, "*Canticle of the Plains* World Premier."

of progressive evangelical of the 1970s and 1980s, the Kid Brothers' reimagining of Francis' life was grounded in interpretations of Francis that emphasize his love for people, interactions with nature and commitment to peace. In this they did not stray far from popular portrayals of the saint in American culture.

Unique, however, was the Kid Brothers' imitation of Franciscan monasticism. Mullins was not the first Christian musician to be attracted to Franciscan monasticism; John Michael Talbot's admiration of Saint Francis had led him toward converting to Catholicism in the 1970s.²⁴ But Mullins and his companions stayed within the evangelical Protestant world, practicing an evangelical take on Franciscan monasticism. They were evangelical Franciscans, seeking to live a life of Christian discipleship by following in Francis' footsteps. For the Kid Brothers of Saint Frank, Saint Francis was not only seen as an inspiring and authentic Christian but also a model for evangelical monasticism.

American New Monasticism

In the cast of the Wheaton production of the "Canticle of the Plains" was a young Shane Claiborne. In the mid-2000s Claiborne became the popular face of the new monastic movement of young evangelicals forming monastic-inspired communities in poor urban neighbourhoods. Communities such as Rutba House in Durham, North Carolina and the Simple Way in Philadelphia served as models for a proliferation of similar groups.

There had been calls for such a movement. Christine Sine and her husband the futurist Tom, who ran a small Protestant community in Northwestern Washington, drew inspiration from the likes of the Celtic monks and Saint Francis as alternatives to "a compartmentalized piety in which [both evangelicals and liberal Protestants] quietly sanction

²⁴ Powell, *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Christian Music*, 921.

the values of modern culture instead of challenging them.”²⁵ Saint Francis’ “countercultural monastic order” provided a model for Christian spirituality of the future.²⁶ The Sines note the rise of new holistic and relational “postmodern churches” experimenting with new kinds of community, including lay monastic orders.²⁷ The future of Christianity, they claimed, would be innovative while modeled on the likes of past heroes such as Saint Francis.

Such a movement was soon well underway. Beginning in the 1990s, many young, usually white, evangelicals moved to form “intentional communities” among the urban poor.²⁸ A 2004 conference of like-minded groups issued “12 Marks of A New Monasticism”—a list including relocation, economic sharing, racial reconciliation, peacemaking, an environmental emphasis on the local economy, contemplation, monastic-inspired spiritual formation and community rule, and respect for both celibacy and marriage.²⁹ While some older Catholic and Anabaptist organizations were part of the new monastic orbit, most were of an evangelical background.³⁰ These communities drew from a diverse number of modern inspirations including *Sojourners*, Tony Campolo and the older progressive evangelical movement, Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker, John Perkins and the Christian Community Development Association, Mother Theresa and the Sisters of

²⁵ Christine Sine and Tom Sine, *Living on Purpose: Finding God’s Best for your Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), 95-96.

²⁶ Sine and Sine, *Living on Purpose*, 100.

²⁷ Sine and Sine, *Living on Purpose*, 156, 160. The Sines’ “postmodern churches” are likely associated with the so-called emergent or emerging church. See Chapter Seven of this thesis.

²⁸ James S. Bielo, *Emerging Evangelicals: Faith, Modernity and the Desire for Authenticity* (New York: NYU Press, 2011), 33. According to *Christianity Today*’s Rob Moll, the term “intentional community” is shorn of the weird associations of Jesus movement communes. Rob Moll, “New Monasticism.” *Christianity Today*, September 2005, 39.

²⁹ Rutba House, ed., *School(s) For Conversion: 12 Marks of a New Monasticism* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2005), xii.

³⁰ Wes Markofski, *New Monasticism and the Transformation of American Evangelicalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 163.

Charity, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer's illegal seminary, among others.³¹ They also interacted with contemporary movements such as Renovaré and the new Emergent Church network of young evangelical leaders explicitly responding to postmodernity.³²

Yet many of the most significant influences for these new monastics were ancient monks such as the Benedictines.³³ The editors of the "12 Marks" sought models for "radical discipleship" in "the best in the church's long tradition."³⁴ The authors contend that "the church's response to compromise and crisis has consistently been one of new monastic movements," taken in a broad sense to include the Desert Fathers and Mothers fleeing imperial Christianity, the early Anabaptists, underground slave churches in America, and, of course, Saint Francis. "In the midst of the Crusades," the authors state, "as religious violence raged, St. Francis rejected economic privilege and started a new monastic movement."³⁵ New

³¹ Rutba House, ed, *School(s) For Conversion*, viii; Jonathan R. Wilson, "Introduction," in Rutba House, *School(s) For Conversion*, 3; Charles Marsh, *The Beloved Community: How Faith Shapes Social Justice from the Civil Rights Movement to Today* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), 201. Markofski notes the deep similarities that new monastic communities share with the settlement house movement popularized by Jane Addams and Hull House in Chicago. That New Monastic leaders do not cite this movement as an influence indicates, to Markofski, the entrenched fundamentalist liberal divide of the twentieth century where ideas did not cross the boundaries. Markofski, *New Monasticism*, 67-68. The phrase "new monasticism" itself comes from Bonhoeffer.

³² Rutba House, ed, *School(s) For Conversion*, viii. Many scholars have equated new monasticism with one branch of the emerging church. James Bielo claims that "while all New Monastics are Emerging Evangelicals, not all Emerging Evangelicals are New Monastics." Bielo, *Emerging Evangelicals*, 99. Marti and Ganiel claim that new monasticism "serves a sort of template for how people in the [emerging church] would like to live their lives, even if in actuality they do not. Gerardo Marti and Gladys Ganiel, *The Deconstructed Church: Understanding Emerging Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 149. Markofski challenges what he sees as an arbitrary grouping of the two. Both movements, according to Markofski, "have distinctive origins, movement leaders, institutional networks, position takings, and trajectories as it relates to the evangelical field." Markofski's offers this claim in a critique of Bielo's "lived religion" approach to social analysis of emergent church. Markofski, *New Monasticism*, 76. Markofski also notes that emerging churches lack new monasticism's social and political emphasis. Markofski, *New Monasticism*, 92. Accepting Markofski's distinction, I contend that new monasticism and the emerging church are separate movements in origins and goals, but nevertheless share some characteristics and overlap in association. Shane Claiborne, for example, had clear connections with Emergent Village conferences and leaders. Marti and Ganiel, *The Deconstructed Church*, 220, n. 47. For an overview of the history of John Perkins' Calvary Ministries and the Christian Community Development Association, see Marsh, *The Beloved Community*, 153-158.

³³ Jon Stock, Tim Otto and Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, *Inhabiting the Church: Biblical Wisdom for a New Monasticism* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2007).

³⁴ Stock, et. al., *Inhabiting the Church*, ix.

³⁵ Stock, et. al., *Inhabiting the Church*, ix.

monasticism was an exercise in tradition retrieval and emulation of a select group of Christian saints.³⁶ “Could a new monasticism really be the hope of the Church in North America?” asked Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, a founder of Rutba House, “Is the Spirit calling us, as he called St. Francis, to ‘rebuild my church which is in ruins,’ by establishing outposts of God’s love in the abandoned places of empire?”³⁷

New monasticism was also a movement built from opposition to war, nationalism, consumerism, and the powerful religious right of the second Bush presidency.³⁸ “In an age when ‘Christian’ America is the ‘last remaining superpower’ in an all-out ‘war on terror,’” state the authors of the “12 Marks,” “we’ve begun to think that once again it is time for a new monasticism.”³⁹ Their embrace of small, and countercultural community was also directed against the evangelical Baby-boomer megachurches that had adopted large-scale, entertainment-driven church growth strategies.⁴⁰ New monasticism was a movement of protest.

New monastic communities emerged across the US, the UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, tripling between 2010 and 2015.⁴¹ The movement was widely covered by

³⁶ James Bielo notes that New Monastics saw this tradition retrieval as a move toward authenticity, reconnecting with the authentic and early Christian past that had been corrupted over time. Bielo, *Emerging Evangelicals*, 99-100.

³⁷ Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, *To Baghdad and Beyond: How I Got Born Again in Babylon* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2005.), 108.

³⁸ Markosfki, *New Monasticism*, 28.

³⁹ Rutba House, ed., *School(s) for Conversion*, ix-x.

⁴⁰ Markoski writes “Neo-monastic evangelicals have constructed their holistic communitarian meaning system in an attempt to transcend what they perceive to be false antinomies and antagonisms—such as the antinomy between the spiritual and social gospel—inherited from the religious past.” But, Markosfki claimed, they set up their own antagonisms, of authentic and small versus bureaucratic and large. Markofski, *New Monasticism*, 174. Shane Claiborne plays with his own evangelical identity, redefining the word evangelical based on purported ancient connotations of the gospel as the proclamation of Jesus’ kingship that challenges state power. Shane Claiborne. *The Irresistible Revolution: Living as an Ordinary Radical* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 23.

⁴¹ Markofski, *New Monasticism*, 15. Paralleling Claiborne’s brand of new monasticism was a charismatic-influenced movement that started in the UK in 1999. The 24/7 prayer movement, referencing the practice of community members praying in shifts over a 24-hour period, commonly created “Boiler rooms”—gathering places for prayer, community and mission. They drew heavily on monastic inspirations such as the

media, including praise from *Christianity Today*'s Rob Moll.⁴² James Bielo, however, rightly claims that the true impact of the movement on young evangelicals lay not in the numbers of people forming intentional monastic communities, but in more modest changes in behaviour around values of simplicity, stability, and community living.⁴³

Saint Francis of Calcutta, Baghdad, and Wall Street

Dreadlocked and sporting baggy homemade clothes, Shane Claiborne brought the message of radical discipleship, peaceable resistance, relocation and community to evangelicals across America in the mid-2000s. He penned a bestselling book, *The Irresistible Revolution*. Claiborne made a big deal of his former "Bible Belt" Tennessee evangelicalism, stating his rejection of the "Christian industrial complex ready to help with Christian music, bumper stickers, T-shirts, books, and even candy."⁴⁴ He became the popular face of new monasticism, but, as Marti and Ganiel observed of his reception among evangelical college students, "Claiborne was accepted as a prophet to hear more than as a model to follow."⁴⁵

Claiborne was a student at Eastern University in Philadelphia, studying sociology with Tony Campolo, when he and other students befriended and advocated for local

Desert Fathers, Celtic Monks, and Saint Francis. Andy Freeman and Peter Grieg, *Punk Monk: New Monasticism and the Ancient Art of Breathing* (Ventura: Regal, 2007), 16. Andy Freeman and Peter Grieg's *Punk Monk* presents Francis as a reformer. "Saint Francis of Assisi... formed his Franciscan movement out of an increasing frustration with organized religion" and was mocked as too extreme. Freeman and Grieg, *Punk Monk*, 39. The 24/7 prayer movement emphasized prayer and evangelism much more than their new monastic counterparts. Over half of the boiler room communities are in the United States, and they mark the more charismatic and evangelistic end of the new monastic spectrum. Markoski, 91. 165. See also Scott A. Bessenecker, *The New Friars: The Emerging Movement Serving the World's Poor* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 184-189.

⁴² Moll, "New Monasticism," 46. Moll's *Christianity Today* article neglects any reference to the radical political critique of many new monastics.

⁴³ Young evangelicals inspired by new monasticism embraced simplicity through downsizing, pooling resources, becoming debt free, dumpster diving, and resisting consumerism, and sought stability through commitments to stay in a neighbourhood and embrace community living and regular prayer. Bielo, *Emerging Evangelicals*, 103-109, 116.

⁴⁴ Claiborne, *The Irresistible Revolution*, 37, 39. James Bielo notes the role of "deconversion" stories emerging evangelicals tell, from pasts of conservative evangelical subculture. Bielo includes Claiborne among emerging church leaders. Bielo, *Emerging Evangelicals*, 31, 44-46.

⁴⁵ Marti and Ganiel, *The Deconstructed Church*, 150.

homeless families who were facing eviction in an abandoned Catholic church where they had taken refuge. They attracted media attention, and—with a phrase perhaps inspired by Rich Mullins—made signs saying, “How can you worship a homeless man on Sunday and ignore one on Monday?”⁴⁶ While they ultimately lost this fight, Claiborne recounted the struggle as a formative time: “It was in St Ed’s [Claiborne’s name for the cathedral] that I was born again... again. There is something mystical about finding God in the ruins of the church.” He likens their cause to Saint Francis and his first companions in their effort to rebuild the church: “Now hundreds of years later, another bunch of young dreamers was leaving the Christianity that smothered them, to find God in the abandoned places in the desert of the inner city.”⁴⁷ These restless young evangelicals moving to be with the poor were, for Claiborne, the new Desert Fathers and Mothers, Benedictines, and Franciscans.

Claiborne recounts his pursuit of “looking for a Christian” who took discipleship seriously: “I kept coming across dead people—the desert fathers and mothers of the fifth century, Francis and Clare of Assisi, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King, Jr., Oscar Romero” and Dorothy Day.⁴⁸ Contemporary examples included Mother Teresa, whom Claiborne and a friend visited in Calcutta, and Rich Mullins, “a pretty crazy dude who hitchhiked a lot, went barefoot all the time, and likes St. Francis of Assisi (my newfound hero).”⁴⁹ Claiborne found Mullins to be “one of those folks who assured me that the Gospels were not just for Mother Teresa and St. Francis.”⁵⁰ There were living links to the discipleship of people such as Saint Francis who embodied, for Claiborne, a radical, true Christianity.

⁴⁶ Marsh, *The Beloved Community*, 201. See footnote 15 of this chapter.

⁴⁷ Claiborne, *The Irresistible Revolution*, 65.

⁴⁸ Claiborne, *The Irresistible Revolution*, 72.

⁴⁹ Claiborne, *The Irresistible Revolution*, 96.

⁵⁰ Claiborne, *The Irresistible Revolution*, 98.

Alongside Jonathan and Leah Wilson-Hartgrove who went on to found Rutba house, Claiborne joined a delegation from Christian Peacemaker Teams to Iraq on the eve of the American invasion in 2003, where they witnessed the first American bombing of a hospital in the city of Rutba.⁵¹ Claiborne's team included a Franciscan priest, and discussion led naturally to Saint Francis:

We flashed back to another confusing time of conflict—1219, during the Fifth Crusade. Christians and Muslims were slaughtering one another in the name of God. War had become a necessity and a habit. Centuries of church history, in which followers of the Way [an early term for Christianity] renounced their allegiance to the kingdom of the world and its kings, had been perverted by the seduction of gaining the whole world but losing our souls. And then Francis ... had a vision of loving our enemies.⁵²

Claiborne notes that Saint Francis risked his life to visit the Egyptian Sultan, and humbly accepted a gift of an ivory horn he later used to call his monks to prayer.⁵³ In Claiborne's telling of history, Saint Francis marks a reconnection with the revolutionary and peaceable early church that had become compromised over time.⁵⁴

Claiborne appeals to the example of Francis and Clare to legitimate the new monastic affirmation of singleness and celibacy.⁵⁵ In *Jesus For President*, a more politically targeted book coauthored by Claiborne and Chris Haw, Francis' companion Brother Juniper is an

⁵¹ For a detailed account, see Hartgrove, *To Baghdad and Beyond*. This event was memorialized in the name of the Hartgrove's intentional community.

Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) was formed in response to Ron Sider's 1984 address to the Mennonite World Conference in Strasbourg, France, where Sider chastened Mennonites for their "isolationist pacifism," calling them instead to a "costly pacifism" of creatively offering their lives in non-violent witnesses to peace on behalf of the oppressed. CPT soon began sending delegations to places of conflict around the world. Ronald J. Sider, "God's People Reconciling," Christian Peacemaker Teams, accessed August 9, 2018, <https://www.cpt.org/resources/writings/sider>.

⁵² Claiborne, *The Irresistible Revolution*, 274.

⁵³ Claiborne, *The Irresistible Revolution*, 275.

⁵⁴ James Bielo notes the new monastic assumption of church corruption over time. This narrative "could easily be read as a species of the broader eschatological impulse among Protestants." Bielo, *Emerging Evangelicals*, 100. More than that, Protestantism at its foundation was premised on the idea that the church was compromised. Claiborne's view of church history is not unique among many evangelicals, except in his Anabaptist-like emphasis on peace.

⁵⁵ Claiborne, *The Irresistible Revolution*, 111.

example of a new type of hero for his simplicity.⁵⁶ Francis and the early Franciscans served as models for new monastic community life.

In a later article, Claiborne calls his readers' attention to Francis—"one of the first critics of capitalism, one of the earliest Christian environmentalists, a sassy reformer of the Church and one of the classic conscientious objectors to war."⁵⁷ Claiborne highlights Francis' connection of material possession with violence. "It does make you wonder if he'd be on Wall Street protesting today," Claiborne claims, hearkening to the recent Occupy Wall Street protests.⁵⁸ Claiborne again recounts the story of the visit to the Sultan, placing it in the context of hate, war and religious extremism. "We've seen Christian extremists burn the Quran," Claiborne mourns, "blow up abortion clinics, bless bombs, baptize Wall Street and hold signs that say 'God hates fags.' But Francis invites us to be extremists for grace, extremists for love."⁵⁹ Claiborne proposes some responses to the life of Francis: "Maybe we can get rid of some of our stuff or spend some time with a homeless person. Maybe we can laugh at advertisements today that try to convince us that happiness can be purchased. Maybe we can hang out in the woods and spend some time with the lilies and the sparrows. Maybe we can take an enemy out for dinner."⁶⁰ Francis is Claiborne's ideal model for resisting violence, consumerism and economic injustice—a proto-activist of many causes, and an

⁵⁶ Shane Claiborne and Chris Shaw, *Jesus for President: Politics for Ordinary Radicals* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 320. The political critique of Claiborne, Shaw, Wilson-Hartgrove and others in the New Monastic orbit is largely inspired by the Anabaptist-influenced peace theology of John Howard Yoder and Stanley Hauerwas, the biblical scholarship of Walter Brueggeman and Walter Wink, Dorothy Day and the *Catholic Worker*, and Jacques Ellul's Christian Anarchism, all of which are showcased in the pictorial bibliography at the end of *Jesus For President*. Claiborne and Shaw, *Jesus for President*, 360-364.

⁵⁷ Shane Claiborne, "Praying with Francis, the Radical Christian Peacemaker," The Blog, *Huffington Post*, October 3, 2011, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/shane-claiborne/st-francis-radical-christian-peace_b_992545.html.

⁵⁸ Claiborne, "Praying with Francis."

⁵⁹ Claiborne, "Praying with Francis."

⁶⁰ Claiborne, "Praying with Francis."

example in the life of radical discipleship. Saint Francis was a hero of Claiborne's type of new monasticism.⁶¹

New Friars

Scott Bessenecker, an InterVarsity Christian Fellowship staffer from Wisconsin, highlighted another side of the new monastic movement with his book, *New Friars* (2006). Bessenecker showcased a group of young evangelicals who move to urban slums around the world as a service-based missionary effort, taking vows of poverty and service. He differentiates these new friars from old monks and celibate ascetics with “unquestioned devotion to a hierarchical church structure.”⁶² While disappointed by his own encounters with actual Franciscan monks,⁶³ Bessenecker presents Francis and Clare as inspirations for service and love for the poor.⁶⁴ According to Bessenecker, Francis “didn’t start out attempting to found the order that would become the largest continuous stream of Christian youth intent on placing themselves among the poorest on earth.”⁶⁵ Bessenecker highlights Francis’ emphasis on “the simple life of preaching and praying and caring for the poor.”⁶⁶ He elaborates: “Francis’s and Clare’s life [serves] as a picture of just how attractive downward

⁶¹ North of the forty-ninth parallel a Canadian Mennonite Jamie Arpin-Ricci, leader of the Little Flowers intentional community in Winnipeg, Manitoba, published a book exploring the life of Saint Francis as a key to new monastic community. “It was Francis’s commitment to live in solidarity with the poor as an expression of his allegiance to Christ that first led me to him,” Arpin-Ricci states. “And it was Francis’s radically embodied (if sometimes extreme) commitment to live the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount that opened my eyes to the possibility of a way of life and faith that we had never considered before, one that promised the richest blessings but exacted the highest price.” Jamie Arpin-Ricci, *The Cost of Community: Jesus, St. Francis and Life in the Kingdom* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 16. For Arpin-Ricci, as for Claiborne, Francis is not an “unreachable holy man,” but a model for following Jesus in discipleship and community. Arpin-Ricci, *The Cost of Community*, 219. The book’s evocation of Bonhoeffer’s *The Cost of Discipleship* is a significant nod to Francis’ role as a model for true discipleship.

⁶² Bessenecker, *The New Friars*, 26.

⁶³ Bessenecker, *The New Friars*, 14.

⁶⁴ Bessenecker, *The New Friars*, 70-73. Bessenecker also includes Brigid of Kildare and St. Patrick alongside early Nestorian missionaries as other historical models for new friars. Bessenecker, *New Friars*, 99-105, 129-133.

⁶⁵ Bessenecker, *The New Friars*, 65.

⁶⁶ Bessenecker, *The New Friars*, 72.

mobility can be to the middle class and rich... They wanted to en flesh the gospel to those at the bottom of the rubbish heap by stripping themselves of all worldly riches and seeking the endowment of spiritual wealth in its place.”⁶⁷ They are models for “incarnational” ministry.⁶⁸ Bessenecker praises Francis’ and Clare’s poverty, mission and downward mobility.⁶⁹ For Bessenecker, they were saints for young middle class Christians who wanted to follow God by serving the poor.⁷⁰

Conclusion

For the Kid Brothers of Saint Frank and new monastic evangelicals, their discontent with the status quo of American evangelical faith and politics led them to seek new Christian heroes for faith in the modern world. Saint Francis offered such an example for community and justice and the possibility of connecting to what they perceived as true, authentic Christianity by emulating the life Francis lived. For Claiborne and the activist wing of new monasticism, Saint Francis was an anti-war and anti-capitalist representative of radical love. For Bessenecker and the “new friars,” Francis and Clare showed the way to mission in service of the world’s poorest. The Kid Brothers and many new monastics saw following Francis’ in his monasticism, poverty and identification with the poor as a real possibility. For all of them, Saint Francis was seen as an authentic Christian disciple, and a guide to Christian faith and community in the modern world.

⁶⁷ Bessenecker, *The New Friars*, 73.

⁶⁸ Bessenecker, *The New Friars*, 83.

⁶⁹ According to Kenneth Stewart “It is not monastic dress, communal life, or styles of devotion that fires the imagination of [Bessenecker], but the model of a voluntary, celibate, impassioned ministry to the poorest and neediest that he sees displayed in the careers of Francis of Assisi... Bartolomé de las Casas... and Mother Teresa.” This is, to Stewart, a romanticized version of monasticism. Stewart, *In Search of Ancient Roots*, 177. 183.

⁷⁰ Francis and Clare even provide inspiration for navigating parental conflicts. Like Francis and Clare, young Christians who want to live the life of gospel poverty will have difficulties communicating what they are doing with their families. Bessenecker, *The New Friars*, 81.

New monastic appropriations of Saint Francis reflected the declining hold of evangelical Protestant traditions on some young, educated evangelicals in America, and even their rejection of many evangelical values. There was a primitivist impulse in new monastics' attempt to create communities modeled on what they saw as earlier radical, uncompromised and authentic expressions of Christianity. Their admiration of the saint of Assisi, alongside a host of other old and new inspirations, shows openness to an eclectic array of spirituality; anything Christian was ripe for plunder.

Does this new monastic impulse divulge a renewed collective interest in tradition or does it reveal a selective cherry picking of Christianity's greatest hits?⁷¹ To an extent both are true. New monastics' interpretation of Francis was individualist, selective, and Protestant. While Rich Mullins acknowledged Francis' veneration of Mary and submission to church hierarchy, new monastic leaders passed these by without comment. Their appropriation served contemporary purposes. In their search for alternative models for Christianity, new monastic interpreters readily paralleled Francis' age with the world of the early twenty-first century.

Nevertheless, new monasticism also marked an attempt to forge community responses to perceived evangelical compromise. In doing so they saw themselves in continuity with Christians of the past. New monastics sought alternatives to American evangelical individualism and political conservatism in tradition and collective identities.⁷² New monastic communities, alongside the Kid Brothers of Saint Frank, were as decisive in

⁷¹ Molly Worthen claims emergent and new monastic evangelical interest in pre-Reformation Christian traditions and practices is selective and individualist, and sometimes charged with no small hint of rebellion toward earlier generations of evangelicals. Worthen states, "Worshippers may join in medieval chants and patristic prayers, but church history serves as a resource, a liturgical larder, rather than a tradition to which today's believer's must conform." Molly Worthen, *Apostles of Reason: The Crisis of Authority in American Evangelicalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 256-257.

⁷² Wes Markoski claims new monastics formulated a "holistic communitarian perspective of religion and politics" as an alternative to the individualism of other evangelicals. Markoski, *New Monasticism*, 31.

their renunciation of the world and attempt to follow Francis' example as any Franciscan third order. These evangelical Franciscans followed (their versions) of Saint Francis to a dramatic degree.

Chapter 7
The Postmodern Saint: Saint Francis in the Emerging Church

Introduction

Doesn't the religious community see that the world is changing? Doesn't it have anything fresh and incisive to say? Isn't it even asking any new questions? Has it nothing to offer other than stock formulas that it has offered? Is there no Saint Francis or Søren Kierkegaard or C. S. Lewis in the house with some fresh ideas and energy? Has the "good news" been reduced to the "good same-old same-old?"¹

Emergent church poster-child Brian McLaren's evocation of Saint Francis and other notable Christians as inspiration for "a new kind of Christian" (in a popular book by that title) had irked *Christianity Today's* Mark Galli to write a quarrelsome response.² But appeals to Saint Francis and earlier church traditions were a major part of McLaren's and other emerging evangelicals' pursuit of new ideas and practices for Christians in the "postmodern" era. Some emerging church figures connected Saint Francis with authentic and inspiring faith, the recovery of ancient spiritual practices, connection with nature, and an entirely new way of doing church. In all these Francis was evoked as an ancient, authentic alternative to dominant modernist evangelicalism, especially of the megachurch variety.

This chapter explores the emergent church movement's interactions with Saint Francis. It focuses on interpretations by emergent pastor Brian McLaren and author Ian Morgan Cron, who appealed to Saint Francis for intentionally "postmodern" ways of conceiving church and Christian faith.³

¹ Brian McLaren, *A New Kind of Christian* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001), xiv.

² See Chapter Five of this thesis.

³ In this chapter I use the term "postmodern" as emerging church authors use it. Postmodernity, for them, involves a critique or rejection of "modernist" rationality, epistemological certainty, and other characteristics of evangelical Protestantism and earlier American culture. They embraced values of authenticity, a narrative approach to truth, and critiques of power and authority.

Emergent Evangelicals

The emergent or emerging church was a movement often associated with new monasticism, but not equivalent.⁴ In 1995 a number of mostly young, educated, white pastors and church planters formed the Young Leaders Network, eventually becoming Emergent Village, holding widely-attended annual pastoral conferences.⁵ It was a contentious movement from the beginning, even for members of the network, defined less by what it was than by what it was not. Intentionally rejecting seeker-sensitive megachurch structures, dominant evangelical methods of evangelism, politically conservative ideology, and modernist thought and rationality, emerging evangelical leaders sought to carve out what they saw as postmodern, relational, authentic models for church life and mission. Emergent movement adherents drew intellectual roots from scholarly critiques of modern epistemology, missions, and evangelical church life.⁶ They also drew heavily on ancient-future movements and progressive political mobilization.⁷ The movement spanned a wide ideological spectrum in their strictness of theological orthodoxy and their response to and embrace of postmodern epistemology. It was hardly a unified movement; significant figures such as Brian McLaren and Rob Bell precipitated fissures between emergent leaders with

⁴ Some associated with the movement argue that “emergent” is a narrow label for members of the Emergent Village network, while “emerging” encapsulates a larger movement. Gerardo Marti and Gladys Ganiel, *The Deconstructed Church: Understanding Emerging Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 7. To avoid unnecessary confusion, I adopt the terms interchangeably, recognizing the ideological and theological diversity. For the relationship between new monasticism and the emergent church, see Chapter Six, footnote 32 of this thesis.

⁵ James S. Bielo, *Emerging Evangelicals: Faith, Modernity and the Desire for Authenticity* (New York: NYU Press, 2011), 5, 8.

⁶ Scot McKnight, “Five Streams of the Emerging Church,” *Christianity Today*, February 2007, 37.

⁷ Bielo, *Emerging Evangelicals*, 10-16.

their controversial stances on widely held evangelical stances on hell, homosexuality, and the nature of biblical revelation.⁸

Emerging evangelicals were clearly marked by protest. “It is post-evangelical,” claims Bible scholar Scot McKnight, who was associated with the movement, “in the way that neo-evangelicalism (in the 1950s) was post-fundamentalist.”⁹ Megachurch evangelicalism was a target for American emerging evangelical criticism.¹⁰ Megachurches such as Willow Creek in Illinois and Saddleback Church in California sprung up from the church growth movement of the late twentieth century. These suburban churches were often entertainment heavy, evangelistic rather than political, highly individualist, and largely culturally homogenous.¹¹ Sociologists Gerardo Marti and Gladys Ganiel note the way emerging believers portray megachurches “as a charismatic, senior-pastor-oriented service, buttressed by a never-ending series of gimmicks (sketches, videos, giveaways) to persuade crowds in a manipulative fashion under the guise of ‘winning people for the gospel.’”¹² James Bielo also notes the role of “deconversion” stories that emerging evangelicals tell

⁸ Gerardo Marti and Gladys Ganiel, *The Deconstructed Church: Understanding Emerging Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 7, 92-93. Brian McLaren’s 2010 *A New Kind of Christianity* prompted criticism from other emergent leaders. Phyllis Tickle calls the division that ensued “Emergence Christianity’s Marburg,” as more theologically conservative emerging leaders such as Scot McKnight and Mark Driscoll formally parted ways with McLaren and the Emergent Village network. Phyllis Tickle, *Emergence Christianity: What It Is, Where It Is Going, and Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2012), 143. Scot McKnight saw in McLaren’s criticism of evangelicalism and reading of scripture an abandonment of orthodoxy in favor of older nineteenth-century evolutionary views of God’s nature. “Unfortunately,” says McKnight, “this book lacks the ‘generosity’ of genuine orthodoxy, and, frankly, I find little space in it for orthodoxy itself.” Scot McKnight, “Rebuilding the Faith from Scratch: Brian McLaren’s ‘New’ Christianity is not so much Revolutionary as Evolutionary,” *Christianity Today*, March 2010, 66.

⁹ McKnight. “Five Streams of the Emerging Church,” 38.

¹⁰ This differs in the UK context, where the movement is defined more as a protest against mainline denominations. Marti and Ganiel, *The Deconstructed Church*, 110.

¹¹ Molly Worthen, *Apostles of Reason: The Crisis of Authority in American Evangelicalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 254; Markofski, *New Monasticism*, 88. For an examination of the Willow Creek model, see G. A. Pritchard, *Willow Creek Seeker Services: Evaluating a New Way of Doing Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996).

¹² Marti and Ganiel, *The Deconstructed Church*, 110.

about the pasts of those from a conservative evangelical subculture.¹³ These stories emphasize the faults of an evangelical past.¹⁴ Emerging evangelical identity was often self-consciously post-evangelical.¹⁵

Ecumenical borrowing plays a significant role in emergent evangelicalism.¹⁶ Data from a limited pool of emergent congregations in the US and UK finds as many adherents with mainline backgrounds as evangelical, though the role of the Anglican church in the emerging movement in the UK probably skews this data for the American context.¹⁷ Many emergent congregations heeded the calls of earlier ancient-future movements, adapting liturgies and integrating contemplative practices. The emergent church and new monasticism share this proclivity for tradition appropriation, seeking historical practices and figures to inspire new forms of community, church, and mission.

The influence of emergent evangelicalism is difficult to gauge. Soong-Chan Rah, a vocal critic of the emergent church and its mission strategies, claims with real merit that the

¹³ Bielo, *Emerging Evangelicals*, 31, 44-46. Bielo includes Shane Claiborne as one example of this.

¹⁴ D.A. Carson, a Reformed New Testament scholar from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, published a critique of the movement alleging emergent evangelicals “tend to gravitate to the worst exemplars [of conservative evangelicalism] and seem to mock them.” D. A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church: Understanding a Movement and its Implications* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 64. McKnight claims that Carson’s critique is from a distance and overly concerned with epistemology and Brian McLaren. McKnight, “Five Streams of the Emerging Church,” 36.

¹⁵ Phyllis Tickle distances the emerging church from both Protestantism and Catholicism, considering it a separate, new form of Christianity. Tickle, *Emergence Christianity*, 115. Tickle overstates the significance of the emerging church movement as she likens it to a historic shift in Christianity as significant as the Protestant Reformation or the fall of the Roman Empire and emergence of monasticism.

The emerging church nevertheless bore likeness to the seeker sensitive movement in the desire to create culturally and generationally appropriate mission. Molly Worthen sees similarities in the messaging itself, paralleling the “feel-good holiness” of Willow Creek’s pastor Bill Hybels with the therapeutic message of emergent authenticity and discomfort with authority. Worthen, *Apostles of Reason*, 256, 356. See also Carson, *Becoming Conversant*, 36. While emergent evangelicals have been equated with liberal Christianity, they maintain a thoroughly evangelical emphasis on individual experience. Marti and Ganiel, *The Deconstructed Church*, 169.

¹⁶ Marti and Ganiel, *The Deconstructed Church*, 24-25.

¹⁷ Marti and Ganiel, *The Deconstructed Church*, 23.

emerging movement has had disproportionate impact for its size.¹⁸ The movement is tiny, Rah notes, next to Asian-American churches and other immigrant groups, or burgeoning global Christian movements, which he calls “the real emerging church.”¹⁹ While Rah critiques from the side of marginalized minorities, the emergent church has also served as a convenient, postmodern bogeyman for many more conservative evangelicals.²⁰ In spite of its small size, its presence in media and publishing was large. The noise around the movement at the turn of the millennium make the emergent church an indelible part of the development of evangelical thought and conversation.

A New Kind of Saint

The most well-known flag-bearer of the emergent label was Brian McLaren, exaggeratedly called “the Martin Luther of Emergence” by Phyllis Tickle.²¹ McLaren was a writer, speaker and pastor of a Washington D.C. area emergent congregation.²² His galvanizing influence and popular appeal garnered a nod on *Time*’s list of twenty-five influential evangelicals.²³ Known for provocative statements, his unconventional theological positions often landed him in hot water with more conservative evangelicals and other emerging church leaders.²⁴

¹⁸ Soong-Chan Rah, *The Next Evangelicalism: Freeing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2009), 111, 124.

¹⁹ Rah, *The Next Evangelicalism*, 110. Rah is deeply critical of the emerging movement on several counts. Its emphasis on small church size and micro-community perpetuates cultural isolation, individualism and white hegemony in evangelicalism. Rah, *The Next Evangelicalism*, 113-114. “If the white voice dominates the dialogue,” Rah claims, “then the only ‘real’ voices and ‘authentic’ point of view that is acknowledged resides within the white community” that only plays lip service to diversity. Rah, *The Next Evangelicalism*, 116-117.

²⁰ See Chapter Five of this thesis.

²¹ Tickle, *Emergence Christianity*, 99.

²² Marti and Ganiel highlight the centrality and influence of McLaren in the emerging church scene. Marti and Ganiel, *The Deconstructed Church*, 71-73.

²³ Time Staff, “Influential Evangelicals: Brian McLaren,” *Time*, February 7, 2005, http://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1993235_1993243_1993300,00.html.

²⁴ See footnote 7 of this chapter.

In his 2004 book *A Generous Orthodoxy*, Brian McLaren spells out his “postcritical” stance to theology, seeking “to find a way to embrace the good in many traditions and historic streams of Christian faith, and to integrate them, yielding a new, generous, emergent approach that is greater than the sum of its parts.”²⁵ This borrowing across Christian traditions was nothing new, hearkening to the likes of Richard Foster, though McLaren is more explicit in his intentions to remake evangelical Christianity. McLaren cites Leonard Sweet and Robert Webber—ancient-future enthusiasts—as key influences on his ecumenical “generosity.”²⁶ Responding to conservative critics, McLaren tries to show “how a new kind of Christian is also an old kind of Christian,” open to the good in the multiplicity of Christian traditions.²⁷ “What if we enjoy them all, the way we enjoy foods from different cultures?” McLaren asks.²⁸ The book’s subtitle communicates this sentiment well: “*Why I am a Missional, Evangelical, Post/Protestant, Liberal/Conservative, Mystical/Poetic, Biblical, Charismatic/Contemplative, Fundamentalist/Calvinist, Anabaptist/Anglican, Methodist, Catholic, Green, Incarnational, Depressed-yet-hopeful, Emergent, Unfinished Christian.*”

While taking some shots at modern conservative evangelical positions and proclivities, such as pro-capitalism²⁹ and a tendency for over-systematizing,³⁰ McLaren reframes dominant evangelical values to serve his vision of positive Christianity. The Bible

²⁵ Brian McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy: Why I am a Missional, Evangelical, Post/Protestant, Liberal/Conservative, Mystical/Poetic, Biblical, Charismatic/Contemplative, Fundamentalist/Calvinist, Anabaptist/Anglican, Methodist, Catholic, Green, Incarnational, Depressed-yet-hopeful, Emergent, Unfinished Christian* (El Cajon: Emergent YS, 2004), 18. Phyllis Tickle considers *A Generous Orthodoxy* to be a catalyst of the emerging movement, “the Emergence analog of Martin Luther’s Ninety-Five Theses.” Tickle, *Emergence Christianity*, 101.

²⁶ McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 18.

²⁷ McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 22. McLaren holds the Apostle’s and Nicene Creeds and the Bible as authorities in his quest—excluding those outside mainstream Christian orthodoxy. However, he does advocate an openness to learning from other religions, if not in doctrine, at least in practices. McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 28, 255.

²⁸ McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 66.

²⁹ McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 239.

³⁰ McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 151-152

should keep its authority, but should inspire readers to serve the world. “That’s why I am proud to be a biblical Christian,” claims McLaren, “in the tradition of St. Francis, Mother Theresa, Billy Graham, my grandparents and parents, and thousands like them.”³¹ Saint Francis also stands alongside Gandhi and King as those who embraced a narrative advancement approach to scripture—McLaren’s way of explaining violent Old Testament texts through the continually advancing revelation of the biblical narrative.³²

McLaren invokes Francis extensively in his defense of Christian environmentalism.³³ McLaren argues that if Christians can rediscover the doctrine of creation’s original goodness they will find value in even seemingly insignificant created things and natural processes.³⁴ He writes, “If you see our world this way, you can’t help becoming a St. Francis, a brother to the whippoorwill, a sister to the meadow vole, a friend of the trees, hailing your fellow creatures in God’s world in a spirit of good cheer and good, clean fun.”³⁵ McLaren cites G. K. Chesterton on Saint Francis’ view of nature as neither over nor completely under humankind, but as a sister. “Follow St. Francis and Chesterton,” McLaren urges, “and you won’t sell your little sister; you will enjoy her, cherish her, protect her, and encourage her to become all she can be.”³⁶ This relational approach is a foil to the “Evangelical-dispensational ‘left behind’ eschatology” that neglects the earth as temporary.³⁷ McLaren further argues that the love of the poor ought to parallel and enforce environmental care, turning the church from a socially irresponsible, capitalism-justifying force to an agent for good, caring for the poor and vulnerable and the land. McLaren writes, “One realizes that the spirit of St. Francis

³¹ McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 166.

³² McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 170.

³³ “Why I am Green,” reads the chapter title. McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 231.

³⁴ McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 235-236.

³⁵ McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 236.

³⁶ McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 236.

³⁷ McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 237.

and the spirit of Mother Teresa are one and the same: the spirit of Jesus, to whom the poor and sick and the sparrows and salamanders are all precious, each in a unique way.”³⁸ In this last case, Saint Francis’ name itself evokes a fraternal love of creation. As for evangelical environmentalists before him, Brian McLaren’s Saint Francis points the way to a “green” Christianity.

In his 2008 book *Finding Our Way Again*, McLaren issued a familiar call to recover ancient Christian spiritual practices to compliment social engagement (citing the likes of Dallas Willard, Richard Foster, the Benedictine Joan Chittister, Tony Campolo, Jim Wallis and Ron Sider as inspirations and mentors).³⁹ McLaren presents Christian spirituality as a way of life—an option to fulfill the postmodern search for spirituality and an alternative to violent versions of fundamentalism (Christian and otherwise).⁴⁰ Saint Francis naturally enters the discussion of sacramental living.

The caricatures of Saint Francis as a joyful songster in the fields have some merit to McLaren, but “for all his simple joy, [Francis] was a complex man who suffered a lot of pain.”⁴¹ This pain came through his voluntary obedience, poverty and chastity as well as his close proximity to the poor, sick and suffering. McLaren compares Francis’ pain to “the suffering of the helping professions,” but Francis did not leave the poor behind at the end of a workday: “Saint Francis basically took his work home with him every night of his life.”⁴² Saint Francis’ depiction of true joy being found through suffering and rejection stands as a stark and difficult example of a saint formed by pain and spiritual discipline.⁴³ Following

³⁸ McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 239.

³⁹ Brian McLaren, *Finding Our Way Again* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008), vii.

⁴⁰ McLaren, *Finding Our Way Again*, 4-5.

⁴¹ McLaren, *Finding Our Way Again*, 191-192.

⁴² McLaren, *Finding Our Way Again*, 192.

⁴³ McLaren, *Finding Our Way Again*, 194.

Saint Francis, McLaren encourages the recovery of practices such as memorization and recitation, which were sometimes disparaged by contemporary evangelicals, as a better way for spiritual formation.⁴⁴ Saint Francis' high stakes visit to the Egyptian Sultan was only possible through such formation. The encounter was "like a southern Baptist getting a private audience with Osama bin Laden. Francis stood before this man who was hated by his nation and his religion ... not a spirit of conquest and war, or a spirit of cowardice and appeasement, but rather a courageous spirit of reconciliation and love."⁴⁵ This courage came in spite of Francis' physical ailments. For McLaren, the possibilities of fostering revolutionary love were found in Francis' discipline and acceptance of pain.

Yet this encounter between Saint Francis and the Sultan was more than a courageous personal stand for peace. According to McLaren, Francis was up to something else; he

saw a possibility: that Islam (compassionate and alive in the sultan) and Christianity (aglow within his own heart) could stop fighting over the ancient city of Judaism (Jerusalem), and instead, the three religions could dream a dream of peace together. For Francis, a believer in Jesus as the Prince of Peace, this dream came naturally, and he had to take a stand.⁴⁶

Following a line of thought increasingly popular after September 11, 2001,⁴⁷ McLaren invokes Francis' encounter as an invitation for interreligious cooperation and peace.

Francis' suffering and spiritual practices led him on the path toward union with God and his action of love for the sultan.⁴⁸ His action is an invitation; "Saint Francis is in a sense

⁴⁴ McLaren, *Finding Our Way Again*, 194.

⁴⁵ McLaren, *Finding Our Way Again*, 199.

⁴⁶ McLaren, *Finding Our Way Again*, 199.

⁴⁷ André Vauchez, *Francis of Assisi: The Life and Afterlife of a Medieval Saint*, trans. Michael F. Custado (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 243-244.

⁴⁸ Here McLaren draws on ancient Christian monastic traditions of *katharsis*, *fotisis*, and *theosis*—purification, enlightenment and union with God, offering Francis as a model.

still standing there, still holding the dream, as a kind of icon, inviting us to seize the unimagined opportunities offered us by the ancient way and the ancient practices.”⁴⁹

McLaren uses Saint Francis’ life to summarize his book:

Spiritual practices help develop *character*, the kind of character we see in Saint Francis standing as a man of peace before the sultan ... they help us be *awake* and alive and more fully human, as the singer of songs, lover of birds, embracer of lepers, and carrier of joy so clearly was ... they help us *experience God*, or ... they help us join God so that we glow with Francis like holy embers radiant with the fire of God.⁵⁰

Francis not only offers a window into spiritual growth and union with God, but an alternative to “our current highway of crusade and jihad.”⁵¹ McLaren evokes John Lennon’s “Imagine” to talk of the world’s unity as a sign of God’s kingdom, pointed to by Francis.⁵²

McLaren introduces his 2011 book *Naked Spirituality* with the image of Saint Francis naked before his father and the bishop, renouncing his father’s wealth and embracing God as father. “In so doing,” McLaren claims, “Francis stripped off this earthly identity and clothed himself in a more primal and primary identity as God’s unclothed Creature, God’s naked vulnerable child.”⁵³ Saint Francis later preached naked alongside Brother Rufino, a monk under his care.⁵⁴ McLaren employs the motif of nakedness to point toward an edenic spirituality: “naked before God and before one another ... we have no need to cover up, to protect, to posture, to dress to impress, just the freedom to be who we are, what we are, as we are.”⁵⁵ This is a spirituality of “authentic” selfhood—casting off the “layer upon layer of heavy, uncomfortable,

⁴⁹ McLaren, *Finding Our Way Again*, 200.

⁵⁰ McLaren, *Finding Our Way Again*, 201.

⁵¹ McLaren, *Finding Our Way Again*, 201.

⁵² McLaren, *Finding Our Way Again*, 201.

⁵³ Brian McLaren, *Naked Spirituality* (San Francisco: Harper One, 1989), v.

⁵⁴ McLaren, *Naked Spirituality*, v-vi.

⁵⁵ McLaren, *Naked Spirituality*, vii-viii.

pretentious, well-starched religiosity.”⁵⁶ Put differently, for McLaren, evangelical pretension and traditional formalism stand in the way of the true heart of spirituality, one that Francis’ complete renunciation of artificiality embodies.

For Brian McLaren, Saint Francis shows the way to disciplined spiritual formation, union with God, authentic selfhood, and peaceful unity between religions. Saint Francis is McLaren’s archetype for what it means to live a spiritual life, recovering lost spiritual practices and pointing to a new future of peace. McLaren brings together many threads from earlier evangelical interpreters of Saint Francis, and others from popular culture, pointing to his perceived need to remake evangelical faith. Francis was the saint of this new kind of Christianity.

Rebuilding the Authentic Church

While McLaren brought Francis into discussions of spirituality, Ian Morgan Cron, an evangelical Episcopalian involved with the Emergent network, offered Saint Francis as a model for “authentic” church in a thinly veiled work of fiction that explores many emerging church themes. Cron’s *Chasing Francis* presents the story of Chase Falson, a megachurch pastor in New England, whose messages brim with assurances of certainty and modernist rationality. He notes his young congregants are “all heading off to some hip new church in Bridgewater where everyone seems to like candles and goatees.”⁵⁷ After the death of a young child in his congregation, the daughter of a single mom with a troubled past, Chase confesses to his church that he has lost his faith and certainty. He turns to an uncle who is a Franciscan priest for advice, who brings him to Italy to take him on a pilgrimage of sites related to the life of Saint Francis. Maggie, the mother of dead child, eventually joins him.

⁵⁶ McLaren, *Naked Spirituality*, viii.

⁵⁷ Ian Morgan Cron, *Chasing Francis: A Pilgrim’s Tale* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 16.

While in Italy, Chase devours books and articles about Saint Francis. He considers Francis a postmodern saint.⁵⁸ Chase pokes holes in his rationalist evangelical subculture, and the book takes potshots at sentimental Thomas Kinkadee paintings,⁵⁹ the apologetics of C. S. Lewis and Lee Strobel,⁶⁰ and views of the Bible as a rationalist instruction book.⁶¹ The encounter with Francis gives Chase a more holistic gospel message. Chase confesses that his “relationship with Jesus was more personal... I never thought about how faith related to big global issues.”⁶² Chase’s Catholic guides make much of medieval church corruption and Francis’ role as a reformer. They meet people running a soup kitchen for the poor, inspired by Francis’ life.⁶³

Freshly stirred by the authentic faith of Francis, Chase returns to reckon with the church leadership at home. He offers his own vision for the future of the church that could easily be any emergent manifesto, marked by “transcendence, community, beauty, dignity, and meaning.”⁶⁴ Among other things, he tells his church audience that the early church “was a pacifist movement known for its outspoken criticism of any form of bloodshed or violence” before Constantine.⁶⁵ His message is met with mixed reception, but ultimately the church elders vote to oust him. Chase starts his life anew with an ambiguous future.

With this book, Cron rehashes many emerging criticisms of modernist faith and megachurch evangelicalism, with his caricatures of evangelical rationalism and cheap sentimentality. Cron’s vision of a new, missional, and “authentic” form of church reflects

⁵⁸ Cron, *Chasing Francis*, 49.

⁵⁹ Cron, *Chasing Francis*, 31.

⁶⁰ Cron, *Chasing Francis*, 44.

⁶¹ Cron, *Chasing Francis*, 100, 150.

⁶² Cron, *Chasing Francis*, 134. Chase acknowledges, however, that his problems are not merely from the “Christian subculture.” Cron, *Chasing Francis*, 156.

⁶³ Cron, *Chasing Francis*, 164-165.

⁶⁴ Cron, *Chasing Francis*, 196. Italics removed from original.

⁶⁵ Cron, *Chasing Francis*, 202.

many emerging church themes. Saint Francis is Cron's chosen guide for this postmodern faith, a new kind of church based on Francis' perceived authenticity, reforming impulse, missional drive and simplicity.

Conclusion

For emergent evangelicals Brian McLaren and Ian Morgan Cron, Saint Francis showed an alternative to what they perceived to be dominant evangelical rationality, spirituality, worship and politics. Saint Francis was a guide to what they considered to be authentic Christian faith, at once the recovery of things lost and the forging of a new, appropriately postmodern path. Francis gave justification for emergent "deconversion."

Emergent evangelicals such as McLaren attempted to bring together many ideas already active in the twentieth-century evangelical milieu—the casual attitude of seeker-sensitive evangelicals, liturgy and classical spiritual disciplines from the ancient future movement, critiques of political conservatism from progressive and new monastic evangelicals, alongside scholarly critiques of modernity. The result of this amalgamation, however, was simply another stone in the increasingly fragmented evangelical mosaic. Likewise, the tolerant, postmodern Saint Francis of emerging evangelicals bears little resemblance to the biblicist Saint Francis of more conservative evangelicals such as *Christianity Today's* Mark Galli.⁶⁶ The many evangelical positions and movements brought forth conflicting images of Saint Francis of Assisi.

⁶⁶ Emergent evangelicals have drawn criticism for their selective tradition appropriation. Critics such as D. A. Carson have labeled emerging church tradition-appropriation selective and individualist: Carson claims that while emerging evangelicals emphasize "the whole tradition" of historic Christianity against the idiosyncratic traditions of suburban American evangelicalism, emerging church tradition retrieval "is controlled by what these emerging thinkers judge to be appropriate in the postmodern world—and this results, rather ironically, in one of the most self-serving appeals to tradition I have ever seen." Carson, *Becoming Conversant*, 139, 141. Carson further chides emerging evangelicals for failing to choose between Christian traditions that make contradictory claims.

For McLaren and Cron, Saint Francis represents the alternative to dominant conservative evangelicalism, seeker sensitive churches, and modernist rationality. Their appeals to Francis indicate a longing to move beyond modernist evangelicalism by looking to the past. They exhibit a strong primitivism in their wish to bypass the modern era and attach themselves to the undiluted, authentic faith of the first Christians and of Saint Francis. In doing so, however, they explicitly connect the ancient with the new and “postmodern.” The irony of many of admirers of Francis, evangelical and not, is their look back to create a future that bears little resemblance to the past that inspires it. The emergent Francis (as well as the charismatic, progressive, conservative, and new monastic Francis) is often a saint of evangelicals’ own making.

Conclusion

Saint Francis of Assisi found his way into the increasingly fragmented world of American evangelicalism in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. A diverse array of evangelical Protestants found Saint Francis to be an inspiration and a model for Christian life in contemporary America. These evangelicals invoked Saint Francis' example as a representative of "authentic" Christian discipleship, who inspired and legitimated their own ideals. Saint Francis became an evangelical Protestant saint.

Evangelicals saw Saint Francis as a model Christian of different varieties; whether in his obedience to scripture, his ardor for Christ, his love for the poor, his mystical connection with nature, his countercultural witness or his proto-Protestant reforming zeal, Saint Francis represented a vision of true Christianity. For evangelicals Saint Francis could be progressive or conservative, charismatic or traditional, reformist or institutional, a saint to admire critically or a saint to imitate. What emerges overall, however, is their perception of Saint Francis as a true, authentic disciple of Christ, one who has something to say to the contemporary world and to contemporary evangelicals.

These manifold evangelical interpretations of Saint Francis' "authentic" faith are significant in that they indicate a shift in evangelical values and conceptions of true Christian faith, a move toward authenticity and holistic spirituality. These changes within evangelical Protestantism coincided with changes in broader American culture. Sociologist Wade Clark Roof notes the rising interest among baby boomer Americans in varieties of spiritual "holism" that embrace all of life rather than compartmentalize it in dualisms,¹ as well as

¹ Wade Clark Roof, *A Generation of Seekers: The Spiritual Journeys of the Baby Boom Generation* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1993), 76.

growing emphases on authentic personhood and language of experiential spirituality.² For many evangelicals, these values superseded (or complimented) the centrality of older evangelical Protestant values of evangelism, belief, and traditional Protestant interpretations of scripture. The emerging evangelical values encouraged and informed evangelical appropriations of Saint Francis of Assisi. This shift in evangelical conceptions of what constitutes true Christian faith warrants further study.

The adoption of Saint Francis as a hero and model for American evangelicals also reflects a trend of the softening of religious borders as evangelicals appropriated non-Protestant Christian traditions and spirituality as their own. This again paralleled larger trends of religious relativism and options in American culture,³ though evangelical admirers of Saint Francis usually stayed within Christian parameters. Evangelical proponents of classical Christian spirituality and tradition offered their fellow evangelicals a new cadre of heroes in the pre-Reformation (and in some cases post-Reformation) Catholic saints and mystics. American evangelical cooperation with Catholics in the political realm, whether on the left or right, is well documented;⁴ but many evangelicals also took spiritual inspiration from their Catholic partners. This Catholic borrowing is most visible in progressive evangelical and ancient-future movements. But from evangelical monasticism to megachurch devotionals inspired by the rule of Saint Benedict,⁵ evangelicals are openly plundering

² Wade Clark Roof, *Spiritual Marketplace: Baby Boomers and the Remaking of American Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 7.

³ Wade Clark Roof's idea of an American "spiritual marketplace" aptly captures the softening of religious boundaries and religious relativism. Roof, *Spiritual Marketplace*, 46, 84.

⁴ See for example Darren Dochuck, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2011), 346.

⁵ Peter Scazzero, *Daily Office: Remembering God's Presence Throughout the Day* (Barrington: Willow Creek Association, 2008); the book was later expanded in Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality Day by Day: A 40-Day Journey with the Daily Office* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2014); See also Stewart, *In Search of Ancient Roots*, 11-12.

Catholic spirituality for what they find useful, or for what they think may be lacking in their own recent evangelical traditions.

The diverse interpretations of Saint Francis by evangelicals reflect competing visions, factions and impulses in ideologically fragmented evangelical Protestant networks. Some evangelicals were unabashedly selective in their approach to Saint Francis, while others sought to confront difficult differences between the medieval saint and their own evangelical faith. While some evangelicals showed wholehearted embrace of Saint Francis' ideals, others met the saint with distance and critical reserve. Many of the figures examined in this thesis used Saint Francis to challenge other evangelicals and to legitimate changes in evangelical spirituality, politics and church life. As has often been the case, American evangelicals adapt and reinvent their movements to respond to social and cultural change. Behind evangelical appropriations of Francis were competing visions of the future direction of evangelicalism.

As evangelicals emphasize the significance of the historical veracity of the life of Jesus Christ as presented in the Bible, evangelicals naturally brought a kind of historical literalism to their understanding of Saint Francis. For them, miracles attributed to Saint Francis need not be rejected as legends. To evangelical admirers of the saint, Francis reveals possibilities for the Christian life, whether in his peacemaking, poverty, evangelism or mysticism. Some evangelicals encouraged others to follow Francis' example in one of these areas; even Saint Francis' miracles were not out of bounds. A few, including the Kid Brothers of Saint Frank and new monastics, modeled their lives on Franciscan ideals.

While Protestant Reformers rejected much of the medieval Catholic cult of the saints, Protestants nevertheless have had their own heroes and archetypes. For contemporary evangelicals this has sometimes included the living—evangelists (such as Billy Graham),

pastors, authors, parachurch ministry leaders, and Christian musicians. Sociologist Simon Coleman has noted the proclivity of neo-charismatics in particular to elevate ministry leaders to a status analogous to sainthood, as mediators of the divine.⁶ Yet many other evangelicals also extend saint-like admiration to the dead. Historic reformers and movement leaders such as Martin Luther, John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards and John Wesley, continue to have their evangelical admirers. C. S. Lewis and Dietrich Bonhoeffer likely topped the list for late twentieth-century American evangelicals, but there were others.⁷ Evangelicals admired missionary martyrs, such as Jim Elliot and his companions,⁸ and heroes of Christianity under persecution, such as Watchman Nee, “Brother Andrew” van der Bijl, and Columbine High School victim Cassie Bernall. Keith Green and Rich Mullins, both contemporary Christian singers who died in untimely accidents, were remembered and memorialized for their committed discipleship. Evangelicals do not venerate images of saints or ask them for intercession as Roman Catholics might; but, consciously or not, evangelical “saints” serve as admired archetypes for evangelical faith, often through the Bonhoefferian lens of costly discipleship. Toward the end of the twentieth century this admiration was extended to non-Protestant figures such as Saint Francis. The place of models and saints in evangelical thought warrants further study.

The evangelical interest in classical Catholic and Orthodox spirituality is one of several new options for evangelical spirituality in the late twentieth century. While often unconscious, the values and language of the Higher Life or Keswick movement dominated

⁶ Simon Coleman, “Transgressing the Self: Making Charismatic Saints,” *Critical Inquiry* 35, no. 3 (Spring 2009): 417-439.

⁷ A *Christianity Today* column calls Lewis the “Patron Saint of American Evangelicals.” Melissa Steffan, “Lionizing Lewis: Patron Saint of American Evangelicals Finally Gets His Due in His Homeland,” *Christianity Today*, October 2013, 18.

⁸ Elliot was among five missionaries killed during their attempt to evangelize the remote Huarani people in Ecuador. Their story was dramatized in the 2006 film *The End of the Spear*. Elliot’s widow, Elizabeth Elliot, became an influential evangelical writer.

American evangelical spirituality into the twentieth century, and its influence continues to be seen in evangelical piety and worship.⁹ Nevertheless, other late twentieth-century evangelical spiritual movements, such as the charismatic movement, prosperity gospel, the spiritual formation movement, or spirituality of social justice all offered new possibilities for evangelicals seeking spiritual growth, challenging the dominance of Higher Life spirituality. Yet these evangelical spiritual movements also responded to a decline in evangelical spiritual practices such as prayer and Bible study. The result was that twenty-first-century evangelicals had many more spiritual options than evangelicals a generation or two earlier. More study is needed to identify the reasons for the decline in Higher Life thought and the relationship of this theology to subsequent changes in evangelical spirituality, but the evangelical love of Saint Francis and the emergence of new forms of spirituality indicate this decline.

Scholars have made much of the primitivist impulse in American religion, particularly among nineteenth-century groups such as the Mormons and restorationist “Christians.”¹⁰ Timothy Weber extended the primitivist label to the Evangelical Orthodox Church of the 1980s in their attempt to connect with original New Testament Christianity.¹¹ Some twentieth-century American evangelicals interested in Saint Francis linked his apparently authentic Christianity to a rediscovery or renewal of a purer age of Christian life

⁹ For example, Keswick emphasis on personal surrender still pervades many evangelical worship songs, from the classic hymn “I Surrender All” written in 1896 by J. W. Van DeVenter to Hillsong’s 2012 song “I Surrender.” Hillsong Worship, “I Surrender,” on *Cornerstone*, Hillsong Records, 2012.

¹⁰ See Richard T. Hughes, ed., *The American Quest for the Primitivist Church* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998) and Richard T. Hughes and Crawford Leonard Allen, *Illusions of Innocence: Protestant Primitivism in America, 1630-1875* (Abilene, Abilene Christian University Press, 2008).

¹¹ Timothy Weber claims that the creation of the Evangelical Orthodox Church and their move to the Antiochene Orthodox Church of the 1980s and 1990s reflects not only a growing historicism present in parts of evangelicalism, but also a primitivist tendency to seek a direct link to the New Testament church. Weber, “Looking for Home: Evangelical Orthodoxy and the Search for the Original Church,” in *New Perspectives on Historical Theology: Essays in Memory of John Meyendorff*, ed Bradley Nassif (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 105.

undiluted by later corruption. This was especially the case for progressive evangelicals, new monastics and emergent evangelicals, who often embraced the narrative of a Constantinian fall of the church. Yet their primitivism was not that of earlier restorationists who neglected Christian history for a direct application of the Bible;¹² rather, these evangelicals saw themselves in continuity with Christian traditions before them, and sought to reconnect with them. This traditionalist-primitivist tension is like that identified by Joel Carpenter among earlier twentieth-century fundamentalists: a qualified primitivism that saw the Protestant Reformation tradition as the restoration of the true church.¹³ But for some of the evangelicals in this study, Saint Francis seemed to be elevated to a place alongside or even above the Protestant reformers as truer to the spirit of early, “pure” Christianity. Some American evangelical Protestants found a new saint in this poor medieval friar, and with him, changing views of what constituted true, authentic Christianity.

¹² Brian McLaren, however, seems to embrace a similar anti-tradition sentiment in his relationship to biblical interpretation.

¹³ Joel Carpenter, “Contending for the Faith Once Delivered: Primitivist Impulses in American Fundamentalism,” in Hughes, *The American Quest for the Primitive Church*, 101.

Epilogue

Jorge Mario Bergoglio, an Argentine Jesuit, was elected to succeed Pope Benedict XVI after his surprise retirement in 2013. Taking the name Francis, the new pope quickly became known for his simplicity, humility, and love for the poor. Alongside proclamations emphasizing evangelism and Bible study, Pope Francis made ecumenical overtures towards Orthodox and Protestant Christians, among them many mainstream evangelical and neo-charismatic leaders.¹

While beyond the scope of this study, the election of Pope Francis offers yet another example of admiration and indirect appropriation of Francis on the part of American evangelicals. Evangelicals took notice of the new pope, connecting him with his namesake from Assisi. Writing for *Christianity Today*, theologian Timothy George observed the similarities.² Saint Francis was noted for his reforming impulse, humble obedience to Christ and evangelistic zeal. If Saint Francis imitated Christ in these things, it was a hopeful sign that the new pope seemed to be imitating Saint Francis. Recalling evangelical-Catholic cooperation in the pro-life movement, George called for an even stronger partnership. “Without forgetting the deep differences that divide us,” George states, “now as never before we are called to stand and work together for the cause of Christ in a broken world.”³

A year later Shane Claiborne offered his praise of the new pope in *Sojourners*.⁴ Like George, Claiborne highlights the pope’s humility, simplicity and love for those on the

¹ Martin Bräuer, “Pope Francis and Ecumenism,” *The Ecumenical Review*, World Council of Churches, accessed October 24, 2018, https://www.oikoumene.org/en/papal-visit/Braeuer2017TPope_francis_and_Ecumenism.pdf; Kris Vallotton, “Pope Francis,” krisvallotton.com, June 13, 2016, <https://krisvallotton.com/pope-francis/>; John and Carol Arnott, “Meeting with Pope Francis,” Catch the Fire Toronto, July 11, 2014, video, <https://youtu.be/BIHfYgRIP4s>.

² Timothy George, “Our Francis Too,” *Christianity Today*, June 2013, 65.

³ George, “Our Francis Too,” 65.

⁴ Shane Claiborne, “The First Year of the Pope’s Revolution,” *Sojourners*, March 14, 2014, <https://sojo.net/articles/first-year-pope-s-revolution>.

margins (though for Claiborne this also includes sexual minorities). Pope Francis' forthright confrontation of wealth inequality garners Claiborne's admiration. Claiborne also notes the pope's willingness to pick up hitchhikers in the pope-mobile. "I can't help but think Francis of Assisi (the pope's radical namesake)," Claiborne states, "and all the angels and saints in heaven must be smiling as they look down on our brother Jorge Mario Bergoglio, whom we now fondly call 'Pope Francis.'"⁵

Pope Francis has appealed to evangelicals on different sides of social, ecclesiastical, theological and political divides. It seems that part of this appeal came from his association with the saint of Assisi. It is too early to know what significance Pope Francis' tenure will have on the future of evangelical-Catholic relations.⁶ And while some evangelicals retain the anti-Catholic stance of earlier generations, there is little doubt that the Catholic Saint Francis has taken his place as a saint for American evangelical Protestants as a representative of what they see as historic, authentic Christian faith.

⁵ Claiborne, "The First Year of the Pope's Revolution."

⁶ According to one poll Pope Francis enjoyed great popularity among evangelicals until recent scandals over widespread sexual abuse by Catholic clergy. Kate Shellnutt, "Francis Effect Fades: Pope's Approval Drops Among Most Evangelicals," *Christianity Today*, October 3, 2018, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2018/october/pope-francis-approval-evangelical-catholic-priest-abuse.html>.

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- Young, Neil J. “A Saga of Sacrilege: Evangelicals Respond to the Second Vatican Council

CURRICULUM VITAE

Paul Foth

EDUCATION

2017-2019

Master of Theological Studies, Church History track, Associated Canadian Theological Schools, Trinity Western University
Thesis: *The Born-again Friar: American Evangelical Appropriations of Saint Francis of Assisi, 1972-2013*
Supervisor: Dr. Bruce Guenther

2005-2009

Bachelor of Arts, Interdisciplinary International Studies, Global Development and Cultural Change track, Trinity Western University

RESEARCH AND TEACHING INTERESTS

- Twentieth-century evangelical Protestantism
- Twentieth-century American religious history
- Patristic theology and exegesis
- General church history
- Academic research and writing
- Bird distribution and identification

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

2016-present

Graduate Student, ACTS Seminaries, Trinity Western University. Includes courses from Orthodox School of Theology, Trinity College.

- Thesis examines American evangelical appropriations and interpretations of Saint Francis of Assisi, from 1972-2013.

Researched and wrote term papers on:

- Evolutionary history, class, nationalism and providence in Salem Bland's *The New Christianity*.
- Erasmus' and Luther's evolving views of the church fathers in their debate on the freedom and bondage of the will.
- Apostolic succession in Irenaeus of Lyons.
- The biblical exegesis of John Chrysostom and Ephrem the Syrian.
- John of Damascus and eighth-century Islam.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

2018-present

Adjunct Instructor, ACTS Seminaries, Trinity Western University
Course Title: Term Paper Tutorial

- Taught class on graduate-level research writing for incoming seminary students.

- 2017-2019 **Teaching Assistant** to Dr. Bruce Guenther, ACTS Seminaries
 Course titles: History of Christianity I, History of Christianity II, Christianity and Culture
- Graded student assignments and research papers.
 - Prepared materials and organized online class portal.
 - Delivered occasional guest lectures.
- 2012-2015 **Assistant Director of Migrant Ministries, Ministry Worker**, Tierra Nueva, Burlington, WA
- Assisted with direction of Family Support Centre primarily serving migrant farm worker families.
 - Led ministry times among jail and prison inmates, former gang members and others in the community.
 - Trained and supervised new employees.
- 2011-2012,
2005-2006 **Intern, Administrative and Communications Assistant**, Kidzana Ministries, Everett, WA
- Contributed to training events for children’s ministry workers in the USA, Mexico, Ethiopia, Thailand and Lebanon.
 - Assisted in developing content and training curriculum.
 - Coordinated local outreach and homework clubs for at-risk children in Everett, WA.

PUBLISHED ARTICLES

- “Repentance: A Time to Water and Weed.” *MB Herald*. January 20, 2019.
- A Lenten reflection on the fourth-century prayer of Saint Ephrem the Syrian.

CONFERENCE WORKSHOPS

- “Meeting at the Well: Exploring and Practicing Christian Faith in a Multi-Faith World.” Co-presented with Mia Baumgartner at the 2014 Krista Foundation Service Leadership Conference, Spokane, WA.
- This workshop was based on my experience in jail and prison ministry and my co-presenter’s experience as a hospital chaplain.

AWARDS AND GRANTS

- Krista Foundation for Global Citizenship colleague and grant recipient, 2013
- The Krista Foundation is a mentoring organization for young leaders in social work and faith-based service.

MEMBERSHIPS

- 2018-present Orthodox Peace Fellowship
 2019-present Canadian Society of Church History

LANGUAGES

Conversational Spanish